

About Edge Finishing.



So long as original ideas shall be written or trenchant phrases recast in words which attract the attention or temporarily influence the thoughts of intellectual men and women; so long as type is set by hand or machine, as paper is printed upon and as volumes big or little, valuable or worthless to posterity, are made for the millions who buy them in aggregate, so long will the discussion continue as to the relative merits of trimmed or untrimmed edges in books. Shall page margins be cut or uncut? Ought full-bound books in fine leathers, either gold finished or blind tooled, be gilt or not gilt on all the edges of their letterpress?

A writer in one of the best known of the metropolitan daily papers, commenting on the descriptive sentence, "bound by William Matthews, in full red morocco, gilt top, uncut edges," which had been used to specialise the exterior finish of a superbly printed and illustrated book, limited and numbered for club subscribers, says that the quoted phrase seems inoffensive, but that it gives the authority of a coterie of New York artisans, literary garnishers, and connoisseurs to what he calls a singular and inexcusable practice of all the English bookbinders, with the sole exception of Cobden-Sanderson, whose work he places in the highest niche of excellence.

They bind every kind of volume, he complains, in full morocco, then gild the top marginal edges and leave the other edges white, whether trimmed or untrimmed; that is, if their patrons—as generally happens—care not for a few dimes of extra cost and humour the binder's rigid whim. In that writer's opinion the effect is bad. A book, he affirms, which is so treated has the aspect of work unfinished. "Imagine," he says, "a room wherein the ceiling shall be of gold and the walls of pale plaster!" Then, to emphasize his personal disapproval of what he insists is incompleteness in the outer ornament of a book, he bluntly asks: "Why do they do it?" and in the same paragraph replies: "Because they do not know and find it easier not to learn how to gild uncut edges."

The simile which he employs is, so far as harmony and good taste in any class of decoration are regarded, as ill-chosen as the style or method of edge finishing, which seems to have won his admiration, is positively absurd when measured by standards of artistic workmanship, for it is notorious that delicate hues of fresco on the walls of their home rooms, offset or contrasted with even paler tinted or entirely white ceilings, are preferred by all persons of culture and native refinement. Metallic wall panellings, with cornices, ceilings, and centrepieces of the latter heavily gilded, are tolerable only in theatres, public ballrooms, or the larger size parlours of hotels. Affluent or profuse displays are usually criticised as the outward signs of an imitative, a servilely acquired, or vulgar taste, and never of that which is inherited of perfect symmetry and grace or which has been sedulously cultivated.

That all leaf edges of a luxuriously printed book, if it is full-bound and more or less richly ornamented

on both of its side covers and title back, should be gilded, whether they are cut or uncut, is one of those startling dogmas of the self-elect in judgment which will find no logical acquiescence. A newspaper writer who presents his individual liking in so questionable a shape as to seriously pronounce a full binding unfinished because its uncut marginal edges are not gilded as well as the trimmed upper or dust-edge, is weak in the philosophy of effectiveness. He might as obtusely, not to say perversely, claim that no full bound book is complete in its cover adornment unless incised leather is substituted for marbled or handsomely printed end-papers of appropriate design.

The miscalled advance school of book milliners has only a squad following. Excessively decorated octavo or quarto volumes will possibly in the United States, as in France and England, continue to be a craze with the few autocratic levellers of a noble art, who are more gratified by the dazzle of gold and bright colour than they can ever be sensible of the utility, merit, and elemental harmony of certain styles of fine leather bindings, which have long been—as they will long remain—popular with expert American fanciers. Neither a Lortic nor a Ruban may be set up as a model in this country while the good influence of a chaste workman like the elder Matthews is tangible.

A book which is merely intended for show can be a mass of metallic glitter on its recto and verso and title back. All of its leaf edges may be trimmed, smoothed to nicety, and full gilded to correspond with the flash of gold on its leather covers. Even its headbands might be of golden threads to complete the auriferous livery. The smaller the book the more intricate, rich, and gaudy could its exterior be made, for narrow space is a direct challenger of the skill of an expert finisher. But no artistic bookbinder will ever counsel, nor will the owner of a really valuable and useful work ever consent, that all of the page margins shall be prepared for gilding.

There is a happy mean in practical bookbinding, as in other manual arts. The sincere lover and hoarder of literature affects exquisite bindings if they are also substantial, not too fine for handling or occasional service, and will regale the eye without offending his sense of what is proper in ornament and compatible with use. Yet, beyond this, the ardent student, a vigilant worshipper at the throne of type, delights in the untrimmed leaves of books. His arguments for them and their rough purity of edge are not many, but they are sufficient. Moreover, his dictum is a law honoured by hosts of like faithful observers.—*American Bookmaker.*

THE Baltimore *American* recently reproduced in *fac-simile* a copy of its first number, printed 118 years ago. In it is contained the evidence that George Washington was not only the father of his country, but also the father of advertising. In a very shrewd and business-like advertisement, one-half column in length, George Washington announces that he had bought 10,000 acres of land which he had divided into homesteads and was ready to sell to applicants. We'll wager something that G. W. made a profit on every acre of it.