Hand-Coloured Calf.

It must have been noticed by many of our readers that the demand for hand-coloured calf has of late years much increased. It is also equally true, that the older we get the less we seem to know about the various methods that were employed, and the chemicals used by our predecessors. We recall with pleasure the beautiful, but by no means large collection of rare books, bound in hand-coloured calf, which were shown at the meeting of the Librarians' Association of Great Britain, when they met at Lord Mount-Edgcumbe's, near Plymouth, two years ago. These volumes—there were only about twenty of them—would put to shame many of us at the present day, were they placed side by side with our work for comparison; and moreover, would puzzle us as to how they were prepared. Many would probably answer that we cannot get the same chemicals now, but perhaps the true reason is, that in this age of competition, we do not care to spend the time necessary to prepare the acids and colours in the same manner as was done some fifty to a hundred years ago. As we write this, a little army of books in their calf jackets stands on a shelf before us, and one has a particularly pleasing coat. It is bound by Edwards of Halifax, in what was at the period known as Etruscan style; but we question, if any of us could produce exactly the same effect now. We will, however, endeavour to give a few hints on the practical method of colouring calf, making them as plain but as complete as possible.

First then, see that your calf is of the right kind, for many have failed through getting a leather not suitable for colouring. There are three kinds of white calf. 1. A pure white, suitable only for wedding presents. 2. Calf tanned with shumach, used for law books. 3. Calf tanned with bark, which has a browner hue than law calf. This last is the best leather for hand-colouring done by the binder.

We have found by practice that a more uniform result is obtained by colouring the calf when on the book, and the operations we describe below refer to this method. First it is necessary to paste-water the calf all over equally, in order to get a uniform ground for subsequent work, and also that the colouring liquids may not sink in too much. Make the paste-water rather thin, and be sure to allow the leather to get thoroughly dry before any attempt at colouring is commenced. For convenience, we may divide calf-colouring into three heads, viz.:—Tints, Sprinkles, and Marbles.

TINTS.

Brown.—Procure from the drysalters some salts of tartar: dissolve a ½-lb. in two pints of hot water; bottle this for use. We advise the use of salts of tartar as being more uniform in strength than the cheaper kinds of alcalies. This liquid will be constantly required for colouring, and will keep in this form any length of time. It produces a fine mellow tone, and the calf can be coloured to any degree of brown, from yellow brown to a very dark brown by successive washes, allowing each coat of colour to dry before applying the next. It should not be used too strong, but diluted, say two ounces of the solution to a half-pint of water. By adopting this method it will be found to work much better, and more uniform than using it full strength.

Black.—Sulphate of iron, commonly known as copperas, is the chief ingredient in colouring calf black. The name copperas is probably due to the old and mistaken idea that the crystals being a greenish blue colour contain copper. It can be purchased at the rate of 1d. per lb.

[To be continued.]
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almost exclusively for account-books, and is often stained green. In Italy and Spain, it is still used for binding; but, as we are speaking more especially of English bindings, it is not necessary here to enter into this question.

PARCHMENT is prepared from sheep-skin, and is in comparison to vellum as roan is to calf. It is used generally for account-books.

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We said in our last paper that sulphate of iron was the chief ingredient in colouring calf black. Used by itself it gives a greyish tint, but if a coat of salts of tartar or other alkali be previously washed on the calf, a darker grey even down to purple black will be the result, according to the strength of the alkali or the iron. The iron solution will not keep long, it oxidizes in a few days, and it is recommended not to use it if it has turned of a rusty colour. A simple manner of making the solution is to boil a \( \frac{1}{4} \)-lb. of the sulphate of iron in a pint of water and to bottle the clear liquid when cool. Another, is to boil a number of pieces of iron, nails, steel filings, in fact any iron waste in vinegar, adding iron or vinegar as required, re-boiling the liquor from time to time; but we cannot see the advantage of this method, although it is employed by many at the present day.

Here then, are two simple chemicals, and by employing these by themselves or consecutively we are enabled to get any shades of brown, even to jet black.

