The Principles of Design as Applied to Bookbinding.

By Henry B. Wheatley, F.S.A.

Read at the Society of Arts Feb. 14th 1888.

In submitting to the Applied Art Section a paper on the development of modern bookbinding, I fear that it may be thought that I have chosen a somewhat too ambitious title; but the title expresses what I wish to discuss, and as the subject is fairly fresh, I hope you will extend to me your indulgence, and will excuse the inadequacy of my treatment of a very interesting subject.

So much magnificent work has been produced, that there is a strong inducement for the binder to imitate this work; but we know that a living art cannot be one of imitation only. New ideas must be adopted, and the old motives must be reconsidered, and adapted to the new, if the art is to be of vigorous growth, and to become essentially modern, or a living art.

In its best days bookbinding was one of the fine arts, which influenced the others and was influenced by them. This is not so now; it is an art apart, and those who understand it are but few. It is not the philistine only who cannot appreciate the beauty of good binding, for many an artistic nature is unable to understand the motives of the binder, by reason of ignorance of his methods. To illustrate this, I may point out that the special growth of the æsthetic sentiment during the last few years has had but little influence upon the art of bookbinding. Such growth of a taste for good binding as exists is almost entirely owing to the public sales of fine libraries, by means of which so many beautiful specimens have been brought under the public eye.

I do not propose in the present paper to accumulate æræological details, but my object is rather to refer to the past as a storehouse of ideas for use in the future. At the outset it may be well to answer the question, what has the binder to bind? He has old books to repair or rebind, and new books to bind for the first time. With respect to the first, he requires a knowledge of the various styles of the past, so that he may put the book into a covering appropriate to its date, and, I would add, its language. It is not satisfactory to see an English book, on an English subject, elaborately tooled with nothing but fleurs de lis. The French have done so much in illustration of the history of binding, that all those who obtain their knowledge from a French source are too apt to ignore the very existence of good old English binding. In fact, the general ignorance of the history of English binding among Englishmen, as well as among foreigners, is very great. Mr. Weale, respecting whose remarkable researches into the history of early bindings I shall speak later on, is inclined, I believe, to place the position of the English artist of the 12th and 13th centuries very high indeed. He considers that his work not only will bear comparison with the work of any country of Europe, but that it is superior to contemporary work abroad. The same conventual establishment which turned out some of the most exquisitely written and illustrated missals and service books of the Middle Ages also produced the most beautiful bindings.

We have, therefore, plenty of material to hand, which may be studied and adapted to our present needs. With new books the style should be new and fresh. It is surely a waste of time to copy elaborately a design of the 16th century on the cover of a book published this year, unless, of course, the design may be appropriate to the subject of the book. In
considering a design on paper, and its fitness for reproduction on the cover of a book, we have several points to consider. Thus, the shape of a book, the material used for binding, and the colour of the leather, are matters of the greatest importance.

As to materials, calf, morocco, and vellum, from their difference of surface, seem to indicate difference of treatment; and as to colour, many a design has been spoilt by the want of harmony in the colours used to carry it out. In the old work there is a mellowness in the colour of the leather and the gold which often gives a charm to very ordinary work, so that we overlook incongruities of styles while admiring the glories of tone.

In this paper I do not propose to deal with the early bindings of manuscripts and printed books in velvet, metal, and embroidery. These styles may be studied with advantage by those who have to bind special objects in book form; but on the present occasion the consideration of the treatment of leather and cloth will fully occupy our time. I propose to treat my subject under the three headings of (1) Blind Tooling, or mediaeval work; (2) Gold Tooling, or the work of the Renaissance; and (3) Cloth Binding, or modern work.

I.—BLIND TOOLING.

Mr. Weale, as the result of long-continued researches among the cathedral and conventual libraries of Europe, tells us that for the genesis of design on leather we must go much further back than the time of the invention of printing; and he has made most important discoveries, the results of which we shall all look forward to be informed of, and I hope it will not be long before his work on this subject is published, with a full selection of reproductions of the magnificent series of rubbings which he has collected. Mr. Weale finds three schools of English binding in the 12th and 13th centuries, viz., that of Durham, of Winchester, and of London. I will not enter into this point further, as it is for Mr. Weale to explain the results of his own researches, but I only mention it here as a remarkable revelation of the perfection to which leather binding had arrived so early as the 12th century. This revelation we owe entirely to Mr. Weale.

