WILLIAM SKEEN

EARLY TYPOGRAPHY

William Skeen

Early Typography

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Table of Contents

PREFACE.

Table of Contents

THE germ of the present work was a Lecture delivered by the writer before the Members of the Colombo Athenæum, on the 24th February 1853. That Lecture was fully reported at the time in the *Colombo Observer*, and a few copies were subsequently printed for private distribution. These having been disposed of, the writer's attention was directed to the preparation of a more extended essay upon the subject. The result of his labours is now submitted to the public. The work makes no pretension to the character of an exhaustive treatise; it is, in fact, but little more than a broad outline of the subject which it ventures to describe; but it is hoped, that a fresh interest may have been imparted to some of the topics touched upon, and that they will be found placed in a light which, if not wholly new, is at any rate somewhat clearer than that in which they have hitherto been exhibited.

W. S.

Colombo, Ceylon,
April 29, 1871.

Early Typography.
CHAPTER I.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTORY.—LETTER-PRESS PRINTING THE "DIVINE AND NOBLE" ART—WHY SO TERMED.—FREEDOM OF THE PRESS—WHERE FIRST PROCLAIMED.—PRINTING KNOWN IN CHINA FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL.—METHOD OF CHINESE PRINTING.—BIBLIOGRAPHY AND PALÆOTYPOGRAPHY.

PRINTING is the art of producing copies of engraved writings or designs, by pressure, either upon the inked surfaces of characters raised in relief, or on metal plates, the upper surfaces of which are polished, and the sunk engravings charged with colour. The most important, if not the oldest branch of this art, is that of TYPOGRAPHY, or LETTER-PRESS PRINTING. To this Art, as it was invented and perfected in Europe in the Fifteenth century, the epithets DIVINE and NOBLE have not untruly been applied.

It is Noble, not merely because it is one of those arts or professions, the practice of which was permitted to the nobility of the German Empire, but because it is the nurse and preserver of all other arts and sciences; and is unquestionably the most important as well as the most beneficial invention the world has ever seen. It is the disseminator of every other discovery; the commemorator of all other inventions: it hands down to posterity every important event; immortalizes the actions of the great and good; and requires, moreover, in all who would thoroughly excel in its practice, the highest attainable combination of

mental alacrity, educated intelligence, and expert manual dexterity.

It is Divine, inasmuch as it is one of the grand instruments in the hands of Providence for the regeneration of fallen humanity. By it the mightiest movement the world has ever seen since the days when the Apostolic Twelve went about “turning it upside down,”—the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth century,—was mainly effected. Without it the Word of God could not have been diffused, as it has been, is being, and will continue to be, to every nation and tribe and people and tongue throughout the world: while but for it England and the Anglo-Saxon race, who owe it so much for the stability and uniformity it gave to their language,[1] would never have attained their present proud pre-eminence amongst the nations of the earth.

Religion, Arts, Sciences, Commerce, and Civilization, have had the greatest scope, and been most fully developed, wherever the Press has been the least restricted. Its free action is as necessary to the well being of a State, as the free action of the lungs is to the well being of the human body. This is well illustrated in the history of unhappy Poland, where the Liberty of the Press was first proclaimed in the Sixteenth century. But the narrow-minded bigots who succeeded the monarch who proclaimed it, beheld in it a portent foreboding evil to themselves; and they not only speedily abrogated it, but followed up that step with measures destructive of the most cherished privileges of the Polish nation.[2] The result was fatal, as well to the country as to the kings who misruled it. Corrupted, crushed, enslaved,—every vent for the expression of patriotic feeling

choked up,—and the voice of the people stifled by the stern gripe of the strong hand of the despot,—the doom went forth, and the record against her was written as against Great Babylon of old,—“Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.” “God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

