

**A CATALOGUE OF FIFTEEN HUNDRED BOOKS
REMARKABLE FOR THE BEAUTY OR THE AGE
OF THEIR BINDINGS: OR AS
BEARING INDICATIONS OF FORMER
OWNERSHIP BY GREAT BOOK-COLLECTORS
AND FAMOUS HISTORICAL PERSONAGES**

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A Catalogue of Fifteen Hundred Books Remarkable for the Beauty or the Age of Their Bindings:
Or As Bearing Indications of Former Ownership by Great Book-Collectors and Famous
Historical Personages by Bernard Quaritch

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BERNARD QUARITCH

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Preface.



THE subject of Bookbinding is one which should be of high interest to the lovers and the makers of books. Supercilious persons may deride as mere vanity the jerkin of gilt leather in which the binder delights, and may prefer beauty in a naked state; but binding is like the saving grace of faith. Without binding, there can be no salvation: it confers mundane immortality on bad and good books alike, preserving the latter for our enjoyment and the former for our—instruction. For the want of binding, myriads of authors have perished, leaving a great many deplorable gaps in the literary history of the past.

This is the utilitarian side of the topic; it has also an aesthetic one. Binding offers a field for the display of decorative art which has not always been neglected, and the eye is as much gratified by dainty and delicate patterns on the outside of books, as by the display of taste in furniture, tapestry, hangings, urns, screens, vases.

There is besides a sentimental aspect in the cult of old bookbindings. The same feeling which formerly prompted veneration for bits of the True Cross, for the relics of saints and martyrs, the pollax of St. Sebastian or the coxa of St. Margaret, inspires the modern book-lover with reverence for the volumes, whether well or ill bound, which are stamped with the emblems of his nobler predecessors. We have heard of the enthusiast who took to bed with him a newly acquired tome to which the quiver and crescents of Diane de Poitiers lent a vicarious fascination.

The ensuing catalogue is devoted to the service of the Holy Church of Bibliophily, according to the three various Uses above specified. If the works of modern art predominate in the collection, there is little cause for grumbling. The names of Trautz and Bedford, Padeloup and Roger Payne, of Lortic, Chambolle-Duro, and Marinus-Michel, are in themselves sufficient guarantee that the volumes which bear them are emphatically "fine books," which will some day become venerable as "old books."

The reading public is almost wholly ignorant of what is meant by "book-binding." It is one of the industrial arts, capable of high and splendid cultivation, and absolutely indispensable for the preservation of the literary monuments of former ages. Most men who have handled and used books are aware of the necessity of such a mode of protecting them; but, ordinarily, the work of the binder is not supposed to be anything more elegant or enduring than the mere

temporary covering bestowed by the publisher upon his printed wares. Yet it has been for many centuries the delight of book-lovers to array their cherished volumes in gold and scarlet, and to embellish them with gems, enamels, and ivory carvings, or with decorative designs of such high merit that even the most stupid inheritor of a library would preserve its rough diamonds for the sake of their settings.

A history of Bookbinding would be a desirable addition to the literature of bibliography, but none worthy of the name has yet been written. Arnott's little work is not uninteresting but is absurdly pretentious in its scope; and his account of the bindings used in the classical world of Greece and Rome is ridiculous. We know nothing positive or sufficient on the subject, and we have little to do with the rolls enclosed in cylindrical boxes which were used before the time of Christ everywhere, and which are still used by the Jews. Bookbinding, in the sense in which the word is now employed, may be said to have begun with the fifteenth century. Two kinds of bookbinding had been practised for nearly a thousand years previously. In their elements, they were practically identical with the modern art; but their exterior decoration constituted an essential difference. The "forwarding" portion of the work has been constantly the same from the beginning. The sheets were stitched together in order, leathern bands fixed transversely at intervals on the back with their ends hanging out for a few inches. These ends were laced into wooden boards which thus covered the sides of the book, and finally a wrapper of skin or leather was superimposed so as to hide the nakedness of the back and the exterior surface of the wood, its lappings turned over the edges of the boards, folded down inside and fastened with glue. So far, all binding has been alike at all times, the chief change since the fifteenth century being the substitution of carton or pasteboard for the wooden covers. In the earlier times, the more precious volumes, especially those of biblical or liturgical character, seldom required a leather covering. The upper wooden board was used as a ground for ornamentation with plates of metal bearing pictorial designs generally in relief, set off with gems and enamelled surfaces, and frequently decorated with an ivory carving of the crucifixion or some other sacred subject, inlaid in the centre. Examples of this kind are now very rare, the intrinsic value of the exterior rendering it liable at all times to become the prey of aesthetic burglars, or to undergo translation (with modification) from one book to another till it disappeared utterly. The plain leather covering upon other books began, in the twelfth century, to be considered appropriate for decorative treatment of a different kind. This was the impression of ornamental designs from plates engraved for the purpose, in blind tooling or *à fers froids*, as we now call it. The decorative motifs of the outside can always be considered as in some degree akin to the methods of ornament used by the calligraphers or illuminators on the pages within; but there have been at all times recurrent traces of derivation from an Oriental source. The early excellence of English work may perhaps be traced through Anjou to Toledo, just as Italian work of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century betrays the influence of Saracenic and Byzantine models passing through the Levant to Venice and through Tunis and Palermo to Naples. France and Germany had their share of this foreign

