

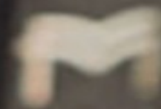
**WALTER
CRANE**

**DIE
BIBEL**

SCHLACHTER
VERSION
2000



DIE BIBEL



**OF THE DECORATIVE
ILLUSTRATION
OF BOOKS OLD
AND NEW**

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**OF THE DECORATIVE
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OF BOOKS OLD
AND NEW**

Walter Crane

Of the Decorative Illustration of Books Old and New

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My subject is a large one, and touches more intimately, perhaps, than other forms of art, both human thought and history, so that it would be extremely difficult to treat it exhaustively upon all its sides. I shall not attempt to deal with it from the historical or antiquarian points of view more than may be necessary to elucidate the artistic side, on which I propose chiefly to approach the question of design as applied to books—or, more strictly, the book page—which I shall hope to illustrate by reproductions of characteristic examples from different ages and countries.

I may, at least, claim to have been occupied, in a practical sense, with the subject more or less, as part of my work, both as a decorator and illustrator of books, for the

greater part of my life, and such conclusions as I have arrived at are based upon the results of personal thought and experience, if they are also naturally coloured and influenced from the same sources.

All forms of art are so closely connected with life and thought, so bound up with human conditions, habits, and customs; so intimately and vividly do they reflect every phase and change of that unceasing movement—the ebb and flow of human progress amid the forces of nature we call history—that it is hardly possible even for the most careless stroller, taking any of the by-paths, not to be led insensibly to speculate on their hidden sources, and an origin perhaps common to them all.

The story of man is fossilized for us, as it were, or rather preserved, with all its semblance of life and colour, in art and books. The procession of history reaching far back into the obscurity of the forgotten or inarticulate past, is reflected, with all its movement, gold and colour, in the limpid stream of design, that mirror-like, paints each passing phase for us, and illustrates each act in the drama. In the language of line and of letters, of symbol and picture, each age writes its own story and character, as page after page is turned in the book of time. Here and there the continuity of the chapters is broken, a page is missing, a passage is obscure; there are breaks and fragments—heroic torsos and limbs instead of whole figures. But more and more, by patient research, labour, and comparison, the voids are being filled up, until some day perhaps there will be no chasm of conjecture in which to plunge, but the volume of art and human history will be as clear as pen and pencil can

make it, and only left for a present to continue, and a future to carry to a completion which is yet never complete.

If painting is the looking-glass of *ILLUMINATED* nations and periods, pictured-books may *MSS.* be called the hand-glass which still more intimately reflects the life of different centuries and peoples, in all their minute and homely detail and quaint domesticity, as well as their playful fancies, their dreams, and aspirations. While the temples and the tombs of ancient times tell us of the pomp and splendour and ambition of kings, and the stories of their conquests and tyrannies, the illuminated *MSS.* of the Middle Ages show us, as well as these, the more intimate life of the people, their sports and their jests, their whim and fancy, their work and their play, no less than the mystic and religious and ceremonial side of that life, which was, indeed, an inseparable part of it; the whole worked in as with a kind of embroidery of the pen and brush, with the most exquisite sense of decorative beauty.

GERMAN SCHOOL. XVTH CENTURY.



LEIDEN
CHRISTI.

(BAMBERG, ALBRECHT
PFISTER, 1470.)

Mr. Herbert Spencer, in the course of his enunciation of the philosophy of evolution, speaks of the book and the newspaper lying on the table of the modern citizen as

connected through a long descent with the hieroglyphic inscriptions of the ancient Egyptians, and the picture-writing of still earlier times. We might go (who knows how much further?) back into prehistoric obscurity to find the first illustrator, pure and simple, in the hunter of the cave, who recorded the incidents of his sporting life on the bones of his victims.

