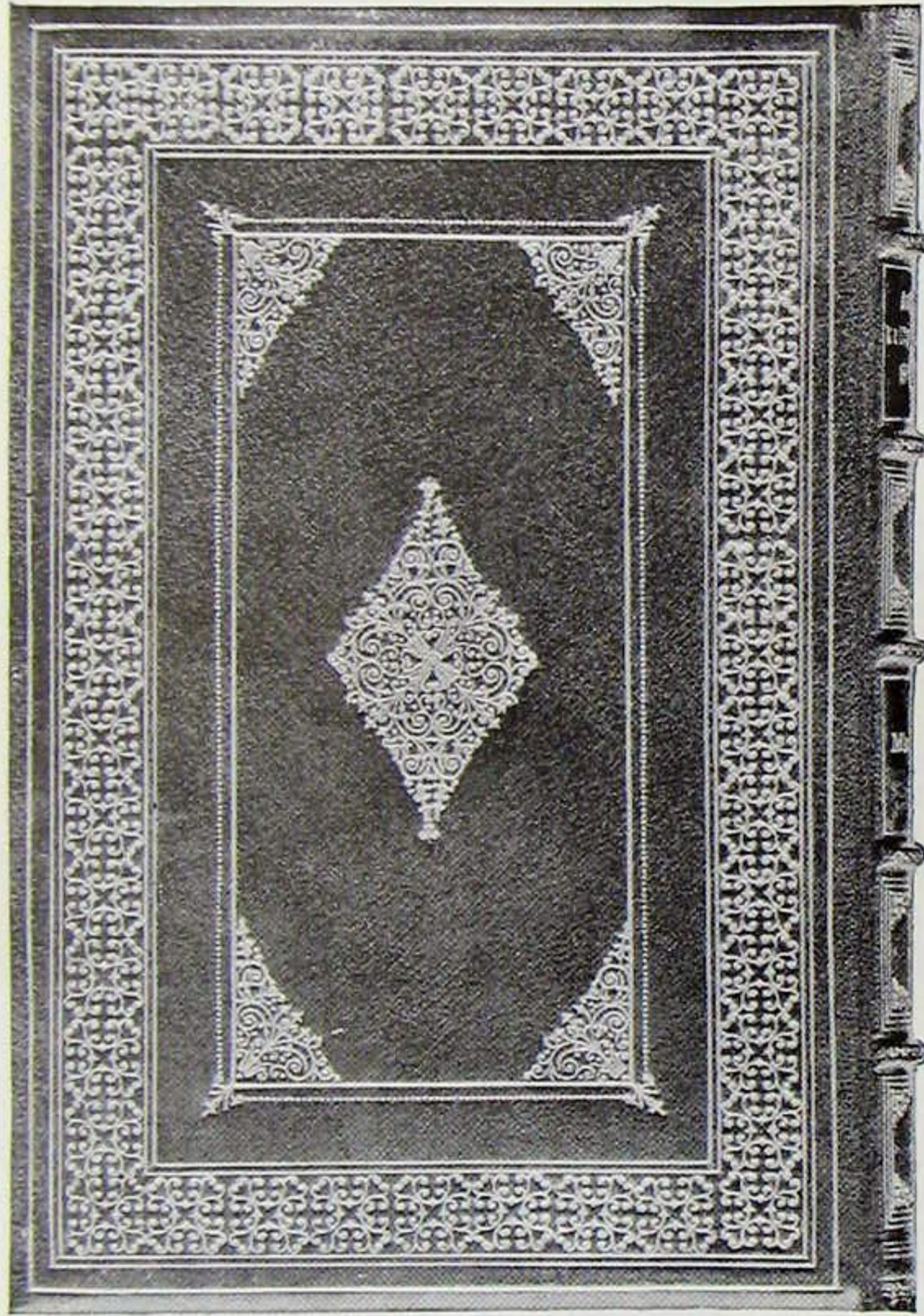


Bookbinding as a Decorative Art.



WHETHER bookbinding is to be regarded as one of the fine arts is a subject upon which opinions are very much divided. There are three classes especially in the community who hold widely different ideas on this subject. The first embraces the artistic bookbinder, the bibliophile and the custodian of libraries containing books and art collections. This class entertains no doubt that bookbinding is a fine art. The second class includes country town bookbinders, botchers of jobs,



dabblers in the art, those who scamp their work, and those in the trade who never realise to what a degree bookbinding can be developed because they hardly give a thought to the subject, seldom use cutting machines, are still in the habit of beating books in the old-fashioned way, and hire incompetent help in the bindery. This class is larger than is generally realised, and its members never read a journal devoted to the interests of the craft, never see an exhibition of objects connected with the trade, nor visit an art museum; but in ignorance of all suggestions of improvement in taste, style, and methods continue to work in the old

grooves, to which they have become accustomed in the past half century. They simply regard bookbinding as their means of livelihood, and have never asked themselves whether it could be anything more.

