THE BOOKBINDER. BY JOOST AMMON
On Bookbindings,
ANCIENT, MEDIÆVAL, and MODERN.

CHAPTER I.
ON ANCIENT BINDINGS.

The earliest records of Bookbinding carry us back far beyond the Christian era. The ancient manuscripts in which, from the remotest ages, chronicles of national importance were preserved, were variously protected from injury. Valued in a degree proportionate to their great importance, these manuscripts were venerated and handed down to successive generations; and it was to the efforts made to preserve them that the binder's art owed its origin.

A very complete account of all the operations of bookbinding has been given by several Roman writers; and from their many allusions to the beauty of their bindings we may infer the height to which the art was carried before the Augustan age. Cicero, we read, was very particular about his bindings, and admired the gay covers of the precious manuscripts in his own library in his villa at Tusculum, and in the library of his rich young neighbour, Lucullus.

When a book was completed, as far as the author's intention went, it was placed in the hands of librarii, or transcribers, who answered to our printers, and who made many copies of it. From the hands of the transcribers the works passed to the librarioli, who ornamented the margins with fanciful scrolls and devices, and supplied titles and terminations. The work thus elaborated was then sent to the bibliopægi, who corresponded to our binders. The first operation of the bibliopægus was to cut the margins above and below perfectly even, and the sheets of

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parchment at the beginning and end square. He then polished the exterior with pumice-stone, just as the interior had already been smoothed by the writers. Horace, Ovid, and several other writers bear witness to this use of pumice. The cover (involucrum) was next fastened to a cylinder of wood, bone or gold, and the scroll* rolled round it. At the end were balls or knobs called umbilici or cornua. The title was inscribed on a piece of vellum or parchment glued on near the top, or sometimes only on a label affixed to the roll. In some cases the first page had a portrait of the author. The value of the book was often indicated by the ornaments; thus, the bosses were sometimes of gold, or even of precious stones, while the cover was coloured purple or scarlet, and the papyrus leaves perfumed with oil of cedar.

A bookseller’s shop in Rome would have shown a collection of scrolls more or less ornamented, not unlike our modern maps, and in this form books were passed round to be read. The scrolls, when completed, were often put for further protection into a cylindrical case called capsa or scrinium; this was frequently of beech-wood. The scrinium appears to have been a larger case, adapted to hold many rolls. Martial tells us that these cases might be locked, and learned men and authors could thus carry their libraries about with them. Several rolls were found at Herculaneum, so well preserved that the Roman ink on the parchment was scarcely faded; and, more recently, papyrus rolls, which have traces of gold on their leathern coverings, have been found in tombs at Thebes.

A still nearer approach to modern binding was made in the Roman pugillaria, or table-books, of which also many were found at Herculaneum. They consisted of from two to eight leaves made of ivory, wood, or metal, connected at the back by rings, and covered with wax to take the impression of the stilus. These pugillaria, much more than the scrolls, suggested a cover, which at first was a leaf of parchment or other skin, and, afterwards, of boards.

These facts show that the Romans were little inferior to the moderns

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* The word volume (volumen) is from the rolls or scrolls of parchment, or papyrus, which were connected together by a thong or cord, and which were often highly ornamented.
in the art of bookbinding. Aiming first only at utility, the Roman bookbinder was insensibly led on to ornamentation. The first step was taken when leather was stretched over the edges and backs of the covers of books to prevent injury arising from rubbing, and another improvement arose when, instead of securing it by straps, clasps for books were provided. Horace, Catullus, and many others bear witness to the sumptuous book-shops which existed in every considerable city; and Cicero, Pliny, and Seneca often refer to the pleasure they had in their
books. Then, as now, workmen became noted for their skill, and were eagerly sought by amateurs. A letter of Cicero's is extant in which he requests his friend Atticus to send him some fine parchment, and two slaves who were very clever binders.

