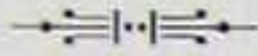




## Dress Fabrics as Book Covers.



SEVERAL weeks ago three sharp-witted business men, accidentally in conclave, sat debating a question provoked by their varying ideas concerning the outer embellishment of volumes which were chiefly intended for the annual holiday demand. The necessity of combining attractiveness and utility was the single point upon which all agreed. How it could be best accomplished at a minimum cost for edition work was the natural interrogation. It led to a series of diverse opinions.

None of these men was a tyro in the making or handling of books; nor could any of their views, frankly expressed on the subject under discussion, be regarded as impracticable. Fitness, availability, and comparative economy of manufacture were made the basis of each argument. Being of the trade, thrifty, and brought day by day into a closer wrestle with his intelligent competitors, the publisher had less to advance or defend than either the bookbinder or art connoisseur. In fact, the latter spoke unreservedly; not, however, from his experience solely, but with a nice judgment warranted by special culture and keen sensibility.

To what his friend, the publisher, was forced to contend for he gave ready acquiescence; because, as he curtly said, "there's no margin in any business for that æstheticism which is distinctive, harmonious, and pure." The bookbinder quickly bridled at this assertion. He insisted there ought to be such a margin, and a very wide one, in an educational pursuit, even if it were restricted by mercantile usages. Nevertheless, he admitted that price yet was, and it would indefinitely continue to be, the severest rub.

"If you once could," he remarked to the publisher, "break clean away from what the perversely ignorant miscall style, and fight heartedly for the substantial and genuinely artistic, there might then be some chance to show you honest work properly done by my fellow-craftsmen, my shopmates and myself, within a reasonable limit of cost for our time, our labour and our skill; but now how is it? Everything goes which sudden whims dictate or suggest.

"Rough dress fabrics happen to be the present rage with our sisters, wives, daughters, aunts, neices, or cousins feminine. They dare not be seen, therefore, buying or carrying a book which exteriorly, in colour and material, does not match the street or house apparel each has taken a fancy to wear, because the women round the corner, in the next block or on t'other side of the town, have similarly draped themselves. So cheviots, frieze, camel's hair, storm-serges, and heavy homespuns are sent in piece rolls from the dry goods lofts to the commercial binders."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed the bibliophile, seemingly unconscious that he thus perpetrated a neat jest on the fad of costume.

"Yes, it is nonsense; and there's too much stuff of the wrong kind," said the binder. "Why, we have a contract order now from a leading book house here in New York city for covering a thousand sets of an illustrated classic, which is in two volumes, octavo, printed on super paper. Five hundred of the lot are to be bound in white vellum cloth, with blue or steel-grey quartering; one hundred and fifty sets in half calf, polished, the edges trimmed and gilt; and fifty sets in full levant morocco, crushed, gold lined, and stamped in delicate floriations on the title back to imitate fine hand tooling."

"And the remaining three hundred sets?" queried the publisher, becoming interested.

"Well, I cannot tell you, for the simple reason that the firm is yet undecided. About a dozen samples of dress goods, such as I've already named, have been so far submitted, but most of them proved worthless experiments. No doubt something outlandish in its weave and dye will finally be selected.

"This season there's a moderate call for high tints of velvet. Satin, silk, and corduroy are also in fair demand again for gift books. Some narrow-barred Caledonian plaids have been ordered, both in silk and woollen; yet I must candidly say that they were seldom found consonant with the letterpress. You know subject and style will now and then curiously differ. The greater part of our work in any of the classes of coverings was finished during the summer months, although we've had a few delayed orders."

"Then I'm to understand," said the connoisseur, "that, with me, you are utterly opposed to anything for book ornamenting or library use except good polished leather casings not too profusely gilded?"

"Don't mistake me," replied the binder. "The bulk of our labour is on editions. Hence the less good leather we use the more money for publishers and ourselves. Buyers of cheap volumes obtain what they are willing to pay for. They cannot expect a \$2 binding on a new book marked to retail for \$1.50. That's a case where the unexpected never happens. The idea which I seek to convey to your minds is this: no material, however showy and for the time being desirable on account of some freak of fashion, should be regarded as fit for volume casing if it is excessively difficult to paste or trim. Ordinary muslins (whether plain, printed or machine gauffered), smooth, ribbed, and pebbled book cloths and leatherettes are all easily worked. I am personally very strongly prejudiced in favour of half-morocco covers. What tough, close textured goat skin and stout marbled paper will jointly resist I well know. In both of them there's more wear than any other good quality. Taste and careful workmanship do the rest, for these materials are susceptible of beautiful combinations and the most ornate finish.