The Freedom of the Press is the birthright of the Anglo-Saxon race,—the hard-won palladium of all other rights; and yet, while there are few amongst that race who do not rightly appreciate the blessings flowing therefrom, the great majority are ignorant of the origin or the history of the Art, the privileges of which they so highly prize, and over which, with watchful jealousy, they guard against every thing that bears the semblance of encroachment. This ignorance is doubtless, in the main, owing to the expensive nature and technical character of many of the works in which such information has been published. These works, forming of themselves a distinct class of literature, are neither few in number, nor wanting in interest. Some of the more important are indeed hardly procurable; and in the far East, where works of the kind must be imported for individual use, writing upon special subjects of European lore is beset with difficulties from which authors in the mother country are happily relieved.[3] Acting however, on the maxim of Lord Bacon, “that every man is a debtor to his profession, from the which as men do, of course, seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they, of duty, to endeavour themselves by way of amends to be a help thereunto,” I have spared no pains in this endeavour; and

am not without hope of imparting to my readers some interesting particulars concerning the origin and history of the Noble Art

“That stamps, renews, and multiplies at will,
And cheaply circulates through distant climes
The fairest relics of the purest times,”—

thus creating “a moral atmosphere which is, as it were, the medium of intellectual life, on the quality of which, according as it may be salubrious or vicious, the health of the public mind depends.”[4]

Printing from surfaces of wood, engraved in relief, is an art which appears to have been known in China from time immemorial. Its origin there is hidden in the obscurity of bye-gone ages: it may have been practised by the Chinese from the very commencement of their empire;[5] or the idea may have been derived at a later period from blotting-paper impressions of writings, or from tracings or rubbings of inscriptions, which travellers from ‘the flowery land’ may have taken, in foreign countries, on sheets of paper, such as are known to have been manufactured in China from times of a very remote antiquity, and which are to this day better adapted for such purposes than any papers elsewhere made. Such rubbings, forming a kind of papier-mâché castings,[6] would naturally suggest, not only the idea of stereo-blocks, whereon writings in reversed characters could be engraved in relief, but also the mode of printing, which, to the present day, prevails throughout the Chinese empire. With the fact before us, that the Chinese were, up to a certain period in their history, far ahead of all other nations,

not even excepting the Egyptians, in the development of inventions which could only be the product of an advanced state of civilization, it is not unreasonable to conclude, (especially in the absence of positive information to help us in our researches), that the art of printing from blocks originated in China in the manner above stated. Whether such were the case or not, Du Halde, in order to establish its great antiquity, cites the following proverb, quoted by an old author as written by the Emperor Van Vong, who flourished 1120 years before Christ—“As the stone Me (a word signifying ink in the Chinese language) which is used to blacken the engraved characters, can never become white, so a heart blackened with vices, will always retain its blackness.” This quotation, however, not being very conclusive on the subject, he fixes the invention at fifty years before the Christian era.

Father Couplet, Klaproth, and others, ascribe it to a much later date. “Under the reign of Mint-song,” writes Klaproth, “in the second of the years Tchang-hing (932) the ministers Fong-tao and Li-yu proposed to the Academy Koue-tseu-kien to review the nine king or canonical books, and to have them engraved upon blocks of wood, that they might be printed and sold. The emperor adopted the advice; but it was only in the second of the years Kouan-chun (952) that the engraving of the blocks was completed. They were then distributed and circulated in all the cantons of the empire.”

But that the art was known and practised by the Chinese at a period still more remote, we learn from the 39th volume of the Chinese Encyclopædia, where we are informed, that on the eighth day of the twelfth month of the thirteenth

year of the reign of Wen-ti, founder of the Souï dynasty (593) it was ordered by a decree to collect the worn out drawings and inedited texts, and to engrave them on wood and publish them. This fact is confirmed by various Chinese writings; and this, continues the work quoted, was the commencement of printing upon wooden blocks. Under the Thang dynasty, from 618 to 907, it grew much into use; made still greater progress during the five lesser dynasties, from 907 to 960; and reached its perfection and greatest development between 960 and 1278. But as block-printing was only for the first time imperially ordered in the year 593, it is very probable that the art was known long before that date. Had it *then* been a new invention, something surely would have been said about its origin and author.