In spite, however, of this early perfection, we may broadly say that when the early printers began to issue their works in a leather covering they began afresh to build up their designs. This, however, was not so much the case in Germany as in England, for in the former country the printers made more use of the old models than they did in England. It is necessary to remember that in the case of the work of the monasteries, most of the beautiful binding, to which reference has been made, was worked in single copies, bound for the library of the convent, with its stamp on the cover, while the coverings of the works issued by the early printers were produced wholesale, much in the same way as the cloth bindings are nowadays.

The earliest printed books in England were issued in leather covers, with a few diagonal marks upon them; for instance, most of the bindings of Caxton are of a very coarse and crude character. Then stamps were produced, often very elegant in design, but these were surrounded by very indifferent tooling. The blocks were usually small, and on a small book one would be placed on the front side and the other on the end side; but when the side of the book was of sufficient size both would be placed on the one side. I have here an instance
of this, taken from a book in the library of the British Museum, by the celebrated printer, Julian Notary, with his initials and stamp (Fig. 1). Here the two blocks are on one side, and while the blocks are beautifully bright and well cut, the tooling is very careless and irregular. Pynson used French tools in his bindings; but the bindings of Wynkyn de Worde were better in themselves, and more distinctly English in character. The building up of blocks, with connecting designs of the artist, is to be found in all old blind work, but it is marked in its crudest form in the books of the English printers.

Among bindings of the early printers, German art was greatly in advance of ours. While our printers were turning out books in a somewhat uncouth style, the Germans and Dutch were issuing theirs covered with excellent designs. There is no reason why many of the designs which are worked in gold should not also be worked in blind, but as a rule this is not the case. It is, therefore, I think, fair to distinguish blind tooling as the style of the Middle Ages. It is not suited, as a rule, to the books of to-day. It can, however, be adapted with advantage for the binding of old books, or books connected with mediaeval times. I have here an instance of this in a copy of Loftie's Latin Year, lent by Sir George Birdwood.

II.—Gold Tooling.

When we come to trace the origin of gold tooling, we are met with a very great difficulty. I believe that it is totally distinct in its origin from blind tooling; but there are instances in which the two have been found together. Thus, the gold tooling, as we have it now, came into being at the end of the 15th century, yet gold and blind have been found together at a much earlier period; and Mr. Weale has discovered a very early instance of inlaid leather binding, with gilt rings of metal over the edge of the inlay. This specimen is
dated about 1367. There is thus the same difficulty in drawing the exact line of
distinction of blind tooling and gold tooling that there is in showing where animal life ends,
and plant life begins; but as an ordinary plant and an ordinary animal are sufficiently
distinct, so there is little difficulty in tracing the totally distinct motives of blind and
gold tooling—they really have nothing in common. Gold tooling is evidently the child
of the Renaissance, and I believe that we owe it to the Italians, who obtained it from
the East. I know that in stating this view thus broadly I am running counter to Mr.
Weale's views, and, considering the scientific manner in which that gentleman has
worked, and the mass of material which he possesses to back up his opinion, I
challenge his view with some diffidence. I understand Mr.
Weale to contend that gold
tooling is of German origin, for although the
first known specimen of this work was pro-
duced at Rome in the middle of the second
half of the 15th century, it was the work
of a German printer, and the second known
specimen was produced at Augsburg. Thus
there is much to be said for Mr. Weale's
view; but I cannot believe that this truly
Renaissance art came from the country which
continued longest the mediæval methods,
and it seems but natural that the art should
have been born in the land of the Re-
naissance. The sequence of historical bind-
ings can be traced to Italy, and through
Maïoli and Grolier to France, which has
been the scene of their chief triumphs.

