Our Portrait Gallery - No. 8.

Arthur E. Calkin.

Percival Calkin.
THE BRITISH BOOKMAKER.

Our Portrait Gallery.

No. 8.—ROBT. RIVIÈRE & SON (MESSRS. P. & A. E. CALKIN).

The house of Robert Rivière has long been celebrated for fine bindings, on which both good workmanship and artistic skill are happily combined, and small wonder that such a reputation has been won when we look back to the history of the firm.

Valentine Rivière, the descendant of an old Huguenot family, who settled in England shortly after the revocation of the edict of Nantes, was a drawing master of some reputation who brought up eight of his nine children to the arts. William, the eldest son, was the father of Briton Rivière, R.A.; Robert became a bookbinder; the third was a member of the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours; and the ladies of the family all became accomplished artists or musicians.

Robert was apprenticed to Messrs. Allman, the booksellers, of Princes-street, Hanover-square. In 1829 he started in business for himself, in Bath, but not doing very well he came back to London in 1830, and started as a bookbinder in Great Queen-street, where his artistic taste soon secured for him the liberal patronage of many of the best bibliophiles of the country. In 1840 he removed to Piccadilly with a growing reputation for careful and conscientious work, for, though self-taught, his early training and the cultured environments of his home had quickened his faculties for the production of the beautiful in whatever sphere his work should lie.

By his marriage, in 1839, Robert Rivière had two daughters, but no sons to whom he could look to carry on the business, and having a presentiment that he should not live long to carry on his work, he had young Percival Calkin, his youngest daughter’s son, brought from school at the age of thirteen and placed in the workshops. There he was taught all the branches of the trade, with all the studious care that Mr. Rivière could bestow, and a private tutor was engaged that the lad’s education might not suffer by the sudden stoppage of his school life. In 1879 he was taken into partnership, and the style of the firm was changed to Robert Rivière & Son. In 1882 the head of the firm died, and Mr. P. Calkin succeeded to the business, carrying it on successfully until his brother, Mr. Arthur E. Calkin, was taken into partnership in 1889, since when it has been controlled by these two enterprising grandsons of its founder.

The commodious premises in Burlington-buildings, Heddon-street, Regent-street, were taken in 1884, and we have recently had the pleasure of going through the light and lofty workshops where the various processes of best bookbinding were in operation. Every book that goes into the house is first numbered and collated to see if it is perfect, and each order is then pushed on in due course, so that no haphazard selection gives preference to some, while delaying others.

In the women’s shop we were especially delighted with the excellent work being done in washing and mending. Perhaps nothing requires such patient skill and nice discernment as this branch of the art. The various stains must each be studied to enable the washer to determine the character of the remedial measures to be taken, and the ever varying textures of the paper must also be taken into consideration. Some of the mending was exquisite in its minute delicacy: one valuable old book was woefully worm-eaten, each leaf of many of the sheets having over a hundred tiny holes through it. These had all to be covered up with spots of paper that would not interfere with the print, yet looking at the sheets none gave any indication of the work done till held up to the light, when the patches could be seen. Books half eaten away, rotted with mildew, or with the corners torn off, are common blemishes that have to be dealt with, and most successful are the operations in this hospital of books; two washers and three menders being constantly employed. Another class of work requiring much care and painstaking is the print inlaying. The firm have in hand many original manuscripts of novels by celebrated authors. These all have to be dry cleaned, cut square, pared thin and laid on and into a broad margin of paper which is also pared round so that the joints cause no bulky ridge in the bound book. In a book of two or three hundred leaves this must be done very exactly, but the completed books seen by us show that the work has been gauged to a microscopic nicety.

Machinery is used for the cheaper classes of work, but all the best work goes through the old processes of production, and it is upon the best work that the firm relies. The gilding is all done in-doors. After covering, the book is firmly tied up round the bands, and the shape thoroughly secured till perfectly dry. Mottled, dabbed, and tree-calf are specialties here, the firm priding themselves upon their stained calf being above the usual standard.

In the finishing shop everything is excellently arranged, the fine sets of tools being all classified and placed in racks with little square doors to each separate set; on the doors are black impressions of the tools enclosed, or at least so many of them that the finisher can immediately find his Harleians, Montesquieaus, Groliers, or Le Gascons without hunting for them.

We were looking at some of the specially prepared designs for finishing work in hand, and sighing, as we thought of the blocking press, at what we feared
was the decadence of this master-branch of the craft, so we asked Mr. Percival Calkin if he thought we were losing ground in London on fine bindings?