YELLOW.—If you wish to colour your calf to a rich yellow, such as is known as hand-coloured calf, take a little of the salts of tartar solution in a basin, add water to this in proportions, say one to four of water, then with a clean soft sponge wash the cover rapidly, doing first the back and then the sides: to get a perfectly even coat, the colour must not be allowed to stand on the leather, but when the back is washed with the sponge, the sponge should be dropped and the palm of the hand be rubbed along the back to equalize the colouring matter; the same with the sides, but instead of using the hand the arm should be used, crossing the lines of the sponge. To make our meaning clearer, if the direction of the sponge be from head to tail the arm should cross from fore-edge to back. By this means the coat of colour is much more evenly distributed and no marks of the sponge will be visible: this coat should be allowed to dry, and the cover washed again and again till the desired tone or shade has been attained. The process is extremely easy, requiring only a little care on the part of the operator that the paste-washing is evenly done and the colour is not too strong. It is advisable to employ a piece of glass to place the sponge upon when released from the hand instead of placing it upon the work-board; glass is easily washed, and by using it for this purpose the work-table is kept clean. But it is absolutely necessary that a separate sponge and a separate basin be kept for each colour, on no account may a sponge be used for tartar that has been used for iron. In fact you require three basins and three sponges; one of each for paste-water, one for the alkali solution, and one for the iron solution. The whole process of tinting may be said to be contained in the foregoing lines, the only additions are a few other chemicals that may be used.
Bright Yellow.—For a bright sharp yellow, dissolve picric acid in water, it is a pale yellow of an intensely bitter taste; bottled, it keeps any length of time,—indeed, we have some now that was bottled seven years ago, and to all appearance is as good now as then.

Warm Yellow.—Into a bottle having a glass stopper put half an ounce of turmeric powder, pour on 4 oz. methylated spirit; the mixture must be shaken occasionally for a few days to extract as much colour as possible. This gives a very warm yellow, pleasing to the eye and permanent, it may be used either alone or after a coat of salts of tartar; if used alone the paste-water may be made very thin, in order that the yellow may strike the leather the better.

Rich Deep Brown.—The green shells of walnut may be used: they should be broken up as much as possible, mixed with water to which a little table-salt has been added, and allowed to stand for some days. The liquid should be strained and bottled for use: this being a pure stain does not corrode the leather, but the preparation is rather “messy,” and is therefore not often used. But it is a useful recipe to have by you.

We shall not describe any other preparations for tinting, such as logwood for purple or red, because coloured calf in all shades may be had from the leather merchants, but confine ourselves to the salts of tartar and sulphate of iron, these being the two essentials of which it is our intention to speak in future papers.—Our next article will be upon Sprinkling.

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Notes and Queries.

Suitable Ornament.—The binding of Sir Henry Layard’s new edition of Kugler’s Italian Schools of Painting is decorated with thoroughly good and characteristic ornamentation, novel, and quite in the right direction. In the copy before us, the impression of the blocks is far too heavy, thus marring much of the good effect. It is a pity binders are not more careful. We are glad to see the woodcuts in this work excellently well printed.

A Printer’s Handbook of Trade Recipes, Hints, and Suggestions relating to Letterpress and Lithographic Printing, Bookbinding, &c., has been compiled by Mr. C. T. Jacobi, manager of the Chiswick Press, and will be published next month. It is intended to be a work of reference for employers and employés, and especially for members of the numerous technological classes now becoming so general in the large centres of industry.

The Gibson-Craig Library.—The second portion of the late Mr. Gibson-Craig’s library will be sold before Christmas by Messrs. Sotheby. Many fine specimens of early Scottish bindings will be included.

In human Leather.—“Through the courtesy of the sub-librarian of Trinity College Library, Cambridge, I was enabled,” says a recent writer, “to examine a portion of human skin, which, he told me, was taken from the body of Corder, the murderer of Maria Marten.
Still keeping to salts of tartar and sulphate of iron, Sprinkling can be done in many and greatly varied styles.

Brushes which are made purposely for sprinkling can be bought of the dealers in bookbinders' materials; but as each worker has a fancy for a particular shape of brush, it may be advisable for him to choose his own; bearing in mind that a large brush is of much more use than a small one. We have found a brush measuring three inches across with the hairs seven inches long a very handy and convenient size. It will be necessary to have one for the iron solution and one for the tartar solution, and on no account may they be used for any other purpose, nor may they be mixed. It will also be advisable to make a mark on one that it may be readily distinguished from the other. In our own case we have cut off half an inch from the top of our "iron" brush leaving it flat; the mere handling of this at once appeals to the sense of touch, and is at once noticed if the wrong one has been taken up. The desirability of readily distinguishing the right brush is apparent when quickness of action is of the greatest importance, particularly in the case of marbling.

