

Eighteenth Century (Early) Binding.

THE title of this work is, "A Paraphrase and Annotation upon St. Paul's Epistles." It is an English binding of the beginning of the eighteenth century. Our illustration is from Mr. Wheatley's book, being a reproduction of plate 57. The author thus describes it: "So distinctive a piece of fine binding as is shown in this plate is not often seen." The book is bound in red morocco with a centre of purple.

Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo Styles.

CONCERNING a revival of the Rococo style of ornamentation for book exteriors, the following appears in the *Journal für Buchbinderei*:—

A tendency has been manifested of late to replace the Renaissance style which has been almost exclusively in vogue by the Rococo style of ornamentation. It is true that in the way of ornamentation for covers in bookbinding this style has as yet been only sparingly introduced, but there seems to exist a probability of more frequent and persistent attempts being made in this direction, even if solely for the sake of indulging in the passion for something new. In branches of trade closely allied to bookmaking the attempt has been more successful. For more than a year past the Baroque and Rococo styles have seemed to take the lead, and ornaments executed after the Renaissance become fewer every day. Albums, portfolios and similar goods are gotten up in the Baroque and Rococo styles, and even in pressed leather work, which originated in the early period of the Gothic art, place has been made for these new comers. To what will this tend? Is it a fact that in a brief space of time appreciation of those wonderful forms of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which are exemplified in the Renaissance has been exhausted, and that we are to take up and imitate their puny successors, the Baroque and Rococo styles? Or is it that good taste has temporarily gone astray, and will very soon return to the proper path? The fact remains, as undeniable as it is remarkable, that while it took ten years for bookbinding and kindred arts to become emancipated from the domination of the Renaissance, the ascendancy of the Rococo will be at an end inside of five years. And then what? In the seventeenth century the decline of Renaissance art in Germany was soon followed by that of artistic bookbinding. Although the change from one style to another (in the present instance from the Renaissance to the Rococo) does not occur nowadays to the same extent as formerly, still the change seems startlingly apparent, especially to beginners in art.

In order to make the sequence more easily understood it is best to review the rise of these different styles.

1. The Renaissance. The real meaning of this word is "revival," signifying the revival of ancient Greek art, which burst the fetters of the Middle Ages, inspired mankind (hitherto slaves of the church) with a greater sense of liberty, and thus showed "the path direct" from the Middle Ages to modern times. The Renaissance style originated in Italy in the fourteenth century, and appeared in Germany about a century later—not, however, by itself, but in combination with the Gothic style. The new style, although owing its existence to the study of the antique, did not adhere to this standard; but, inheriting from its source simplicity and grandeur, it independently developed through great creative talents the forms

of the antique into such manifestations as call for the admiration of art connoisseurs down to the present day even. There is a distinction made between the early and the later Renaissance, especially in architecture. In application to the ornamentation of book covers its distinction is not maintained with the same stringency, although it is an easy matter to distinguish a Maioli from a Grolier. The German Renaissance is not characterised by as pure a style as the Italian, but the before-mentioned combination of two styles, as it was employed in Germany, lends to the German Renaissance a peculiarly attractive character which gives it the strongest individuality.

2. The Baroque style. This style, derived from the Renaissance, it would not be out of place to designate as a degeneration from the latter. Being next to Rococo, it is often mistaken for it, but this is an error, inasmuch as the Rococo belongs to a later period. The Baroque was at its best in the reign of Louis XIV. (1643-1715). The chief peculiarity of this style is that strict subordination to rule gives way to arbitrary caprice; under its dictation curiosities are sought for and surprising and piquant turns, which, in spite of glimpses of genius, degenerate into oddity and contradiction.

3. The Rococo style, an offspring of the Baroque, to which it is closely related, also had its birth in France, where it gained triumphs in the reign of Louis XV. (1715-1774), and thence was introduced into Germany. Ornamental bookbinding was not spared by this intruder. In one respect the Rococo is preferable to the Baroque style, in that it exhibits more of the neat, the refined, the elegant. The Rococo period was that of a morbid, exquisitely luxurious and innately frivolous generation. All of these characteristics are apparent in this style, which was chiefly employed in the petty branches of art. The decoration of dwellings, the craft of the jeweller, and the work of the bookmaker were brought under its domination. The weighty framework came to be an organized being, the band ornament vanished entirely, and scroll-work became very much neglected. The frame encircled the panel, which, luxurious as it was, contained more of vegetable ornamentation, never showing a firm basis, but everything at odds and ends, destitute of symmetrical development. Such is the Rococo style.

The word, although of French origin, is not comprehended by the French of to-day who refer to the "style of Louis XV." Finally the Rococo in the nineteenth century gave birth to that pedantic style which in a half-hearted, narrow-minded way imitated the antique, but only retained the bare forms. In old bookbinding establishments one can sometimes come across stamps of this period, viz., Greek vases; even the Grecian fillet, still in use, owes its existence to this style. Each of these styles has been recalled into use since the feeling of weariness over the inexhaustible Renaissance became apparent. The downward tendency of art since its abandonment of the Renaissance has been pointed out. Moreover, we have ourselves witnessed within the past ten or fifteen years a remarkable advance in art after its return to the Renaissance, and the art of bookbinding is not last in the long line of crafts which have been benefited by the change. Of course the word "stylish" has been greatly misused, and the expression "stylish bookbinder" was at one time a household word in Leipsic. Certainly one should think twice before abandoning one style, which has not been given a fair amount of time in which to ingratiate itself among artists generally, in order to turn to another of which little or nothing is known, except that it caters to an over-excited taste and incontinently hurries one into the perils of shallowness.