The earliest printed books we possess, the splendid folios of Faust and Schöffer, owe very much of their beauty and attractiveness to the illuminated initial letters, and for these ornaments they were directly indebted to the scribes and missal-painters who, before printing was discovered, had brought their art to the greatest perfection. The aim of the printer was to produce, by mechanical means, fac-similes of the masterpieces of the illuminator, and we know that Faust was able to sell examples of the famous "Mazarin Bible" in Paris, as manuscript works. It has been well said that "no art ever rose to perfection with such rapidity, after its groundwork had been completed, as that of typography," and if we carefully examine the "Psalter" of 1457, the first book with a date, we are unable to escape the conviction that little more was possible for the subsequent masters of the art. The Psalter, the fine large gothic type of which rivals the best manuscripts of the period, both in the beauty of the formation of the letters and in the blackness of the ink, is enriched with no less than 306 woodcut initial letters, many of them printed in red and blue, with ornament and scroll work extending far beyond the outlines into the borders of the page. Most of the sheets necessitated three printings, which have been executed with consummate skill, while in point of design and excellence of workmanship the letters compare very favourably with the illustrations to the block-books and donatuses of that date.

For our present purpose we need scarcely reopen the vexed question of their attribution to Gutenberg or to Peter Schöffer; there can be no doubt that some of the smaller capitals were used in books printed at Mentz previous to 1457, and the probability is that they were actually designed by Schöffer, who would seem to have been engaged by Faust to illuminate copies of the first bible. This bible, a page of which we have reproduced in fac-simile, is now generally admitted to be the work of Gutenberg, and its date must have been not later than 1455. It will be seen from our illustration that the page is in double columns of 42 lines each; three of the lines in the second column, following the preface to St. Luke's gospel, are in manuscript. The capital letters and the ornament in the margin have been inserted by the illuminator.

Wonderful and perfect as was the "Psalter" of Faust and Schöffer as a specimen of typography, it remains almost alone among the earliest printed books in the luxury and taste of its production and in the finished beauty of its workmanship, and when, shortly afterwards, the art of printing began to be practised in the surrounding country, no effort seems to have been made to produce woodcut initial letters, or even large capitals, to be printed simultaneously with the text. It is not until the close of the fifteenth century that we find the printer had wholly emancipated himself from the illuminator and the rubricator, to whom he had been hitherto so largely indebted for the finishing touches to his work. This may to some extent have been a stroke of policy on the part of the printers in order to retain the good will of the scribes, whose art was threatened by the new invention, and it may have been deemed expedient to cage them into friendship by providing them with work in each volume before it was issued from the press. This was not, however, the only motive, for large numbers of early books are in existence in which the initial letters are entirely wanting, and still more have been preserved in which the capitals have been obviously supplied at a much later date. The coarseness of the designing and engraving of the special blocks may have militated somewhat against their general employment, and the difficulty of providing woodcuts which should take the place of the beautiful scroll-work of the missal-painter may likewise have proved an obstacle to their introduction.

We shall not be far wrong in saying that from the date of the first Psalter until Zainer began to print in Roman type at Augsburg, about 1472, the use of woodcut initial letters remained in abeyance. In Venice, where some of the most perfect specimens of typography were produced by Jenson, Radolt, and others, initial letters printed with the type were sparingly employed, and, indeed, until the advent of Erhardt Raddolt in Venice, in 1476, we believe there is no example of their use in Italy.

Following in the footsteps of Schöffer, and taking for his models the usual types of illuminated capitals, came Günther Zainer of Reutlingen, who was the earliest printer of Augsburg, where he set up his press in 1468. He used at first a very beautiful and large gothic type, somewhat resembling that of Gutenberg, but as early as 1472 he supplied himself with Roman characters and printed two works with Isidorus, which are stated by Panzer to be the first books printed in Germany in Roman type. In the following year he issued a complete edition of Comenius' "Historia Scholastica," a sort of paraphrase of the bible, and this work is enriched with some hundreds of woodcuts, or, as some have thought soft metal, initial letters, evidently intended to be hand-coulored. The initials are in two different sizes, the larger ones, at the beginning of each book, are eight lines in depth, and the smaller ones are three lines deep. There are many different varieties of each letter, and even the large capitals, of which there are twenty-one, are all different. We have reproduced one of these initials, the S on the reverse of page 30, which, in our copy of the History, has escaped the notice of the illuminator. It will serve to show how entirely the designer has
been guided by the work of the missal-painter, whose art his outlines are intended only to supplement.