The following particulars relative to Chinese printing are given by Du Halde.

“The work intended to be printed is transcribed by a careful writer upon thin transparent paper: the engraver glues each of these written sheets, with its face downwards, upon a smooth tablet of pear or apple tree, or some other hard wood; and then with gravers and other instruments, he cuts the wood away in all those parts upon which he finds nothing traced [as in the fac-simile[7] in the margin]; thus leaving the reversed characters ready for printing.... When once the blocks are engraved, the paper is cut, and the ink is ready, one man with his brush can, without fatigue, print ten thousand sheets in a day. The block to be printed must be placed level, and firmly fixed. The man must have two brushes; one of them of a stiffer kind, which he can hold in his hand, and use at either end. He dips this into the ink, and rubs the block with it; taking care not to wet it too much, nor to leave it too dry.... The second brush is used to rub over the paper with a small degree of pressure, that it may take the impression: this it does easily, for not being sized with alum, it receives the ink the instant it comes in contact with it. It is only necessary that the brush should be passed over every part of the sheet with a greater or smaller degree of pressure, and repeated in proportion as the printer finds there is more or less ink upon the block.”

The number of copies which, according to Du Halde, a Chinese workman can print in a day, is greatly exaggerated. About four thousand, or four hundred an hour, is the utmost that the most expert workman would be able to throw off.

To the above account it may be added, that the blocks, each containing two pages, are frequently engraved on both sides; that the sheets printed are small, and impressed on

one side only; and that each sheet when dry is folded back, so as to present the appearance of a leaf impressed on both sides.

The history of printing in China, and the productions of the Chinese press, are subjects which Oriental bibliographers have more or less touched upon. Interesting as they are, there will probably be no occasion to allude to them in these pages more than once again.

But the history of books in Europe, the productions of the early printers in the various countries to which they carried their art, is one to which our subject is most closely allied; and European bibliography is a study to which many men of great ability have devoted themselves during the last three centuries, in Germany, Holland, England, Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, and other countries. To their labours all later writers on the subject are under manifold obligations.[8] But in attributing various undated books to one or other of the earliest established presses, guess-work, and the bias of national prejudice, have largely prevailed amongst even the most painstaking of European bibliographers. This unscientific method, long felt to be a reproach to learning and literature, has of late years been attempted to be remedied by a more close and critical examination of the Incunabula, or books printed in the Fifteenth century. “The method of arranging these early books under the countries, towns, and presses at which they were produced,” says Mr. Henry Bradshaw, the Librarian of the University of Cambridge, “is the only one which can really advance our knowledge of the subject. This is comparatively easy with dated books, though there is no safeguard against the

misleading nature of an erroneous date. But the study is of little use unless the bibliographer will be content to make such an accurate and methodical study of the types used and habits of printing observable at different presses, as to enable him to observe and be guided by these characteristics in settling the date of a book which bears no date on the surface. We do not want the *opinion* or *dictum* of any bibliographer, however experienced; we desire that the types and habits of each printer should be made a special subject of study, and those points brought forward which shew changes or advance from year to year, or where practicable, from month to month. When this is done, we have to say of any dateless or falsely dated book, that it contains such and such characteristics, and we therefore place it at such a point of time, the time we name being merely another expression for the characteristics we notice in the book. In fact each press must be looked upon as a *genus*, and each book as a *species*, and our business is to trace the more or less close connection of the different members of the family, according to the characters which they present to our observation."

