



On
Cloth
Book-
Binding.

CLOTH-BINDING :

IT is now time to turn our attention to this, by far the most important branch of Book-binding in a commercial sense ; and we propose to devote three or more articles to an account of its rise and progress. Our first paper will treat of

THE ORIGIN OF CLOTH-BINDING.

ANYONE who has access to a library of books which were published in the first quarter of the present century will find that those still in the state in which they were first issued may be divided into two large classes :—1. Dictionaries, Gazetteers, and other books of reference—the Classics and School-books, which were mostly bound in roan or sprinkled sheep. 2. Historical works, Books of Travel, Poetry, and the Drama ; Novels and Tales, which were almost always issued in drab-coloured paper boards, with a printed label pasted on the back, or with the full title printed on the back and sides, as in the case of “Walker’s British Classics” (1818). Sometimes a particular kind of dark green paper was affected—called cob-green (perhaps from the colour of the husk of the cob-nut), and occasionally a dull venetian-red was used—as in “Whittingham’s British Poets” (1816). Anything bright seems, for some inscrutable reason, to have been forbidden. Even so late as about 1832, those two exquisitely-illustrated books, “Rogers’s Italy” and “Rogers’s Poems,” were sent forth clothed in sad coloured drab, while “The Book of Gems” and other *livres de luxe* appeared in vellum-coloured paper, stamped with gold.

When coloured glazed calico was first used for bookbinding, there is no perfect record. Mr. Robert Leighton, says (in “The Bookseller” for July 4th, 1881) :—

“I have in my library a volume presented to my father by the author. It is bound in smooth red cloth, with a paper label ; the publishers’ names are Lackington, Hughes, Harding, and Lepard, and the date on the title-page is 1822, and I have every reason to believe it is one of a number similarly bound in that year.” And we have now before us, Buchanan’s

“Memoirs of Painting,” published by R. Ackermann, in 1824; bound in dark green calico, with a printed paper label. Other books of a similar period were bound in watered cloth.

“In the early days I speak of,” says Mr. Leighton, “the white calico was bought in London, sent to the dyers to be dyed, and from thence to Mr. John Southgate, of 3, Crown Court, Old Change, to be stiffened and calendered.

“The embossing of bookbinders’ cloth was suggested by my father to the late Mr. De la Rue, and was by him carried out so admirably, that his process remains in use unaltered to the present day. The desired pattern was engraved on a gun-metal cylinder, and transferred in reverse upon one made of compressed paper, strung upon an iron spindle, and turned in the lathe to the exact circumference of the gun-metal one, and these two being worked together in a machine, and the pattern transferred from one to the other, the cloth was passed between them and received the impress of the pattern engraved on the metal cylinder. In this way the whole of the cloth used by our firm was for many years embossed upon our own premises. The cylinders were only fourteen or fifteen inches wide, and the machine was turned by manual labour, and heated by red-hot irons which were placed inside the gun-metal cylinder, and when cold replaced by others. In those days it was customary to engrave special cylinders for books of importance, and you may still occasionally meet with stray volumes of ‘The Penny Cyclopædia,’ or ‘Knight’s Pictorial England,’ with embossed cloth covers so prepared.”

But the triumph of cloth-binding was not achieved till the year 1832, when specially-prepared bookbinders’ cloth was stamped with gold letterings and ornaments. The first work that appeared in this new dress was the edition of Lord Byron’s Works, published by Mr. John Murray in seventeen volumes. And we may fairly arrive at the conclusion that it was to the joint exertions of Mr. Archibald Leighton, of Exmouth Street, Clerkenwell, and Mr. James Leonard Wilson, of St. John Street, that the problem of stamping gold upon cloth was satisfactorily solved.

Speaking of his father John Henry Bohn, the celebrated binder, Mr. H. G. Bohn says, in a letter to the *Art Journal*:—

“In my early days, being at every spare moment at the side of my father, I became familiar with all these processes, and by the time I was ten years old could perform them, as well as bind, gild, and letter a book perfectly. In later life the knowledge of the peculiar dressing used for gilding on silk enabled me to communicate with Mr. Leighton, of the firm of Leighton and Eeles, bookbinders, the means of getting cloth prepared so as to take gilding by heated machinery at the rolling or stamping press, which a leading trade firm said was impracticable. The process, however, after a few weeks’ experiments conducted by the late Mr. James Leonard Wilson, was successfully accomplished, and Mr. Leighton thereupon wrote to me triumphantly announcing the fact, and undertaking in consequence to bind in gilt-cloth several thousand volumes at half the price I should previously have had to pay, on account of the necessity of having to add leather pieces on the backs for taking the

