

LEATHER BINDINGS.

THE London Daily News has recently interviewed the bookbinding and leather trades as to the durability of the leathers used in the binding of books, the result of which is concentrated in the following two opinions, one from a prominent bookbinder, the other from a leading tanner.

The bookbinder referred to said to the interviewer, "Look at this book. It is three centuries old, and yet the leather is as sound as on the day it was cut from the hide. I could not guarantee that even the leather which I put on my best work will last as this has done, and carry my name down the ages. I do not make my own leather. We do not tan today as they tanned in olden days, and the trouble comes partly from the tanning, partly from the acid dyeing, and partly from the altered conditions under which books live."

No leather, however good, will stand years of exposure to the fumes of gas. The atmosphere of towns is generally bad for leather bound books, especially when they are left undisturbed on the bookshelves. The fumes act chemically on the leather, and set up sulphuric acid. Naturally, where there is already sulphuric acid in the leather the process of decay is much more rapid.

I know of only one firm which professes to sell leather absolutely innocent of acid. They all use acid, some more, some less. Some colors, such as the greens, require more acid than other colors. Some leathers, before they can be dyed at all evenly, so as to be dyed profitably, have first to be bleached neatly white with acid. Some processes seem to require more acid.

"Russia leather is so charged with acid that I have entirely given up using it, except when customers insist on having it after I have told them what the result must be. It is so bad that it perishes even before I can use it."

The binder showed the interviewer a number of pleasantly smelling hides of "Russia" leather tanned in London. The perfume was still there, but the leather was so

rotten that it would tear like paper, and its surface would break up beneath the thumb-nail.

"That," continued the bookbinder, "has not been on my premises more than a year. I suppose it has not been tanned for longer than fifteen months at the outside. It cost me close upon 2s. a square foot—and it is useless."

"Here," and he picked up a pretty volume of a series specially addressed to "book lovers." It was bound in what appeared to be natural undyed pigskin. "Beautiful to look at, isn't it?" It is sheepskin into which that pigskin pattern has been rolled.

"Sheepskin is utterly useless as a book cover. But almost all the cheap leather bindings are made out of sheepskin. Some of them—'roans,' as they are called—are such excellent imitations in appearance of genuine goat that after they are made up I could not myself say positively that they were imitation. A hide of 'roan' costs about one-sixth of the price of a genuine goat hide. You can therefore guess how much real goat is used."

The leather seller informed the interviewer that he could not guarantee hides free from acid, and did not believe that dyed leather was produced without acid. He was so certain of it that he would not pretend to attempt to procure a hide which could be guaranteed.

After a little chat he readily produced a number of hides for inspection. He was rather proud of his imitation pigskin, made from sheepskin, and, comparing it with a real hide, pointed out that it was the more natural looking, and its grain a better "pattern" than that from the genuine pig. He explained that an especially choice sample was always chosen as the model for the machine rollers. He showed almost every kind of skin made out of sheep hides, and also morocco made from pigskin. Among the imitations was a thin sheepskin leather that would tear like tissue paper. "That," he said, "is used for linings, and, at any rate, it enables the dealer honestly to say that the article is all leather. It certainly is leather. It is a surface split by machinery off a sheepskin. Imitation pigskin is largely used for cheap furniture as well as for books, so also in large quantities is imitation morocco."

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