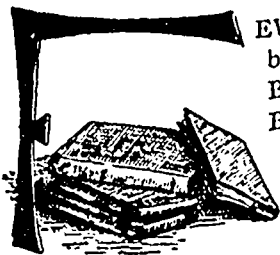


BOOKBINDING FOR THE BOOK-LOVER.

By E. J. Hathaway, Toronto.



“There are who know a beautiful book when they see it,” writes Mr. Brander Matthews in his “Notes of a Book Lover,” “and fewer still who appreciate one.” A well-printed and well-bound book may be in itself as true a work of art as the piece of literature which it contains, yet, in the libraries of many

persons of literary and artistic tastes tall volumes are rarely found, and the poorly-printed and cheaply-bound books of the business world are considered good enough. With some, the chief interest in a book consists in possessing it.

Still am I busy books assembling,
For to have plentie it is a pleasaunt thing.

Others cherish a book because of its rarity, or because of the handwriting upon its fly-leaves. In their eyes the good edition, well printed on fine paper with liberal margins, and finely bound in leather, with artistic decorative designs, is not to be compared with the often-times cheap-looking and ill-made volume, which by some chance happens to be the editio princeps of some neglected and almost forgotten author. These persons, however, are bibliomaniacs, and not bibliophiles. The bibliophile is the true book-lover. To him, the printing, illustrations, and binding are equally important with the contents. By many these are considered as mere necessary details, having no intimate association with the contents and possessing no claims to attention by reason of an intrinsic beauty.

In Burton Hill's “Book Hunter” it is recorded that, in the hearing of a dealer in old books, it was remarked that a certain person was said to know something about books. “He know about books,” was the retort, “nothing—nothing at all, I assure you, unless, perhaps, about their insides.”

When setting up The Kelmscott Press in 1891, Mr. William Morris said: “I thought it would be nice to have a book or two one cared for printed in a way one would like to see it.” This is the secret of the book-lover's affection.

The distinguishing feature of the books issued during the greater part of the present century was an apparent indifference to outward appearance. Any kind of covering seemed good enough. The paper was often poor, the printing indifferent, and the binding cheap and tawdry. That intimate relationship between the contents and the covering, which appeals to the book-lover, was entirely lacking.

A change, however, is now passing over the bookmaking world, bringing with it the well-balanced title-pages, the tasteful contrasts of black and white, simple but effective designs in the decoration of the covers, and other characteristics of the 15th and 16th centuries, when book-making reached its highest development. In those days bookbinding was numbered among the fine arts, and received much attention from collectors. Many of the most tasteful and valuable bindings now in existence were produced during that period, and, although they are now widely scattered, they are jealously treasured by their owners as veritable works of art.

Mr. William Matthews, of New York, for many years the foremost bookbinder in America, in an address before the Grolier club of that city a few years ago, said: “Fifty years ago there was not a finely bound book, except what by chance had been procured abroad, to be found in any collection in America. Fine binding was an unknown art.” The present condition is greatly different. Bindings of beautiful and tasteful design, which have been executed by local workmen and which are expressive, as were those of the middle ages, of a refined artistic appreciation, are now to be found in many libraries; and they are valued, not so much for what they contain, as on account of their inherent beauty.

And not alone in fine bindings has this improvement taken place. In cloth edition work the change has been even more strongly marked. The gaudy book covers of a quarter of a century ago, whereon a great variety of colors were lavished in a sort of pictorial hodge-podge, have given place to simple decorative designs, pleasing to the eye and gratifying to the artistic sensibilities.

The art of bookbinding, which, previous to the invention of printing, had been mainly in the hands of the silversmiths and ivory workers, was largely developed in the monasteries of Europe. As in other lines of art, wealthy patrons endowed the book-making departments of these institutions, and many volumes still remain bearing the heraldic designs of their former owners. The books bound in the monasteries in the earlier days were encased in wooden boards, and it was no unusual thing for the workmen to hunt the animal for its hide, and subsequently use it for the covering. In the course of time the wooden boards became worm eaten, and eventually they gave place to pasteboard sides, which were made by pasting together the sheets of printed books not then in demand. With the increasingly large output of books, following the introduction of printing, leather workers in other lines were employed as binders, and thus bookbinding not only had the benefit of their skill in handling the leather, but also the use of the tools with which they used to decorate the saddles and harness of their former patrons.

In spite of the many improvements in the art of bookbinding, the finest books are to-day bound substantially as they were in the days of Grolier. Indeed, Mr. Morris, at his Kelmscott Press, recently produced some of the most beautiful books ever printed, using type modelled on that of the 16th century, and printing the paper on an old-fashioned hand press of the style of many generations ago. Such improvements as have taken place in bookbinding have been mainly in connection with edition work, where cheapness is the essential point and steam power can take the place of hand work. The attention of the bookbinders of the present day is largely devoted to edition work. The tendency is to the production of books the first coverings of which are expected to be permanent. These coverings are usually of cloth, although leather is frequently employed, and they are stamped by machinery with some distinct and appropriate design. Such commercial work, however, is not to be compared in artistic value with the individual fine