

The Printing Art

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EDITION BINDING

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OF late years, with the revival of craftsmanship, according to the gospel of Ruskin and William Morris, there has been a rush into all the departments of manual dexterity, needing for successful achievement the guidance of artistic feeling. The result of this has been that there is a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the ornamental and the decorated, to the exclusion of not only simplicity but, let us say frankly, of plainness and the undecorated surface of flawless material. The over elaboration of the decorative arts must inevitably produce a reaction sooner or later, very quickly for those who prefer restraint, more slowly for the majority of the public, to whom ornament is always synonymous with art. For such as these fashion counts for much ; and it is in the hope that those who lead taste in the matter of edition bindings may find a scope for their enterprise on somewhat new lines that I venture to ask consideration for this paper.

After all, the costly bindings achieved for wealthy amateurs must always constitute but a small portion of the output of bound work. There will remain the cloth or leather-covered book in greater or smaller editions, for which covers are made in quantities by machinery, separately from the book, and for decorating which metal dies are cut and stamped by means of an embossing press, either with or without the addition of colors or gold leaf. It is of this class of work that I propose to treat, giving first a brief account of the stages through which it has passed in modern times, then showing how it was dealt with, though on a much smaller scale, in the early days of printing, and finally offering some suggestions for its more varied and, as I think, more artistic treatment in the future. This treatment would necessitate the employment of leather ; but there is no reason why the less expensive kinds of skins should not be used, not perhaps for books issued in large numbers, but for small editions where a little extra outlay could be easily recovered on the published price of the work. Roans made from the best sheepskins, which are the hides of Scotch sheep, would not be a costly material, and would give good results in the embossing press. Pigskin is a very suitable material for the better class of bindings, on which stamps are to be used, and is both strong and comparatively inexpensive, considering the size of the skins. Vellum, again, might be occasionally used for small editions ; it blocks well, and is most effective with but little ornament. At one time much in demand for bindings, it ceased for many years to be used at all in England, except in account-book manufacture, when it was generally stained green. It has lately come into

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fashion again, chiefly for limp work, through the initiative of William Morris, who introduced it on most of the works issued by him from the Kelmscott Press; and both the Doves Press and the Ashendene Press have continued to employ it. To observe its suitability for blocking, either when used limp or on boards, we have only to turn to the coats of arms which frequently decorated it on the books of the great collectors of past times. There was a very fine specimen of vellum, ornamented in black, shown at the Burlington Fine Arts Exhibition in 1891. But before considering in detail how edition bindings were treated in the days when, comparatively speaking, books were few in number, we will get some idea of their treatment in more recent times, starting with the last century.

Up to, roughly speaking, about 1825, books of the type of dictionaries, classics, school books, and books of reference were mostly bound in roan or sprinkled sheep; while books of history, poetry, and novels were issued in drab or olive-colored paper boards, with a printed label pasted on the back, or the full title printed on the back and sides, as in the case of "Walker's British Classics" (1818). It was very rarely that anything but a dull color was used, though "Whittingham's British Poets" (1816) had a dark Venetian red paper, and the class of literature known in those days as gift books or annuals occasionally appeared in vellum-colored paper, stamped with gold. The more valuable of these, however, filled with choice steel engravings and prepared for the Christmas market, were bound in morocco and silk, and issued under such titles as "The Keepsake," "The Bijou," "Friendship's Offering," "The Book of Beauty," "The Landscape Annual," and so on. Such books commanded a large sale, even in those days; and a writer on the subject, in the first volume of "The Bookbinder," mentions two thousand imperial quarto volumes (Finden's Tableaux), full bound in best morocco, gilt. The paper-covered boards, which clothed the larger number of the books of that time, had a way of cracking at the hinge, and so becoming disconnected, a difficulty which was got over about 1822, by covering the back with calico or cloth. As an illustration of this step, we may take Scott's "Waverley Novels." The "Novels and Tales," in twelve volumes, appeared in 1819 in pink paper, with white labels; the "Historical Romances," in six volumes, followed in 1822, in blue paper, with pink cloth back and white paper labels; and "Novels and Romances" in 1824 in the same fashion. The next step was that of covering books entirely with cloth, introduced by Mr. Archibald Leighton, one of the most enterprising and successful of modern binders, whose business capacity and energy secured for him the patronage of the chief publishers of the day. He bound for Murray, Pickering, Colbourn, Tilt, Charles Knight, Moon, Boys, Graves, and many others, and died prematurely in 1841, leaving to his family a well-established business which, under a somewhat varying character, has remained in their hands up to the present time.