We know that the letters of our alphabet were once pictures, symbols, or abstract signs of entities and actions, and grew more and more abstract until they became arbitrary marks—the familiar characters that we know. Letters formed into words; words increased and multiplied with ideas and their interchange; ideas and words growing more and more abstract until the point is reached when the jaded intellect would fain return again to picture-writing, and welcomes the decorator and the illustrator to relieve the desert wastes of words marshalled in interminable columns on the printed page.

In a journey through a book it is pleasant to reach the oasis of a picture or an ornament, to sit awhile under the palms, to let our thoughts unburdened stray, to drink of other intellectual waters, and to see the ideas we have been pursuing, perchance, reflected in them. Thus we end as we begin, with images.

Temples and tombs have been man's biggest books, but with the development of individual life (as well as religious ritual, and the necessity of records,) he felt the need of something more familiar, companionable, and portable, and having, in the course of time, invented the stylus, and the pen, and tried his hand upon papyrus, palm leaf, and

parchment, he wrote his records or his thoughts, and pictured or symbolized them, at first upon scrolls and rolls and tablets, or, later, enshrined them in bound books, with all the beauty that the art of writing could command, enriched and emphasized with the pictorial and ornamental commentary in colours and gold.

As already indicated, it is my purpose to deal with the artistic aspects of the book page, and therefore we are not now concerned with the various forms of the book itself, as such, or with the treatment of its exterior case, cover, or binding. It is the open book I wish to dwell on—the page itself as a field for the designer and illustrator—a space to be made beautiful in design.

GERMAN SCHOOL. XVTH CENTURY.



FROM BOCCACCIO, DE
CLARIS MULIERIBUS.

(ULM, JOHANN
ZAINER, 1473.)

Both decorated and illustrated books *THE TWO*
may be divided broadly into two great *GREAT*
periods: *DIVISIONS.*

- I. The MS., or period before printing.
- II. The period of printed books.

Both illustrate, however, a long course of evolution, and contain in themselves, it might be said, a compendium—or condensation—of the history of contemporary art in its various forms of development. The first impulse in art seems to answer to the primitive imitative impulse in children—the desire to embody the familiar forms about them—to characterize them in line and colour. The salient points of an animal, for instance, being first emphasized—as in the bone scratchings of the cave men—so that children's drawings and drawings of primitive peoples present a certain family likeness, allowing for difference of environment. They are abstract, and often almost symbolic in their characterization of form, and it is not difficult to imagine how letters and written language became naturally evolved through a system of hieroglyphics, starting from the unsystemized but irrepressible tendency of the human to record his linear ideas of rhythm on the one hand, or his impressions of nature on the other. It would seem that the illustrator or picture writer came first in the order of things, and the book afterwards—like the system we have heard of under modern editors of magazines, of the picture being done first and then written up to, or down to, by the author.

Side by side with the evolution of letters and calligraphic art went on the evolution of the graphic power and the artistic sense, developing on the one hand towards close imitation of nature and dramatic incident, and on the other towards imaginative beauty, and systematic, organic ornament, more or less built upon a geometric basis, but ultimately bursting into a free foliation and flamboyant blossom, akin in inventive richness and variety to a growth of nature herself. The development of these two main directions of artistic energy may be followed throughout the whole world of art, constantly struggling, as it were, for the ascendancy, now one and now the other being paramount; but the history of their course, and the effect of their varying influences is particularly marked in the decoration and illustration of books.

Although as a rule the decorative sense was dominant throughout the illuminated books of the Middle Ages, the illustrator, in the form of the miniaturist, is in evidence, and in some, especially in the later MSS., finally conquers, or rather absorbs, the decorator.

There is a MS. in the Egerton collection in the British Museum (No. 943), "The Divina Commedia" of Dante, with miniatures by Italian artists of the fourteenth century, which may be taken as an early instance of the ascendancy of the illustrator, the miniatures being placed somewhat abruptly on the page, and with unusually little framework or associated ornament; and although more or less decorative in the effect of their simple design, and frank and full colour, the main object of their artists was to illustrate rather than to decorate the text.

GERMAN SCHOOL. XVTH CENTURY.



