The Most Artistic Book.*

WHAT is the most artistic book?

I answer that book in which the letterpress is produced separately from the illustrations, and both brought together to furnish the book.

This course of procedure is that which I would invariably endeavour to recommend as far as lies in my power.

I will briefly notice the circumstances that lead to this conclusion.

Firstly: The best pictures are produced by the copper-plate press, or if otherwise, then by the use of the finest possible *dry* paper and ink, with a thoroughly skilled pressman, working without other things to interfere, and preferably by the hand press.

Secondly: the type matter of a book is best when printed on a paper of good character with plenty of ink, and when the paper is *damp*.

The well-known system of producing the American magazines and their imitators need not be further noticed than to observe that the get-up of the page and of the book, also the endurance of the paper itself, are all sacrificed to the present appearance of the cuts. If you try the paper with the tongue you will find that it has no sizing, and that the smooth-rolled surface is an artificial and temporary substitute. Such work cannot be called the most desirable or valuable thing. The object of this method is simply to provide a smooth yet absorbent surface, on which the ink will dry quickly, and yet possess a gloss as if printed on sized paper.

Now I need not apologise for belonging to the class who believe in hand-made paper, and good old style type, arranged in well squared pages, with here and there a most unmistakable initial letter of good design.

I also like a surface on the paper that can be felt to possess a pleasant undulating roughness. This surface on a well-sized paper protects it from wear as well as from smearing. The high parts

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take both the wear and any griminess, and can be easily cleaned with rubber. A soft, smooth, absorbent paper once soiled is spoiled for good. I wish and hope that any word I can make use of will tend to increase the use of really good, well-sized paper, not rolled too smooth. Bank ledgers, though blue and ruled, are, I believe, still made of material like this, and are thoroughly good.

But such paper cannot take fine impressions, and if my suggestion is carried out it will not be needed. Let the finest possible printing on the finest imaginable paper be the method for the cuts; then having the type printed and the spaces left, carefully insert the cuts by pasting them in. They look brilliant, and altogether raised above the common by the process, and are legitimately a part of an artistic piece of work.

Copper-plate illustrations.—Mr. Linton's noble work, *The Masters of Wood Engraving*, is almost entirely produced from copper-plate photogravure facsimiles of the various originals at equal scale. All those in the text pages are printed on thin "China India" paper, then trimmed closed and mounted. Few instances are on record of such determination to do justice to the subject.

But it is just to remark that purely pictorial subjects should always be treated thus, and the combined result will be worthy of the trouble. It is particularly worth noting that there is no uncertainty about this mode; there is no doubt whatever as to the resulting appearance of the work when so faithfully performed.

Practical men will see the great difficulty in any other way of illustrating a book with small copper-plate pictures, for a plate mark from a small plate spoils a page of type. Rogers, the poet, met the case by putting his pictures on very large steel plates, so that they could be printed on any part of a page without the edge of a plate coming within its margin. But even this mode necessitated the cutting up of the sheet of paper into leaves, or half, or quarter sheets, at all sorts of places in the book—an immense burden, and quite out of the question now-a-days.

A point of advantage both to copper-plate and relief printing is that a number of subjects are printed at once. In relief work a dozen or more may be done at each pull. But in copper-plate work half that number will generally suffice. The cost of mounting is not great, but the flattening of the sheets sometimes costs as much as the mounting. However, it may be generally

assumed that small and medium sizes can be completed at 5s. per hundred, or 2s. 6d. for a book containing 50 such plates or pictures. When it is remembered that this cheapens the working of the letterpress, particularly as regards time, the increase of cost will be regarded as trifling. But it remains all the time perfectly unquestioned and true that this system will provide the really beautiful book of the future ; not, as now, confined to the limited *Edition de Luxe*, but the entire edition really good from first to last, to the credit and the profit of the producer.

ALFRED DAWSON.