Thread and Wire Stitching.

Whether book sewing is accomplished by hand or machine it imposes upon practical craftsmen the nicest judgment. No other part of the technique of binding probably is so necessary to the outward aspect and the utility of the whole work as proper stitching. It is important to here emphasise that word proper, because while nothing should be slighted in the details of bookmaking, most of all must there be no want of discrimination or exactness when the sheets of a volume are collated in sequent forms after folding, and are then made ready for the later manual or mechanical processes.

However the sewing is done it should invariably be well done, even for what is commonly spoken of as a cheap job. In these days of mountains of presswork, an ordinary railway excursion pamphlet, a book sale or art exhibition catalogue, the usual yearly reports of corporations, beneficent societies, social coteries and other associations, with paper covered literature of every kind of text and widely differing complexion, are better printed than were the most valued philosophical, scientific treatises, historical records and belles-lettres of any former age.

They are, as a matter of progress and inventiveness, more rapidly sewed, but not as a rule so firmly bound as the costlier and scarcer books which were meant to withstand the wear and tear of those cultured, constant users who, old fashioned in their thoughtful intelligence, most implicitly believed that books were meant to be read and re-read, that knowledge was actually power, that wise reading made a full man, and that any volume regarded by men equally intelligent with themselves as worth printing was certainly worth putting into a durable and convenient shape.

Judgment is required (“great judgment,” enunciates an employing binder of contemporary reputation) to keep the swelling of a book down to that medium which is essential to form a good backing groove and no more. To do this it is from time to time necessary that the sheets shall be lightly tapped with the wooden or bone folding stick. To avoid drawing the kettle stitch too close and too tightly at fastening, care must be exercised, or else the top and bottom of the collated book will be discernibly thinner than its middle portion at the shelf back.

“Two sheets on” is a common procedure when the sections of the book which is being sewed are thin or in half-sheets. Especially convenient as well as practicable is this method if the volume itself is extra thick. After the needle is passed by hand from the kettle stitch to the first band of the first sheet and then out, another sheet is placed on top of the first and the needle is inserted at the first band and brought out at the second band. Again the needle is run through the first sheet and in at the second band, then out at the third band.

In that way the two sections are treated as one. Of course only half as much thread will be used in the back. With books which have their top margins trimmed, it is necessary to open each sheet cautiously up to the back prior to putting it on the press. The centre may not otherwise be caught. Two or more sheets will therefore be found detached after the book is bound.

Overcasting for strength is also necessary with the first and last sections of every volume. Single leaf books must be overcast, and each section thereof treated as the section of an ordinary volume, the only variation being that a stout paper lining should be put on the back of the book before covering up, so that it cannot bulge or rise.

Subsequent to the sewing of the book it is released from the press or sheet clamps by merely slackening the screws which tighten the beam. This easily detaches the sewing cord from the keys and lay cords. It may be left at its full length until the end papers are about to be put on. Then it must be cut down to about three inches.

Wire-sewing machines for book and pamphlet work, although yet regarded as expensive innovations, have recently been so modified, and such a variety of them has been presented, that these automatic stitchers can now be purchased at less than £10 for a small size, while the more complex machines cost as high as eighteen or twenty times that amount.

There is a popular medium machine, unadaptable for library bindings of standard works or the finer editions of new publications, but it is excellent for a stationer’s usual run of sheet threading. It is said that it will work a collation of 1½ inches thickness, stabbing very close to the folded edges of folded sheets. Having this advantage, it is particularly serviceable for binding thick, narrow-margin “time table” work or similar collations, where there is no space to spare at the back of the book.

This machine operates from the reel with wire graded for eight numbers from 25 down to 18. It is equally serviceable for stitching through the fold on saddle back work. So strongly is it made that major thicknesses are firmly clenched. The adjustment to vary thicknesses is quite simple, and the entire routine labour with it is so easy that dumb indeed must be the boy or girl who cannot be entrusted with it after a few days’ practical instruction. Four thousand stitches an hour can reasonably be expected from it. Even a greater number can be made under favourable conditions as to paper and wire. A more intricate automation by the same patentee and manufacturer is wire fed from spools by small steel rollers. At each revolution these rollers supply the little U shaped staples with which all handles of wire tightened books are more or less acquainted. Each turn of the machine makes as many of the staples as each sheet of the collated book requires in sewing.

These U bent wirelets are forced through the sections from the inside of the folds. Then as the tapes stretch and are held by clasps directly opposite to each staple bender and inserter, the legs of the U's
penetrate the tapes and extend through to a sufficient
distance to admit of the wirelets being bent inward
toward each other's point and to be firmly pressed
against the tapes. No tapes are required for this
machine stitcher when memorandum books, thin
catalogues, or ordinary sized pamphlets, like society
reports, are sewed.

