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MODERN BOOKBINDING.

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(From British and Colonial Printer and Stationer.)

Bookbinding has certainly very much altered since the days of Grolier and his contemporaries. Could he but see some of the clothwork that is now in the market, he would, there is no doubt, be astonished. Seeing that there are comparatively few books bound now but in cloth, it behooves us to ask, Is not clothwork modern bookbinding?

On some of the clothwork there is doubtless good taste shown in the selection of colour and general get-up of the book; but on how few is the book itself studied that the binding should be in keeping with its contents! Compare the volumes of Keepsake and other table books that were issued some few years ago bound in silk or in stamped velvet to the books now cased in gaudy cloth. Of the thousand and one published, how many books are issued in a properly bound form? For one must make a distinction between a cased book and one bound in boards. A cased book, or, in plainer words, a cloth cover, is, after all that can be said in its favour, only a superior kind of wrapping; at the first fall or rough usage the book parts from its jacket, and the cover then offers but little protection to its contents. True, there are a few books to be had which are placed in a better sort of binding, but as the leather used and the binding altogether is scarcely better than a fraud, it takes a place but very little higher than clothwork, and of the two, one would almost prefer the cloth-cased copy, because one knows what to expect if the book be used much, and the cost is very much less. Again, how many are there who understand or even know a properly bound book? So much of this cheap work has been done that it is almost a rarity to have a well-bound book in one's hands.

Is the binder to be blamed for this deterioration of solid work? One can hardly censure him, for he, being under the direction of the publisher, has to do as ordered; or, if the work is estimated for, the publisher accepts, in almost every case, the lowest tender, and the binder has, very often, to scamp the work to make it pay, and does not care how it is executed, so long as his work be accepted. This, then, inculcates the publisher, for one cannot blame

the public, who are attracted by anything that is cheap and of a gaudy character. No doubt the public require retraining as to the choice of books and bindings. An attempt was made in this direction some three or four years ago by an enterprising publisher, who certainly did print a very choice book, and who promised its subscribers the book in a properly bound form. So that everything should be correct, a first class binder was consulted, who finally took the order to get up two copies in different styles, each copy consisting of a few sheets of letterpress, but filled up to the proper thickness with blank paper so that the travellers could show the style of printing, woodcuts, thickness of book, and, lastly, the beautiful binding, perhaps also quoting the binder's name as a further inducement for orders. The binder having promise of such an unusual order—viz., some hundreds of copies in fancy vellum, took great trouble, had his men working during holiday time, and turned out two very fine samples of binding just in time for the travellers. The books were shown and admired, but when the time arrived for them to be bound, instead of the original binder reaping the benefit of his brains, the two books were taken to a cloth binder, the sides were electroed, the books cased, and issued to the subscribers, very few of them knowing the fraud practised. This is quoted as one instance that few of the public—ay, and very few booksellers, really know a properly bound book when they see one.

Another example happened in which the writer was a silent spectator. A gentleman came to a binder of good repute; he wanted a book very nicely bound, and, after having a number of books shown him bound in various styles, from plain russia to daintily inlaid morocco, at last selected a superb Grolier for pattern; the colour was next selected, then the price was asked; a modest sum was named. "What!" exclaimed the customer, "I don't want to pay more than 2s. or 2s. 6d." A plain green cloth binding, lettered on the back, with sprinkled edges, was afterwards chosen, and the gentleman expressed himself quite as well satisfied as with the morocco copy.

Here was a man, evidently moving in good society, who, taking quite one hour of a tradesman's time, expected a rich Grolier in morocco, with gilt edges, for 2s. 6d.