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On German Bookbindings.

In our June issue we gave a German view of English bookbindings from the *Illustrirte Zeitung für Buchbinderei*, which somewhat amused us at the time, partly by reason of the ignorance it displayed concerning the methods adopted in English work and partly because of the cool assumption that the Germans, who have learned all they know from other nations, can produce beautiful work, while we poor English, having enclosed ourselves with a Chinese wall of prejudice, have neither style nor taste in our productions. The writer kindly suggests that there are exceptions to this sweeping condemnation, but not many.

The article referred to was so laughable and generally ridiculous that we did not think it worth while to set other things aside in order to answer it, but at the same time its pretentiousness needed some examination, coming from such a journal. If what it claims be correct, the only thing to be wondered at is that the whole bookbinding trade of other parts of the world has not collapsed, and the work been swallowed up by those possessing this supreme excellence, not to speak of their cheapness of production, of which we hear marvellous stories. Such is, however, not the case, and we would venture the opinion that with a little more enterprise on the part of English binders the tables might be turned and a very fair share of trade be done in binding German books for German use, only that, according to another German writer whose opinions we quote in "Foreign Notes," the Germans do not buy books, and the decline of the German binding trade, with all its beautiful work, is attributed to the meanness of the German public. This is almost a fatal objection, but having some experience of how English shopkeepers have been induced to overload themselves with our own binders' "sweetly pretty" designs, there may yet be a chance on the Continent where they will have little competition to fear. We should be sorry to be made responsible for these opinions ourselves, for we have no predilections in favour of one nation more than another, and certainly no antipathy to either, but when a writer in his own national technical organ deliberately expresses them, we must respectfully accept them as true.

Our business, however, is not to make complaint of what others have written about English bindings—if any of it is true we hope the lesson will be taken to heart—nor of the character of the German public, but thoughtfully and carefully to give our view of German bindings in exchange for the valuable contribution of our neighbours, and we shall try to be fair and strictly to the point in the criticism of the specimens before us, which, with plates and illustrations of work deemed of sufficient importance for a place in their own journals, amount to sixty examples of various styles of German work from various great centres of the industry.

German forwarding is commonly unshapely, and the books as a rule the reverse of solid; the boards generally thick, clumsy, and soft, and the bevelled edge predominates; but when the bevel is confined to a portion only of each exposed edge of the board, and the corners are left of the full thickness of the board, which must be thicker for a bevel than without, the effect is hideous. Fortunately, this style is peculiarly German, and never meets one's sight elsewhere. When bands are used they are what might be called bold, which to our minds would mean broad and clumsy; in fact, the closely nipped-up band, sharp and delicate, is almost unknown. It is, however, a very common practice not to have bands on the backs, and then we get unequal divisions, one panel being much larger than the others; in the centre two skimmed little panels, in the lower of which, in repulsive bareness, the simple Arabic 1 or 2 stands for the volume. You never see five fillets, or false bands, in the place of bands; it is usually only four. The heads of large quantities of even best work are not "set" as in English and French work, but turned in flush with the boards as we turn in a cloth case. Squares are usually large; gilt edges of a hue which suggests any metal but gold, and may look as if they had never been scraped. If marbled, the colours are staring, and do not harmonise; and the same may be said of their thin papers, though in the matter of papers we get even worse abominations than in their marbled types.

But let us turn to their designs, for it is in this direction that they have made such great strides of improvement. Two favourite styles are those of Grolier and Henry II., both of which have been Germanised—that is, improved. The improvement consists generally of one of two forms: either the design has been expanded one way only so as to fit a square book (they are great on square books!), or it has been overloaded with ornament, natural or alien, till all grace and beauty has been obliterated beneath the weight of the gold butter-stamping. Every design must have its frame, and there is a singular unanimity of practice, never found elsewhere, of leaving a margin of blank leather outside the outer roll and outside the run-off pallet at the head and tail of a back. The effect is peculiar, and worries one, especially if the turn-in is not quite even. Even in the work turned out from the technical schools by the teachers the same thing occurs. Most of their lines are coarse, and utterly different to the delicate French lines used in finishing; and even in heraldic work, of which they are very fond, their scrolls have a stiffness in them much more suggestive of lead than of silk. They talk glibly of grace and beauty, but, like the Esquimaux, they judge it by their own standards, which a certain vein of patriotism demands shall be German. Their designs are squat, their mosaics massive, their ornamentation generally crowded, and their execution

heavy. A peculiar notion that a straight bar device along the bevelled edge of the board is ornamental frequently spoils some of their work which might otherwise be passable, and a common plan of putting lettering panels exactly in the centre of a back or side leaves the impression on the eye that it is below the centre, an optical illusion which most finishers know how to remedy in other countries.

