



On Bookbinding in England.

By W. H. JAMES WFALE.

THE History of Bookbinding in this country has hitherto been almost entirely neglected. I have for some time past been engaged in collecting and bringing together the materials for writing it, and have succeeded in identifying the work of a certain number of Binders, but this is not an easy matter and cannot be done in a hurry. Years ago when I commenced working at the History of Art in the Low Countries, I at first lost a great deal of time, owing to my having followed the lead of untrustworthy guides. I commenced by examining the different paintings assigned to Van Eyck, Memlinc, and others at Bruges, and trying to fix in my memory the peculiarities of each master; then I went to Antwerp, Brussels, and other towns, and found, as I journeyed on, the same names constantly turning up in picture-galleries and in churches, but attached to paintings differing in many respects from one another; at the end of some time I discovered that what I had to do was to try and forget all I had learned, and to start afresh on a surer basis; mentally to dissociate all old pictures from the artists whose names were attached to them, unless positive proof of their authorship was forthcoming; to try and class all the better pictures in groups, according to the composition, and to the peculiarities of drawing and of colour they presented. I soon found out that the last was the right basis, and that the similarity of composition was not to be relied on as a proof of identical origin. Having grouped the pictures, I searched the archives for documents, and was fortunate enough to get positive proof of the authorship of many a panel that had been up to that time attributed to other artists. Now it is certainly far more difficult to identify the authorship of a binding than that of a picture, unless one or more of the stamps used are identical. The composition of, say, a panel or band of the time of Henry VII. or Henry VIII. is no evidence of authorship; for binders were not organised into guilds in this country as in the Netherlands, and had no right of property in the design of the panels or bands with which they adorned the covers of the books they bound. Initials again are no sure guides, for instance three different binders with the initials G. G. were practising the craft in England in Henry VIIIth's reign, and using very similar designs. I have been fortunate enough to be able to identify all three. The initials G. R., J. R., and N. S., again each represent two or three contemporary binders. I think it well to insist on this point because THE BOOKBINDER may do real good service if care is taken not to attribute a stamp

