

Tree Marbling.



BEARING in mind the general instructions given last month, and the principle of the work, we may now proceed to the highest stage yet attained in the art, that of tree-marbling. In this, even more than in the ordinary marbling, everything depends upon the speed and decision of the workman after the colours are once in working order.

First, mark a line up the sides of the book near the joint as a guide for the roll; pastewash; brown as usual, but a little darker than for sprinkling; glaire all over, leaving no bubbles of froth. Once again, let each stage thoroughly dry before commencing the next. Take a sheet of thin tin and, either with a pair of shears or the board machine, cut a strip about twice as wide as the back of your book; mark with point of the shears a line about a quarter of an inch from the edge on each side and turn the edges up to the line, thus forming narrow gutters; now bend the tin till it forms an inverted v, so that it will cover the back of the book when spread out on the rods, the gutters resting on the lines you have marked on the sides. By bending the tin sharp in the middle the water will flow off quickly without flooding the gutters and washing over on to the sides as it might do on a rounded cover. Once having made a few sizes of these tin back-covers, they will last, and can be each used for several sizes of books by pinching in or spreading out, and they are far better than the clumsy strips of millboard frequently used. You will observe that in tree-calf the back is left plain and the marble confined within the framework of a roll border.

Now in this work the flow of water is required to run from head to tail down the centre of the panel framed by the gold roll when finished, so the board must be carefully bent to form a channel, not in its centre, but on the centre measuring from the fore-edge of the board to the marked line up the joint, and so bent that at the head on each side it is sharper than at the tail where the broad base of the trunk of the tree has to be formed and the water must lie longer there to do it. Be careful in bending not to break the board. To avoid spoiling the boards some people cover their tree-calf work on to thin bag-cap cut to the same size as the boards, and after treeing, the cover is thrown into water till the bag-cap soaks off, when it is dried and the book covered in the usual way.

When the sponges, pail of water, and brushes well beaten out are all ready, place a book on the rods, slightly elevating the head by a piece of wood placed under the boards, so that the water will just flow but not run off too quickly. Take a sponge half full of water, drop three or four drops in the centre bend, say one inch below the head on an octavo book, and proportionately on other sizes, and let it run down to the tail. Then take the birch, fling on water all over till the streams from the raised sides join the central stem, and while they are running sprinkle black; cease as soon as it strikes in and sprinkle brown, heavily; then squeeze a full sponge of water over the whole, let it run off, remove the tin cover, wipe off the superfluous water, straighten the boards and stand up to dry.

After your first try, look at the results. If they are successful you will find: (1) That the stem widens as the water flowed from head to tail and is almost free from sprinkle spots, but has faint streaks instead, with one or two little places where the water divided, leaving a dry island on which the sprinkle rested; these are called "knots," and should be near the base. To procure these in uniformity on a set of books it is customary to guide the first flow of water down the centre by the little finger, debouching to the right and left so as to leave these dry spots in regular order and position, and the flowing down afterwards, from the birch, follows the easy course laid out for it; thus a whole set of books may have a smaller upper knot, and a larger lower one in every trunk, if done by a skilled marbler. A touch of grease will effect the same splitting of the water round the place it touches.

(2) By starting the flow at a fair distance from the top edge of the board, the sprinkle on the dry ground has left something like the top foliage of a tree. You never see a trunk upreared into the air level with the foliage: so in marbling this is avoided by the expedient of starting the flow from below the top.

(3) By using the tin back cover with a gutter you will find that, as no water runs off the back on to the sides, an even flow is obtained on each side of the stem, and this being very narrow at the start, widens as it merges in the central stream, thus giving the fair semblance to the graduated thickness of branches, while between the streams the dry places allow the sprinkle to bite in, making the foliage.

(4) When wiping off the wet, should any part smear, you will know, what should have been found out before, that your black is too strong and should be weakened. If the colour is too faint, the black is too weak. If the sprinkle is too prominent, the water was not sufficient, or ran off too rapidly. If the pattern of the tree is vague and blurred, too much water was thrown on.

The water must be just sufficient to make distinct streams converging into the central one, and it must be in motion when the sprinkle falls to make a good tree. Do not try uniformity till you can succeed in variety, for after all no two trees are alike.

With all marbled books the inside edges of the leather are dirtied by stains, and it is usual, when the books are dry, either to brown the insides and then black them or to wash out the stains with oxalic acid—1-oz. dissolved in a pint of warm water—used cold. As soon as the stains are removed, paste wash. We prefer the white insides, which should have a gold roll. The edges of the boards should also be gilt.

Tree-calf is invariably treated to a gilt back, and round the sides it is usual to work a gold flowing roll quite close to the edge of the boards. On best work a mitred line frame and panel back is the style; in either case the sides are glaired all over and polished with a round iron; afterwards varnished thickly, either with a large sponge or a piece of soft baize folded up into a pad. When fairly dry, rub gently with a clean oiled rag and place between japanned iron plates, which should project over the joints. With a heavy pressure, if the books are not too dry, the sides will come out like a looking-glass.