In the "Bookseller" of July 4, 1881, there is an interesting account, by Mr. Robert Leighton, of the invention of bookbinders' cloth by his father, and of how the subsequent embossing of it came about. The exact date of cloth binding he is not able to state, but says that he has in his library a volume, presented to his father by the author, bound in smooth, red cloth, with a paper

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label. The publishers' names are Lackington, Hughes, Harding & Lepard, and the date on the title-page is 1822. There is every reason to believe that it is one of a number similarly bound in that year. In those days the white calico was bought in London, sent to the dyers to be dyed, and thence to Mr. John Southgate, of 3 Crown Court, Old Change, to be stiffened and calendered. The embossing of bookbinders' cloth was suggested by Mr. Archibald Leighton to the late Mr. de la Rue, and was carried out so admirably by him, with the appliances he possessed for embossing paper, that his process remains still comparatively unaltered. The desired pattern was engraved on a gun-metal cylinder, and transferred in reverse to one made of compressed paper, strung upon an iron spindle, and turned in the lathe to the exact circumference of the gun-metal one, and these two being worked together in a machine, and the pattern transferred from one to the other, the cloth was passed between them and received the impress of the pattern engraved on the metal cylinder.

In this way the whole of the cloth used by Messrs. Leighton was for many years embossed upon their own premises. The cylinders were only fourteen or fifteen inches wide, and the machine was turned by manual labor and heated by red-hot irons which were placed in the gun-metal cylinder, and replaced by others when cold. In those days it was customary to engrave special cylinders for books of importance, and you may still occasionally meet with stray volumes of "The Penny Cyclopædia" or Knight's "Pictorial England," and such like popular works with embossed cloth covers so prepared. Mr. Pickering was the first person for whom Mr. Leighton bound books in cloth, and either his "Aldine Poets" or the "Diamond Classics" were the first books on which it was put. The first person to undertake the embossing of bookbinders' cloth on cylinders a yard wide was Mr. Law, of Monkwell Street, and for years he embossed all the cloth sold by Mr. James Leonard Wilson, of St. John Street, who had followed Mr. Leighton's methods in the preparation and sale of the cloth. Mr. Wilson sold his business to Messrs. Duffield, who established a manufactory of bookbinders' cloth at Hoxton, and so improved it that for years he held practically a monopoly of its output. The exact period when gold-stamping was first applied to cloth is clearly marked by the publication of Lord Byron's life and works, in seventeen volumes, by Mr. John Murray, of Albemarle Street. The volumes were published monthly, and had a sale of about 20,000. They were bound in green cloth, and the first volume was issued in 1832, with a green paper label on the back, matching the cloth in color, on which was printed in bronze the title and a coronet; on the second and succeeding volumes the paper label was dispensed with, and the coronet and title were stamped in gold upon the cloth itself. Mr. Henry George Bohn, in a letter addressed to the "Art Journal," says that his father, John Henry Bohn, a German bookbinder, established about 1795 in Frith Street, Soho, had a special reputation for gilding on the silk linings of books, as well as calf-graining, tree-marbling, and other special processes, all of which he himself made acquaintance with when a boy. "In later life," he continues, "the knowledge of the peculiar dressing used for gilding on silk enabled me to communicate to Mr. Leighton the means of getting cloth prepared so as

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to take gilding by heated machinery at the rolling or stamping-press, which a leading trade firm said was impracticable. The process, however, after a few weeks' experiments conducted by the late Mr. James Leonard Wilson, was successfully accomplished; and Mr. Leighton thereupon wrote to me, triumphantly announcing the fact, and undertaking in consequence to bind in gilt cloth several thousand volumes at half the price I should previously have had to pay, on account of the necessity of having to add leather backs for taking the gold by hand tooling. The book was Martin & Westall's 'Bible Points,' which I brought out in 1832. What to me at the time seemed an accomplishment of little moment has now become of such importance to cloth binders that, could the discovery have been patented, it would have yielded a considerable income."

