Sprinkling and Marbling.

Owing to pressing requests for information upon the subject of tree marbling, we gave, in our August number, a general idea of this beautiful branch of the binder's art, and now revert to the subject, giving details which we hope will be of use to practical binders; for although the process is generally more or less vaguely understood, it is practised by very few, and fewer still get the chance to learn, as those who are adepts in it often object to show and explain to others that which it pays to keep secret. Good marblers being rare birds, employers allow them to have their own way rather more than is customary with other workmen. We shall, however, do our best to give such plain and simple directions as may enable anyone with a fair amount of intelligence to follow out. To be a good marbler experience is necessary—experience that can never be gained by book theories, though written by the finest workman that ever lived, so do not blame the writer if undesired results follow the first practising of the following instructions.

Do not begin by trying to marble, but take the earliest stage possible, and the initial step should be on sprinkled sheep work, of which considerable quantities are done in some shops.

For sprinkles the following are most largely in use. **BLACK** : put half a pound of green copperas into about a quart of boiling water, and when it is thoroughly dissolved add another quart. That will make a stronger black than is ordinarily required, but it can easily be weakened by adding more water. **BROWN** : put half a pound of salts of tartar into a quart of boiling water, and when it is thoroughly dissolved add another quart.

Be particularly careful always to test your black on a waste piece of the material you are going to colour, by dipping your finger in it and smudging it over the leather. When dry, wash it and see if it smears, if so it is too strong, so add more water. Copperas used too strong leaves on the stain a slight dry bloom which spreads when washed over.

Always use large and good brushes, well soaked before bringing them into use. Large, because you can sprinkle more evenly, as they hold more colour; good, because if the hairs are not firmly fixed they soon drop out under the beating, and falling on your work leave a long streak. The best vessel for the colour is a large earthenware crock or pickle-ja. An iron bar is best for beating the brushes on, and a thick one cuts the hair less than a thin one. Do not use a press pin; the square centre part of the pin will soon ruin your brushes. Get, if you can, a thick piece of gas pipe; being hollow it is also light, and you would soon find the advantage if you tried both.

Have an old jacket ready to put on, and a piece of coarse sacking for an apron, as the iron you use will soon spoil your linen.

All your work must be thoroughly dry in each stage; wherever there is the slightest damp the colour will spread.

Let the rods rest on trestles not much higher than your knees, so that the spray may have a good fall. Always be careful after beating out the brushes to wipe the iron rims, so that no heavy drops may fall to mar the work. As you sprinkle, revolve the iron bar in your left hand so that no moisture may collect, and occasionally wipe it through the brush, or heavy drops may fall from that also.

Should a drop fall, touch it over with a piece of pointed wood dipped in strong oxalic acid, so as to break the big spot into little dots of black. Do not try to take the spot right out, because if you do you leave a white space almost as glaring as the black spot, and the black will not take on it afterwards.

These are plain instructions which must always be remembered, no matter what work you are engaged upon. For each class of work we will now give details.

**SPRINKLED SHEEP.**—First wash up with stout paste-water. When dry, lay out on the rods, flat; beat out your brushes against a millboard till the spray falls in a fine mist, leaving spots which when dry will not be larger than the points of a fine pinhead fillet. Wipe the brushes and bar, and then holding both brush and bar level with your head, move slowly up and down the row of books and beat out the sprinkle, keeping the spray evenly distributed. Black first, then the brown. Having sprinkled to the required shade of pattern or fancy, let them dry. The usual course is then to put on the lettering pieces of a dark colour, prepare with a coat of albumen, finish, polish with a round iron, and press either in japanned plates or tinned boards.

Take this gentle hint: until you can sprinkle a sheep book decently, that is, with an even fine sprinkle—which, however easy it may appear in print, is not easy to earn your living at—do not attempt anything further. Get perfect in your sprinkling and other matters will come easier.

**SPRINKLED AND PANELLED CALF.**—The calf used for this work is not the white calf used for law work, but a slightly browner shade, generally known as tree calf. Always use it fresh; that is, do not use any that has become stale and dry by keeping in stock, because you will find when you go to brown it or to marble it, a white bloom will sometimes arise which resists the even acceptance of the colour; in fact, frequently, the only way out of the difficulty is to rip off the cover and put another on.

For sprinkled calf: paste-wash and sprinkle as for sheep, but notice that the colour strikes in more readily than on sheep, so that less is required.

For panel sprinkling: first mark up your sides as for finishing. Paste-wash: then cut out of stout magazine wrappers the counterpart of the panels you require lighter than the rest of the cover: lay these papers on the places marked out, and sprinkle as for sheep, removing the papers before you have got to the required tints of the darker panels, so that the finishing strokes may sprinkle lightly the lighter panels and sufficiently darken the darker ones.