In almost all kinds of binding we may
find traces of design which appears to have
come from the East; but in the older gilt tooling we often come upon designs which are almost entirely Oriental in character. That thick gilt centre, so common in gold-tooling of all periods, is identical with what is to be found on Persian books, and it still is to be seen on English bindings of to-day. Sir George Birdwood exhibits two blank books, in elaborately tooled leather, such as are sold in India for about a rupee apiece, which are of great interest, as showing the connection of European gold tooling with Eastern design.

When we come to trace the sequence of styles which have held sway in the art of gold tooling, we shall find that the first general pattern was the purely geometrical, as seen in the books of Maioli and Grolier. It is a question worthy of investigation whether this design, which spread over Europe in a very remarkable manner at the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century, was imitated from the books of Maioli and Grolier, or whether these collectors adopted it because it was the fashion. Whatever its origin may be, this geometrical pattern will always continue to be known by the name of Grolier.

The next step was to fill up the vacant spaces left between the lines of the geometrical pattern, and this was done by means of floral decoration. The two chief forms of this decoration are the branch and the scroll. This singularly beautiful style is now thoroughly associated with the name of Clovis Eve, royal binder to Henri IV. and Louis XIII., who also bound for De Thou. It is, I think, an interesting illustration of the intercommunication of the domestic arts that the scroll just referred to is to be found on an old Damascus plate now at the South Kensington Museum (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

The next departure was the elaborate geometrical design without floral decoration which is associated with the name of Le Gascon. This is a name to conjure with, and it is often given to designs quite unlike those now referred to; and a curious instance of this misappropriation was seen in the catalogue of the library of the late Mr. Bedford. Here books bound by Bedford in the pure old English cottage style were described as after Le Gascon. Nothing is known of the history of this binder, and M. Léon Gruel, in his beautiful work Manuel Historique et Bibliographique de l'Amateur de Reliures, even expresses a doubt of the existence of such a binder.*

* M. Léon Gruel’s work, which contains some of the finest reproductions of old bindings ever made, has been kindly lent by the author for exhibition.

[To be continued.]
The side lining (double) is of equal excellence, perhaps even more skilful: a copy of it will be given in a future number. Both plates are printed in colours in the Manuel de l'Amateur de Reliures lately issued by Léon Gruel, by whose permission they have been reproduced.

We think we ought to add that the block from which this plate was printed was made by the Phototype Company, 303, Strand, from a negative taken by the orthochromatic process, by Mr. L. B. Fleming, Norwood Villa, Hanwell. It is an exact reproduction on a small scale. There is no touch of handwork on it.

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Monsieur Gruel gives some splendid specimens in this style, bound about 1640 by Florimond Badier, which have been attributed to Le Gascon, and thinks it possible that Le Gascon is merely a surname for Badier, or some other binder of the time.

Besides these designs, a simpler, but equally effective one, was obtained by the repetition of initials, emblems, badges, and other personal ornaments, such as the F and fleurs de lis of Francis I., the H and D and interlaced crescents of Henri II. and Diana of Poitiers, the C of Charles IX., the lilies of Margaret of Valois, the H and fleurs de lis of Henri IV., the M of Marie de Medicis, and the L of Louis XIII., and the monogram of L and A, of Louis and his wife, Anne of Austria.

With the eighteenth century came in the elaborate inlaid work of Le Monnier and others; but in this same century we see but little of a fully covered side, and the De Rômes adopted borders and corners, with arms in the centre, and much plain leather left untooled. Then we have the weak lace borders of Padeloup, and after this binder comes darkness. There can be no doubt that the finest specimens of historical gold toolings were produced in France, and it is, therefore, convenient to choose the examples of eras in design from French bindings; but we must not forget that England produced some splendid specimens of the art, which followed the same lines as the French, but which were by no means servile copies of the productions of our neighbours. James I. was apparently the most tasteful patron of bookbinding among our sovereigns, and the British Museum Library contains a magnificent collection of his books, bound in the most sumptuous manner. Many are large folios covered with heraldic thistles, which have a very fine effect. Fig. 4 is taken from one of these handsome volumes, and this portion of the side shows the repetition of the thistle and fleurs de lis.

