Much has been written on the subject of bookbinding, both from a practical and artistic point of view. Such literature, however, has referred almost entirely to leather work, cloth binding seeming to be unworthy of serious consideration, probably on account of the comparatively temporary properties of the materials used, and the consequent short-lived and unloved existence of a book so bound. It is true that, much of it being done more upon the lines of cheapness than of quality, its durability is, therefore, less than need be, good sewing, forwarding, and case-making not appearing to be considered of so much consequence with some publishers, as an attractive and saleable decoration of the cover. It is upon this latter subject—decoration—only that this paper is written. It is not proposed to go back to the early days of cloth work, but rather to treat of the productions of but yesterday and to-day. In leather work we read of an imposing, though limited, number of names of artist-binders and of styles which appear to hold classic rank, and are being for ever quoted and imitated. These are the Aldine, Maioli, Grolier, Eve, Doré, Roger Payne, and one or two others of the present time. Examples of these are spoken of as being precious and priceless, and doubtless merit the admiration and eulogism bestowed upon them. They have, however, been produced without regard to cost (that bug-bear of the publisher’s binder of to-day), and their charm and value lie in the excellence or richness of the cover embellishments, the quality of the materials used, and, particularly, in the fact that each specimen is hand-finished by the artist binder, and is supposed to be original and unique. The literatri merit of the bound work is not of so much consequence, although, as a rule, only good books are thought worthy of good binding.

In cloth work the artist prepares the design alone, he has nothing to do with the work on the book itself. Engravings on brass are made from his drawing and carried out by the mechanical process of blocking, being reproduced in hundreds or thousands, according to the sale of the publication for which it has been prepared. However good the decoration may be, such profuse reproduction is fatal to its chances of admiration by the dilettante connoisseur. This should not really spoil its charm for the genuine lover of art, rather should it be cause for rejoicing that a good example of appropriate design should be circulated freely. Let us look at the names of a few artists who have done, and happily some are still doing, something for the craft. There are W. E. Wyon, W. Harry Rogers, Dr. Dresser, John Leighton, F. E. Hulme, J. Moyr Smith, Walter and Thomas Crane, Lewis F. Day, and H. G. Wells—all men with a name in the decorative art world. There are also other capable artists—unknown outside the trade—who make cloth book-cover designing their special study. The last few seasons have seen bindings produced from the drawings of such graceful artists as Alice Havers, Ernest Wilson (both, unfortunately, early deceased), Harriett M. Bennett, G. H. Edwards, and Gordon Browne. It may truly be said that there is often quite as much soul put into a cloth design as into a masterpiece in morocco. If the artist-binder in leather should endeavour to make his decoration harmonise with the character and period of the book in hand, or to enshrine in it some essence of the author, how much more is it expected of the cloth-cover designer to do so. He must sometimes embody the whole subject of the book on its front side and help to sell it too. He

Designed by Miss E. A. Pearse for Ernest Nister.

is not expected—except by special request—to reproduce variations of the styles of long ago, but must be constantly evolving something new and “taking,” or striking enough to call a person from one side of the street to the other to look at it, or, for quieter tastes, he must produce something chaste, recherché or quaint, not forgetting the “sweetly pretty” style. Sometimes he has most exasperating and quite inartistic notions to carry out. He does not always work to please himself, but to satisfy the personal taste of his client, whose judgment he must accept, and in whom perhaps the commercial instinct far exceeds the artistic. It is very necessary to know something of this personal taste and the class of trade catered for ere he commences his work, because the design that would charm A, of quiet taste, would not be looked at by B for his
market, and, vice versa, the style that would "fetch" B would, if shewn to A, impress him with the idea that the artist’s senses had taken leave of him. Occasionally a design is required that shall be suitable for a "series," combining tales of home and school life, of travel, war, adventure, shipwreck, books of natural history, fables, and flowers. Some of the titles being long and others short, both must be arranged for on back and side, and not more than one and a half sheets of gold used on the completed cover. To meet such a case as this, something of the prize-book order is submitted, but to prove successful it must be quite distinct from, and more attractive than anything else in the market. He is asked again for a "library," a "novel," a "juvenile," and a "religious" style—avoiding crosses and emblems for Nonconformity, and accentuating the symbolic for the Church. He is expected to draw the figure, flowers, animals, birds, landscape, letterings, and conventional ornament of all periods and styles—in short, to provide suitable treatment for books on all subjects both in the heavens above and in the earth beneath. All-round decorative knowledge is necessary, and a comprehension of the practical possibilities of the materials used and the methods of engraving and executing the work is very essential.

The question of what ought or ought not to appear on a book-cover—from a decorative art point of view—is not discussed in this paper. The subject is treated from artistically practical premises; for instance, when it is said that all naturalism should be avoided, the answer must be that it is impossible to do so. Some clients will have it, and the artist’s aim must be to clothe their ideas and desires with as much good taste as shall satisfy—as far as may be—his own sense of artistic propriety, and at the same time gratify his patrons. The capacity for pleasing an individual, giving a man what he wants, is the great desideratum and touchstone of success in every-day commercial art.