The study thus defined is designated Palæotypography; and concerning it Mr. Bradshaw further says, "except Mr. Blades's monograph of Caxton's press,[9] the Hague *Catalogus*[10] and *Monumens Typographiques*[11] are the only books existing in any literature, so far as I know, which render the study of palæotypography in any way possible upon a proper basis. Germany, Italy, France, and Spain, are at present perfectly impracticable fields of work, and are, I fear, likely to remain so for some time to come."[12]

Respecting Mr. Bradshaw's own labours in this field of investigation, Mr. Frederick Müller of Amsterdam, an enthusiastic bibliographer of rare power, bears the following testimony:[13]—"Hardly anybody in England takes an interest in foreign bibliography—the only exception being that excellent bibliographer, Henry Bradshaw, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, who is examining with great enthusiasm the Incunabula Typographica, and who has lately arrived at most surprising and important results in this department.... I do not know which most to admire—the acumen of the conjectures about the places where some of the works were printed, or the clearness with which the writer treats several very difficult subjects.... This method of ascribing a work solely from the appearance of the types used, he carries to the utmost point of application.... Mr. Bradshaw is the first who turns to advantage the excellent lessons of the French and German bibliographers, and through him a new light will probably arise in English bibliography."

To the researches of Mr. Bradshaw and Mr. Blades, and to the labours of Mr. Ottley[14] and Mr. Humphreys,[15] in their last published works, I am greatly indebted. The interesting information they have accumulated I have freely made use of in the preparation of this volume, although I differ considerably from some of the conclusions which one or other of them has arrived at.

Footnote

Table of Contents

[1] “The multiplication of printed books and the consequent still greater multiplication of readers, created, what may be termed a literary public throughout England, and when the printed copies of a book from Caxton’s press were spread throughout this public, each member of it used a copy that was uniform with the copies used by all the rest. But before printing was known, and while copies of a book could be made in manuscript only, the transcribers were apt to introduce changes of spelling, of syntax, and of phrase, according to the dialect of the part of the country to which each copyist belonged. And the dialects of different parts of England differed then from each other in a far greater degree than any amount of variation which can at present be detected by the most zealous philologist. Moreover, each author wrote in his own dialect, or to speak more correctly, in the pure native English of his own part of England. Hence the diction of an author of those times in many cases appears to us more archaic than the diction of his contemporaries, or even of some of his predecessors. But in proportion as men of letters became familiar in their reading with the nearly uniform English language of printed books, they followed or approached that uniform English in their own writings. The language continued to receive changes by the introduction of new words and phrases, and by the zeal for imitating Latin models, which grew to excess in many of our prose writers not long after the close of the Fifteenth century. Many more modifications of etymology, and some of syntax, took place before the modern English language can be said to have been substantially established throughout the country; but that amount of uniform establishment never could have been effected at all, without the intervention and the extended use of the art of printing.”—Sir Edward S. Creasy’s *History of England*. 8vo. 1870. vol. ii. pp. 556–7.

What the Art of Printing did in this respect for England, it likewise did in all other countries to which it was carried, in greater or lesser degrees, according to the amount of freedom it enjoyed, or of restriction to which it, and the people to whom it spoke, were subjected.

[2] *Vide* Reformation of Poland, by Count V. Krasinski, 2 vols. 8vo. *Nisbet*, 1838–40.

[3] For assistance in this matter, I am much indebted to my father, Mr. Robert Skeen, under whose able teachings I was thoroughly instructed in, and made a master of my craft—the Art of Printing. I have also to acknowledge, with thanks, the material aid received from Mr. H. W. Caslon, the eminent Type-founder, as well as from my publishers, Messrs. Trübner and Co., of Paternoster Row.

[4] Southey's "Colloquies."