But we must look to the East for the most marked advance in the art of bookbinding. We read of the massive books which were carried in the public processions of the Byzantine Emperor in the middle of the fifth century. Doubtless these mighty records of the nation's laws impressed the populace with awe, and added to the dignity of the sovereign ruler. The bindings of these splendid volumes were in red, blue, or yellow leather, and thin golden rods were placed in lines across the back, so as to form lozenge-shaped patterns.

In the bindings of the sixth century which have been preserved, precious stones begin to play a prominent part. "Byzantine coatings," as they were called, were principally of metal—gold, silver, and copper gilt—into which the jewels were introduced. We must not forget that in the Middle Ages monopolies were so universal that the goldsmith claimed the external ornamentation as his own; the miniaturist expected to be called upon to adorn the interior of the work; and to the binder belonged only the fastening of the leaves, and adjustment of the wooden covers.

A book of the Gospels, translated in A.D. 370 by Ulphilas, Bishop of Moesia, is an example of the costly style in which books were adorned in early times. It was called the "Silver book of Ulphilas," and bound in massive silver. It was such magnificence as this that called forth the exclamation of St. Jerome: "Your books are covered with precious stones, and Christ died naked before the gate of His temple."

In the early days of the Christian Church there was no more popular gift than an illuminated manuscript. Princes and prelates alike bestowed such marks of their favour upon their favourite monasteries and churches. Leo III., on becoming Pope in 795, gave splendidly-adorned "Gospels" to various churches; and the Emperor Michael, about 855, sent a "Gospel" decorated with pure gold and precious stones as a present to St. Peter's. Such cherished gifts were placed upon the high altar.
To preserve such valuable possessions from theft, many expedients were resorted to. It was usual to chain them to shelves and reading-desks, and when, as often happened, the volume was too heavy to be lifted, the desk upon which it was chained was made to revolve. In large households, or baronial castles, it was no unusual thing to find a book which was prized and valued by all, attached to a table or stand in the great hall, so that those members of the family who could read had easy access to it. A print in Lecroix's *Moyen-Âge et la Renaissance*, representing the Library in the University of Leyden, shows that this custom continued down to the seventeenth century. The name given to the books thus chained was *catenati*.

If we pass on a few centuries later, we find that the monks were still almost the only *literati*. They wrote chiefly upon subjects of religion, and bestowed great pains upon the internal and external decorations of their books. In the thirteenth century some of the gospels, missals, and other service-books for the use of the Greek and Roman churches were ornamented with silver and gold, apparently wrought by the hammer; sometimes also they were enamelled and enriched with precious stones and pearls of great value. But they were not always lavish in the coverings which protected their books. They used great discrimination in their selection. Skins, roughly cured and stretched over boards, sufficed for their more ordinary books; sealskin was often chosen, or even the tough hide of a shark was utilised; but only the coverings of the most valuable works were elaborated. No doubt the preservation of the ancient manuscripts is largely owing to the thick and impervious substances in which they were encased.

Among the few magnificent specimens of manuscript copies of the Holy Scriptures still preserved, we may call attention to one with which Charles the Bald enriched the monastery of St. Denis, and which is now preserved in Munich. The binding itself is very coarse, but the ornaments are of great value. The cover of the book, as it is now to be seen, is of gold plates embossed, and adorned with pearls and precious stones. This style, in which the bookbinder’s art was the least, and the gold-
smith’s skill was the most highly exercised, was very much in vogue: several specimens of it are to be found in the National Library in Paris—among others a Carlovian manuscript which Charles V. ordered to be covered with massive gold boards, before he presented it to La Sainte Chapelle. A book-cover of excellent workmanship, of this date, is preserved in the South Kensington Museum; and another, very similar, is in the Library of the Vatican. Both are magnificent examples of ivory carving.

Bookbinding, as an elaborate art, made great progress in the age of Charlemagne. It became more and more the fashion to employ Italian artists and designers. A large collection of richly-illustrated manuscripts, ornamented in the most skilful way, is described in the will of a Count Errard, the son-in-law of Louis le Debonnaire; but unfortunately not a single volume of his splendid library has been preserved. This is the more to be regretted as a comparison of these bindings, which were largely due to Italian workmen, might have assisted us in forming a more accurate idea of the progress of art in the ninth century.

