AUTHORS' OWN COPIES.

THOSE who, like myself, have trodden the byways of book-collecting must at times have stumbled across specimens of works which of themselves, perhaps, would attract but little attention, but which, in consequence of the grandeur of their bindings, assume an importance to which otherwise they would scarcely appear to be entitled. Every book, of course, has an author, or at the very least a translator, and the vanity of the author is proverbial; too often, indeed, we find, when we come to look closely into the matter, that the sumptuous binding betrays the author's pet and gives us his own estimate of the value of his performance. But it is not always the author's pride, or the courtesy of some dear friend, which helps by its splendid binding to save the work from destruction. There are many other motives for the attractive jacket which may ultimately cause an obscure or even worthless volume to obtain a cherished place in the cabinet of the collector, for it would manifestly be absurd to relegate a specimen of the art of Padeloup or Derome to the bargain-box, or the back shelves.

We all know, when we come to the heading of 'bindings' in the catalogue of the second-hand

bookseller, that we are scarcely likely to find here any literary rarities, for this category is too often reserved for works which have little beyond their attire to recommend them to the purchaser; but it is nevertheless occasionally an interesting study to look carefully into this section of the catalogue and to determine, if possible, the cause of the lucky accident which has led to the exercise of such undue extravagance in the choice of the binding.

We may often find something pathetic in the story which such books may unfold to us; the hope of the writer for wealth or fame, destined, alas! never to be realized; the desire to attract the attention of some wealthy patron, or even Royalty itself, by the glory of the outer garment, rather than by the merit of the literary contents; the struggle of some poor inventor to extend the knowledge of his marvellous contrivance, or to awaken the attention of some apathetic capitalist. Every motive which in its turn has influenced the human heart—pride, hope, ambition, flattery, and even love—may be found at some time or other to have each one had its share in directing the best energies of the book-binder and in providing us with evidences of his ability in decking out the meanest of literary efforts. Every library must contain a certain number of these books, which rank merely as 'bindings,' and it is only in exceptional cases that we can find rarity and good authorship associated with the contemporary binder's skill.

In speaking of author's own copies, I desire to include all such works as have been specially bound for the author to serve some private ends, or to

attain some particular object in view, and I propose to glance briefly at a few of such books now before me, which will illustrate the foregoing observations and will explain more particularly the title which I have chosen.

In full morocco, most elaborately tooled with gold, bearing the royal arms, and *double* with purple watered silk linings is a thin octavo, treating of the invention by 'Mr. Seth Smith of Wilton Crescent, Belgrave Square,' of a 'Patent Metallic Lining and Damper for the Chimneys of Dwelling and Other Houses and Buildings.' This volume fortunately contains also two very explanatory autograph letters. The first, dated April 4th, 1831, is from the author to King William IV, begging his Majesty to receive the accompanying book, and pointing out the merits of the 'New Chimney Flue.' The concluding paragraph is very naive, as we read: 'To obtain these advantages for your faithful and devoted People will no doubt be very desirable to your Majesty, and secure your Paternal attention: this conviction has alone inspired me with courage in this humble attempt to approach your throne.' In the second letter we see that this valiant effort was rewarded, for 'Sir Herbert Taylor presents his compliments to Sir Jeffrey Wyatville, and is honoured with the King's Commands to refer to Him the enclosed work,' dated from 'Windsor Castle, April 19, 1831.' But we have no further intimation concerning the famous architect's verdict in this matter, and when his books were dispersed many years ago this essay in its royal binding formed an inconspicuous item. All that can be said is that

some one has read the book diligently and has made therein numerous pencil notes.

In the early seventies of the last century, a vast amount of attention was devoted to the 'Sewage Question,' as it was called, and the Stock Exchange was inundated with inventors who were one and all persuaded that they could so deal with the sewage of towns as to convert these waste matters into a source of profit and advantage. It is clearly in connection with that movement that this next specimen in green morocco, with much gilding, acquired its magnificence. It is entitled 'Concerning Sewage and its Economical Disposal.' The author is F. H. Danchell, C.E., and it bears an autograph of that gentleman and two other donors, who presented it to 'W^m Bragge, Esq^{re}.' A newspaper cutting is inserted, descriptive of 'A Trip to the Dartmoor Peat Beds,' and we gather that the work appears in the interests of 'The Peat Engineering and Sewage Filtration Company, Limited.' Mr. Bragge may have been in a position to influence some wealthy corporation to adopt peat for its salvation. I wot not whether this rich binding proved effectual in securing his co-operation or not, but I well remember that the Bradford Town Council made many costly experiments in the employment of this material.

Quite another motive is apparent or expressed for the choice binding of this next volume of poetry: Pope's 'Rape of the Lock,' the pretty edition which Stothard illustrated in 1798, and which contains some of Bartolozzi's finest plates. The crushed Levant was destined for some haughty lady-love, I

ween, for was not a certain page still turned down, as it had been for over one hundred years, where the poet tells us:

Some nymphs there are too conscious of their face,
For life predestin'd to the gnomes' embrace.
These swell their prospects and exalt their pride,
When offers are disdain'd and love deny'd:
Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
While peers, and dukes, and all their sweeping train,
And garters, stars and coronets appear,
And in soft sounds 'Your Grace' salutes their ear.

I do not desire to suggest that any binding would be too exquisite for Pope's delightful poem, but again, nothing could be too magnificent for one's lady-love in such a case as this, with the prospect before her of the 'gnomes' lifelong embrace!'

By far the largest number of our best bindings, however, are lavished upon religious works; from the days of the richly illuminated missal, even until now, the devotional books are those which fare the best at the hands of the binder, though, if not an author's pet, it is at times far from easy to account for the splendour in which even the volume of sermons may be decked or that may be bestowed on some obscure controversial pamphlet, which has long ago lost all its interest for the casual reader. Such books as these, in bindings whose former owners may yet be identified, or which have originally belonged to some royal or noble personage, are often highly treasured, and owe their preservation solely to their covers. It would no doubt be an excellent suggestion to offer to the

otherwise unsuccessful author, that if he could only induce himself to have his books bound by the best binders of his age; he might then be sure that in future generations they would be listed by the second-hand bookseller, and, perchance, even hoarded among the treasures of the book-collector.

GILBERT R. REDGRAVE.