

ART IN BOOKMAKING

A Scholarly and Practical Essay by Mr. Ernest J. Hathaway, of Warwick Bros. & Rutter.

Reported for PRINTER AND PUBLISHER by C. G. Hickey.

A LECTURE on the above subject delivered by Mr. Ernest J. Hathaway at a meeting of the Women's Art Association in Toronto recently was of considerable value to printers and others interested in the making of printed books. Mr. Hathaway thought that the best works of literature should be becomingly dressed, and what was a proper binding and printing formed the theme of his address.

Art in bookmaking, he said, did not consist in the illustration of the printed pages nor in the decoration of the cover; it was architectural—not pictorial. A book might be beautiful if only the type was printed clearly and neatly, so as to be easily read, and a proper regard shown for the paper and other materials that entered into its making. The decorations and illustrations might enhance the beauty of the book, but they were not essential to its art. In the production of a work of art, one central thought or feature should stand out above all, and in the making of a book, the chief place should be given to the author, and all arts and materials in its production should be subordinate to him.

So far as typography is concerned there are two requisites in a beautiful book—harmony and simplicity. Readability was the end to be sought. The fewest possible kinds and sizes of type should be used, and they should be arranged in as simple a manner as possible. The books produced during the first 100 years after the invention of printing were the most perfect models of typography and binding the world has seen, and the degeneration that followed was due to the fact that bookmaking, which once was an art, was now a mechanical process, and the motive of production was not how good, but how cheap. Printing alone, of all inventions, was born fully matured, and began to degenerate almost immediately. The printers of early days were under the influence of the manuscript writers, and, as there was a prejudice against printed books, as cheap imitations, it was necessary that they should follow as closely as possible the manner and style of the manuscript books. The early printers understood the arrangement of the type on the printed pages better than we do. As to the position of the type there was no fixed rule, but the plan of the early printers of making the inner and upper margins of the pages about one-half the width of the outer and lower margins seemed best, for it not only presented a more artistic appearance, but, if it was necessary to rebind a book, the edges could be trimmed again without spoiling its appearance.

Those engaged to illustrate the books of olden times were the best artists of the day, and, as education was then very limited, the use of pictures was necessary in order to convey more clearly the meaning of the author to the

reader. In the use of illustrations there should be two main objects; first, the pictures should help to make clear the author's meaning, and, secondly, they should add beauty to the printed pages. The early artists understood this, and every illustration not only conveyed some idea to the reader, but made the book more beautiful. The most important invention since printing, as regards the making of books, was that of engraving by photography, but, unless artists and printers unite to preserve the tradition of the art of illustration, this new method of engraving will be its destruction. It is too easy to make a collection of photographs or sketches and call them illustrations.

In the binding the two materials in general use were cloth and leather, each requiring a different treatment and different degrees of artistic skill. Cloth was entirely a nineteenth century invention, the original object in using it being merely to provide a temporary covering for the book until a leather one could be given. But at present very few books ever receive anything more than the cloth cover, and the object should be, therefore, to make it as fine as possible. At first, cloth bindings were of the commonest description, and a paper label on the back was the only decoration. The next step was the combination of a number of pieces of metal rule in a sort of geometrical design, and this was followed by the present custom of printing designs from special plates made from artist's drawings.

The work of the artist in the stamping of cloth-bound books consisted in merely making the original drawing on paper, but in finishing leather bound books the entire process was a work of art. Every design was original in itself, and the details had to be worked out by hand, each impression of the finisher's tools corresponding to a stroke of the artist's brush. The art of the finisher was limited by the tools at his command, and every design must be capable of being transferred to leather. The finisher, with a knowledge of the tools in his mind, outlined the scheme of decoration on paper, usually with the tools themselves. The paper was then stretched over the leather, and the design impressed through the paper on to the surface of the leather. The paper was then removed and the design again gone over, with the tools slightly heated, to make the impression sharp and distinct. The leather was then washed with a sizing to make the gold stick, and the design gone over a fourth time, again with the tools heated. The surplus gold was then brushed away. This process must be repeated on the other side and back before the cover is completed.

The description, however, is much easier than the accomplishment. The gold often cannot be persuaded to stick, the leather may be too dry, the tools may be too hot, or too cold, each kind of leather requires a different treatment, and what that is can be learned only by practice and study. The difficulties in the manipulation of the tools are many, and a host of other things make the discouragements and disappointments of the finisher very numerous and serious. The artist may toil over the work hour after hour and day after day, for the gold is exceedingly thin, and impression after impression is required to produce a satisfactory result. Hundreds of separate impressions of