The British Museum contains a copy of the Latin Gospels of the eighth or ninth century. It is beautifully written, but the binding is evidently not of the same period. The plates which cover the boards are of silver. The centre contains the figure of a saint in high relief, one hand raised, the other holding a book, which, we can see, has clasps and is ornamented with a geometrical pattern over the whole of its surface. The raised border of the covers of the gospels is very massive, and is also composed of silver plates, in which large uncut crystals and precious gems are set, and which stand out very prominently. The corners of this valuable book have square medallions of gold with black enamels, representing emblems of the four Evangelists. Another volume of the tenth century has rich blue enamelling, with large crystals set in the bordering.

We find that, in the early years of the Middle Ages, the very richest materials were employed in the bindings of books. In the Cluny Museum two magnificent plates of Limoges enamel are preserved, which evidently
formed part of the cover of a book. On some specially valued writings, as on a Book of Prayers belonging to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, pearls, gold nails and rubies were lavishly sown, and there is an account of a copy of Boccaccio which was “covered with red velvet, and on each cover five large rubies.”
It thus became necessary to provide an every-day dress for volumes which were so expensively decorated. After the goldsmith had finished his work, it was returned to the bookbinder, who placed over its rich cover a more ordinary wrapper which served to protect it from injury. This outer covering was generally made of "chevrotin," a kind of thin leather, or of rough silk called "sendal," but the latter was only used upon rare occasions. In the French royal account for 1360, there is an entry for "sendal" to cover the king's missal. The general term for these was chemise; a prayer-book of St. Louis, in the Musée des Souverains, is described as in its chemise of sandal-wood. These covers were sometimes made by women, for we find the Duke of Burgundy, in 1398, paying "50 sols tournois" to Emelot de Rubert, an embroideress, for cutting out and working in gold and silk two covers in green cloth, as well as working some markers and straps. A reference to women as bookbinders is also found in a very curious record of old London, which runs thus: "In Edward II.'s reign, certain Welchmen were attached at the suit of Dionisia le Bokebyndere, on a charge of having broken into her house in Flete Street, in the suburbs of London."

In the treasury of Essen Cathedral is a book supposed to be of the early part of the eleventh century, which is decorated with elaborate workmanship and precious stones. The plaque in the middle is a marvellous piece of intricate carving in ivory (see illustration).

In the British Museum, a manuscript of the eleventh century is preserved, bound in a cover of a later date. A beautiful painting in the centre, representing St. Agnes, is sunk in blue velvet. She is clothed in scarlet, and is reading a book, and is supported by two aged saints, one of whom is St. Blaise.

To the twelfth century belongs another specimen now in the British Museum: it is a Latin Psalter which was copied for Melissenda, Queen of Jerusalem. It is bound in red morocco, inlaid with ivory, carved by a Greek named Herodias. The principal actions of David’s life are represented, and many figures are introduced whose names are written upon small labels above their heads in red letters: the ivory is studded with turquoises and other precious stones.
As we have said before, the work of the binder proper was generally the least part of the elaborate operation of preparing an ancient manuscript for the library. The monks, among other privileges, enjoyed that of being allowed both to write and to bind books. Every abbey contained a room for transcribing and binding, called the scriptorium, and estates were often given specially for its support. Mr. Arnett, in his curious work on books and the arts connected with them, speaks of the Irishman Dagæus, who was skilful in caligraphy, and was also a good bookbinder—that is to say, one who could both write the book and cover it with gold and silver. He was a monk, which explains his being skilful in both arts, and also his being allowed to practise both; for in any other position he would have been limited to one. Writers were obliged to be writers only, and binders, binders only, neither being allowed to encroach upon the goldsmith's art. From this we readily understand how it happened that the art made rapid strides in monasteries, and scarcely advanced at all in the cities.