"The standing objection to velveteens, plushes, or velours, is their tendency to spot or lose lustre in the gluing. Like silks, each of these fabrics requires to be at first lined with thin paper, cut to the exact size of the book; then pasted with a thin, fluent gum, rubbed smoothly down and allowed to dry before it is

glued to the rounded title back and flat boards. I don't care to worry with plush and velveteen, or any stuff of that nature, or to parboil my fingers in trying to raise the cotton pile by holding the book which it covers over a steaming kettle."

"Have you ever tried finely corded Irish poplins?" asked the publisher, as with hat on head he rose to help break the audience.

"Yes," said the binder, "I've used the dainty greys and steel colours, and occasionally the browns. They come up tolerably well; but, to tell the truth, a costly imported poplin looks best on a pretty woman. It doesn't set just right on a book, nor in the least enhance its typographic beauty." "My sentiments to a dot!" murmured the bibliophile. So the friendly trio decorously adjourned.—*The American Bookmaker.*

## International Exhibition of Bindings.



URING November an exhibition of bindings was held in Paris, organised under the auspices of the Cercle de l'Imprimerie et de la Librairie, an account of which we take from the *Revue des Arts Graphiques*, written by

the able and practical critic, M. Em. Bosquet.

"The object of the opening of this exposition was to show the present condition of commercial bindings, and to draw useful lessons therefrom. The organisers of this brilliant collection have reserved the place of honour for art bindings. Bindings of art are those of the French, *par excellence*, and in all exhibitions where French bindings appear they surpass all others.

"Is the art, as it is represented at the Circle, calculated to produce enthusiasm? In considering the art of binding, if we mean that of Jean Grolier and Th. Maioli; that which was practised by the famous finisher at the time of Henri II., and later by Le Gasçon; that which was interpreted in our own time by that inimitable master, the late Marius Michel, the virtuoso would be out of his reckoning. But, on the other hand, if we mean the art which characterised the work of the artists of the eighteenth century—Padeloup, the Deromes, and Dubuisson—with such happy results: that is admirably represented on the one hand by M. Mercier, an old finisher, and successor of the late Fr. Cuzin, and on the other, although in a lesser degree, by the finishing of an artist known by his inlayings of two or three bindings bearing the signature of M. Ruban.

"The art of the eighteenth century, an art eminently French, is represented at the exposition in all the splendour of its original form and admirable qualities, but we must say also, with all the inherent faults which were evident on the bindings of that time. We cannot praise enough the artist finisher who imitates the most beautiful of that which has been handed down to us, but we cannot wish him to push his imitation so far as even to accentuate certain defects which our predecessors could not altogether avoid, either because of lack of perfection in their tools, or because of

imperfections in their materials, leather or boards, etc., which were at that time far from being made with the scientific care bestowed upon them nowadays.

"The imitation and reproduction of the specimens left to us of the older forms of our art is to the majority a stumbling block, which only the more skilful, those who possess a thorough grounding in the science of art, are able to avoid. To reproduce the more beautiful forms of any epoch, is all very well and good, but to copy at the same time the defects met with on certain works—even in masterpieces—which have occurred either by accident or through imperfections in materials in the first place, and to pile fault upon fault in copying is to work without profit, so far as art is concerned.

"In the eighteenth century the boards were manufactured in a very poor fashion: they were rough and uneven, and in spite of the preparation to which they were subjected by the binder, there was much to be desired; but, added to this, the covers were usually put on with a composition of paste, the dampness from which swelled the board and put it out of shape more or less.

"The skins of morocco were also far from being manufactured as they should have been for use in binding: they were of what is known to-day as Algerian morocco, skins tanned in a very indifferent fashion, with very little grain and that poor, dull, and fleshy; excellent in lieu of canvas as a groundwork for embroidery, as it was executed in that country, or for upholsterers' work, hangings, etc., but not for art bindings, especially if for hand gold tooling. French and English manufacturers still make it, it is true, and after undergoing certain preparation it may pass, but it always retains a certain sponginess of character. The ornaments, cut after the style of that time, were heavy, massive, and had little depth, so that they required sometimes very heavy impressions to imprint the tooling on the skin. We say on the skin, in order that it may be understood that to make the gold adhere, the impressions had to be made with great force, and even after several impressions had been made some blisters would inevitably appear.

"It is true, sometimes we use skins of English morocco, which are prepared with a view to remedy the inconvenience we have just referred to, but the question of avoiding blisters always rests with the boards; still the tools must be impressed with great force to make the gold adhere."

[To be continued.]

A WORKMEN'S EXHIBITION, where the highest efforts of our skilled handicraftsmen may be laid before the public, is a good idea. The London Trades Council have taken the matter up and the Lord Mayor has given them every assurance of support from the City Guilds and the Corporation. The exhibition will be during next June and July at the Agricultural Hall. As the Lord Mayor said, "the character of a nation's work is too often judged by its worst examples, and it is necessary to re-assert the old standard of good and solid work, which has always been the characteristic of British manufactures."