

Embroidery on Bookwork.

IF there is one thing more than another that has been impressed upon the minds of the public by the recent exhibitions of bookbinding, it is the suitability of embroidery for the purposes of book embellishment, and it is quite evident that the lessons taught at earlier exhibitions have not been lost sight of, for at almost every exhibition lately, more or less of this style of art work is being shewn. The most charming effects may be gained in this direction if ladies will only devote a little of the exquisite taste and deft handicraft which they expend on other forms of work to the production either of book covers or loose cases for bindings. In almost every house there are some books which are household gods, loved and worshipped, on which no expense of time or labour would be deemed too great; yet ladies will go on working tea-cosies and toilet-mats when their skill might be more profitably employed in devising some design imaging the thoughts of their favourite authors—a task surely as congenial, to an active mind, as the mere stitching to while away time. The work admits of the greatest variety of materials, textures, colours, and stitches, and in book decoration the worker has absolutely a free hand, there being an unlimited scope for the exercise of individual taste and ingenuity.

At the Royal School of Needlework, an effort has been made, for some time past, to revive this art—which has always existed to a greater or lesser degree through all the various epochs of the art of bookbinding—and to give it prominence, and there have been turned out some highly creditable specimens, as visitors to the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions may remember, and also in some later exhibitions, but it would seem to us that a mistake is sometimes made by attempting to embroider things which require perspective. The embroidery that best suits book work must necessarily be delicate and minute, as it is for close inspection, and it should present only such patterns as would naturally lie upon the same plane. Embroidered work that attempts to introduce distances reminds us of Chinese art. Sometimes, too, in the adoption of old methods of production, there is a tendency to follow old and imperfect drawing. It is necessary to work with the ingenious stitches invented by the old master workers, better cannot be devised; but, while studying the technical rules of production, there seems a liability to fall unconsciously into the crude and misshapen outlines that have an attraction by reason of their quaintness, and to bring these crudities into modern work, instead of striking out in fresh designs, current, living expressions of ideas.

The study of old embroideries are both necessary for the would-be worker and interesting for the historian, and, fortunately, both have a fairly wide field for research. If we indicate where a few lie, it is only to whet the appetite. Perhaps the earliest printed book in an embroidered cover is "*Fichetus Rhetoricorum*," printed in Paris, 1471, and preserved in the British Museum. It is in red silk and is embroidered with the arms of Pope Sixtus V. when

Cardinal. Queen Elizabeth was not only a lover of embroidered books, but herself a skilled embroideress, several of her works being extant, and it was doubtless her predilection for this class of work that induced Archbishop Parker to choose it for the presentation copy for the Queen of his own work, "*De Antiquitate Ecclesiæ*," the design for which, it is conjectured, was intended as having reference to his own name. It is covered in green velvet, the back and sides being embroidered with coloured silks and silk thread in high relief, and presents a park enclosed by railing, with a large rose tree in the centre, and several deer. That may be found in the British Museum. Katherine Parr and Mary Queen of Scots were also skilled embroideresses, and a beautiful specimen of the latter's work, a missal, is in South Kensington Museum. All through the Tudor period embroidery was cultivated, and the Stuarts had similar tastes. "*The Whole Book of Psalms*," in white satin, embroidered with coloured silks and gold and silver thread, is a very beautiful and curious example; for on it is also worked, in satin stitch, a portrait of Charles I., wearing a crown, red robe, ermine, and blue ribbon of the Garter. This is in the British Museum, and is one of the very rare specimens of embroidered portraits, though there is another in the Bodleian Library at Oxford which is supposed to be a portrait of Charles in the character of King David playing the harp. A few books still exist which shew that the lady binders known as the "*Nuns of Little Gidding*" were embroideresses, but their work was not of a very high order; one of the books was exhibited at the Liverpool Art Club in 1882, and another catalogued at the sale of Lord Crawford's library in 1887.

We are not writing a history of embroidery, so these few must suffice. Those who would like to study the subject would do well in obtaining "*Embroidery and Lace, their manufacture and history*," by Ernest Lefébure, translated and annotated by A. S. Cole, in which some very beautiful designs are given. We are convinced, however, that a wide and profitable field of labour is open to women if they chose to follow the example of these old embroiderers, and turn their attention to book decoration. Woman's labour has always played an important part in the world's productions, and always will, and we bookbinders are not likely to envy her or vie with her in the product of the needle; it is a branch of art work in which she is undisputably sovereign, and we shall be quite content to add our heavier skill to her delicate manipulations by the forwarding of the book she adorns.

IN "*Shakespeare and Typography*," Mr. Wm. Blades cites this among instances of technical terms used by Shakespeare:—"If a book is folio, and two pages of type have been composed, they are placed in proper position upon the imposing stone, and enclosed within an iron frame, called a 'chase,' small wedges of hard wood, termed 'coigns' or 'quoins,' being driven in at opposite sides to make all tight.

'By the four opposing *coigns*
Which the world together joins.'—*Pericles*, iii., 1.

This is just the description of a form in folio.