CLOTH COVER DESIGNS BY SMITH BROTHERS.

Printed on Grosvenor, Chater & Co.'s "Acme" Printing Paper.
THOUGH not belonging to the higher forms of the bibliopagie art, and often sneered at by purists as not being binding at all, case work, or the cloth branch of the trade, is so fecund as to have far outrun all its rivals in its almost unlimited productiveness, besides giving scope for the greatest variety of artistic processes in the ornamentation of the covers at a merely nominal cost. At its introduction in the year 1822, few could have foreseen what its dull-grey body papers, the title being printed on small square white paper panels and stuck on the backs. These cheap books were, however, usually cut in boards and properly laced in, but with cloth, case work became prevalent, and there was ushered in a new order of rapid production and cheapness, which were the motives for its introduction. Several of the largest firms in London owe their existence to the development of the cloth work, and amongst them is the firm of Messrs. Smith Brothers.

The business was founded by Mr. Joseph James Smith, who, in the year 1833, opened a binder's shop in

**Henry Smith.**

**George P. Smith.**

Little Wild-street, Lincoln's-inn, where he succeeded in establishing a trade in miscellaneous work. In 1830 he removed to No. 5 Ivy-lane, Paternoster-row, which was more convenient for many of his customers, whose dealings brought them frequently into that district. In 1844, within a few days of the birth of his
youngest son, Mr. Smith died rather suddenly, and his widow, who had never entered her husband's workshop during his life, had to take over the control of the business. Fortunately, she proved herself equal to the emergency, for she conducted it with tact and energy until her youngest son, George Poole, had reached the age of fourteen, when he was brought in to learn the trade. Under her able management cloth work was introduced into the house, and at the time of her death, in 1863, the usual run of the work had entirely changed, the business being then mainly publishers' work in the cloth style. Although young Mr. Smith had been at the trade only five years, he had acquired sufficient practical knowledge to take over the business, but, under his mother's will, his elder brother Henry was to join him, though not previously engaged in the trade. The style of the house then changed to Smith Brothers, and the two very soon began to develop the business, so that an extension of premises was required. No. 6 Ivy-lane was then taken in, when the firm only occupied the upper part of the house, and let out the ground floor to a printer, but the arrangement was of short duration, for within six months they were compelled to compensate him to leave. Success followed success, and house after house was taken, until, after much trouble, the firm held possession of Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, all small houses with short leases, but in that busy neighbourhood of books, each little property was held tenaciously, and no one would part with it, except after being amply compensated. The total area of these properties was sufficiently extensive to make very large workshops, but so much space was wasted by parting walls and staircases, that, after perforating the buildings in all directions, till the rooms assumed the appearance of so many pigeon holes, and were in reality not much larger, the result was unsatisfactory, and the firm determined to pull down and build afresh. By giving up the existing leases at a considerable sacrifice, they secured a long lease, and in 1881 operations were commenced. The work had to be done in sections, with much inconvenience to business, and it was not till towards the close of 1883 that the shops were finished and they began to settle down; but not for long. On the evening of April 2nd, 1884, a fire broke out at a printer's in the rear of Messrs. Smith's premises, and as the wind blew in from the east, it was not long before their building was also on fire, and hopelessly so, for by the early morning the whole place was a heap of ashes. Fortunately, the iron safe, although almost melted on the outside, so intense was the heat, preserved the books in safety.

By nine o'clock on April 3rd, the firm were in negotiation with Messrs. Collingridge for part of their new “City Press” building, where steam power was all ready to hand, and after a few days of tremendous exertion they were at work again. Within six months the new building was sufficiently advanced for a return to the old locality, and they were able to get in in time for the winter trade, the new shops having been built upon the same plans and specifications as were used for those destroyed by the fire.

A glance round Messrs. Smith's establishment shews that ere long it will not be large enough for their growing business. Even at this slack period of the year, there are evidences of want of room that causes their floors to be packed from floor to ceiling with work or stock, in an unpleasantly crowded state. The ground floor is stacked high with quires, behind which a few case makers, working in pairs, are hidden. The fourth and third floors are chiefly occupied by women, who fold the work and sew much of it by hand, whilst the rest is done by Smyth and Brehm's machines. In a small side room, there is a large gas cooking-stove for the convenience of the women. The second floor is devoted to the forwarding and gilding, which is here done indoors; here are also the cutting machines and bevelling machines, of which we noticed one of Sowerby's patents, besides two large Thomas's sewing machines, for thin pamphlet work. On the first floor are large stock rooms for the storage of the cased books; while in another room the cloth is cut up into sizes, as required; and in yet another, a number of case-makers were busily employed. In the basement are the large stocks of strawboards, the steam engine for the hydraulics and other machinery upstairs, as well as for the blocking presses, and a large number of Gough's and other presses. In this department we saw some fine specimens of blended work, and other processes which are always so important a factor in the book's appearance, and we noticed that here the gold is laid on by men. On reaching the ground floor again, we enter Messrs. Smith's offices, the walls of which are hung with large frames filled with specimens of work executed at different times by the firm, and which form a beautiful set of pictures. One series of cases were particularly pretty, having on the sides groups of children in all their various forms of enjoyment; the pictures were striking, the colouring exceedingly artistic, and the whole of the details charmingly worked out. Most of this work has been produced under the direction of Mr. Mitchell, who takes charge of the whole work of designing. Drawerful after drawerful of cases were produced, over which many a person might spend hours of enjoyment, so beautiful were the devices on them.