This Mr. Robert Leighton, who thus wrote of his father's invention, was himself the pioneer in the use of steam machinery in bookbinding, and he adopted in his own business nearly all the machinery which has since become indispensable to the wholesale binder. He was also the first to use steam power for blocking in gold: the first to use aluminum, and black and colored inks for cloth cases, examples of which he showed in the exhibition of 1851. He had a great reputation for the designs of his cloth bindings, which he devised in conjunction with his artist cousin, John Leighton, known as Luke Limner, a good instance being the pleasant and appropriate covers for Mrs. Jameson's "Legends of the Madonna" and "Legends of the Monastic Orders." The two Leightons, father and son, thus inaugurated and furthered the great revolution in the art of edition binding associated with the employment for the purpose of specially prepared cloth, and its decoration by means of steam-blocking in gold and colors. It was natural that such an invention should lead to abuse; and in a short time, unfortunately, there was so much gilt ornament that a strong reaction took place, and, while cloth as a material for the cover continued to be used, it was either left plain or had a single bordering line in gold with or without the title likewise in gold upon the sides. More recently, color printing upon cloth has been revived with excellent results in many cases, especially where an artist who understands the power and limitations of the blocking process has been employed upon the designs. Many of these are entirely without gold and give representations of scenes taken from the books with excellent impressionist effect. I would mention as instances in this country the novels published by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, such as "In Our Town," "Her Majesty's Minister," "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," "The Hebrew," and many others of the same firm, one of whose members gives especial attention to the successful production of cloth covers. The bindings of books issued by Mr. John Lane are also frequently very successful, though it is not so easy to keep in touch with the output of American work on similar lines. I have seen at Messrs. Puttenham's some excellent examples of taste in color printing, notably, "The Romance of the Colorado River," "Puerto Rican," "Lights of Childhood," and "The Romance of the Renaissance Chateaux," in which the castle of Langeais is shown in black on a gray cloth. The same house showed me, likewise, one or two books bound in plain cloth, with a photographic print on the cover, which

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seemed a pleasant variation not in use over here ; while "Twenty-Six Historic Ships," also issued by them, is a most satisfactory example of blocking with white foil on a blue ground. At Messrs. Appleton's I saw several specimens of bookbinders' cloth which do not come over here at all. We have but little variety in the nature and preparation of our cloth ; while in America it is treated in many different ways, which naturally give very varied results in the blocking-press.

Messrs. Gay & Bird showed me some effective color printing on "In South Africa with Buller," and an attractive example of a loch and mountain scene in four sombre colors on "The Story of Gösta Berling." There is little doubt that the most artistic effects are got by using very few colors in harmony rather than in contrast with the cloth. Gold is much more sparingly used for cloth work than formerly, and with far better taste. "Paris in its Splendor," published by the last-named firm, is an interesting example of the different effects that can be obtained from the gold by varieties of matted ground in the block ; while in "Walden," issued by Messrs. Houghton & Mifflin, the cloth of the cover represents the design, the gold being confined to suggesting the background, with a decidedly original result.

This, then, is the position of cloth binding at the present time as shown by the leading publishers' work. The technical processes are probably as perfect as such things can be, the drawings are frequently the work of artists, there is far more restraint than formerly, both in the matter of design and the employment of color, while the taste in color schemes is often as good as possible, and a great advance on that shown a decade or two ago. We do not think that in that special branch of edition bindings there is any great advance to be made or novelty to be assumed, though no doubt we may expect a wider diffusion of the taste that we have noted in the best work and an increasingly small number of book covers inferior in design, color, and general effect.

In what direction, then, can we hope for any new departure ? In order to answer the question and complete the scope of this paper, I shall ask you to spend a few moments in a study of the bindings in which books were clothed when they were less numerous, and during a period when they reached what many think the high-water mark of successful decoration.