In cloth work much the same faults abound, and there is no mistaking the nationality of the work, but we admit freely the German skill in colour printing. For albums they have made themselves a reputation which we have no desire to detract, but on religious work such as Liturgies, Prayer, and Psalm books the work is simply execrable. We have seen several samples lately on which an attempt has been made to copy English styles, but the result was lamentable. A "Die Heilige Schrift" that lies before us is a queer compound of almost all the faults we could enumerate, an extremely light, we might have said fantastic, border encloses a piece of heavy work German Grolieresque in style, forming a centre panel of interlaced fillets out of which a heavy and badly-proportioned cross springs. The whole design is incongruous, and the workmanship is worse than is usually put into leatherette in England.

We do not wish to proceed further; the German technical journals have been for the past two or three years the satirists of the trade, and have repeatedly shewn their appreciation of English work by giving examples and laudatory comments. With something like pardonable national pride they look to Zaehnsdorf as their beau-ideal, and latterly they have regarded Otto Zahn as his transatlantic compeer. For both we have a great deal of admiration, and hope that they may influence our trade in the right direction, but they can scarcely claim Zaehnsdorf as a German, and still less that Otto Zahn won his good name by sticking to German ideas. Change of climate has a great effect upon bookbinders, and they generally improve faster out of the German Empire than in it. Germany cannot keep those workmen who prove themselves adepts at the trade; their ideas are too confined at home. For album builders, binding botchers, cheap paper hands and "tripe" producers of all descriptions, paper hangers and window cleaners included, go to Germany, but not for fine binders.

With all German work there is no possibility of mistaking it for the work of other nations, but there is little that is worthy of holding up as an example to our trade. Of course there are exceptions, but they are so few and far between that there is little chance for their leaven permeating the whole mass of trash producers and mongers who have been lashed with the scorn of their best friends, but without avail.

The latest fashionable fad in the States is embossed leather covers on which the figures are the same as on prayer books. The covers are put around paper-covered novels, and may be transferred from one novel to another. It enables the possessor to be reading the latest French books without the slightest suspicion but that the contents of the cover are those of a prayer book.

American Trade Journals Please Copy.

WE are pleased at finding how much THE BRITISH BOOKMAKER is appreciated in the United States, and how some of the American trade journals, desiring to make up for their own lack of practical information, take the product of our labours without money, and often without acknowledgment. Our delight at opening the leaves of *The American Bookbinder* for July knows no bounds, and we ardently wish that its editor were here that we might demonstrate the force of our affection towards him.

This journal, of 20pp. imp. 8vo, has lifted the following items from our pages *with* acknowledgment: a half column on p. 177, and a column and a half on p. 185. On pp. 186-7 it has appropriated one of our articles, "On Finishing"; changing our title of "Lettering Pieces" to "Colored Title Labels," WITHOUT acknowledgment. On pp. 188-9 it has also taken a series of translations from foreign papers made for this journal, and without acknowledgment to us, printed them as "Foreign Notes." That is not bad work for one issue! Recently we found some German bookbinders' songs which we had translated into English verse lifted in the same manner without any recognition of the English versifier.

Among the advertisements we find the following premiums offered by *The American Bookbinder*, Buffalo, N.Y.:—"Zaensdorf's (*sic.*) Art of Bookbinding,' a practical treatise; with plates and diagrams. New edition, revised and enlarged, 16mo, \$1.75; postage 10 cents. One year's subscription, and 'Zaensdorf's (*sic.*) Art of Bookbinding,' post paid \$1.75; or for seven yearly subscriptions we furnish above book free by mail."

We are very forbearing, and of the kindest disposition towards our contemporaries, but having been brought up with some knowledge of the obligations of the eighth commandment, we would wish all our transatlantic friends to bear it in mind. When we find that their early education has been neglected, or forgotten, we shall endeavour to set before them this simple precept, "Thou shalt not steal."

(To be continued, as occasion may require.)

The Printing News, "a monthly journal for the workers," price one penny, has been started by Feilden & McAllan, Limited, 52 Gray's Inn-road. It is "officially recognised by the London Society of Compositors," and we hope the members will support it with more liberality than they have done its predecessors. As a rule the working man does not support the journals run for his special benefit, but there is hope for *The Printing News* in the fact that the L.C.S. has subsidised it to the extent of £10 a month for three months.

THE publisher of the *American Bookseller* (Mr. N. R. Monachesi) has started a new journal, the *International Bookseller*, which promises to be a success. It is a weekly, and is issued from 33 Clinton-hall, Astor-place, New York.