The third class is the public at large. This class admires the ornamental gold binding but cares little for stamped leather or leather mosaic work, and it recognises no difference between hand and machine gilding. It possesses more taste, however, than the dabblers in the art above mentioned, but it is not sufficiently enlightened as to the difficulties involved in hand work to correctly estimate its importance, and it accordingly gives other trades a higher position in the arts than bookbinding. So the great public fails to regard bookbinding as one of the fine arts.

We have, therefore, the three classes. The first does consider bookbinding as one of the fine arts, but its number is still composed of only a few individuals. The second gives no thought for the morrow and pays little attention to the question under discussion. This class, too, is small in number and will after a while die out. The third class considers the matter as of no importance. The second class is incapable of improvement, and every effort to arouse its members from their lethargy would be in vain; but the third class may be influenced to undergo a change for the better if this task is undertaken in the right way; for the public mind is formed by an exhibition and comparison of artistic and everyday objects and by lectures and explanatory talks. Hence the future of the bookbinding art and the economical as well as the artistic development of bookbinding depends upon a proper recognition of these facts; for the greater number capable of appreciating the art in our trade, the easier it will be to obtain artistic employment. The more deeply the art is felt, the more remunerative will the market become and the higher the material return will be.

A person who has laboured for years for the recognition of art in the bookbinder's trade cannot entertain a doubt that bookbinding belongs to the fine arts. Indeed, bookbinding was a branch of art work long before the invention of printing, with which the development of the trade has ever since marched hand in hand. We need not go back to remote antiquity, but can refer to artistic bookbinding which dates from the eleventh century, when the material was not such as is used in our bindings of to-day, but consisted of wood, ivory, etc. Even when the shape of the book differed from that in use at present, and the written leaves were glued together under instead of back of one another, and rolled upon a piece of wood—even then these covers or rolls were artistically ornamented.

Exactly how old the art of bookbinding is it is impossible to determine, but bookbinding even as applied to the book in the shape which it bears to-day is older than the art of printing, and artistic decorations for books had already before that been regarded as necessary. But it was chiefly religious works which were bound in those days. For such a purpose nothing

was considered as too valuable, and gold, silver, pearls, and precious stones were used. The old monasteries possessed many bindings of this description, for they had unlimited means. Thus we see the decorative art in bookbinding is very old.

We owe the most artistic work to the Italians, who had as early as the eleventh century developed a pure Roman taste in their ability to produce fine bindings, and as the Romans as a rule are easy-going, sprightly, and lively, so their decorations are free and light; but later on the French became their rivals and improved upon their teachers. But the Oriental is even older than any of these ornamental bindings, the Moorish and Byzantine being the most valuable of all. One can trace national character in German bookbinding as well as in the English, the ornamentation being heavy, serious, and devoid of particular grace; but ornamental art is still a speciality with these people, although manifested in a different manner.

