We have much pleasure this month in presenting our readers with a portrait and some biographical notes of a binder whose artistic productions in America have excited considerable interest, and whose claim to our admiration rests upon such an all-round knowledge of our trade in all its various departments as very few men possess in these days, resembling more the mediæval master craftsman than the modern bindery foreman.

Otto Zahn was born at Berka, in the principedom of Schwarzbürg-Sondershausen, Germany, in 1856, and was the son of a Protestant clergyman. He was fortunate in receiving a good education there, and was then placed in a small bindery at Arnstadt in the same principality, where he not only learned to fold, sew, bind, and finish both blank and letterpress work, make portfolios, pocket books, albums, paper and other fancy boxes, but was expected to make all the thousand and one other little articles required for the fancy stationery trade, which in Germany is commonly combined with that of bookbinding. According to prevalent German custom, having finished his short apprenticeship, in the year 1873 he set out on his travels, and moving further and further from home and its limited opportunities of improvement, he found his way into some of the best shops of Germany, Italy, Egypt, Switzerland, France, England, Brazil, the West Indies, Mexico, and the United States, where he arrived in 1883, settling down at Memphis, Tennessee, in the year 1884.

With an intelligent mind and a retentive memory, he studied not only the styles of work by which he was daily surrounded, but availed himself of the opportunities which residence in these various countries afforded by visiting the great storehouses of art treasures, and acquainting himself with the masterpieces of the great binders of bygone times. Fine decorative bindings had always had a great attraction for him, and he investigated the historic styles and made their characteristics his special study, from the wonderful interlaced work of the Arabs, the chromatic splendour of Moorish and Persian art, the plainer gothic, and the glories of the renaissance, down to those of the present century. All the essential decorative elements in the ornamentation of all periods, on other objects besides books, that have come within his observation have been noted and stored up as his own intellectual property.

In the actual work of the trade, his time and attention have been devoted with almost equal success to vellum and letterpress binding, wholesale and retail, edge gilding, marbling, the staining and marbling of calf, and the art of incised leather work which of late years has been revived with such marked success; but his chief study has been that of finishing. For some years Mr. Zahn has been foreman in the bindery of S. C. Toof & Co., of Memphis; but though constantly and busily engaged in the production of work at something like commercial prices, he has managed to find time for the writing of a series of articles for the *Illustrierte Zeitung für Buchbinderei* on the styles of ornamentation applied to bookbinding, and technical papers for American journals.

From one of the latter on "Incised Leather," published in the *American Bookmaker*, we quote some of his ideas on design:—"Any style of any period will prove worth making, provided the artist knows just what he is about. In considering the elements of a design it must be remembered that style does not merely relate to decoration, as is too often supposed,
but originates in construction, to which decoration is only subsidiary. Style implies some dominating influence, reflecting the mind of the age in all its works and therefore presumes a certain unity of character throughout. The design must have regard to construction, and consequently to the proper use of materials prior to the consideration of its ornamental decoration. As construction necessarily implies a purpose, utility must take precedence of decoration.

"Construction necessitates proper consideration of materials, and as each material has its own mode of manipulation, and is wrought by separate and varied processes, design must necessarily be bad when it applies indiscriminately the same forms or ornamental treatment to materials differing in their nature and application.

"The man who would cover a ledger with velvet, and ornament it with silver mountings, would be as guilty of violating that law as he who should ornament his leather-bound books with the fronts of cathedrals, stone tracery, &c., or be satisfied with a mere imitation of natural objects for decorative purposes. 'No art is noble which in any way depends on direct imitation for its effect on the mind'; but he who ornaments may learn something of restraint and guard against over-ornamentation by seeing how nature restricts her true ornaments, the flowers, to the most salient and culminating points, and sprinkles them sparingly, contrasting with the foliage."
"The ancient Egyptians, although deriving the details of their ornaments from nature, treated them strictly conventionally, and arranged them accordingly. The Hebrews were taught by divine command to arrange symmetrically, and in continuous order, 'a golden bell and a pomegranate.' These principles of symmetric or conventional treatment have been handed down to us from the nations of antiquity, and have prevailed largely in all prominent epochs.

'Now if such laws of arrangement were necessary when all ornament was produced by hand labour, imitation of past works will not renew or give vitality to an old style. In order to do this the artist must enter into the spirit of the past age and be imbued with the feelings which then prevailed.

'Look at the flashy, gaudy, cheap-looking cloth and paper bindings! They are like wearers of cheap finery. Their Dutch metal stamped imitative ornament is always a size larger than it should be—bolder, coarser, and more impudent than the true thing—exciting contempt for its tawdriness, and the meanness and vulgarity which it is intended to adorn. The

how much more are they in our age of production by machinery? In all ornament so produced, whether by printing, stamping, tooling, or incising, some law of geometrical recurrence, both in form and colour, is enforced by the requisite repeats, and takes place, however we may strive to disguise it, at frequent intervals.