The monks not only transcribed and bound books, but they also prepared the parchment for the manuscripts and the leather for the binding. Their favourite leather was made from stag-hide, and for this pious purpose they valiantly hunted the stags on their estates, and if their own forests were not large enough to supply sufficient skins, some neighbouring lord would lend them his woods, with permission to kill the stags they might find; to take the venison for their refectory and reserve the hides for their library.

A peculiar interest also attaches to the use of leather in binding, as exhibiting one of the earliest forms of printing. "It would not be difficult," says M. Libri, "to prove that, in all probability, the impression by the blind-tooling of figures on the skin employed for the covers of books preceded every other impression of figures from engravings either on wood or metal. The Italian word stampare, employed long before the invention of printing, and which was anciently used as applying to the action of pressing on the skin, is one proof of this assertion."

There was no limit to the adornment which fine manuscripts met with
at the hand of the goldsmith. Sometimes the elaborate covers were protected by a thin leaf of feldspar, which was transparent, and allowed the design to be seen through it. The book was then placed in a costly case. If the volume was small, this cover was sometimes entirely formed of gold embroidery, but more often it was of silk. These silk cases were often double the size of the book, the extra piece of covering being to tuck into the girdle. Duke Philip the Bold had a little Book of Prayers which he used without any outer cover, but to which was attached a case for his spectacles! Such an addition seems to have been rare, but small bars of gold or silver, which served as supports for the markers were very usual; they were called *pippes*, and were often made of silver gilt, with several tassels of silk. These tassels were sometimes very valuable; a pearl or ruby was often fastened to the end of the markers.

The beautiful and richly ornamented Book of Prayers given by Margaret of Austria to the Bishop of Paris, in 1515, is a splendid specimen of these luxurious volumes; it is covered with pearls, intersected with various silks. The ruby set in the *pippe* was valued at more than a thousand florins, and to it were attached twenty-five markers, each garnished with a pearl.

But in our interest in the outer covering and its limitless adornment we must not forget the basis of the absolute binding—which was made of simple wood. These boards, which were intended to protect the manuscript, often led to its destruction, for, becoming worm-eaten, the grubs with which they were infested in process of time invaded the pages, which became riddled with holes. The boards at one time were made of beech (in German *buch*, whence our word book is derived), and were so massive as to be like doors which closed in upon the manuscript.

After a time, the habit of binding books in boards fell into gradual disuse, a change which, however advantageous to new books, was destructive of many old and valuable ones, for the basis of the new bindings was pasteboard, and to make it, sheets of paper were pasted together. To secure sufficient paper, the pages of old books were used: every volume which seemed to have served its turn was destroyed in
this way, and many rare works must have disappeared. In modern times, valuable manuscripts and parts of forgotten volumes have frequently been discovered embedded in the pasteboard cover of a book.
In the fifteenth century, it was the custom with many bookbinders to place their names in the midst of the pattern stamped upon the leather. The Flemish binder, Louis Bloc, bound an exceedingly beautiful manuscript, now preserved in the library at Tournai, in brown calf, with this inscription: LUDOVICVS BLOC OB LAVDEM Xristi Librum HVNC RECTE LIGAVI. This is evidently an impression from an engraved plate—the lettering runs on the four sides of a decorated panel, which is repeated, twice at the top and twice at the bottom of the cover. And on a book in the Douce collection, in the Bodleian Library, occurs the name of another Flemish binder, with this legend: IORIS DE GAIFERE ME LIGAVIT IN GANDAVO OMNES SANCTI ANGELI ET ARCHANGELI DEI ORATE PRO NOBIS.

In the age of chivalry, books became far more common, and in addition to the sacred and classical writings, many histories, poems and romances were produced. Ladies, as well as monks and scholars, interested themselves in literature, and the change in the character of the manuscripts naturally affected the style of binding, which became of a lighter and gayer character. It was at this period considered proper that books should both please the eye and be easy to hold in the hand; so, as time went on, we find finer vellum employed, much velvet used to hide the thin wooden covers, and great progress made in the portability of books.

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