FROM BOCCACCIO, DE
CLARIS MULIERIBUS.

(ULM, JOHANN
ZAINER, 1473.)

The Celtic genius, under the influence of Christianity, and as representing the art of *THE BOOK OF KELLS*.
of the early Christian Western civilization—
exemplified in the remarkable designs in the Book of Kells—
was, on the other hand, strictly ornamental in its
manifestations, suggesting in its richness, and in the
intricacy and ingenuity of its involved patterns, as well as
the geometric forms of many of its units, a relation to
certain characteristics of Eastern as well as primitive Greek
art.

The Book of Kells derives its name from the Columban Monastery of Kells or Kenlis, originally Cennanas, a place of ancient importance in the county of Meath, Ireland, and it is supposed to have been the Great Gospel brought to the Christian settlement by its founder, St. Columba, and perhaps written by that saint, who died in the year 597. The original volume is in the library of Trinity College, Dublin.

In one of the pages of this book is represented the Greek monogram of Christ, and the whole page is devoted to three words, *Christi Autem Generatio*. It is a remarkable instance of an ornamental initial spreading over an entire page. The effect of the whole as a decoration is perhaps what might be called heavy, but it is full of marvellous detail and richness, and highly characteristic of Celtic forms of ornamental design (see No. 1, Appendix).

The work of the scribe, as shown in the form of the ordinary letters of the text, is very fine. They are very firm and strong in character, to balance the closely knit and firmly built ornamentation of the initial letters and other ornaments of the pages. We feel that they have a dignity, a distinction, and a character all their own.

There is a page in the same book where the symbols of the evangelists are inclosed in circles, and panelled in a solid framing occupying the whole page, which suggests Byzantine feeling in design.

The full pages in the earlier illuminated MSS. were often panelled out in four or more compartments to hold figures of saints, or emblems, and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries such panels generally had small patterned

diapered backgrounds, on dark blue, red, green, or burnished gold.

The Anglo-Saxon MSS. show traces of the influence of the traditions of Classic art drawn through the Byzantine, or from the Roman sources, which naturally affected the earliest forms of Christian art as we see its relics in the catacombs. These classical traditions are especially noticeable in the treatment of the draperies clinging in linear and elliptical folds to express the limbs. In fact, it might be said that, spread westward and northward by the Christian colonies, this classical tradition in figure design lingered on, until its renewal at the dawn of the Renaissance itself, and the resurrection of classical art in Italy, which, uniting with a new naturalism, grew to that wonderful development which has affected the art of Europe ever since.

The Charter of Foundation of Newminster, at Winchester, by King Edgar, A.D. 966, written in gold, is another very splendid early example of book decoration. It has a full-page miniature of the panelled type above mentioned, and elaborate border in gold and colours by an English artist. It is in the British Museum, and may be seen open in Case 2 in the King's Library.

"The Gospels," in Latin. A MS. of the *ANGLO-SAXON* eleventh century, with initials and borders *MS.* in gold and colours, by English artists, is another fine specimen of the early kind. Here the titles of each gospel, boldly inscribed, are inclosed in a massively designed border, making a series of full title pages of a dignified type.

GERMAN SCHOOL. XVTH CENTURY.



Er erste heimlich scheinbott oder
sberg dē d̄ teufel sendt dē mensche
ze fahen dz ist die hochfart/der selb
bott kumpt geritten /vnd sitzt auff
ainē Dromedari/vn̄ ist mit guldin
harnasch angelegt Vn̄ furt auff dē
helm einē pfaben/in dē schilt einen Adler In dem panzer
einē gekrōnten Leo/vn̄ in d̄ hand ein brautes schwert •



"BUCH VON DEN SIEBEN TODSÜNDE N UND DEN SIEBEN
TUGENDEN."