[5] A reference can scarcely be avoided, in connection with this subject, to the exclamation of the patriarch Job (ch. xix. 23, 24), "Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen, and lead, in the rock for ever!" The book of Job is commonly supposed to have been written either by Moses, when residing amongst the Midianites about 1520 years before the commencement of the Christian era, or by Elihu, one of the speakers in the book, which would probably carry its antiquity a century and a half or two centuries further back. The word translated 'printed' does not, however, bear the meaning in the original, which is now generally attached to it. It evidently refers to the method of inscribing records on rolls, made of the skins of animals, for the purpose of preserving them for the benefit of future generations, or on such other substances as were then used for that purpose; and in the texts quoted the modes of writing and the instruments for inscribing are expressly referred to. Plates of metal, and prepared leaves of the talipot palm, are to this day engraved and inscribed on, in Eastern countries, with iron 'styles,' for purposes of record. Books of the laws of Buddha exist on plates of gold, as well as on the more common olas; and although we do not know upon what material Moses transcribed the Law, which God himself commanded him to write, and to place in the side of the Ark of the Covenant, we may be certain that it would be written on the most imperishable, as well as the most portable of substances adapted for such a purpose, Moses being learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and having for his assistants the most skilful artisans of the age. The Ten Commandments we know were graven on tablets of stone hewn out of the rock. From tablets such as these, and from engraved plates, as well as from inscribed olas, copies and fac-similes might have been easily made by a process analogous to that of copper-plate printing; the only drawback being that in all such copies the printed characters would have been reversed. That the Hebrews must have been familiar with books, such as were referred to by Job, is clear. In Egypt, during the time of their residence in that country, Public Libraries existed:—"Over the mouldering door which led to the bibliothetical repository of the Memnonium, said to have been built about the time of Moses, Champollion read, written over the heads of Thoth and Safkh, (who were the male and female deities of arts, sciences, and literature), the

remarkably appropriate titles of ‘President of the Library,’ and ‘Lady of Letters.’” (Kitto’s *Cycl. of Bibl. Literature*, Art. WRITING). The Egyptians probably derived their knowledge of writing from Misraim the son of Ham, as did the Canaanites from Canaan the brother of Misraim, from whom they were descended. There is proof in the sculptured pictures and inscriptions in the oldest Egyptian monuments, of about the same age as the Great Pyramid, that 2200 years B. C., writing was an art well known at that early period. “Whatever the employment, or whatever the produce being brought to be laid at the prince’s feet, there were always scribes in attendance to take down the exact amount in writing on the property rolls.” (Vide *Life and Work at the Great Pyramid in 1865*, by C. PIAZZI SMYTH, Astronomer Royal, Scotland; and article in *Good Words*, Part VII, 1867, by the same author, p. 453.) When the Israelites took possession of the land of Canaan, among other great and walled cities which they captured was Debir, whose original name was Kirjath-sepher, or the City of Books, or Kirjath-sannah, the City of Letters, (Joshua xv. 49; Judges i. 11). This word “sannah” is evidently the same as “sannas,” the name given to oblong copper-plates, on which are engraved the record of the grants of lands, &c., made from very ancient times by the kings of Ceylon, to temples, chiefs, and others; and which are frequently, under that name, received in evidence in the law courts in disputes regarding landed property. They are, in fact, the title-deeds under which most of the

Siṇhalese gentry of ancient family hold their estates. These royal grants are sometimes on plates of silver, and occasionally cut in the solid rock or on massive stone tablets.

[6] Plaster casts of inscriptions might also have suggested the same idea. The use of plaster, for the purposes of inscriptions, dates back to a very ancient era. It seems to have been as old as the art of writing itself. We learn from the book of Deuteronomy (xxvii. 2–4), that while the Children of Israel were yet wandering in the desert, after their exodus from Egypt, it was ordained, that when they had passed into Canaan,—the land which should be given them,—great stones, plaistered over with plaister, should be set up, on which stones should be written “very plainly” all the words of the law.

“Sy-chong-ŋgén-pon,”

the name of a Chinese Song-book.