Always beware of one thing. If your lettering pieces are to be red or any light colour, you must cover those panels on the back which you intend so to use.
Some panels of taffeta are left. These are always browned, and this brown is the same as that required for marbling:—Paste-wash first, rubbing over the wet back and sides with the palm of your hand or fleshy part of your arm, so that all strokes are dispersed. When dry, with a sponge dipped in salts of tartar one-third of the strength given above, wash over the whole cover, again using the arm to smooth over strokes. Again let it dry; and again wash over with the same strength of brown, again smoothing it with the arm. That will bring about a nice even shade, but do not attempt to do it by quicker methods till you are well up in the practice. Then sprinkle as above described for panel call.

A very nice effect in sprinkling is obtained by a fine, heavy sprinkle of salts of tartar followed by a light sprinkle of oxalic acid. Take care that the acid does not fall in your eyes.

Ring Sprinkle.—For black: throw a handful of steel filings or parings into a quart of good malt vinegar and let it stand for 48 hours. Strain off, and by adding more vinegar increase your stock. To a pint of the strained liquid add one teaspoonful of vitriol, and stir it up. Paste-wash your calf, and when dry brown it; then sprinkle coarsely with the preparation of vitriol and iron. If the black smears, add water; if the ring is not clear, add a few drops more vitriol. Above all things do not let it fall on you, so hold your brushes lower than usual.

Answers to Correspondents.

W. C.—(1). Will some practical blocker describe the best method of underlaying cloth case blocks having a solid face, the lettering appearing in relief; also the method of preparing cases of this kind for blocking, as they cannot be done with powder? [These questions are not at all clear! We know of no method of underlaying blocks; a solid-faced block having the lettering cut in, will naturally cause the letters to stand out in relief; no preparation is necessary unless the solid face of the block is to be in gold, when the usual glaire is laid on.]

(2 & 3). [We cannot oblige with prices as suggested. No useful purpose could be served by stating London prices, for many reasons, and we must leave every binder to estimate his own, upon the cost of materials and production as they affect him. If you particularly wish to know what some firms do their work for, we would suggest that you obtain the list of prices issued by the Civil Service Stores.]

W. C. (Carnarvon) gives replies to two of “A Country Binder’s” queries which may be useful to our readers generally. [(1). Stiffened webbing is quite as strong as vellum slips, but is not likely to supersede them, as the latter help to give the desirable spring to a well-bound stationery book. (2). Good blocking powders may be had from firms who advertise the article, but I will give A. C. B. a wrinkle not generally known: buy twopennyworth of gum juniper from a chemist; grind and sift it, and you have a blocking powder which is hard to beat.]

Apprentice (Bolton).—(1) What will prevent varnish from tarnishing gold work? [It must be applied very sparingly. Screw a piece of cotton wool up tightly, apply the varnish from the bottle, rub it on a piece of paper leaving very little on the cotton, then pass lightly over the leather so that no varnish falls into the gilded impression of the tools. Brown varnish is always likely to tarnish, so use Zehndrof’s best white.]

(2). Describe the process of gilding a block, red under gold. [Screw up tightly between boards and carefully and evenly scrape the edges; red with a sponge, fanning out the foreedges right and left; when dry, size with the following: the white of a good sized egg beaten up thoroughly, and a teacup-full of water, beat up, and strain through a piece of fine muslin, dampened. Lay this on lightly, not disturbing the red, then lay on the gold; let it thoroughly dry. Place a piece of paper on the edge, one side of which has been passed over the head so as to slightly grease it, on that side press with the burnisher, moving over the whole surface. Then burnish with an agate.]

(3). Are there special presses for blocking with ink? [Yes. Which would be the best way to block with ink with an ordinary press? [Take a sheet of india-rubber and lay your ink on that with a hand-roller; put it in a cold press, pull over gently, and the ink will cover the block; withdraw the rubber, and block as per usual. Or, withdraw your plate and block, and pass a hand roller, charged with ink, over the block; push your plate home, and block as per usual. The first way is best; in either case the press must be cold.]

A Country Binder complains:

(1). That the ink he uses for paging does not dry quick enough to prevent blurring. [Your ink is too moist. Put in a little driers.]

(2). There is a book marbler either in Liverpool or Birmingham who supplies marbling colours in powder. They are said to be first-rate. Wanted his address. [Perhaps some friend in those districts will oblige.]

(3). A special feature in connexion with the library of the binding trade in London is doubtless a complete collection of books on bookbinding. Are these books loaned to provincial and country binders, if so, what are the terms? [No sir, they are not.]

“Progress” (Middlesb’ro’) will be suited with articles on marbling and ruling on hand-made paper in an early issue. A paper on finishing is also in preparation. Our space is limited, but we shall endeavour to satisfy all in turn.

Subscriber (Huddersfield) asks how to prepare bookbinders’ cloth for blocking with imitation gold? [In the usual way by washing up with glaire, but Dutch metal has to be varnished over to prevent tarnishing.]

Badger.—Many thanks for your note. It shall be strictly confidential for the present. [Will o’ the Wisp.]