The books produced by Nicholas Ferrar and the so-called Nuns of Little Gidding, are chiefly known as examples of embroidery, but in some instances this embroidery has been lost, and the tooled leather binding, which was under an embroidery, only remains.

The works of a later date show the influence of the styles of art which succeeded each other, and left their mark in our houses and on our books. I have here a specimen of design in which the influence of Chippendale is seen on the side, and that of the Adams on the back. The Cottage and the Harleian styles, among others, are distinctly English, and
"DE IMITATIONE CHRISTI." Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1640. BOUND BY FLORIMOND BADIER.

In deep red morocco, inlaid with plaques of citron and olive-green leather decorated with gold.
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unlike the styles adopted in other countries. Fig. 5 represents a volume of a magnificently tooled folio Bible of the end of the seventeenth century.

Roger Payne is the artist whose name is best known among those of English bookbinders, but much of his binding is singularly plain. Fig. 6 represents a fine specimen of his work in the British Museum. The border is very elegant, but the side of this volume...
has been somewhat spoilt by the coat-of-arms of Mr. Grenville, which, with much bad taste, has been stamped upon it.

The capabilities of modern binding are endless, and I am happy to see a strong tendency to break away from the fetters which have too much environed the art. There is no need to follow servilely in the path marked out in the past. The French binders of to-day have realised this fact, and two books published by M. Edouard Rouveyre,*—La Reliure Moderne, Artistique, et Fantaisiste, par Octave Uzanne, and La Reliure de Luxe, par L. Derôme,—contain some beautiful specimens of what may be accomplished with the aid of good taste. Perrault’s Fairy Tales has Puss in Boots delineated in mosaic on the side. Victor Hugo’s Notre Dame de Paris is ornamented with an architectural design, and Paul and Virginia has on its side two birds billing and cooing on a branch.

There is another difficulty in the way of a modern binder, and that is that much which would be praised in an old book would be condemned in a modern one. Such is the power of age to silence criticism. Much of the ornament that can be suggested would be ordinarily conventionalised, or it would be treated in a specially heraldic manner, which is one of the most appropriate for a book. There is, however, no reason why the natural should not be used as well as the conventional, so that the two are not mixed. If the side of a book is left plain, a natural flower or spray may be tooled or painted upon it.

This point naturally leads us to consider the materials used for bookbinding. Calf was often used by the old binders as a medium for elaborate ornamentation, but this leather, as prepared at present is so fragile that it is seldom so used now. Tree-marbled calf is effective, and continues to hold the high position which it always has held in public esteem. The beautiful surface of calf fits it for flat treatment, and much may be done with painted designs. Sometimes ornaments have been printed in black on the natural coloured calf.

Vellum is a material as beautiful as it is strong, but it must be used with care, and kept at a distance from the fire. This also takes a painted design well, but gilt toothing is also effective in contrast to its brilliant white colour.

Morocco will always remain the main material for bookbinding; its durability is so remarkable that no other leather is likely to oust it from its pre-eminent position, and its variety is very considerable, as it may either be used rough or smooth as required, and its dyes are fairly permanent, and very different from the evanescent dyes of calf. Sir George Birdwood exhibits a pair of slippers, with a pattern cut out in the leather in a manner which might be adapted to bookbinding, and would be a novelty.

This is not a paper on bookbinding in general, but on design as applied to the binding of a book. I am, therefore, precluded from treating of forwarding, end-papers, half-binding, and sundry other matters which come under the heading of bookbinding.

Mention may be made in this place of some of the vagaries of binding. I have seen a little book with a beautiful cameo portrait of the authoress on the end cover, and emeralds set in the clasp. Ivory carvings have been let into the covers, and many of these eccentricities are allowable as long as they remain the exception, and do not claim to be the rule. Embroidery has lately been revived with so much success that it seems well again to adapt it to bookbinding, as was done in the sixteenth century. The School of Art Needlework at South Kensington have done this in a few instances.