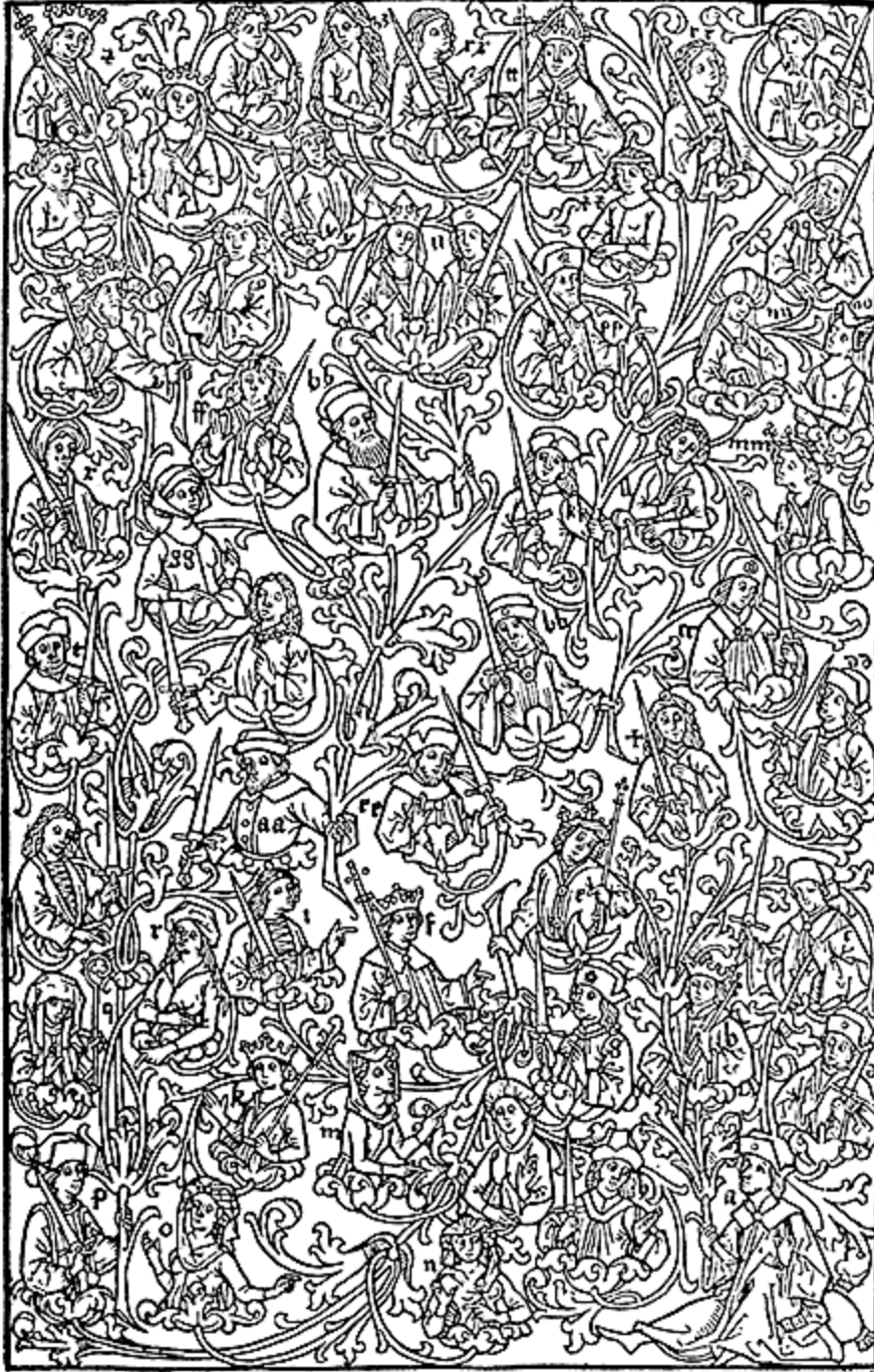
(AUGSBURG, BÄMLER, 1474.)