[8] The following alphabetical list includes the most distinguished of these writers:—Andrès, Antonio, Baillet, Bayle, Blount, Bouterwek, Brucker, Brunet, Buhle, Chalmers, Collier, Corniani, De Bure, De Vries, Dibdin, Ebert, Eichhorn, Falkenstein, Fischer, Foppens, Frere, Gesner, Ginguéné, Goujet, Graesse, Greswell, Hallam, Hain, Heeren, Horne, Kästner, Mallinckrot, Maittaire, Maitland, Meiners, Mendez, Montucla, Naudé, Niceron, Panzer, Portal, Santander, Sismondi, Sprengel, Sotheby, Tennemann, Tiraboschi, Vanderhaeghen, Van der Meersch, Van Iseghem, Van Praet, Watt, Wolf, Würdtwein, Zapf.

[9] The Life and Typography of William Caxton, by William Blades. 2 vols. 4to. with 57 fac-simile illustrations. *London*, 1861–63.

[10] Catalogus Librorum Sæc. XVI. impressorum, in Bibliotheca Regia Haganâ asservatorum, 8vo. *Hagae*, 1856.

[11] Monumens Typographiques des Pays Bas au XVe Siècle, 20 livraisons, imp. 4to. 120 plates of fac-similes. *La Haye*, 1857–66. Of this magnificent work only 200 copies were printed.

[12] Classified Index of Fifteenth Century Books in the Collection of the late M. J. de Meyer of Ghent. 8vo. *London*, 1870. pp. 15–16.

[13] Trübner’s American and Oriental Literary Record, July, 1870.

[14] Inquiry concerning the Invention of Printing, by W. Y. Ottley. 4to. 37 plates, and other engravings. *London*, 1863.

[15] A History of the Art of Printing: Its Invention and Progress to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century, by H. Noel Humphreys. imp. 4to. 105 photo-lithographic fac-similes. *London*, 1869.

Early Typography.
CHAPTER II.

Table of Contents

DATE OF THE ORIGIN OF TYPOGRAPHY IN EUROPE.—ALLEGED EARLY ENGRAVINGS.—PLAYING CARDS.—BLOCK-BOOKS.—MR. F. HOLT'S HYPOTHESIS.—EVIDENCE OF COSTUME.—GERMAN "BRIEF-MALERS."—DECREE OF GOVERNMENT OF VENICE.—STATE OF EUROPE IN THE MIDDLE AGES.—CULTIVATION OF CLASSICAL LITERATURE AT THE CLOSE OF THE FOURTEENTH AND COMMENCEMENT OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

IT has been a question much debated, whether the Art of Printing was not introduced to Europe from the East at a much earlier period than that generally assigned as the date of its invention; and we are informed by Klaproth, that it might have been known in Europe a hundred and fifty years prior to its discovery by the Germans, if Europeans had been able to read and translate the Persian historians, as the Chinese method of printing is clearly explained in the *Djemm'a-et-tewarikh*, by Rachid-Eddin, who finished this immense work about the year 1310.

On this subject, Mr. William Savage, a well-known printer, and a gentleman to whom the public and the profession are indebted for several valuable works on the art, states, in the preface to a volume published in 1841,—"The dates given of the introduction of the practice into Europe by previous writers, are unquestionably erroneous, as we have conclusive evidence of its being followed as a profession for nearly a century before the earliest date they give:"—and

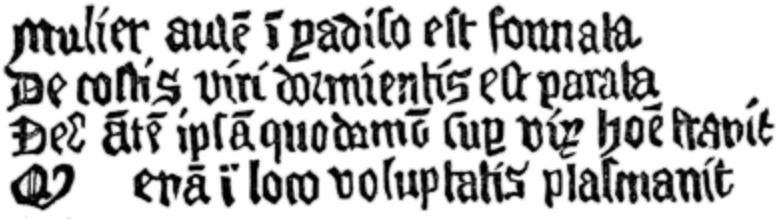
he announced his intention of embodying the facts and information he had been for a long period collecting, in another work, as hitherto, he declares, there has in reality been but little said on the History or Practice of Printing, the numerous works on the subject being chiefly copies from one or two of the earlier writers. This is true enough. From the very nature of the case it can scarcely be otherwise, until and unless the discovery of fresh facts, or the investigations of fresh inquirers lead to conclusions different to those which had previously been generally received.