The work of the early printers was issued in trade bindings as publishers' work is now sent out, but in those days stationers combined the craft of binding with the business of bookselling. The earliest of all were decorated by building up designs from dies, these being arranged in pattern schemes which Mr. W. H. James Weale was the first to analyze and set forth in the catalogue of the fine collection of rubbings of bindings, which he presented to the National Art Library of South Kensington in 1894. These schemes were taken from the covers of manuscripts from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, but the same kind of arrangement, though not so elaborate, may be seen on the earliest printed books ; also witness the illustrations to the monograph on early Oxford bindings above alluded to. Small books were stamped with a panel on the sides, and these often had the initials or mark of the binder, which have led in many instances to the ascription of particular bindings to the stationers who issued them, though a still greater number still remain to be

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identified. The blocks were generally small and were used sometimes one on each side between a bordering of roughly drawn lines; sometimes two together were placed upon one side, and connected with lines or some simple device, and occasionally on large books four panels were arranged in rows of two. The material of the binding was asses-skin, pigskin, calfskin, — though not the fragile kind now associated with the name, — and vellum, but chiefly the three first. The stamps or blocks used were cut in intaglio, both on hard wood or on metal, producing the impression in cameo; the design was often both strong and delicate in treatment, the impression after all these years showing great artistic vigor and inventiveness. Indeed, nothing can be more excellent than the dragons, gryphons, and other mythical animals in the pear-shaped, triangular, circular, or square dies arranged within the pattern schemes of the very early bindings. It is not known exactly how these stamps were used upon the bindings; it is probable that when panel stamps were used, the leather was thoroughly wetted and the book then placed in a screw-press, under a block of wood or metal, for the length of time needed to obtain a clear impression. In “*Marques Typographiques*,” by Silvestre, there is a printers’ mark, used by Pétrus César Gaudanus, otherwise Pierre de Keyser, of Ghent, between 1516 and 1547, which represents a book undergoing pressure in a printers’ press, and Josse Bade, likewise a stationer and printer of Paris, who died in 1535, used a somewhat similar one. Though there is obviously a book in the press, the picture may relate to a process not connected with binding; but in any case it probably represents what must have been the procedure used in impressing the stamps. These dies passed from one workshop to another, and none of them are extant to my knowledge in England, though the heraldic blocks, used on books in the reigns of Henry VII. and Henry VIII., were decidedly numerous and of great artistic merit. In the Netherlands these designs were the binders’ property and protected as such, but in England, where the binders were not organized into separate guilds, this was not the case, and piracy was everywhere prevalent.

On many of the blocks there appear two indentations or holes about a quarter of an inch in diameter, situated within the border at the top and bottom of the panel. The precise purport of these is unknown, and many plausible theories have been invented to account for them. One such suggests that they were stop buttons to prevent the stamp from sinking too far into the leather, but it is more probable that they indicate the heads of nails or pegs which fastened the carved block or metal stamp to another piece of wood. Sometimes the impressions made by them are almost imperceptible, at others there has been an attempt at concealment by carrying the ornament across. Many of the subjects pictured on these stamps were of a religious character: thus the Baptism of Christ, Saint John the Baptist, the Crucifixion, Our Lady of Pity, the Ara Cœli, and the different saints and apostles are all represented upon these early book covers. For an account of them and for a general history of early stamped bindings, which contains also a certain amount of illustration, the interested reader cannot do better than procure the two volumes, published at half a crown by the Department of Science and Art, at South Kensington, entitled “*Bookbindings and Rubbings of Bindings*,”

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in the National Art Library of South Kensington Museum," by W. H. James Weale. This class of binding has given rise to much dispute of an archæological kind, with which, happily, we are not concerned at the moment. Whether the stamps were of wood or metal, in what country they originated, their authorship as indicated by initials incorporated in the design, their *provenance* as apart from the country in which they were in use, who was the inventor of the pattern roller, — all such questions we may leave aside, the point of interest being the fact of the stamp and its astonishing variety of character, for many styles were represented by it, all, with but few exceptions, of great merit and suitability to their end. For our present purpose, and as far as ornament is concerned, we may classify them somewhat as follows:

1. Small Gothic dies with palmated leaves, animals, and so on, combined in design according to certain fixed patterns, such as those on the Bible written and bound in the monastery at Durham for Hugh Pudsey, bishop of that diocese from 1153 to 1195, and other books in the same cathedral library.

2. Interlaced ornament of several distinct types, some Celtic in character, on the earliest books in leather that have come down to us, executed in the north of England in the twelfth century, others recalling the designs on Roman mosaic pavement, others again Eastern in character. Perhaps the most beautiful interlaced patterns of all belong to the latter class, and are the cablework designs found on Italian books of the last half of the fifteenth century, no doubt copied from Arabian examples. The Spanish bindings of the first half of the sixteenth century have interlaced ornament of as fine a kind, but often lacking in comparative simplicity of the Italian.