As examples of illustrated books, according to the earlier
Mediæval ideas, we may look at twelfth and thirteenth

century "Herbals," wherein different plants, very full and frank in colour and formal in design, are figured strictly with a view to the ornamentation of the page. There is a very fine one, described as written in England in the thirteenth century, in the British Museum. Decoration and illustration are here one and the same.

A magnificent specimen of book decoration of the most splendid kind is the "Arundel Psalter" (Arundel MS. 83, Brit. Mus.), given by Robert de Lyle to his daughter Audry, as an inscription in the volume tells us, in 1339. Here scribe, illuminator, and miniaturist are all at their best, whether one and the same or different persons. It is, moreover, English work. There is no doubt about the beauty of the designs, and the variety and richness of the decorative effect. Like all the Psalters, the book commences with a calendar, and full pages follow, panelled out and filled in with subjects from the life of Christ. A particularly splendid full-page is that of the Virgin and Child under a Gothic canopy, with gold diapered background. There are also very interestingly designed genealogical trees, and fine arrangements of double columned text-pages with illuminated ornament (see Nos. 2, 3, and 4, Appendix).

GERMAN SCHOOL. XVTH CENTURY.



SPECULUM HUMANÆ VITÆ. (AUGSBURG, GÜNTHER ZAINER, *circa* 1475.)

(*Size of original, 6-5/8 in. × 10-5/16 in.*)

The Tenison Psalter (Addit. MS. 24686) *XIIITH AND XIVTH*
is a specimen of English thirteenth century *CENTURY MSS.*

work. "Probably executed for Alphonso, son of Edmund I., on his contemplated marriage with Margaret daughter of Florentius, Count of Holland, which was frustrated by the prince's death on 1st August, 1224."

The full-page miniatures arranged in panels—in some instances four on a page, with alternate burnished gold and dark blue diapered backgrounds behind the figures, and in others six on a page, the miniature much smaller, and set in a larger margin of colour, alternate red and blue—are very full, solid, and rich in colour with burnished gold. The book is further interesting, as giving excellent and characteristic instances of another and very different treatment of the page (and one which appears to have been rather peculiarly English in style), in the spiny scrolls which, often springing from a large illuminated initial letter upon the field of the text, spreads upon and down the margin, or above and below, often holding in its branching curves figures and animals, which in this MS. are beautifully and finely drawn. Note the one showing a lady of the time in pursuit of some deer.

In the thirteenth century books the text is a solid tower or column, from which excursions can be made by the fancy and invention of the designer, up and down and above and beneath, upon the ample vellum margins; in some cases, indeed, additional devices appear to have been added by other and later hands than those of the original scribe or illuminator.

There is a very remarkable Apocalypse (Brit. Mus. MSS. 17353; formerly belonging to the Carthusian house of Vau Dieu between Liège and Aix) by French artists of the early