* Mons. Rouveyre has also just issued a beautiful work on the art bindings in the National Library, Paris. All these works, kindly sent by M. Rouveyre, were in the Exhibition.
sides are borders of conventional flowers, a smaller border of flowers within the larger forms the outline of a canopy. The shield: a cross occupies the centre, upon it may be seen the superscription, crown of thorns, spear, rod with a sponge and three nails. On the dexter (right) side: a palm branch, hammer, pierced hand, garment, dice and dice-box. Upon the sinister (left) side: the pincers, lantern, head of Judas Iscariot with the money-bag hanging round his neck, thirty pieces of silver, and the sepulchre. The shield is surmounted by a royal helmet, above which is a wreath; out of it spreads a scroll-like mantle of twelve lambrequins. The crest is the pillar of flagellation, surmounted by the cock that crow when St. Peter denied Christ; attached to the pillar by a cord are two birch rods, and two scourges. The motto on a label under the shield, “Redemptoris Mundi Arma,” in Saxon capitals. Supporters: two unicorns, emblems of purity and strength. John Reynes’ marks occupy the space on either side of the crest. The block is not set square, showing that, probably, it was stamped in a press. This binding complies with the canon that—“Every book should be decorated without, as far as possible in accordance with its contents, and every tool should be beautiful in itself.”

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CLOTH BINDING. (Continued from page 132.)

The history of cloth binding ought to be one of great interest to us, as it is entirely of English growth (the French call it la toile anglaise, and the Germans Englisches Einband), and its introduction is comparatively so recent, that we are able to trace the sequence of the various changes that this special form of binding has gone through. Books at the beginning of the present century were usually issued in paper boards, of various colours, with white paper labels, upon which the title of the book was printed. This was by no means a bad binding, but after a little use the paper was apt to crack at the hinge, so that the side got disconnected from the back. About 1822 a remedy for this was suggested, by covering the back with calico or cloth. This may be illustrated by a set of the old library edition of Scott’s “Waverley Novels,” in octavo. The “Novels and Tales,” 12 vols., were issued in 1819, in pink paper, with white paper labels. The “Historical Romances,” 6 vols., appeared in 1822, in blue paper, with pink cloth back and white paper labels; and the “Novels and Romances,” in 1824, in the same covering.

The late Mr. Archibald Leighton may be called the father of cloth binding, as to him the earliest specimens of this book-covering have been traced. According to an interesting article on Mr. Leighton, in the BOOKBINDER (No. 7), the first book published in the new
material was the first volume of "Pickering's Miniature Classics" (Dante), which appeared in 1822, and probably the second book so issued was Moule's Bibliotheca Heraldica.

The earliest cloth bindings were supplied with a printed white paper label, but after a time gilt letters were stamped upon black paper labels. Then the great advance was made of stamping the title in gold letters direct upon the back of the book. The edition of Lord Byron's "Life and Works," published by Murray, in 1832, has the distinction of showing very clearly the period when this change was made. The first volume was issued in January, 1832, and was bound in cloth with a watered silk pattern, and on the back was a green paper label, with the title and a coronet printed on it in gold. The second volume appeared in February of the same year, with the title and coronet stamped in gold direct upon the cloth.

Mr. Henry G. Bohn, writing to the Art Journal, says that through some hints given by him to Mr. Leighton, that gentleman was able to bind Martin and Westall's Bible Prints for him with the lettering direct upon the cloth of the back, by which means these volumes were bound at half the price he would have had to pay if leather lettering pieces had been added. This book was published in 1832.

Archibald Leighton made a great advance when he produced the stamp cloth which was used for the "Penny Cyclopedia" and the "Pictorial History of England," published by Charles Knight. The octavo edition of Dickens's "Sketches by Boz," with Cruikshank's plates (1839), was bound in cloth, with square tablets on the back, and a flowing design on the side. This was the work of Archibald Leighton, who died in January, 1841. Although cloth binding was introduced in 1822, it was several years before the old paper boards were at all generally discontinued.