It is possible, nay probable, that a knowledge of the art, as practised in China, may have been carried to Europe by the Venetian travellers, or traders, at a very early date; but, as no account is known to exist that such really was the case, so no certain conclusion on the subject can be arrived at. Whether it was so or not, there is little difficulty in supposing that on many occasions attempts might be made similar to that contained in the much disputed account given by Papillon of the discovery at Bagneux, a village near Mont-Rouge, in the library of M. De Greder, a Swiss Captain, of a work, lent to M. De Greder by M. Sperchtvel, another Swiss Officer, supposed to have been printed in 1284 or 1285. This work, which has never since been seen, is said to have borne the following inscription in old Italian.

“The heroic actions, represented in figures, of the great and magnanimous Macedonian king, the bold and valiant Alexander; dedicated, presented, and humbly offered to the most holy Father, Pope Honorius IV, the glory and support of the Church, and to our illustrious and generous father and mother, by us Allessandro-Alberico Cunio, Cavaliere, and

Isabella Cunio, twin brother and sister: first reduced, imagined, and attempted to be executed in relief with a small knife on blocks of wood made even and polished by this learned and dear sister, continued and finished by us together, at Ravenna, from the eight pictures of our invention, painted six times larger than here represented; engraved, explained by verses, and thus marked upon the paper to perpetuate the number of them, and to enable us to present them to our relations and friends, in testimony of gratitude, friendship, and affection. All this was done and finished by us when only 16 years of age."

Interesting as this statement is, and correct as it possibly may be, it can scarcely be accepted as an historical fact, inasmuch as no one but the alleged discoverer appears ever to have seen the originals.



[Copy of an Inscription on the first leaf of the "Speculum Humanæ Salvationis."]

Besides the preceding doubtful account we have notices of a print in the Library of Lyons with the date 1384. Specimens of engravings of playing cards, as well as of saints, said to have been produced in the years 1390 and 1400 are also extant. From the year 1400 to 1440 other and more elaborate engravings, of a devotional character, are likewise to be met with. One of the most curious, representing St. Christopher carrying the infant Saviour across the sea, is in the possession of Earl Spencer, and

bears the date 1423. A few years later we find similar prints accompanied with explanatory inscriptions or texts of Scripture placed beneath them; next came whole series of these prints published together as a book; and lastly, the small Latin Grammars of Donatus, the common school-books of the day, engraved and printed in like manner. These productions are distinguished by Bibliographers as Block-books, and nine or ten different specimens are known to exist. Of these the most remarkable are the *Biblia Pauperum*, or Poor Man's Bible,[16] a book containing 40 pages of quarto, or small folio prints, with several engravings with inscriptions upon each page, supposed to have been executed (most probably at Zwolle[17] in Holland) between the years 1420 and 1435; and the *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*,[18] or Mirror of Salvation, a book containing 63 leaves in the two Latin, and 62 in the two Dutch editions, (each in small folio), 58 of which are ornamented with engravings representing stories from the Old and New Testaments, beneath which are more copious explanatory inscriptions than those in the "Biblia Pauperum." These editions are supposed to have been published between the years 1430 and 1457.

Mean as these books would seem if issued from the press at the present day, they were wonderful productions for the age in which they appeared; and although the first named was called the 'Poor Man's Bible,' or 'Book of the Poor,' it was only in comparison with the cost of a written copy of the Holy Scriptures, which was worth the, in that day, enormous sum of £100.[19] As very few copies are now in existence, (and those generally in an imperfect state), they

have literally become worth more than their weight in gold: a copy of the *Biblia Pauperum* having been bought by the Duke of Marlborough, after a keen competition at an auction sale in 1813, for the almost fabulous sum of £257.