For Sprinkling it will be necessary to go first through the whole operation of pastewashing and colouring; the depth of tinting with the salts of tartar being regulated by the kind of sprinkle and depth of colour required.

Some support will be necessary, and for convenience sake, take two pieces of wood about three feet long, four inches in width, and half-inch thick; support these two boards at each end, so that the book may be suspended between them. These boards may be kept entirely for sprinkling and marbling, and will be found very useful; a pair of small trestles to rest them on at each end will also be found advantageous.

Into a round pan (we employ one of brown earthenware), put some of the copperas fluid, and into another, some of the salts of tartar solution. The book having been placed on the boards, the sprinkling may be commenced.

The brushes, after having been thoroughly soaked in the fluids, should be well beaten out, using the hand-pin of the press to beat against; the first few blows of the brush should be done away from the book, unless a coarse sprinkle is desired. (We have tried many things to beat the brush against, but we prefer the small iron hand-pin of the lying-press; it is very much firmer than wood, and altogether is to our mind the better to use.) Whilst beating the brushes over the book the hands should be held up as high as is convenient, and also moved about, so that a fine and equal spray may be distributed; and this should be continued until the desired depth of colour is attained. The tartar should be the first sprinkled on, as fine as possible; then, when dry, the black, this when dry should have a slight sprinkle of brown over it. Should a cold grey sprinkle be desired the black only should be used; if a warm tint, then plenty of tartar. A very pretty effect may be produced by sprinkling fine black and brown to a medium depth, then, when quite dry, giving a coarse sprinkle of black or brown, or both, making as it were a double sprinkle. This, when properly done, is very pleasing. It may also be varied by putting a geometrical
design, cut out of thin millboard, on the cover, to prevent the sprinkle from reaching the leather. A fern-leaf, or any other leaf, on a botanical work is not only emblematical but looks artistic. The sprinkle used in these cases ought to be very fine and dark. When the sprinkle is dry, lift the design or leaf and the pattern will of course appear in the plain coloured leather. "Cambridge calf" is done in this way, by cutting out a square panel of millboard, and laying it on the sides of the book at the time of sprinkling.

To give variety, a little acid may sometimes be employed; thus, if, after sprinkling, a diluted solution of sulphuric acid be used (say, 1 drachm of sulphuric acid to 6 of water), when thrown on the leather, a very pretty effect will be produced. Another variety may be made by adding a drachm of sulphuric acid to half a pint of iron solution, and sprinkling rather coarsely. The result ought to be a white ring round a black spot. If the ring is not sufficiently prominent add more acid, a few drops at a time, until the ring is just right.

We have enumerated a few of the styles that may be mentioned, but from these the sprinkler may branch out into any pattern he pleases.

In all sprinkles it is advisable, nay necessary, first to brush the whole of the cover with a good brush (we use a medium hard shoe-brush), to remove the refuse or dry powder of the colour, then to re-wash the whole with very thin paste-water.

In a future number we shall treat of Marbling on Leather.

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To the Editor of The Bookbinder.

SIR,—The "Society of Arts" has lately offered prizes for the best examples of Hand-tooled Bookbinding, as an incentive to Art Workmanship; this has been followed by a notice that an Exhibition of Apprentices’ Work will be held next December, at "The People's Palace," to prove, as Mr. H. S. King has written, "that the art and mystery of bookbinding has lost none of its ancient craft, and that they (English bookbinders) can hold their own with any nation in the world." These are matters of such interest to members of the trade, that a few words in connection with the manner in which work is now executed, may not be out of place in your columns.

If the "Consolidated Society of Bookbinders" are really in earnest in this matter, if they desire to retain the reputation for English art-workmanship, earned by such masters as Payne, Lewis, and Mackinlay, and in later days by Bedford, Hayday, and others, a very radical change will indeed be needful to attain this end; for instead of keeping up the artistic merit of their work, the London trade has, with a few honourable exceptions, allowed it to decay, and now undertakes binding at prices that render it impossible to secure good and honest work. We are dealing now entirely with what is usually termed the better class of leather work. The exigencies of trade, the demand for cheap literature, make it needful that ordinary cloth, or case-work, should be executed in the most expeditious way, and indeed the wonder is, how such work can pay anyone. To execute artistic bookbinding through the aid of machinery is almost as impossible as to paint a fine picture by the same means. That good and creditable work cannot be turned out by such aid we do not for a moment say; but if we wish to compete with our Gallic neighbours, if we desire to keep high-class