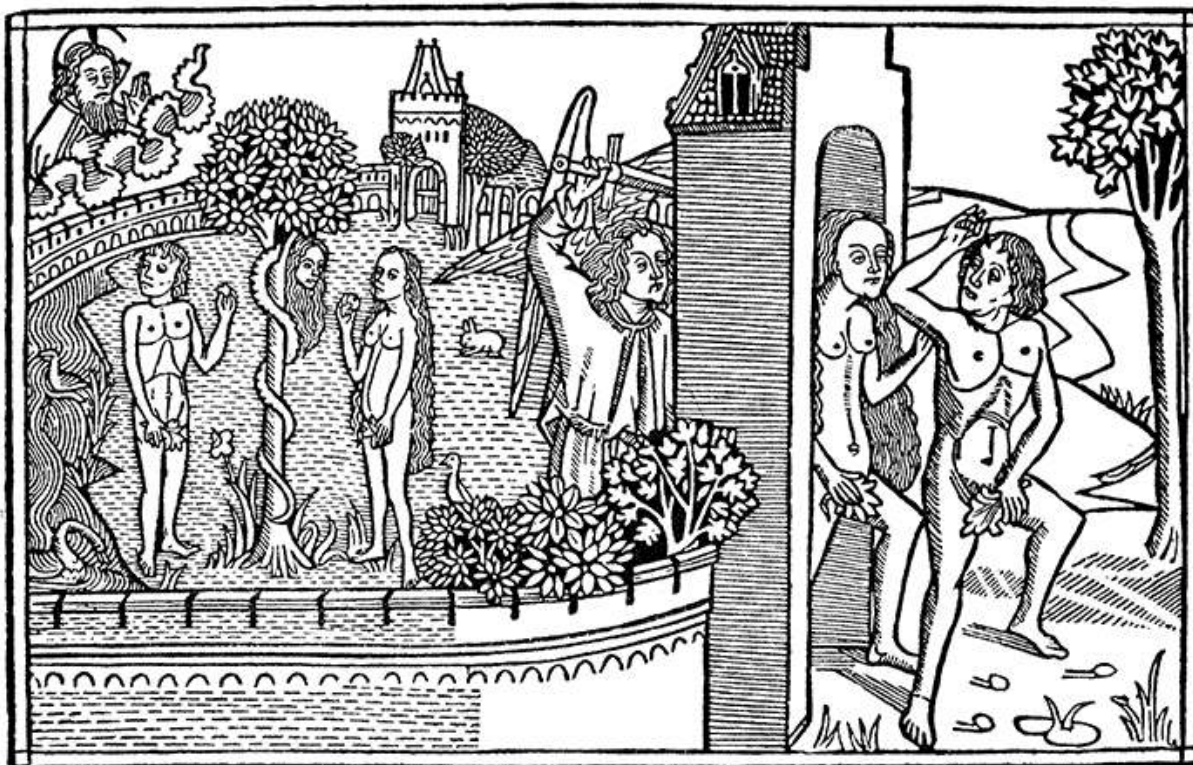
fourteenth century, which has a series of very fine imaginative and weird designs (suggestive of Orcagna), highly decorative in treatment, very full and frank in colour, and firm in outline. The designs are in oblong panels, inclosed in linear coloured borders at the head of each page, and occupying about two-thirds of it, the text being written in double columns beneath each miniature, with small illuminated initials. The backgrounds of the designs are diapered on grounds of dark green and red alternately.

The imaginative force and expression conveyed by these designs—strictly formal and figurative, and controlled by the ornamental traditions of the time—is very remarkable. The illustrator and decorator are here still one.

Queen Mary's Psalter (Brit. Mus. MS. Royal 2, B. VII.), again, is interesting as giving instances of a very different and lighter treatment of figure designs. We find in this MS., together with illuminations in full colours and burnished gold, a series of pale tinted illustrations in Bible history drawn with a delicate pen line.

The method of the illuminators and miniaturists seems always to have been to draw their figures and ornaments clearly out first with a pen before colouring.

GERMAN SCHOOL. XVTH CENTURY.



BIBLE, HEINRICH
QUENTEL.

(COLOGNE,
1480.)

In the full-coloured miniatures the pen lines are not visible, but in this MS. they are preserved with the delicate tinted treatment. The designs I speak of are placed two on a page, occupying it entirely. They are inclosed in vermilion borders, terminated at each corner with a leaf. There is a very distinct and graceful feeling about the designs. The same hand appears to have added on the lower margins of the succeeding text pages a series of quaint figures—combats of grotesque animals, hunting, hawking, and fishing scenes, and games and sports, and, finally, Biblical subjects. Here, again, I think we may detect in the early illustrators a tendency to escape from the limitations of the book page, though only a tendency.

A fine ornamental page combining illumination with miniature is given in the "Epistle of Philippe de Comines to Richard II." at the end of the fourteenth century. The figures, interesting historically and as examples of costume, are relieved upon a diapered ground. The text is in double columns, with square initials, and the page is lightened by open foliation branching out upon the margin from the straight spiney border strips, which on the inner side terminate in a dragon.