It was from these early Block-books, or Donatuses, that Gutenberg, as we learn from the statement of Ulric Zell,—a contemporary, and working printer at Mentz with the original inventors while the art was yet a secret,—derived his idea of printing as at present practised. In the words of Mr. Charles Knight, in his interesting biography of the venerable Caxton, the Father of the Art in England,—"To seize upon the idea, that the text or legend might be composed of separate letters, capable of re-arrangement after the impressions were taken off, so as to be applied without new cutting to other texts and legends, was to secure the principle upon which the printing art depended. It was easy to extend the principle from a few lines to a whole page, and from one page to many, so as to form a book."

Such, according to the almost universally adopted belief, were the successive steps which led to the invention of TYPOGRAPHY. And for nearly a century no one had ventured to doubt that either images of saints, or characters for playing cards, were first printed from engraved wooden blocks, as cheap substitutes for the works of the draftsman and painter;—that these were succeeded by subjects of sacred history with explanatory legends cut in wood, imitative of the art of the illuminator, and the caligraphy of the scribes or professional writers;—that these again were followed by Donatuses;—and that from these Donatuses, printed from

solid blocks, Gutenberg obtained his first idea of the Typographic Art.

But in 1868 an altogether new hypothesis was propounded at the annual congress of the British Archæological Association, held that year at Cirencester. It was there maintained, in a paper read by Mr. Henry F. Holt, that printing from moveable types, as practised in Europe, preceded in point of time that of printing from engravings on wood. After a careful inspection of the celebrated print of St. Christopher, in Earl Spencer's library at Althorp, he contended,—"that the date 1423 is not that of the engraving, but of the legend beneath it, which had been copied by the engraver, and has reference to the jubilee year of the Saint; that it has been printed by a press, and with printer's ink; and, what is more important, upon paper which exhibits the well-known water-mark of the bull or heifer's head, with a flower issuant between the horns, which was used by Faust, and supposed to have been made for him.[20] He has shewn, that the discovery of this supposed early engraving instigated the fabrication of several similar, which were stained with coffee to give them the appearance of age. He further maintains, that the block-books,—originally, in his opinion, produced by the celebrated painter and engraver Albrecht Durer,—were cheap substitutes for the highly-priced productions of the Printing press." And he challenges literature "to prove, that a copy of the block-book known as the 'Biblia Pauperum,' was actually in any known library, public or private, prior to 1485, or known then to be in existence."[21] "All this has," as Mr. Planché observes, "naturally aroused a host of

antagonists, who have more or less courteously contradicted, without convincing Mr. Holt, by the production of any incontrovertible fact, which would refute the evidence he adduces in support of his arguments. Alone and undismayed, he still gallantly defies all comers."

Guided by the test of costume,—"a test which he has never known applied in vain, when called to the assistance of the critical inquirer,"—Mr. Planché, while abstaining from the expression of an opinion upon the principal point in dispute, shews, as a matter of fact in regard to playing cards, that "with the exception of those by the Master of 1466 [an engraver only known by that designation], and a set of "tarots," called the Mantegna Cards,[22] on one of which is the date 1483, all the specimens of printed playing cards that he has met with display the unmistakeable character of the fashions of Germany, France, and England, during the latter half of the Fifteenth century, and the greatest portion those of the very latest part,—Louis XI, Charles VIII, of France; Edward IV, and Henry VII, of England; and Maximilian I, Emperor of Germany."[23]

So far, then, the evidence of the playing cards seems to support the hypothesis of Mr. Holt.

[The Knave of Bells, 1390.]

Most of the early prints are certainly of an extremely rude type, consisting chiefly of mere outlines of figures; in the one case of saints, copied from the illuminated Missals, and in the other, of characters for playing cards similar to the foregoing fac-simile, afterwards coloured in imitation of paintings. Very probably they may have been made, in the first instance, by means of stencil plates; if not, the impressions were obtained from the engraved blocks by friction, after the Chinese manner. Whichever was the