RECENT BOOKS ON BINDING¹

By STRICKLAND GIBSON

BIBLIOGRAPHERS interested in stamped bookbindings have waited many years for the late Mr. W. H. James Weale's catalogue of *Early Stamped Bookbindings in the British Museum*, and if the work as now published falls short of their expectations it must be admitted that the description of 385 stamped bindings with 490 illustrations of early book-stamps demands their gratitude and carries the accurate knowledge of the history of bookbinding a considerable stage further. Although there are no reproductions of book covers, the subjects are so minutely and carefully described that any one with practical experience of old bindings can easily visualize the originals. The bindings are arranged in one chronological order from c. 1145 to 1489, many of the dates being necessarily conjectural. Unfortunately not all the stamps mentioned are illustrated, so that if any one wishes to know, for instance, what stamps were used to decorate a fourteenth-century Noyon binding or a Tavistock binding of c. 1428 he will have to visit the British Museum and look at the originals. Moreover, the reasons for attributing bindings to a particular place are only too frequently with-

¹ *Early Stamped Bookbindings in the British Museum*. Descriptions of 385 blind-stamped bindings of the XIIth-XVth centuries . . . mainly by the late W. H. James Weale. . . Completed by Lawrence Taylor. London, 1922.

De kunst der oude boekbinders, XV^{de} en XVI^{de} eeuwse boekbanden in de Utrechtsche Universiteits-Bibliotheek, beschreven en afgebeeld door dr. A. Hulshof en mr. M. J. Schretlen. Utrecht, 1921.

Bucheinbände aus dem XIV.-XIX. Jahrhundert in der Landesbibliothek zu Darmstadt ausgewählt und beschrieben von dr. Adolf Schmidt. Leipzig, 1921.

A Catalogue of English and Foreign Bookbindings offered for sale by Bernard Quaritch, Ltd. London, 1921.

held. The lack of an index will compel the serious student to read right through the book ; and that is all to the good.

Dr. A. Hulshof and Mr. M. J. Schretlen have written an excellent and detailed little work on the stamped bindings in the University Library of Utrecht which much enriches our knowledge of Low Country binders, about 280 stamps, 40 rolls, and 20 panel stamps being illustrated. The authors have based their work on documents, and have taken great pains to record the provenance of the bindings described. The illustrations consist of rubbings reproduced from half-tone blocks, and are to be preferred to drawings reproduced from line blocks. One need only compare no. 4 of the stamps of Jan Ryckaert of Ghent (Hulshof, Plate 9) with its counterpart in Mr. Weale's book (Plate 32, no. 7) to be convinced that a careful pencil rubbing brings out quite successfully the delicate lines of a stamp, and is necessarily more accurate than a drawing.

The magnificent work by Dr. Schmidt on the historic and decorative bindings in the Landesbibliothek at Darmstadt is a picture-book of no ordinary technical excellence. The earliest binding illustrated is one executed at Cologne in 1356. There are several examples of *cuir ciselé* bindings, and a very interesting series of bindings executed in the sixteenth century for the Electors of Saxony and their wives. The chief characteristics of these later German bindings are the elaborateness of the roll-produced ornaments and the excellent delineation of heraldry and portraits in the panels of the covers. The gilt tooled German bindings which are illustrated bring out very clearly how late certain styles were introduced into Germany. A Saxon binding of 1630 (Plate 68) is tooled with solid and azured ornaments quite in the style of Italian and French bindings of a century earlier. Two *chefs-d'œuvre* of reproduction in colour may be mentioned, a painted vellum binding of 1736 (Plate 84) and a pink silk Darmstadt cover of

1785 (Plate 98). It is difficult to see how such technical skill could be improved upon. The work contains fifty-six plates in colour and forty-four in collotype, and can be obtained for less than £3.

Messrs. Quaritch's *Catalogue of English and Foreign Book-bindings* must be already well known to a large number of members of the Bibliographical Society. This latest addition to that firm's fine series of catalogues surpasses in extent and interest the previous catalogue of bindings published in 1897. It contains, as might be expected, some of the prizes of book-collecting, a mediaeval enamelled binding containing a twelfth-century manuscript, and books bound for Grolier, Lauwrin, Wotton, and Longepierre. There is also a fine series of books bound for De Thou, among which is a copy of the very scarce Bodleian Catalogue of 1605. The late Mr. H. B. Wheatley's beautiful copy of Trapp and Croft's *Musicus Apparatus Academicus*, 1713 (Plate 20), also appears, in our opinion one of the finest bindings in his collection. There are the usual royal English bindings, but whether all such were ever held by royal hands is of course doubtful. An example of a royal binding on which royalty never gazed is in the Bodleian (MS. Tanner 83). On the fly-leaf of the manuscript Archbishop Sancroft has written the following note: 'This Translation of the N.T. into Portuguese was done in the E. India (at Goa, I think) by Mr. Wakefield, Chaplain in that Factory, with the Assistance of the Merchants, and for their Use. The Translator returning into England soon after the Kings Return, bestowed this Binding on it (with the King's Arms &c.) intending, as he said, to have presented it to Qu. Catherine. But being inform'd, how unacceptable to her such a Translation would be, it lay upon his Hands; in which I saw it presently after my coming to be Dean of S. Paul's: and the Author dying a little after, I bought of his Executors both this, and the first Draught of it in a larger Volume.'

As might be expected the prices asked for the majority of the treasures in this catalogue are high, but the unambitious lover of bindings need not despair because of the prices asked for special or identified examples. There are still many of the less spectacular, but by no means uninteresting, ones waiting to be discovered in bookshops. The infinite variety of bindings, the lack of comprehensive illustrated books of reference about them, and the necessity of seeing authentic examples before any adequate knowledge about them can be acquired are all in the favour of the experienced amateur. Fortunately there are still booksellers who pay little attention to unassuming bindings and so do not recognize the monogram of John Evelyn upon the covers, and who think that five shillings is a reasonable price for a fine fifteenth-century Oxford binding. These prizes have fallen to friends and not to the present writer who, however, does possess a modest row of bindings which testify to the fact that an occasional Boyet, Derome, or Roger Payne may still be picked up for a few shillings. But every new bibliographical work is an additional cloud on our horizon. When all the facts about old books and bindings have become common property, the Agent (with his Collector) will bask in the full light of easily acquired knowledge, but your true Book Hunter will know that the night has indeed come.