Leather Work.

Leather Work: A Practical Manual for Learners, by Mr. Charles Godfrey Leland, better known as Hans Breitmann than as the author of educational works, is one more contribution to his series of Manuals of the Minor Arts. A part of one of the chapters or lessons, on "gilding," has been prepared by Mr. J. J. Holtzappfel, and with that we have no cause to complain.

With the work of the late director of the Public Industrial Art School of Philadelphia, however, we are sadly disappointed; we opened it expecting the author quite at ease on the subject, and the work full of sound and practical suggestions, the fruit of working experience, given in plain and simple language for the guidance of those whom he invites to the consideration of "one of the most fascinating of the minor or decorative arts."

It is easy, wonderfully easy, for on page after page we are told so: that it may be mastered "in a few days" (p. 23); "it becomes easy after a few days' practice" (p. 69); "any pupil of very ordinary intelligence can learn in a week to outline, stamp and colour, and varnish a large piece suitable for a screen if a good design be supplied" (p. 79); and, "to those who understand drawing and have had a little practice in modelling in clay or wax, it presents no difficulties whatever" (p. 23). Yet there are indications of doubt as to the ease of mastering even its simplest stage: "It seems a simple thing to trace a line, but a great deal of practice is needed to do it thoroughly well" (p. 13). After that we, too, have our doubts as to its ease.

It is wonderfully remunerative; this is also impressed upon us in several places: "Some consider it is easier than metal embossing and wood carving, and really more remunerative" (p. 1); "It produces the best results as regards effect and is certainly the most profitable" of the minor arts (p. 24); "I have in my mind a lady who...makes perhaps a pound a day by it" (p. 24); "I confidently assert that the amateur or artist who, with even moderate practical skill, unites with that capacity in design, which can always be obtained by study, can always make a living by leather work" (p. 24). Why, the thing is perfectly delightful—a pound a day! or at the worst, a living. Again, "it is very certain that any person who can make a book cover, or album, the back or seats of chairs, cushions, panels, etc., in stamped, cut, or appliqué leather work can sell them at a remunerative price" (p. 69), but—here comes the point—only "if they are of an original and striking design"; and on p. 77 we sorrowfully learn that though it is so easy to learn the work, there are "thousands who are astonished to find they cannot dispose of their wares."

Remuneration, however, is certain if we can only get to design, not only originally, but strikingly—another easy thing, for on p. 72 we read: "Now it is not difficult to learn to design for oneself," all that is required is to give time to it; how much is not stated. We believe this is strictly true, but we opine some of our friends would require a century or two to acquire the art properly. Mr. Leland recommends them to another for that purpose. True, he gives a chapter headed "Of Design and Patterns for Leather Work," but it offers no clue as to how to design, though it gives a few hints upon what to avoid.

This is very disappointing, for what is the use of an easy and remunerative art if it depends upon something you cannot get from the book which pretends to

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teach it? If design is so very easy, a chapter of practical hints on how to do it would have been worth twenty on how not to do it. We cannot help distrusting the mirage the author creates; it is intended to lead us on to spend more money in a vain pursuit. Design cannot be learned, it is the product of a natural faculty, and we must give up the idea. But if we cannot be artists, no doubt Mr. Leland will show us how to be artisans, therefore we will pay strict attention to his PRACTICAL instructions.

Therefore, for some account of this "great Italian speciality," but no further mention is made of it, so we must conclude that to Mr. Leland it is not only supposed to be, but is, a lost art.

Lesson I. is fairly clear, and the advice given is good: "It is of the utmost importance that the pupil thoroughly master the first stages. In nineteen cases out of twenty, all (sic) students of the minor arts could make twice the progress which they usually do if they would thoroughly practice the rudiments and devote ten times as much time to them as usual" (p. 12). Lesson II. deals with cut work, and gives some illustrations of early Austrian flat cut work, but no account of its history, nor is there anywhere else in the book any indication of its origin. This lesson might have been given in one line, thus:—When the design has been traced, cut in the lines; and the student would have learned as much by it.