3. The Gothic stamps of mythical animals, enclosed in circles or scroll-work, bordered with Gothic foliage, and frequently containing a legend. These were mostly of German origin, and were no doubt inspired by the work of Albert Dürer and his contemporaries.

4. The heraldic panels decorated with royal badges, used in England during the reigns of Henry VII. and Henry VIII.

5. The panel stamps of a purely decorative kind, such as those with the religious subjects above mentioned; others like the well-known two used by Moulin, of a miller with his sacks, in punning allusion to his name; and those in use by Norius, in which the acorn figures largely as an ornament.

6. Lastly, the panel stamps with two profile busts in medallion within a framework of Renaissance ornament, thoroughly debased in character, and marking the complete decline of the binder's stamp.

I would sum up, in conclusion, the points I have desired to emphasize in this paper, and which are as follows:

That the flat blocking of cloth work in gold and colors by no means exhausts the treatment possible for edition or publishers' bindings. It has undoubtedly been largely overdone, for lavish ornament is distinctly out of place as applied to cheap material, such as cloths and linens. Indeed, as decoration for the ordinary novel of a few shillings, nothing is in better taste than a single design carried out in two or three color printings without gold, such as some of those mentioned which I have lately seen.

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That there is room for a totally distinct class of bindings for small editions of more important publications, which should be in leather and blocked with a stamp of fine design without gold, which will give a raised impression. For this purpose zincographic blocks are of no use, but brass, as a material which admits of modelling, would be imperative.

That the designing of such stamps should be put in the hands of the few artists having a genius for the work, which is quite special in character, and belongs more to the art of the medallist than to that of the maker of patterns. We in no way want the undue multiplication of these stamps, but would rather, indeed, that they should be reserved for a limited number of publications, for which the subject-matter, paper, and type constitute together a whole worthy of a dignified cover that will stand the lapse of time. In these days of book-lovers and collectors of every sort, it is certainly not unlikely that there are many who would welcome a new venture of this kind, in which they would associate the binding with the book, and have no desire to separate the one from the other. In the little Bibelot series, Messrs. Gay & Bird have already made a slight attempt on the lines I am suggesting.

Lastly, I have, I think, made evident that there is no dearth of material from which the designer of such work may glean the principles on which it should be based, in order to secure satisfactory results. Apart from the bindings still extant, which may be studied for the purpose, such sources as the "Book of Kells" and "Early Christian Art in Ireland," by Margaret Stokes, are full of illustrations in a field strangely little explored by the pattern-maker of to-day.

While only a limited number of examples have been instanced, they are suggestive of what was done in this direction in the past, and may be done again in the future. Such a departure needs, no doubt, the initiative of a printer-publisher who does the best kind of work, and in a field that commands the interested support of the genuine bibliophile. Surely, however, there is no place where one can look for it more securely than in the United States, where for many years now there has been so much enterprise and determination to be in the front rank of everything connected with the production of books.

LONDON, July, 1903.

***T**HINK what a book is. It is a portion of the eternal mind caught in its progress through the world, stamped in an instant, and preserved for eternity. Think what it is — that enormous amount of human sympathy and intelligence that is contained in these volumes — and think what it is that this sympathy should be communicated to the masses of the people. — LORD HOUGHTON, 1809-1885.*

EXAMPLES OF EDITION BINDINGS



SOCRATES — FROM THE THUMB-NAIL SERIES PUBLISHED BY THE
CENTURY CO., NEW YORK

[The Illustration is reproduced in the full size of the book]

On the left, or back cover, a Greek lamp, surrounded by the laurel, typifies the author's wisdom; and on the right hand or front cover, the Kylîx, or Greek cup, surrounded by the hemlock, is indicative of his death. In the right hand cover appears also the head of Athena, as Socrates was identified with the life of Athens. The checkered pattern represents the pavement of the Stoa, where Socrates walked and talked.