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infusion, and the Crusades no doubt helped to mould the destinies of bookbinding as of so many loftier things.

Towards 1475 the Saracenic patterns on Venetian books began to be sprinkled with gold dots, a charming innovation, which sealed the fate of blind-tooling, and at the same moment engendered the true Art of decorative Bookbinding which we have here to deal with. (Blind-tooling died slowly, however, and was practised in Germany with great elaboration and success even down to the beginning of the last century.) Stamped bindings, such as the blind-tooled work which flourished from 1200 to 1600, and commercial gilt bindings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, belong undoubtedly to the genus of decorative bookbinding, but their mechanical qualities exclude them from the artistic species now in view, in which the craftsman worked with a free hand and with a distinct application of skill to every individual volume. Whatever was artistic in the decorative designs on stamped bindings was due to the engraver, not to the bookbinder. The same may be said of all modern publishers' bindings, whether done in cloth or in leather, and these likewise are excluded from our consideration. Individuality of character in the method and decoration of bookbinding is the one thing to be desiderated, for it demands knowledge and taste with the labour of skilled hands.

It may be said that Trautz-Bauzonnet and his fellows in France, Bedford and his fellows in England, have bound and decorated their books with a frequent repetition of the same style of ornament; each volume, nevertheless, was the object of a new effort, no stamps were used to multiply a single design, and the decorative details were in every instance worked out with distinct solicitude. Among their tools, they possessed some which enabled them to reproduce *ad infinitum* certain minute portions of the pattern needing repetition, and, so far, they were, from the utilitarian point of view, superior to the masters of the sixteenth century who cultivated their powers by resorting to more difficult means. To explain this, it may be said that the genuine artists among the binders of the sixteenth century used no other tools than those which enabled them to mark points, short straight lines, and slight curves. With such insignificant aids, they produced ornamental patterns which have never been surpassed in beauty and ingenuity. It is a pity that we are left in utter ignorance of the names of the men who performed high artistic work of that kind, while every little binder of to-day, no matter how moderate his pretension, takes good care that he shall not be forgotten.

It is quite certain that the art of decorative bookbinding was developed, if not hatched, in the house of Aldus Manutius at Venice between 1510 and 1520. During the last ten years of the fifteenth century books had been bound, throughout at least the north of Italy, the ornamentation on which resembled a square frame of gilt metal work impressed by a stamp. The books printed by Aldus, when bound in his own atelier, between 1495 and 1502 or 1508, are all of that kind. Soon after that date his presses became so active that he must have found it necessary to increase and improve his binding-business. A new style of decoration superseded;

plain gold parallel fillets with small fanciful ornaments at the angles began to make their appearance, and the volumes thus finished display a close resemblance to the plainer bindings of all later times. This style was retained in many examples of Venetian work down to 1550, but in the meanwhile the school which produced geometrical ornament had arisen. (It is not inappropriate to mention here that the famous or infamous Pietro Aretino, for whom the Biringuccio described on p. 18 seems to have been bound in the days of his greatness, had been himself a bookbinder at Perugia, about 1510-15.)