"No!" he said, "I cannot think so; at least as far as we are concerned. Indeed we do more of it now than ever before. In my grandfather's time there were generally two finishers kept on best work, but now we usually have six or seven constantly employed in tooling what we should call fine work, much of which is ornamented with special designs that become the property of the book's owner and are never used again."

Then you are not going in for other classes of work because of any scarcity of the best?

"Oh no! Nor does the best suffer in the slightest degree through taking on other and cheaper kinds.

Do you not fear there is a tendency to send the fine work abroad, say to Paris, Leipzig, or Vienna?

"We have no exact means of knowing, but we do not think so. With all the fine show they make, their forwarding will not compare with English forwarding, and taking things all round we can fully hold our own."

We were glad to hear this opinion, for some foreign journals boast as if English binders were being rapidly wiped out.

In the show-room we had ample opportunity of inspecting the beautiful samples of finished work with which the cases were filled. Several of them were exhibited at the Paris Exposition in 1889, where Messrs. Riviére & Son were the only English exhibitors of fine bindings. One, "The Marriage of Cupid and

"His Majesties Poetical Exercises at Vacant Hours."
(Bound by R. Riviére & Son).

We have two distinct sets of workpeople, and we make the best work our special study, relying upon that chiefly as the staple of the house, but having been frequently asked to take up other work, we have done so. Although it has been predicted that we should fail in one or other, we have not found it so, but have rather learned valuable lessons by the wider experience. We certainly did not expect to succeed with the bible and prayer work, but having been asked to get up samples we did so, and to our surprise we have succeeded beyond our own expectations; but that is yet new to us."

Double of "Poetical Exercises."
(Bound by R. Riviére & Son).

Psyche"—reproduced in our "coloured plate—is a beautiful specimen of the style of Le Gascon, in red morocco with inlays of citron and olive green, and is an equally beautiful specimen of finishing, requiring delicacy of touch that no ordinary workman acquires. Another book exhibited at Paris is the "Poetical Exercises at Vacant Hours" (James VI). It is in dark brown crushed morocco; on the outside are roses in full bloom, with buds and leaves in outline, the groundwork being very evenly dispersed dots of gold; and on the double is a modification of the same design in rosebuds laced together, with the same groundwork.
"The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche."

BOUND BY REVIÈRE & SON.

Le Gascon Style. Red Morocco with Inlays of Citron and Olive Green.
A very beautiful piece of work is "Prior's Poems" in gobelin blue crushed levant, with an original design of skeleton leaf work. Another has been just completed by the firm: "Aucassin and Nicolette"; this is in dark blue polished morocco with a modern design, the sprays of leaves being intertwined in the shape of hearts, with large Tudor roses at the junctions, and the ground-work studded with gilt stars.

The books are beautifully finished and the work generally is well calculated to demonstrate the skill and resources of our London binders to hold their own against any outside competition, while the fact that such work is in demand should induce our master-craftsmen to emulate each other in the production of fine work as well as that of the cheaper kinds.

A Machine for Marbling Paper.

MACHINE for marbling papers designed for use in making linings or coverings for books or other articles where such papers have been habitually used, has been invented. The machine consists substantially of a stationary vat for containing a colour supporting liquid, and a series of colour receptacles supported over it, each colour receptacle having a delivery orifice over the vat. A vertical reciprocating movement is communicated to the colour boxes. Rods, set vertically and having also a reciprocating motion, are arranged so as to be projected through the delivery orifices of the colour boxes to the fluid contained in the vat. By this means the colour is automatically conveyed to the surface of the size, and is distributed as wanted. "Brushing" and "combing" devices are embodied in the machine, and are operated to produce the pattern desired. The paper is fed from a roll and carried forward to a point where a cutting mechanism detaches a sheet or the quantity needed to float upon the size in the vat. Carrying devices provided with grippers convey the severed sheet to the vat and deposit it on the surface of the gum solution, to which the colour has been applied by the means above indicated; these carrying devices then return to their former position to secure another sheet, and at the same time another carriage, travelling from the rear end of the machine, approaches the vat, and a "capsizing device" lifts and turns the sheet which has received its colour, whereupon the last mentioned carriage bears the sheet away, with the side which has received the colour uppermost. The sheet is then taken up by the carrier cords to a point where cords operating at an angle convey the paper away from the machine, the drying of the colour being effected in the course of the transmission. It is asserted that excellent results can be obtained by this machine.