The late William Blades “Pentateuch of Printing,” one of his last works, is being edited for press by Mr. Talbot B. Reed, and will be published by Mr. Elliot Stock, of Paternoster-row, E.C. Mr. Blades’ first “Bibliographical Miscellany” “On Signatures” is, we learn, also being reprinted.
A piece of board no larger than a shilling, or as large as any ordinary cover in common demand, receives equal treatment once fairly placed upon this machine. An average of upwards of 300 workers are constantly engaged, and the workrooms are well lighted and arranged for the benefit of the workpeople.

Sprinkling and Marbling.

After acquiring some amount of skill in the sprinkling of leather as explained in our last number, it would be well to extend your operations to that class of colouring known as “dabbing,” in which the same colouring liquids are used, but they are applied by means of small pieces of sponge. For this purpose it is necessary carefully to select pieces according to the kind of dab required.

French Dabs are produced on calf coloured in the usual way with salts of tartar, or on English calf bought ready coloured in red, green, slate, or light brown; for the latter a stout paste wash must be first applied as on uncoloured calf. The sponges must be of soft and open texture, so that the stains made may be as distinct as possible, and not running one into another. They need be no larger than a good sized walnut, but must have a flat side. Try them on a piece of waste leather, and if they are too close in any part, nick little pieces out with a pair of shears till the spots are fairly separated.

Be careful to keep each sponge to its own colour, and for dabbing, the salts of tartar may be used the full strength given.

When the books are thoroughly dry, squeeze out the sponge in the copperas, leaving it fairly charged with colour, but so that it will not run, then gently dab over the whole surface of the cover (except the lettering piece), shifting the sponge now to the right, now to the left, that the dabs shall not be too uniform. Having covered the surface, next take the brown sponge, similarly charged, and dab over the black stains, making them deeper where you touch them, and making a sort of shadow where it touches on the plain leather. This close dabbing on green and red calf is very pretty and effective, and after being glaired polished and varnished closely resembles granite.

Cat’s Paw requires a little more careful and considerate execution in order to make it look carelessly arranged; it is produced in the same manner, but the sponge must be very open and has to be cut to suit its purpose. Cats are not scarce animals, so get hold of one and look at the little velvet pads under its feet. Dab one of the fore feet in black and lay it on a piece of leather; the stain produced you must try to imitate by nicking out a piece of sponge to the pattern set. With your black sponge be most particular, the brown does not so much matter. Having your sponges in order dab over with the black, leaving a space between each stain as broad each way as your forefinger, then brown over with the other sponge to make the black deeper and the shadows in and around the black stains. The effect aimed at is that of a cat having walked to and fro over the book, and is often adopted as a suitable style for old work. It is only used on browned calf, at least we never remember seeing it on any other colour.

French dabs are sometimes used on panel calf, leaving either a plain or sprinkled panel, and we once saw a whole bound calf book so dabbed that it appeared to be half-bound with dabbed back and corners. To preserve the straight line of division for any such fancy it is only necessary to lay a straight edged sheet of stout paper on the lines required, and you may then dab away freely. In any design you may fancy you are your own masters in this class of work, and with a little thought many novel effects may be produced.

In all the foregoing directions we have referred only to salts of tartar as the burning medium, but it often happens that the tint produced is not warm enough to the fancy, and more of a yellowish tint is desired. This may be effected by washing over the browned cover with picric acid dissolved in water. You must, however, be careful in storing this acid in a dry state as mixed with alkalies, like soda or salts of tartar, it becomes a dangerous explosive. Another warm brown or yellow is produced by putting a little annatto into a quart of water, with half-a-pound of common soda, and using it hot.

Tortoise-shell Sprinkle. Before going into the process of marbling, there are some effects produced by a combination of sprinkling and dabbing, which, though little used now, might be more often employed: the best of these is known as tortoise-shell.

Paste wash thoroughly and brown with salts of tartar lightly. Then stain the calf further with the following: half an ounce of turmeric powder put into half a pint of methylated spirit. This must be allowed to stand for several days, giving it an occasional shake up till the whole of the colour is drawn out. Next sprinkle with coarse black spots. Then dab with separate sponges dipped in blue, red, and black, made as follows:—Blue: one ounce powdered indigo to one ounce of oil of vitriol, mix thoroughly and let it stand for two or three days, then add twelve ounces of water. Red: quarter of a pound of brazil dust, two ounces of powdered cochineal, and a small piece of alum. Boil in a quart of good malt vinegar and stir thoroughly; use hot. After each of these colourings the leather must thoroughly dry before applying the next, and when complete and dry, take a stiff brush and give it a good rubbing, then a thin coat of paste wash, and finish in the usual manner.

The golden time of ornamental art in binding was the half century between 1525 and 1575. For the first two centuries the Italians had the best of it; during the other thirty the French took the lead, which they never lost.

Everyone who appreciates a good book will wish to honour it with the best binding he can afford, and thus show without words his high opinion of his loved companion.

Germany, the birthplace of printing, is still the first bookselling country in the world. Distributed over 800 towns there are 3,473 booksellers and publishers.