Another and later invention by a rival patentee is
the thread-sewing machine. The operator sits im-
mediately in front of it, and puts the book sheets
consecutively on radial arms projecting from a
perpendicular rod. These radiating arms rotate, rise
and adjust the sheets (20,000 of which can be threaded
in a day), so as to bring each sheet in its proper place
beneath the curved needles. Small holes are punctured
in the sheets as each radial arm lifts. This piercing
is done from the inside by means of punches, so the
entrance and egress of the needles can be facilitated.

Afterward the loopers receive a lateral movement
which tightens the stitch. In order that the books
may be sewed tight or loose, this side motion is
adjusted for either case.

An American View of the Bookbinding
Exhibits at the World's Fair.

The Chicago Herald gives a report of the
bookbinding exhibit at Chicago, from
the pen of a well-known contributor
to the columns of The American Book-
binder. Not the least valuable of his
acute and common-sense remarks is
that contained in the last paragraph of this very
practical and valuable article. He says: "Allow me
to suggest to my brother bookbinders, and more
particularly the younger members of the trade, that
here at our very doors lies a school of art binding
that will bear many days of hard study. . . . The
rich and varied exhibit should bear fruit in the years
to come in every bookbindery throughout the land."

We have at the World's Fair, indeed, a chance of
technical education, which probably may not happen
again during the lifetime of some of us. The best
bookbinding of America, Great Britain, France,
Germany, and every other civilised country in the
world lies before us to examine, study, criticise, and
excel. Good forwarding, superb finishing and edge-
gilding, and every kind of sumptuous specimens of
our craft, lie, indeed, at our doors, awaiting study
and promising the good results which always follow
intelligent seeing and thinking.

Not alone in fine art binding is the exhibit rich with
specimens. In the American and German sections is
a good show of half and full-bound books of the
every-day sort, and cloth and leather edition binding
—the best of its kind. Every workman in every
branch of bookbinding will find plenty of material in
his own particular line which, if he be the right kind
of a man, will give him a stimulus to be felt by himself
and employer in both far and near future.

Among the many sights which will interest our craft
are a collection of ordinary but handsomely-bound
books in the American section, by Appleton & Co.,
Lippincott, the Century Co., Scribner's, and other
publishing houses. These firms have also some
exquisite art bindings.

In the German section the collection of good,
ordinary samples of bookbinding are plentiful. They
have, for instance, a full set—amounting to some
thousands of volumes—of the pretty Tauchnitz edition
of English authors bound in half-morocco. The
American and German sections contain also some
good cloth edition work. The Teutonic style of
stamping their cloth work (and a great deal of leather
work) with heavy designs in ink and gold until the
fabric or leather in which the book is bound is almost
hidden by Gothic ornament, does not commend itself
to our taste. We prefer the American style, which is
lighter and does not hide the material to such an
extent.

Canada has also a meritorious show of both blank
and printed work; they are well represented by
Brown Bros., of Toronto.

On the ground floor of the Liberal Arts and Manu-
ufacture building, in the New South Wales section, was
a lot of books well worth study. There were in this
Australian exhibit some very fine samples of work.

It has been a moot point among prominent American
binders as to the taste or utility of putting only four
bands on an 8vo and 4to printed book. We have
heard the matter frequently discussed as to how the
style came to be adopted in our country and from
whence it came. A very common idea is that four-
band books became common from the fact that
blank-book forwarders are frequently employed by
small firms to bind printed books, and that the natural
instinct of a blank-book forwarder is to put on four
bands, since he never uses more than that number on
his usual work.

This argument is, we think, ingenuous, but never
commended itself to our mind. A look at the German
exhibit will, we think, give a more plausible hypothesis.
Of all the European countries, Germany is the only
one that extensively uses four bands instead of five on
printed books. The German is a language of long
words with many syllables, and they require a large
panel to get room for their lengthy letters. The same
style adopted on our American books makes them
look mean. Take, for instance, Ouida's novel,
"Puck," and imagine the poor little word placed in a
large ocean of leather panel. If the word be put in
sufficiently large letters to fill the panel, it looks
clumsy; if put in neat type, it looks like a Hawaii of
gold in a Pacific of morocco—one longs to annex it.

It is more than probable, we think, that the influence
of our very large German population has been felt
in this matter, as it has been in many others. We
succeed in moulding our foreign population (in the
course of time) into American citizens, but during the
moulding process a little of the raw material sticks to
the hands of the moulder.

Which of the above theories is the correct one?
We leave those of our readers who visit the exhibition
to judge for themselves. But there is no doubt in
our mind that five bands on anything but a very small
printed book (say a 32mo) looks better than four,
always excepting some unusually long title be needed.