When we consider the rate of speed at which such work is turned out and its consequent cheapness, there is small cause for wonder at the popularity of cloth covers. With a staff of about 100 men and 140 to 150 women, upwards of 5000 books are turned out per day in the busy season; or taking the year round, slack and busy times included, about 3000 is the average daily output.

Choice of the finest examples shewn to us is an exceedingly difficult task, but we have obtained four which we give as specimens of what the firm are capable of producing; as examples of colour printing and gold blocking, they are exquisite. “Songs of the Dawn” is in pale blue smooth cloth, the leaf and landscape part of the work printed in colours; the letters in gold with the lower parts in green, with a bird, in black and gold, soaring upward into the morning light. “Through Woodland and Meadow” is in light brown grained cloth, with a strip on which the grain is crushed out; on this a spray of wild roses and buds is blocked in gold, the petals and leaves
being filled in with colour and the lettering in gold. "A Book of Old Ballads" is in olive green satin grained cloth, the scroll work and figures printed in drab with a dull red lettering, the cloud being a splendidly engraved piece of gold work; the outlines of both scroll, lettering, and figures are in black, and the whole work is highly effective. The most chaste design is perhaps that of "Odatis," which is all in gold, the larger letters being fluted, as well as parts of the leafy spray. The shading of the garments is very beautiful, more resembling that seen on printed work than the production of the blocking press; the gauzy texture, the branch showing beneath it, and all the finer engravings on the shield, making as fine a picture as we have ever seen, and a true work of art.

A School of Printing.

In the immense printing establishment of A. Chaix & Co., in Paris, a school exists, not only to instruct apprentices thoroughly in the different branches of work pursued in the establishment, but also to make sure that they have the wide general information so useful to the printer, and a clear understanding of their duties as citizens and members of the social order. The instructors are drawn mainly from the superior employees or foremen of the house, only a few teachers coming from without. The two hours' instruction every day is given at the time when the foremen and machinery are most at liberty; this may be changed when there is unusual pressure. The preliminary course comprises four years' instruction in language, arithmetic, geometry, history, geography, reading, and accounts. The technical course covers the whole subject of typography and its accessories, the instruction being of the most practical value. Grammar, as applied to typography, and reading in Latin, Greek, German, and English, written and printed, are the literary features of this course. The supplementary course introduces the history of printing and of French literature, with the biographies of great printers; the elements of physics, mechanics, and industrial chemistry; lessons in political economy, social science, and common law, which gives special prominence to all matters relating to the welfare of the working man, such as provident and aid societies, insurance, saving, consumption, co-operation and participation. The elements of political science and commercial law complete this excellent curriculum. The whole cost of instruction is borne by the house, and each apprentice is paid ten centimes for each day's attendance; at the end of the month the pupil receives the amount for pocket money.

The oldest portion of the Bodleian Library at Oxford was founded by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, in 1445, and it is said that the library has not been altered since 1602, when it was made the first free library in the world—a fact, however, which did not preclude a small admission fee.

Artistic Bookbinding.

Leaving out of the question all technical details, we may consider the conditions of a good binding to be the following: (1) regularity in the folding of the printed sheets, solidity in sewing and backing, elasticity of the hinges, so that the volume will open easily and remain open; (2) appropriate and well executed exterior ornamentation. The very nature of the envelope of a book indicates the kind of ornamentation which it admits. The principles of decorative art find their application in binding, and here and elsewhere elegance is incompatible with over-loading, and richness itself needs a certain measure and certain points of repose. The book-cover evidently must not be ornamented all over. The second principle laid down by Charles Blanc for the decoration of book-covers is this: the decoration of a book ought to be in harmony with the nature of the work, with the importance of the author and with the character of his thoughts. Furthermore, whether the ornamentation be executed by hand or by a machine; whether it be blind-tooling, gilding, stamping, painting, or mosaic; whether it be an aristocratic binding or a democratic cover in cloth-boards, the design ought always to be simple and flat without shading. Subjects and figures treated in a picturesque manner are out of place, and, whenever employed, they should be treated flatly after the manner of the friezes and borders of the Greek and Roman ceramists. Arms and heraldic escutcheons should likewise be treated flatly and so as not to give the idea of projections. The same observation, too, applies to mosaics in colour. The decoration of the flat surface of a book-cover should, generally speaking, be purely ornamental, and always without perspective. These principles were instinctively observed by the Italian artists of the sixteenth century. These binders introduced gilding, colour, and mosaic, which, however, did not become general until the seventeenth century. Their effects of colour were obtained by a sort of enamelling on the leather by means of a liquid paste or varnish, the effect and brilliancy of which must have been marvellous. Even now, after a lapse of three hundred and fifty years, many of these coloured Renaissance bindings are singularly fresh. By means of this colouring matter, and sometimes by means of mosaic or inlaying, the complicated geometric designs of the Byzantine ceramists were reproduced by the Italian artists in the bindings called "a entrelacs," that is to say, interlacements. The Aldi were the first to employ these innovations in binding, and the first mosaic binding known, a binding made of inlaid leather, is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, printed by the Aldi at Venice in 1501, and bound for the famous collector Jean Grolier.

Messrs. Bennett Brothers, 3 Bouverie-street, Fleet-street, E.C., send us specimen sheets of a new series of Improved Brass Cast Type manufactured by them, which show neat, bold, clear, and sharp faces, very cleanly cast, and the prices, whether for types or for handle letters, very moderate.