To Erhardt Ratdolt, who, with his companions, Bernardus Pictor and Peter Loslein, came to Venice, as we have seen in 1476, belongs the credit of having originated the enriched border designed to form a species of frame to his title page, and we are also indebted to Ratdolt, or probably to Bernardus, for the beautiful initials printed in red and black ink, which were evidently intended to stand on their own merits, without the intervention of the missal-painter. We wish it were possible to glean more than we know at present of the history of Ratdolt and of that of his companions. We have not been able to trace any work printed by him prior to the date of his arrival in Venice. He did not long work in partnership with Bernardus, for in 1478 we find each of these printers alone credited with works, evidently not issuing from the same office. Ratdolt returned in 1487 to his native city, Augsburg, and as we learn from the colophon of the "Obsequiale Collectum," this was the first book printed there by him after he came back from Italy. Among the works produced by Ratdolt during his stay in Venice we may direct special attention to the History of Peter Mocenicus, by C. Cepio (1477), a beautiful little quarto with an elaborate border to the first page, treated in the white on black style of workmanship for which the wood engravers of northern Italy were so famous at the close of the fifteenth century. In some respects the rich foliage of Bernardus, if as his name implies he was the artist of the firm, recalls the touch of the unknown "Master of the Dolphin," whose praises have been sung by M. Piot and other French bibliographers. That he was an artist of rare skill and one of the earliest, if not the first to emancipate the printer from the slow and laborious cooperation of the illuminator, all who have seen the work we have already mentioned, or the beautiful edition of Appian's History, issued from his press during the same year, will readily concede. This latter work is in two volumes and the title-page of each of them is surrounded with a broad margin of finely designed foliage. This ornament is printed in some examples in red ink, in others, and indeed generally, it is in black. We have reproduced the title-page of Vol. I. with one of the admirable letters to be found in it, which are in two different sizes, some nine lines deep and others only occupying a depth of five lines.

The transition from these letters recalling the flourishes and scrolls of the illuminator to the floriated initial letters in common use in Italy at the beginning of the sixteenth century can clearly be traced, and it would seem that it was really to the printers of that country that we owe the illustrated letters which subsequently became so common. These letters were termed by the early French printers "litteræ florentes," and are found abundantly in the early works of the Venetian and Florentine press. Many different series of them, some designed for works on hunting and the chase, some for copies of the bible, and some for the classic authors with representations of the heathen deities are known to us, and after they had served their original purpose they were transferred to other hands and dispersed, and frequently re-appear in a wholly different volume to that for which they were originally designed. Thus bible scenes are found at the headings of the licentious stories of Boccacio, heathen goddesses preside over solemn chapters in the missal or service book, and the most incongruous designs adorn the coarse jest-books so common about that period. The early designs have in almost every case a background of scroll-work or ornament, which gave to the capitals their name, "a florum figuris quibus erant intermítxæ." Their foliage, which was at first coarse and clumsy, gradually became more delicate and refined, as will be seen in the two letters, Q and S, we have selected for illustration, which were designed by G. Tory, for Estienne of Paris, about 1512, and in course of time figures and animals were introduced, which eventually gave way to small compositions representing the scenes or actions mentioned in the text. The letter itself was always the prominent feature and all the adjuncts were left in the background. It was not until more than a century later that greater attention began to be bestowed upon the background than upon the initial letters, and very shortly afterwards we find that the letter dwindled.
into insignificance and occupied only one corner of
the woodcut, or was even in some cases crowded out
of the composition altogether. Thus the square panel
or frame round the woodcut capital was regarded
only as a space for the introduction of decoration,
and the initial letter was supplied by the printer from
the upper case.

It is, we think, a matter of
regret that the glory of the
early days of woodcut initial
letters has been lost to us,
and that in the place of the
graceful designs which once
headed every chapter we have
now too often to rely upon
the meaningless scrolls and
flourishes with which the type-
founder supplies us. We can
only hope that more careful
study of the work of the early
printers and the growing
fondness for all that was best
in the days of the masters of
the craft may lead to a
revival of the use of book-
ornament, such as is to be
found in the infancy of the
art of printing.—GILBERT R.
REDGRAVE.

Decorative Art in Books.

DECORATIVE ART, as applied
to booklet covers and interiors,
is receiving more attention now
from artists of reputation than
at any previous time, and quite
a number of men whose names
stand high for artistic work,
especially in England, are
engaged in this line. As there
is an ever increasing demand,
due to the exacting and critical
tastes of the day, it is impos-
sible to dispose of the crudities
which, a few seasons ago,
flooded the market. Instead of
the multitude of china-cheeked
gods, prodigy-looking cupids,
and impossibly formed females,
the designs now appear in the
beauties of copies from nature,
a flight of rainbow-tinted
butterflies, a graceful cluster
of La France roses, or a charming
marine view furnishing a motive
attractive and pure. There
are still, however, too many
abominations, having neither beauty of conception nor
harmony of colour to recommend them, which are an
eyesore to all who have any art love. The dealers
are finding out that the chaste things sell and the
garish abominations remain; and it will not be long
before true art will prevail.

Book Sizes.

On the subject of book sizes, a writer in the Pub-
lishers' Circular suggests that the actual measurement
up the back and along the head of every book be given
in inches and decimals of an inch. It would be sufficient
for all practical purposes to carry out the decimal to
one point only; thus a crown 8vo book would be
catalogued as 7.7 × 5; a demy as 8.5 × 5.4, four figures
giving the size of any book to the tenth of an inch.
This may appear complicated at first sight, but if the
size were printed thus in the left-hand bottom corner
of the title-page people would soon get to know the
sizes without a measure.

Title-page of Vol. I of Appian's History,
Border and Initial by Bernardus, Venice, about 1477.