As a specimen of early fifteenth century *THE BEDFORD* work, both for illuminator, scribe, and *BOOK OF* miniaturist, it would be difficult to find a *HOURS*. more exquisite book than the Bedford Hours (Brit. Mus. MS. Add. 18850), dated 1422, said to be the work of French artists, though produced in England. The kalendar, which occupies the earlier pages, is remarkable for its small and very brilliant and purely coloured miniatures set like gems in a very fine, delicate, light, open, leafy border, bright with burnished gold trefoil leaves, which are characteristic of French illuminated books of this period (see Nos. 5 and 6, Appendix).

There is an elaborate full-page miniature containing the Creation and Fall, which breaks over the margin here and there. The thirteenth and fourteenth century miniaturists frequently allowed their designs to break over the framework of their diapered grounds or panels in an effective way, which pleasantly varied the formality of framed-in subjects upon the page, especially where a flat margin of colour between lines inclosed them; and some parts of the groups broke over the inner line while keeping

within the limits of the outer one. Very frequently, as in this MS., a general plan is followed throughout in the spacing of the pages, though the borders and miniatures in detail show almost endless variation. In such splendid works as this we get the complete and harmonious co-operation and union between the illustrator and the decorator. The object of each is primarily to beautify his page. The illuminator makes his borders and initial letters branch and bud, and put forth leaves and flowers spreading luxuriantly up and down the margin of his vellum pages (beautiful even as the scribe left them) like a living growth; while the miniaturist makes the letter itself the shrine of some delicate saint, or a vision of some act of mercy or martyrdom; while the careless world plays hide and seek through the labyrinthine borders, as the seasons follow each other through the kalendar, and the peasant ploughs, and sows, and reaps, and threshes out the corn, while gay knights tourney in the lists, or, with ladies in their quaint attire, follow the spotted deer through the greenwood.

In these beautiful liturgical books of the *MERRY* Middle Ages, as we see, the ornamental *ENGLAND*. feeling developed with and combined the illustrative function, so that almost any illuminated Psalter or Book of Hours will furnish not only lovely examples of floral decoration in borders and initials of endless fertility of invention, but also give us pictures of the life and manners of the times. In those of our own country we can realize how full of colour, quaint costume, and variety was life when England was indeed merry, in spite of family feuds and tyrannous lords and kings; before her industrial

transformation and the dispossession of her people; ere Boards of Works and Poor-law Guardians took the place of her monasteries and abbeys; before her streams were fouled with sewage, and her cities blackened with coal smoke—the smoke of the burning sacrificed to commercial competition and wholesale production for profit by means of machine power and machine labour; before she became the workshop and engine-room of the world.

DUTCH SCHOOL. XVTH CENTURY.



SPIEGEL ONSER
BEHOUDENISSE,
KUILENBURG.

(JAN
VELDENER,
1483.)

These books glowing with gold and colour tell of days when time was no object, and the pious artist and scribe could work quietly and lovingly to make a thing of beauty

with no fear of a publisher or a printer before his eyes, or the demands of world market.

In the midst of our self-congratulation on the enormous increase of our resources for the rapid and cheap production of books, and the power of the printing press, we should do well not to forget that if books of those benighted centuries of which I have been speaking were few, comparatively, they were fit, though few—they were things of beauty and joys for ever to their possessors. A prayer-book was not only a prayer-book, but a picture-book, a shrine, a little mirror of the world, a sanctuary in a garden of flowers. One can well understand their preciousness apart from their religious use, and many have seen strange eventful histories no doubt. The Earl of Shrewsbury lost his prayer-book (the Talbot prayer-book) and his life together on the battle-field at Castillon (about thirty miles from Bordeaux) in 1453. This book, as Mr. Quaritch states, was carried away by a Breton soldier, and was only re-discovered in Brittany a few years ago.

GERMAN SCHOOL. XVTH CENTURY.