'While on the subject of style it must be remembered that old styles are, and perhaps ever will be, imitated, and indeed by far the largest numbers of modern works are based on imitations, but the mere

ornament of past ages was chiefly the offspring of hand labour; that of the present age is the child of the engine and the machine. This great difference in the mode of production causes a like difference in the results. In old times the artist was at once designer, ornamentar, and craftsman, and he was equally facile in the use of the pencil, the brush, the stamp, the hammer, or the punch; his hand and his mind wrought together, not only in the design but in every stage of its completion, and many a beautiful afterthought was embodied by the hand
of the skilled mechanic; many a grace was added to the work by his mastery and skill as he varied his labours with every feeling of his overflowing mind. There are very few binders in our midst nowadays who combine sufficient talent, stimulated by love of their work, with the necessary practical skill to create originals."

There you have Otto Zahn giving vent to his own feelings, with something akin to contempt for modern methods, but he feels the force of his own surroundings so much that he is compelled to deplore that he cannot give the time and labour to a book's ornamentation that will allow him to compete "in exactness and perfection of technical execution with a Zachnsdorf or Rivière." He has to make a living. Art, and theories of art, are one thing, bread and butter another, and his best is but to "try and inoculate the buying public with a taste for fine bindings." Many of his designs are bold and free from the cramping notions that have confined less daring workmen; some are exquisite examples of a dainty skill that can make beautiful conceptions out of a few tools and the ordinary stock-in-trade of a finisher—bits of straight and curved lines. This is the true finisher's art, even though the execution be less praiseworthy than that of a Trautz-Bauzonne et or a Marius Michel.

From the designs sent to us for selection, we regret that those we have chosen do not show up Mr. Zahn's work to the best advantage, owing to the
faulty work of the photographer, who has placed the books in such a position that they appear out of square, but they will serve to illustrate his original treatment as well as his power of following in the old traditions of schools of art that still win our admiration.

The 400th anniversary edition of "America," by Cronan, is bound in medium blue crushed levant, with a black inlaid framework and corners inlaid with sky-blue and orange; the four small circles connecting the centre circle with the framework are in orange, with a lemon-coloured centre circle; the interlaced figures therein are in sky-blue, lemon, and crimson; the panel showing the Aztec god, cream; the panels for the years, brown; the lettering-piece of terra-cotta coloured morocco, with the letter A in lemon. The

The Fust Family.—The Journal of the Ex Libris Society gives, among other illustrations, a copy of a remarkable "book-plate" (6¼ x 3½-in.) of Sir Francis Fust, of Hill Court, Gloucester, a descendant of Sir Edward Fust, created a baronet by Charles II., but more illustrious, if the pedigree is substantiated, are the descendant of Johannes Fust, citizen of Mentz, the world-renowned printer. "Little is known," said M. J. R. Brown, in a presidential address to the "Society of Odd Volumes," "of the immediate descendants of John Fust; the family seems, however, to have migrated to England, for one Richard Fust flourished there during the reign of Edward IV., and Thomas was burnt at the stake at Ware, under Queen Mary. About the middle of the sixteenth century I find that

doubled is in garnet-coloured morocco, hand tooled. Brunet's "La Reliure Ancienne et Moderne" is in light brown crushed levant, with black interlaced framework and grey interlaced corners, the compartments between the framework being filled in with garnet-coloured morocco; style, Grolier. The double is in coffee-brown morocco, hand tooled. The Visitors' Register of the Memphis Cotton Exchange is in straight-grained coffee-brown russica, inlaid with garnet, white, and lemon.

The article on p. 39 in our last issue about the Althorp Library was copied from the London Daily Chronicle, acknowledgment of our indebtedness to that journal being quite by accident omitted. It may be noted en passant that it was from the pen of Mr. W. Roberts, editor of The Bookworm.

Edward Fust settled in the city of London and married Jane Singleton. Their son Richard purchased, in Queen Elizabeth's time, the manor of Hill, in the county of Gloucester." The baronetcy was conferred on his son "in recognition of his father's loyalty to the house of Stuart."

Skytogen is the name of a paper substitute for calico and leather in bookbinding and fancy goods. The surface is soft and leather-like to the touch, does not scratch so easily as leather, and is not so easily soiled as calico. It does not break in folding, but does it retain any wrinkles after being crumpled. It is especially suitable for coloured printing and embossing. Skytogen is manufactured in sheets, and on account of its many good qualities will no doubt be a favourite article for bookbinders.