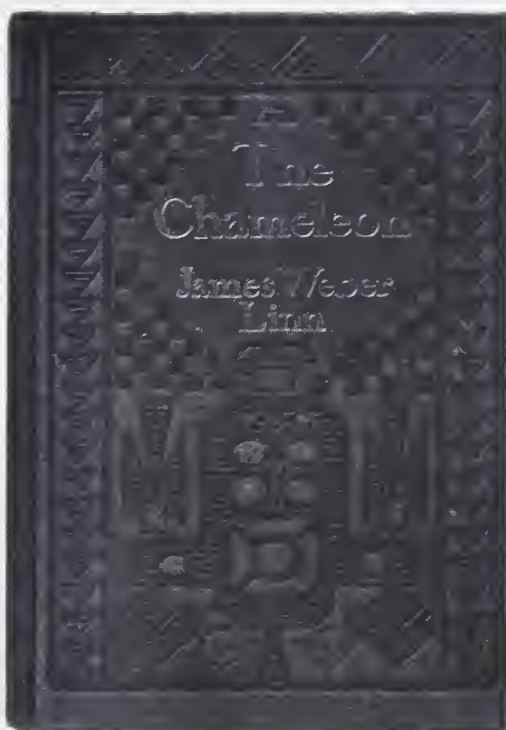
(A)



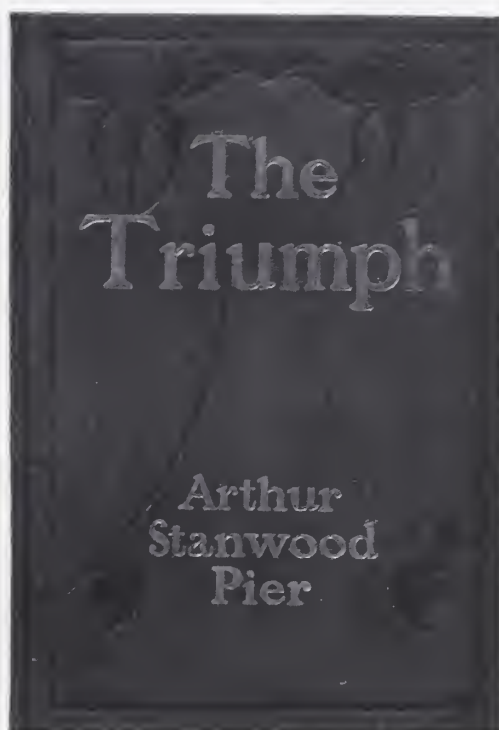
(B)

EXAMPLES OF EDITION BINDINGS—II

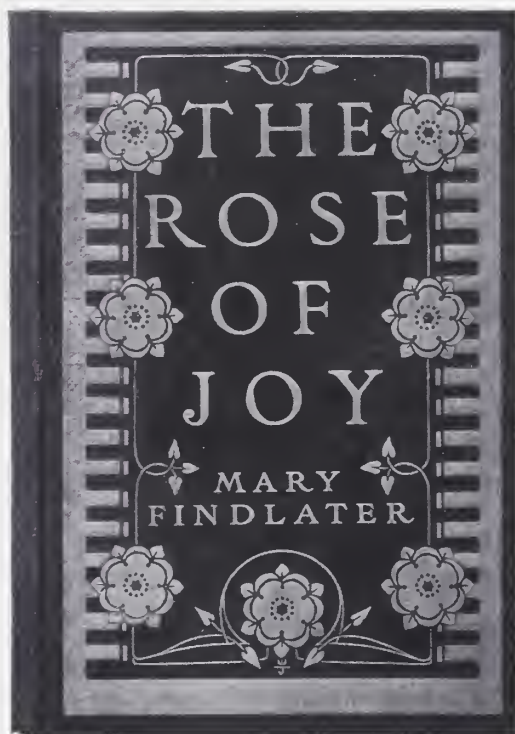
A — Stamped in white and light olive on dark green cloth. B — Stamped in gold and buff on dark green cloth
By courtesy of Hodder & Stoughton, London. Engraved by the Suffolk Engr. & Elec. Co., Boston



(A)



(B)