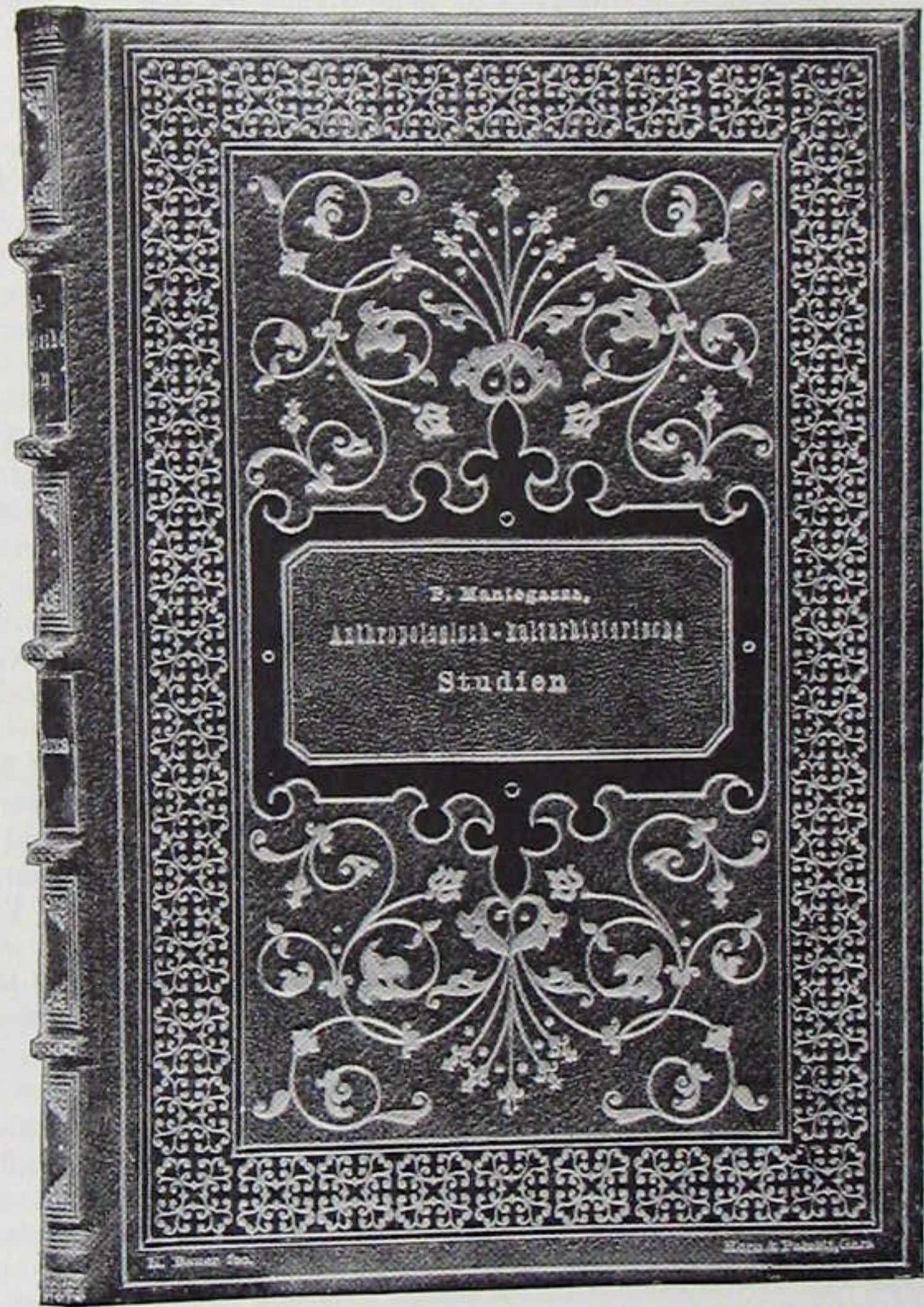
The invention of printing opened a very extensive field to the trade and caused ornamental bookbinding to advance greatly. The material previously employed had often been used in a showy manner at the expense of good taste, but now due consideration was given the latter. The employment of valuable gems was a hindrance to the use of books, and made them unserviceable at a period when books were not in demand as ornaments, but were needed sometimes in one place and sometimes in another. Instead of the jewel-bedizened books, one wanted volumes with artistic decorations on a flat surface, by which they were made both useful and ornamental. Italy is said to have been the first to create specially fine decorations, which the taste of the present day finds attractive and in accord with the true idea of book-cover ornamentation. We especially esteem the beautiful designs which the Italian Renaissance has handed down to us in the way of book covers as well as in other lines of art. German bookbinding endeavoured to make improvements in the art, although one cannot extol its present appearance. The character of all such binding is somewhat gross, and the choice of biblical subjects or portraits of royal personages finds only few admirers according to the taste of the present day. In the German art of bookbinding, Casper Krafft, the senior and junior Weidlichs, and the Elector August of Saxony attained great fame. Even to the English style there was a sort of heaviness; but, for all that, English book-cover decoration stands on a higher plane. Such book lovers as John Norris, Roger Payne, and Lord Harley gave a great impetus to the advancement of the art of ornamental bookbinding. All that has been said tends to prove that from the most remote period bookbinding ranked among the fine arts. What it has accomplished in more recent times is apparent to all. It has availed itself of all new mechanical devices, and has improved in finish, in variety of motives used, in harmony of colours and form, and in learning how its chief material,

leather, shall be employed to the best advantage. When all these points are considered there can be no doubt that bookbinding is justly entitled to a place among the fine arts.—*Ill. Zeit. für Buchbinderei.*

Some Finishers' Specimens.



THE two illustrations we give this month are the front and back sides of a binding by Messrs. Horn & Patzelt, designed and executed by Herr Bauer. They are in every way patterns worthy of imitation, the front cover especially because of its fine taste



in arrangement in the modern Grolier *genre*. The back cover also is an example of what may be done with very few tools, only four being required, yet the simplicity leaves a good impression. The cover is of Russia-green polished morocco, the centre panel of the front side is in black, while the tooled border is inlaid with red.

THE style of the firm of Messrs. Stocker, Wells & Co. has been changed to that of E. H. Wells, who has for some time past carried on the business under the former name.