A steady improvement in style and taste manifests itself each season; the poor show-card-like class of ornament, with the paper illuminations of a few years ago, the heavy ink lines and the gold and black registered panels, bands, and borders are giving way to lighter and more graceful decoration. The danger just now is an over-indulgence in coloured inks, sometimes crudely worked, and producing anything but a pleasing effect. This is not often the artist’s fault, he probably adopts a quiet scheme of colour in his drawing, which is entirely set aside in the working, or carried out on red, blue, brown, and green cloths, whereas he intended the more tertiary colours to be used; the exigencies of the trade, however, demand the glaring selection, hence the sacrifice of good taste. It is the same in all handicrafts in which art and commerce are combined, it is either the "trade" or the public taste which is catered for. As time goes on, with an enhanced artistic and technical knowledge both on the part of the designers and those who employ them, and the public generally, there will be better art displayed all round.

Although greatly improved of late years, the blocking—as a mechanical process—of cloth covers is not yet perfection, nor have the machines used reached the climax of skilful construction. The average "blocker" sadly needs educating in the niceties of his work, the knowledge of "making-up" and adjusting the pressure necessary for producing the effects of differing parts of a design, both in leaf and ink blocking, is wanting. Good workmanship, and a personal pride in the work, for the work’s sake, on the part of the workman, must be present if high-class bindings are to be produced.

A word or two as to the engraving of the blocks or tools, as the old term used to be. Compared with bygone times, the engraver’s talents are put to much greater tests in the present day, for he is called upon to produce more varied effects both in gold and ink workings with intricate and difficult registrations, and is expected to render the feeling of the artist with all the felicity of the wood-engraver. However good a
Supplement to "The British Bookmaker."

**The Harvest Fields**
Illustrations by Ernest Wilson.
Designed by the late Ernest Wilson, for Messrs. Hildesheimer & Faulkner.

**Little Folks**
Designed by Miss H. M. Bennett, for Messrs. Smith Brothers.

**Stories of the Magicians**
Stories of the Magicians
Published by Messrs. Seeley & Co.

**Once Upon a Time**
Designed by Mrs. Lizzie Mack, for Ernest Nister.
rendering the textures of the draperies. It requires, of course, a high-class craftsman to do this, and there are but few in the trade with the special capacity necessary. Recently, when designs that would be difficult or too expensive to produce in brass have been adopted, the photo-zinco process has been tried with some success; a thicker metal, with the etching of greater depth than for ordinary printing, being used, and an additional price per inch charged in consequence.

The accompanying illustrations are given as good examples of British cloth bindings, and they will compare favourably with the very original, sometimes fantastic, but often charming productions of America and the exceedingly well-worked, but invariably overdone conventionalities of the Continent.

It might have been profitable, perhaps, to have shown a few unlovely specimens, and that there are many such to be seen is a deplorable fact, but it would have been ungenerous and of necessity injudicious, since all have erred at times. The consolation is that "On stepping stones of our dead selves we rise to nobler things."—J. W. Mitchell.

Our Prize Competitions.

The Eleventh Prize of Twenty Shillings for the best design made up of rolls and fillets, allowing for the use of a corner tool, has been awarded to Mr. William Cooper, of 95 Gilman-street, Hanley, Staffordshire, and a cheque for that amount has been forwarded.

Highly Commended:—W. Greene; H. H.; "West"; and H. H. Ware.

Again we must call attention to our Rules for competitors. Anyone not complying with the conditions laid down will be disqualified, because, it is only by a firm insistence upon our conditions that we can maintain an equality for our competitors. "Herr Von Mann" would probably have won this prize had he worked out his design in black instead of drawing it in violet ink. "Basila's" design is spoiled because he has used tools and gauges which we did not allow. "Argus" has made up his corners with several tools, whereas we only allow "the introduction of a corner tool." We are often compelled to throw away some better design because it does not conform to our conditions, which is a pity; yet, did we allow of such latitude as some desire, it would be distinctly unfair to those who conscientiously restrict their work to our limitations.

We award the prize of this design not for the workmanship, but we wish our competitors would take more heed as to this part of the work. Whatever you do, do it well. The laced corner of the winning design is faulty, especially because it is not square with the frame, but upon careful examination we find that that is partly the fault of the roll which is not cut exactly, so we have awarded to Mr. Cooper the prize in spite of that defect, as having shown the best effort at getting away from frames and borders pure and simple.

Competition No. 13.
We offer a Prize of Twenty Shillings to apprentices or others under 21 years of age who are learning the trade, for the best half-bound book, not finished.

Now please to comply with the

Rules.

1.—All Books must arrive at our London office on or before December 31st. The award will be made in the January number.

2.—The whole of the work must be performed by one and the same lad from the time of taking the sewn book from the women. That is to say, the book must be end papered, cut in boards, hollow backed, bands stuck on, covered, sided, and pasted down, and it must be accompanied by a note from the foreman or employer guaranteeing the same.

Prize Design of our Eleventh Competition.

3.—Each book may contain a nom de plume, but must also contain the correct name and address of the competitor, and stamps to pay for its return by parcel post.

4.—The decision of the Editor must be considered final.

5.—All books for competition must be directed to The Editor, British Bookmaker, 1 Imperial Buildings, Ludgate-circus, London, E.C., and marked "Prize Competition."

A cheque for 20/- will be forwarded to the successful competitor immediately upon the award being made.