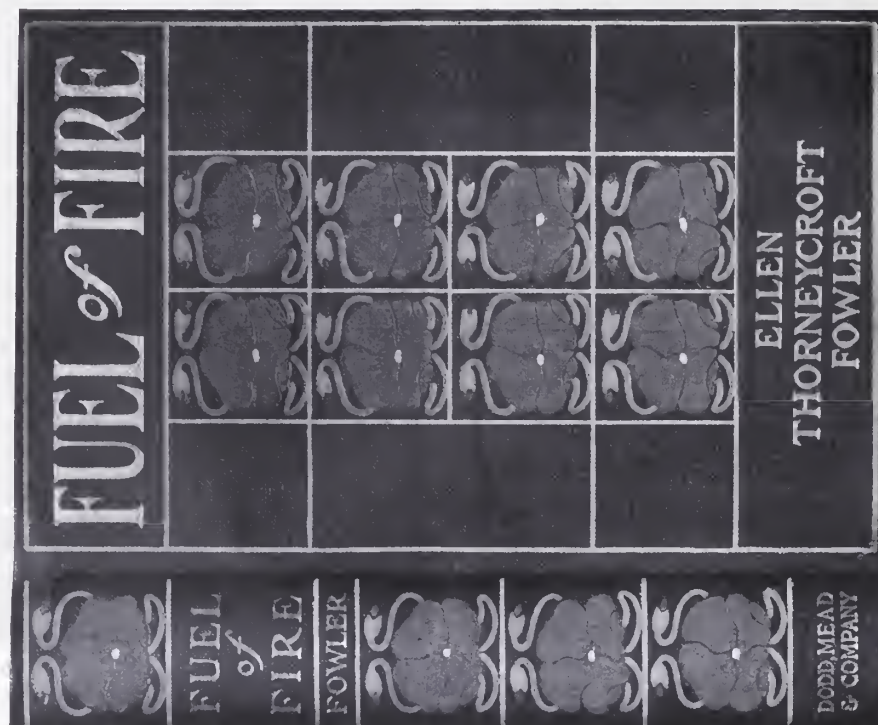
(C)



(D)

EXAMPLES OF EDITION BINDINGS—III

A, B, and D — Titles in gold, decorations in blind stamping. C — Stamped in white on dark red cloth. From designs by W. A. Jordan. By courtesy of McClure, Phillips & Co., New York



(A)



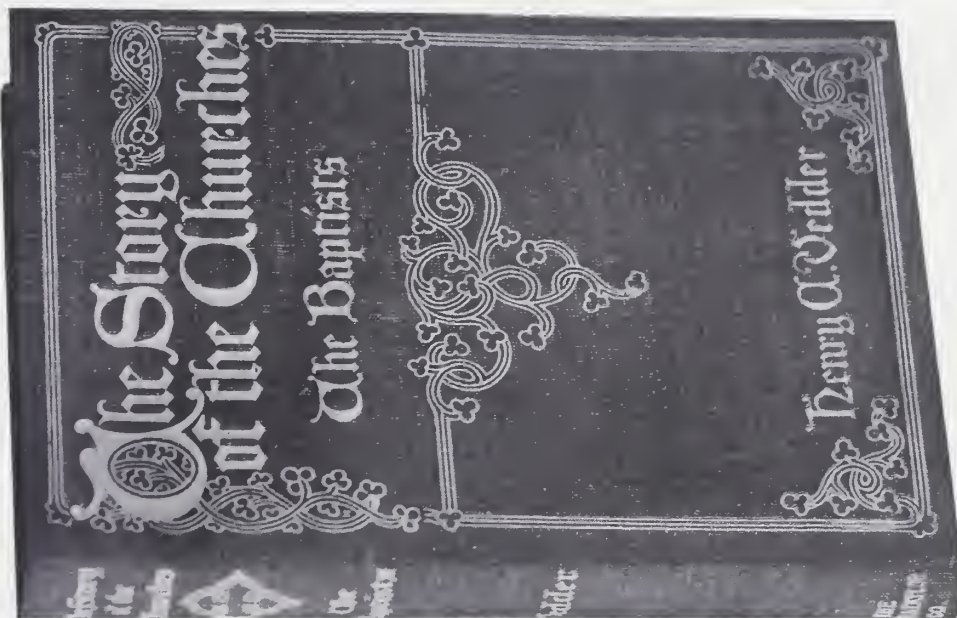
(B)

EXAMPLES OF EDITION BINDINGS—IV

A—Title in gold, decorations in white, red, and olive on black cloth. B—Title in white, illustration in blue and white on dark blue cloth, which gives the silhouette effect to the ship. By courtesy of Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. Engraved by Suffolk Eng. & Elec. Co., Boston