Not long before the lamented death of Mr. Henry Bradshaw, the late Librarian of the University Library, Cambridge, I went over the shelves of his private library with him, in order to settle some of the dates connected with the history of cloth binding, a subject in which he was interested, and we made a special investigation of his very valuable collection of early editions of Lord Tennyson's works, with the following results. "The Poems of Two Brothers" (1827), was in grey paper boards with paper labels. The "Poems, chiefly Lyrical" (1830), in the same covering, and another copy with blue paper sides and grey paper back. The "Poems" (1833), were in grey paper boards, and the "Poems" (2 vols., 1845), in the same binding. Mr. Bradshaw possessed two copies of the "Poems" (2 vols., 1845), which were differently bound. One was in plain green cloth with paper labels, and the other in stamped cloth with gilt lettering. These two being both of the same date, it would have been difficult to prove the priority of either, if it had not been that the one with the paper labels contained some advertisements dated August, 1845, while the advertisements of the stamped cloth copy were dated January, 1846, proving that this had been bound at a later date.

The next great departure in cloth binding was the use of gold in the ornamentation, and some difficulty was found at first in designing for the gold. Till the theory was understood, an ordinary drawing, made upon white paper, was apt to come out wrong when the dark lines were transferred to gold, which is, ordinarily, lighter than the cloth upon which it is placed. To get the proper effect, the design should be drawn upon a slate, when the light lines show on the dark ground. Many specimens of bad outline and bad shading may be seen among the early gilded cloth bindings. The original cloth covers of Mr. Ruskin's works are of interest from an artistic point of view. The best edition of the "Modern Painters" (1851)
is bound in green cloth, with a very poor design in blind and gold. The "Seven Lamps of Architecture" (1849) has a very original and excellent design in blind, while "The Stones of Venice" (1853) has good design in blind and gold; the treatment of the winged lion in gold on the back is not, however, altogether satisfactory. Among the most charming and appropriate cloth covers I know, are those used for Mrs. Jameson's artistic works. The "Legends of the Madonna," with its grey tint, and the union of blind and gold, is very pleasing. The "Legends of the Monastic Orders" (1850) is equally good in design, but the colour of the cloth is not so satisfactory. These are by Mr. John Leighton. After a time the gilt decoration of cloth became so excessive that in due course good taste revolted against this abuse, and books were plainly clothed, with little or no ornament. The plain cloth, with its bevelled edges and plain gold line, and possibly the title in gold on the side as well as the back, has a good effect, but there is no reason why this style should be universally adopted. There is room for a more ornate style. Some of the developments of cloth binding are not to be commended, and some of the coloured pictures on the sides of books are anything but pleasing. Some of the finest specimens of modern cloth binding are due to Mr. William Morris, to whom art owes so much. Mrs. Orrinsmith's design for Lord Tennyson's works is good. If publishers will only employ good artists we should do well, but, unfortunately, this is not always the case.

It is perhaps necessary to mention that cloth bindings are here discussed because this is a paper on design, but of course the mode of treatment is quite different from that adopted in regular binding. It must be borne in mind that in the case of leather binding the design is transferred to the leather by means of a series of tools, while the cloth covers are produced wholesale by means of a stamp.

The French have very cordially acknowledged the admirable qualities of the English cloth binding, and of late years they have adopted it themselves. I think we can discover in the French work that the grand specimens of gilt leather bindings have had a greater influence upon the designer than they have in England. It is rather curious that while the characteristic of French leather binding is great lightness, the cloth binding in France is decidedly heavier than in England. It has, however, many points of merit.

Robert Rivière.

At the end of the last and beginning of the present century, Valentine Rivière, a descendant of an old Huguenot family, was a drawing-master of some celebrity, living in Cirencester Place, Fitzroy Square, where he brought up eight of his nine children to be artists, either in painting or music. The eldest son, William, for many years head drawing-master at Cheltenham College, was the father of the now famous Briton Rivière, R.A. The second son, the subject of this notice, became a bookbinder, and acquired much reputation; the third is one of the oldest members of the Royal Society of Painters in Water-Colours. Of the daughters, we need only say that the eldest, Anne, was the second wife of Sir Henry Bishop, and a singer of great renown; her sisters were all water-colour painters or musicians.