Lessons III. and IV. are miserably deficient of practical information, yet they attempt to deal with the most important parts of the subject. There is not a word about the under-cutting and underlaying of turned up parts of the design, no mention of forcing up work from behind with forcing punches and rings, nor pear punches and their application. For duplicate designs the student is advised to have the pattern cut in cardboard, sheet metal, or fret-sawed thin wood, a most expensive method when duplicates may be easily made on sheets of paper, with the aid of alternate leaves of carbonised paper. A most astounding error is made on p. 30:—"The cover of a book or album may be easily worked with the tracer or stamp, with or without cutting the lines. First cover the book, gluing or pasting the leather to the boards." This is a lesson on moulding. We venture to say that anyone trying to produce a moulded relief design under these instructions will be woefully misled. On p. 32 an illustration of a leather case in the British Museum is given in the text which treats of fourteenth century work, but the specimen from which it is taken is of late fifteenth century work.

Lesson VI. deals with what is called "Scorching and Pressing Patterns," more familiarly known to bookbinders as blind tooling, and the explanations are curious:—"If the reader has a steady hand and a little practice, he or she may begin by executing a cover for a small book, first marking the design with Indian ink or vandyke brown and then going over it with a tolerably firm pressure—not too hard—with a tracer, or a dull, well-polished point. He may rub up and down, but must beware of burning the leather too deeply" (p. 45). No suggestion as to wetting the leather is given, and it is evident that bookbinders' methods are unknown to the author.

Lesson VII. explains how inlaid devices may be "pasted, glued, or gummed on the surface of another colour." No word concerning the paring of the leather. It is to be laid on blotting paper, of all

In the introduction, tools and materials are described; some of the tools we consider unnecessary, while others which are wanted are missing. Our author makes complaint that "not a single modern authority teaches us what was the great Italian speciality of the fourteenth century, that is, the working and carving in raw hide, which produced work of intense hardness, such as now sells for incredibly high prices because the art is supposed to be lost" (p. 6). We looked eagerly through the book,
Leon Gruel's Exhibition Bindings.

At the World's Fair the artist successor of Trautz-Bauzonnet will be represented by some of his most beautiful handwork on leather. Even in his imitations of the classic book cover adorners of old France it cannot be denied that Léon Gruel is a master. He has sent to America brilliant specimens of the styles of Le Gascon, Maioli, and Dérôme. His speciality is engraved and modelled leather in the Gothic patterns. One of the finest examples of Gruel's work in this manner covers a prayer book woven entirely of silk—miniatures, black letter characters and all—by an ingenious manufacturer at Lyons. Another specimen is on a copy of the artist binder's own manual Historique et Bibliographique de l'Amateur de Reliures. He has neatly introduced this, among the Gothic foliage and flowers of its border, a grue (crane) and a book as his marque parlante. Some of the prices of rarities which Gruel has bound for the great international exposition of 1893 are worth noting.

There is a vellum manuscript, "Livre de Mariage," cased superbly in brown levant morocco, with an ivory bas-relief of the Marriage at Cana inserted, and clasped in silver gilt, marked at 2,800 francs; a chirographic copy of the "Imitation de Jésus Christ," translated by Lamennais, with miniatures by Ledoux and E. Moreau, which will cost its purchaser 20,000 francs, if the precious souvenir is destined to remain in pacified America; and an exact copy of Madame de Pompadour's letter, in citron morocco, with flowers daintily inlaid in red and blue. Seven hundred francs will buy the latter. As bookbindings do not exclusively command the skill of Léon Gruel, other elegant specimens of it, which will be shown and admired at Chicago, are a leather-covered casket for jewels, a scissors case after a model in the museum at Cluny, and a card case in Renaissance style.

The new "Linen Finish" and "Buckram" cloths for book coverings, which Joseph Bancroft & Sons Company, of Rockford, near Wilmington, Del., have introduced, are becoming deservedly popular for the best miscellaneous edition work. No better wearing material of their class is in the American market. For many years the makers of these closely woven cotton fabrics have been celebrated as superior bleachers, dyers, and finishers. The permanent qualities of their goods are well known. Susceptible of the highest artistic decoration by gold or silver stamping, colour printing, and blind pressing, this "Linen Finish" book cloth is appreciable from other standpoints than that of economy. The prevailing shades are tan, light chocolate, écu, buff, light and dark green, olive, maroon, lilac, Roman red, terra cotta, and golden brown; the latter tint is standard and excellent. In the "Buckram" moss green and blue are equally good. Different combinations of colour are also possible in these handsome and durable fabrics, which commend themselves readily to all practical binders. No coverings can be better for educational or reference books, which are generally subject to hard usage—

American Bookmaker.