(A)



(B)

EXAMPLES OF EDITION BINDINGS—V

A—Title in gold, stamped in leather. B—Title in white, decorations in buff, stamped on drab cloth. By courtesy of The Baker & Taylor Co., New York. Engraved by the Publishers' and Printers' Eng. Co., New York



(A)



(B)

EXAMPLES OF EDITION BINDINGS—VI

A—Title in gold, in olive, green, and pink, outlined in black, on drab cloth. From design by Jessie Howard Brown. B—In gold, white, and green, on deep blue cloth. From design by Margaret Armstrong. By courtesy of Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Engraved by Suffolk Eng. & Elec. Co., Boston



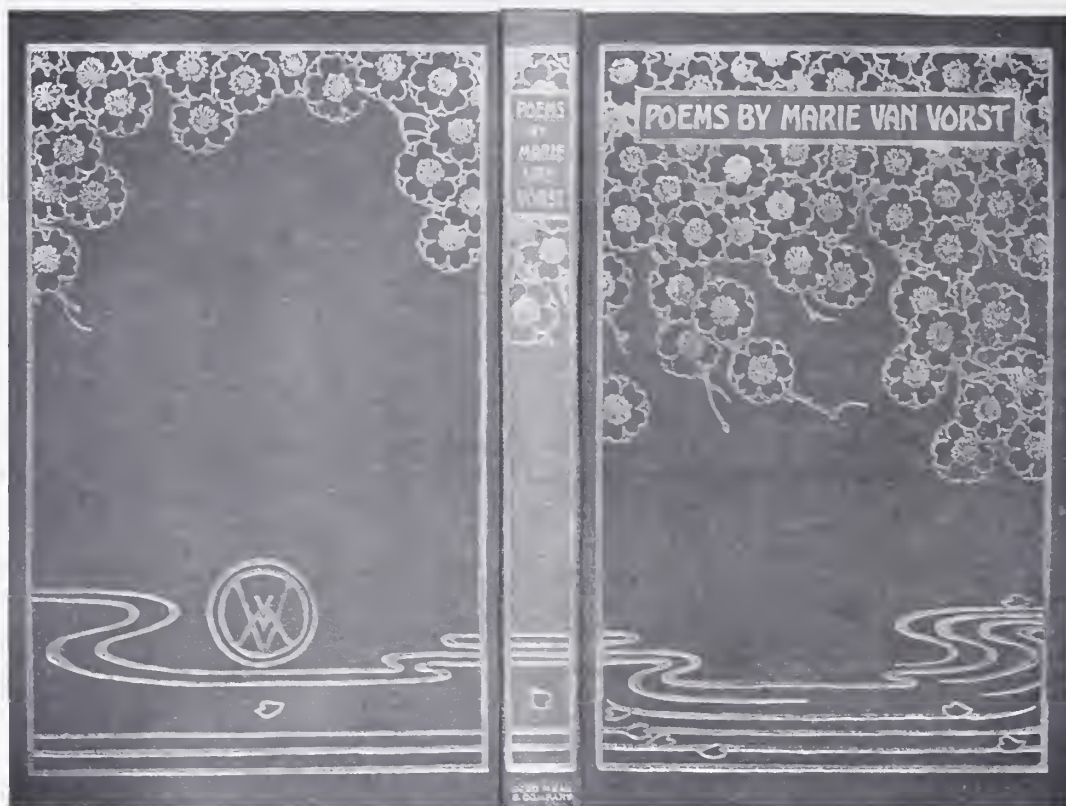
(A)



(B)

EXAMPLES OF EDITION BINDINGS—VII

A — Title and decorations in gold on dark green cloth. Designed by The Decorative Designers, New York. By courtesy of Little, Brown, & Co., Boston. B — Title and design in light colors on dark gray cloth. By courtesy of Hodder & Stoughton, London



(A)



(B)

EXAMPLES OF EDITION BINDINGS—VIII

A — Title and decorations in gold on dark green cloth. By courtesy of Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. B — Title in gold, blossoms in olive, the dark blue cloth forming the silhouette pattern for foliage. By courtesy of Little, Brown, & Co., Boston