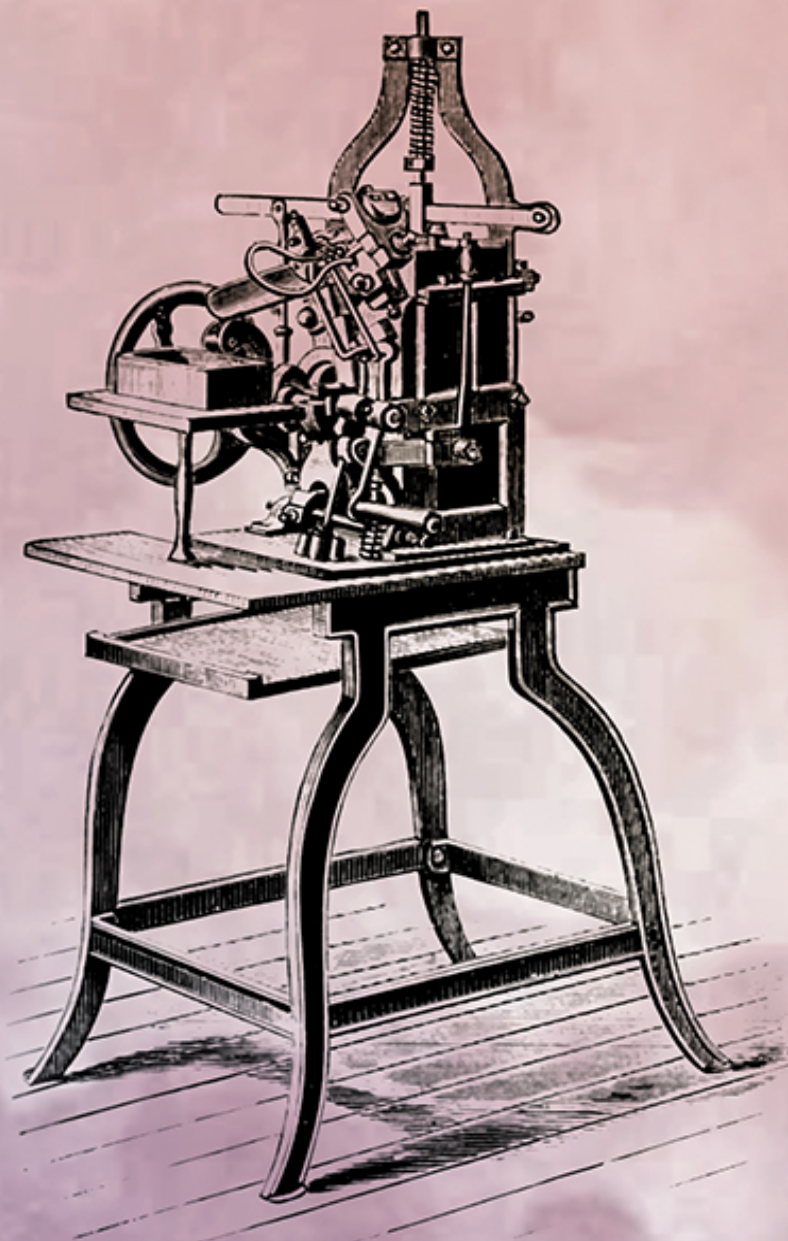


**CLASSICS TO GO**



# **THE INVENTION OF TYPOGRAPHY**

**FREDERICK W. HAMILTON**

**The Invention  
of Typography  
Frederick W. Hamilton**

## **PREFACE**

The writer of this book makes no claim to original investigation. The materials for such investigation do not exist to any considerable extent in this country. The results of such an investigation would form a book not suited to this series.

The writer has attempted to set forth briefly the conditions which brought about the invention of printing and to present the main lines of discussion concerning the inventor. He has consulted with some care a considerable number of authorities and has endeavored to present the results in comprehensive shape.

The writer believes that the history of any particular event is a part of the general history of the time in which it occurred. He has, therefore, endeavored throughout the historical portion of this series to indicate the general historic background of all particular historical events sufficiently to set these particular events in their relations to what was going on at the time in the world generally.

In addition to the supplementary reading indicated in the several volumes which follow, the writer ventures to hope that the students will familiarize themselves with some good general text book on modern history.

## INTRODUCTION

Many persons and many places have claimed the honor of the invention of typographic printing. That these conflicting claims should be made is the most natural thing in the world. Almost all epoch-making inventions and discoveries are of more or less doubtful origin. The reason for this is that such discoveries grow out of conditions and needs. At the time appointed they appear as inevitably as the blossom on the plant. Very likely they appear in several places at once. Often, also like the blossoms on a plant, only one produces what the gardener calls a "set," that is, a fruit which ripens and matures seed for reproduction. The state of human knowledge or the pressure of human need may be such that many students are at work at the same time upon problems which seem to demand solution. In this way the theory of evolution, whose adoption, revolutionizing as it did the entire system of human thinking, was the most important event of the nineteenth century, was independently discovered by Darwin and Wallace, who were working at the same time along independent lines of investigation.

The advance in surgery and a keen appreciation of the suffering under operation which made many operations impossible led to the simultaneous discovery of anesthesia by at least two investigators, William T. G. Morton and Dr. Charles T. Jackson. Investigation of the uses of electricity led to the independent invention of the telephone by Bell and Dolbear. It is certain that occasional European sailors found their way to the western hemisphere through several centuries before Columbus made his famous voyage. These

are only a few of the most notable instances of such disputed or independent discoveries.

In some cases the judgment of the world has probably awarded the glory incorrectly. In other cases the glory has gone, perhaps justly, to that one of two or more discoverers who succeeded in making his invention practically or commercially useful. For instance, while Morton was probably not the original discoverer of anesthesia, it was he who made it practically useful in surgical operations, and while there appears to be no question that Dolbear antedated Bell in the discovery of the telephone, Dolbear's interest was purely scientific while Bell gave the telephone to commerce.

The same conditions of doubt and obscurity surround the invention of printing. As we shall later see, more at length, the invention of printing was a development of existing processes called for by the needs of the time and arising out of the conditions of the time. It was inevitable that typographic printing should be discovered by somebody in the middle of the fifteenth century. So far as the evidence at our command shows, the art was not invented in several places at the same time, but was developed by one man out of familiar processes. For some reason which is not now clear, the work of this man, though considerable in extent, appears to have been without immediate direct results of much importance. At a very early stage the invention was seized upon by another who, with his associates, established a center from which the art steadily grew and developed. So important in its practical results was the work of this man and his associates that he has been for centuries hailed as the inventor of printing. It is needless to say that this man was John Gutenberg.

In the judgment of the present writer, however, the claim that Gutenberg invented typographic printing cannot be maintained. The discussion has been long and sometimes