Aldus Manutius the elder died in 1515, after having printed about a hundred and seventy distinct works, all of intrinsic value, and many of them first editions. He made acquaintance in 1512 with Jean Groulier, the French treasurer of the Milanese, then and for some time after, a conquest of the French monarchy. In the Academy (or scholars' club) founded by Aldus, Groulier met with Bembo, Maioli, and other men whose names are now recorded as great book-collectors. For want of all positive information on the subject, we can only presume (but it is highly probable) that a finer style of ornamental binding was suggested at those meetings, and that Aldus carried out, with the help of Venetian and Greek workmen, designs similar to those which had been admired on Oriental books by his French friend. The result was the creation of those elaborate geometrical patterns displaying a scheme of complicated but elegant interlacements. We know of Groulier's fondness for strong white paper, for large margins, and for fine print: it is recorded in his own letters. It is therefore in nowise unlikely that he also desired and suggested this exquisite mode of decorating his books. He remained during the rest of his life the benefactor and friend of the Manuzio family and the Aldine press, frequently assisting them with large sums of money. After 1530 his career as treasurer of the Milanese ended, but in 1534 he returned again to Italy as ambassador to the Pope for a short time.

Most of Groulier's books (over four thousand in number) were bound for him from the sheets, but some of them reached his hands already so well bound, that he merely caused the usual inscription to be added on the sides. These fall into one category; a second is formed by those expressly bound for him in Venice; and a third comprises the examples of binding done for him in France probably between 1540 and 1556. Those of the last kind are really the most beautiful specimens of Groulieresque work, the designs being more free and flowing, the lines not double but single, and their graceful interlacement diversified by fleurons and small *anses* ornaments effectively interspersed. He did not, however, abandon the older geometrical style, with its masses of thick black parallel involutions outlined in gold; for we find books of his, equally late in date with examples of the French kind, decorated in the Italian manner. Whether he had them done in Italy, or at Lyons or Paris, we have no means of knowing. But the complete identity of treatment between those and the work contemporaneously done at Venice for Maioli, makes it probable that all the more luxuriously embellished volumes were still bound for him in Venice down to the end. The identity of

treatment just mentioned refers chiefly to design: as for the enrichment of the pattern with colour and gilding, Maioli's books were decidedly more florid than Grolier's.

Venice thus claims priority and pre-eminence over other seats of culture with regard to decorative bookbinding. It is not to be supposed, however, that Rome, Florence, and Ferrara, neglected the new and brilliant art. Magnificent work, similar in character to the productions of the Aldine atelier, was done for Leo X, Clement VII, and other members of the Medici family. The earlier examples were plain in style, like those of the Aldine period between 1495 and 1515, but those which followed the geometrical manner of 1520 to 1530 offered a display of gorgeous magnificence rather than refinement of taste. The geometrical pattern was half hidden under the superincumbent waste of gold, which sometimes completely covered the sides and back, giving them the aspect of plates of metal, and sometimes the interstices between the coloured lines of the design were choked with masses of gold dots. These gaudy splendours led to a rapid decay of taste in Italy at a time (1550-70) when Paris was producing the loveliest and finest examples of decorative bookbinding. The contrast between such glittering vanities and the plain bindings bedecked with nothing more than a stamped gold border of the older style for the framework, and a chaste cameo or medallion ornament in the centre, which were not infrequent at Venice between 1520 and 1550, is very great indeed. To the latter kind (which might have been mentioned before the Venetian Grolieresque since it was contemporary with that development) belong several volumes on which the central circular ornament is extremely beautiful, but which we must dismiss, as the exquisite charm of the cameo was not due to the actual binder. Amongst them, but hardly equal to the earlier examples, are the books of the Canevari library. Most of these seem to have been bound in Venice between 1540 and 1660, and cannot therefore have been done for Demetrio Canevari, the only known personage of the name, who was born in 1559, and who seems nevertheless to have had them in his library in the early years of the seventeenth century at Rome. He may have inherited them from a relative, but who that relative was we cannot tell, nor do we know if the name *Mecenate* hinted in Libri's *Monumenti* alludes to a distinct personage or is a mere epithet bestowed upon Demetrio.

To return to Grolier. He was not only (as we suspect) the actual creator of the school of binding known by his name, but he was also the cause of its sudden and rapid development in France and elsewhere. His books aroused the enthusiasm of the court of Francis I. Some volumes were bound (after 1540) for that king in a gorgeous and splendid style, rich in gilding and colour, which contrast strongly with the earlier work done for him by Etienne Roffet. The Dauphin (Henri II) and several grands seigneurs caught the pleasing contagion, and Paris gave birth to a number of grand examples of the kind. Henri II came to the throne, and between 1550 and 1558 several volumes bound for him and his beautiful mistress, Diane de Poitiers, exhibit the highest perfection of achievement in the Italo-Grolieresque style, individualized by the introduction of the chaste symbols of the Huntress-Queen, and the mottoes and devices of the lady and her royal lover. Count Mansfeld,