

JEWELLED AND EMBROIDERED BOOKBINDINGS
AT THE GROLIER CLUB

BY RUTH GRANNIS

ON Monday afternoon, February 9th, the Needle and Bobbin Club was offered the opportunity of seeing and studying a unique series of metal and embroidered bindings.

The exhibition was one of very great general interest, appealing to all lovers of the beautiful, and of cunning craftsmanship, as well as to the collector and the connoisseur. It was the third in a series of exhibitions showing the history and development of the art of book-binding, and was made up of those beautifully wrought silver, bejewelled and embroidered covers which, from the beginning of the art, have been placed among the most treasured possessions of their owners.

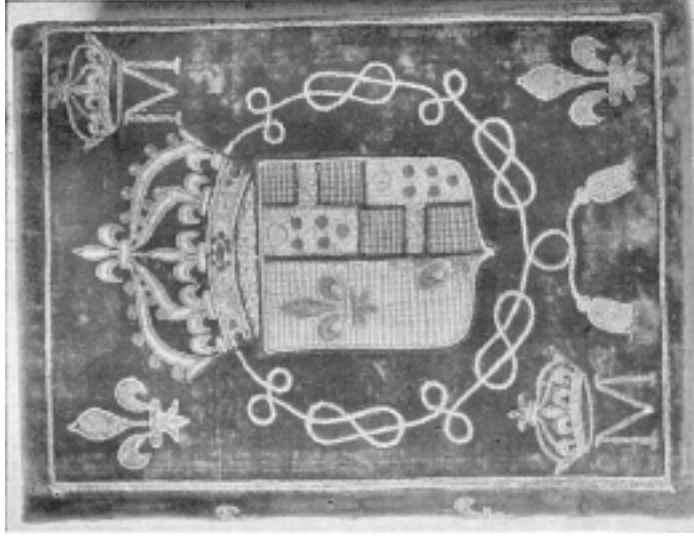
Long before the invention of printing the owners of rare and precious manuscripts were wont to put them, for better preservation and because of their great value, into strong covers overlaid with metal, on which the silversmith lavished his art, adorning them with plaques of enamel and carved ivory, with jewels and crystals. No less than ten of these early bindings, dating from the ninth to the fourteenth century, were shown at the Grolier Club exhibit. But surpassing them all was what is known from the name of its former owner (the Earl of Ashburnham) as the "Ashburnham Gospels," a manuscript of the ninth century, in a magnificent cover of that period. This binding bears the arms of Emperor Charles V and is handsomely enamelled.

Other monastic bindings were inlaid with Mosan and Limoges enamels, decorated with ivory plaques or studded with rock-crystal cabochons.

The imposing array of openwork silver bindings of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, with ornamentations, arms and pictured medallions in repoussé, pierced, engraved and filigree work, comprised the pick of



BIBLE OF KING CHARLES I



BINDING MADE FOR
MARIE DE MEDICI



BINDING IN "PETIT-POINT"
ENGLISH, 17TH CENTURY



EMBROIDERED BINDING
ENGLISH, 17TH CENTURY

several great private collections. We were reminded of the "Silver Library" at Danzig by the numerous specimens from the German and Dutch States.

From the Netherlands also came the quaint, tortoise-shell covers. A group of early Greek and Armenian bindings had a charm of their own, and there was a beautiful specimen of workmanship ascribed to Benvenuto Cellini, or his pupil, Manno, made for Cardinal Farnese.

Then there were bindings of enamels and procelains, of tortoise-shell and mother-of-pearl, of curious skins and of velvet, with delicate embellishments of silver or gold in borders, cornerpieces and clasps. Two Bibles had heavy silver chains with which they might be attached to the girdle. A prayer-book of the Empress Maria Theresa had her crowned monogram delicately wrought in silver on a crimson velvet cover.

The art of embroidering bookbindings seems to have been, *par excellence*, an English one, and at the Grolier exhibit we saw an extraordinary assemblage of English work of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The bindings were of canvas, velvet, silks and satins, embroidered in some cases doubtless by England's great ladies, whose skill in needlework is famous, but often, too (as has been lately revealed through a manuscript petition addressed by the Milliners of the Royal Exchange to Archbishop Laud), by "Imbroiderers" who were accustomed to bring to the petitioners' shops "rare and curious covers of Imbrothery and needleworke, wherein the petitioners have used to cause Bibles, Testaments & Psalme Bookes of the best sort and neatest print to be richly bound up for ye Nobility and gentry of this kingdome, for whome and not for common persons, they are indeed most fitt."

The old theory which attributed most of the embroidered bindings of the seventeenth century indiscriminately to the Nuns of Little Gidding has been disproved, but there were in the exhibition many volumes which were done in the elaborate manner formerly ascribed to them. A truly magnificent piece of needlework was on the Bible of King Charles I, and a French book dedicated to that monarch was bound for him in white silk, richly adorned with crowns and flowers, with miniatures of the King and Queen set in the covers. French embroidered bindings before the eighteenth century are excessively rare, but there was one of velvet richly embroidered for Marie de Medici, with her crowned "M's," followed by a long line of the gorgeous little French gift books and almanacs of the eighteenth century, gay with tinsel and spangles,

many holding inside their covers tiny mirrors and pockets—true little “vanity books.”

Various Dutch and German examples were shown, with a few very fine specimens of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese work.

In all, about two hundred volumes were spread about the Club's exhibition hall, which was hung with sixteenth and seventeenth century tapestries, forming a fitting background for the glittering gold and silver in the showcases.

LACE MAKER'S SONG

What shall I do with the money I earn?
Up in the air it shall certainly turn
Soon as I hear the first cuckoo's “cuck-oo”;
Robin will hear it the same moment too.

Come, pleasant thoughts, and sit round in a ring;
Love is a cage in which happy birds sing;
So I will buy a new bobbin, I may
See one to suit me on Cherry Fair day.

What shall I do with the bobbin I buy?
Give it to Robin for Robin is shy.
Then that I love him he plainly will see,
And he may buy a new bobbin for me.

What shall the motto be? “Dear one, be true”?
“Love me or leave me”? No, neither will do!
This is the motto I think I will take;
“Look at me sometimes for somebody's sake.”

Then in his arms he will clasp me and I
For him will live—though for him I could die.
What a sweet world is this! Now I have found
What it is—love it is—makes it go round.

From Mr. Thomas Wright's “Romance of the Lace Pillow”