AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF PRINTING: TO WHICH IS ADDED THE HISTORY OF PRINTING IN COLOURS

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An outline of the history of printing: to which is added the history of printing in colours by Robert Alexander Peddie

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THE HISTORY OF PRINTING IN COLOURS.

BY

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The History of Printing

PRINTING with moveable types was invented either in Holland or Germany about the year 1440. The name of the inventor and the place of the invention are two of the most hotly contested questions in history. Gutenberg at Mainz, Coster at Haarlem, Waldfoghel at Avignon, Castaldi at Feltre—all these are mentioned as claimants. The value of their respective pretensions has been summed up by a well-known authority in the words: "Holland has books but no documents, France has documents but no books, Italy has neither books nor documents, while Germany has both books and documents." There exist books certainly printed in Holland which are held by some to be earlier than 1454, which is the first printed date of the Mainz press. They are attributed to the press of Laurens Janszoon Coster of Haarlem, but this is not supported by any direct evidence. As to the Avignon claim, this rests upon some documents in the legal archives of the town. Waldfoghel, who was a goldsmith, was in the possession of a method of artificial writing which, by the description given, must have been printing. No work done by him or by his method has been identified.

The claim of Castaldi, of Feltre, appears to rest upon very shallow foundations, and, in fact, it is difficult to see anything but tradition in the story. When we turn to Mainz we are on more solid ground. From the first Mainz press—it is difficult to associate John Gutenberg definitely with it—a broadside Indulgence was issued with the printed date of 1454. Through the haze of tradition, theory and speculation, this Indulgence emerges as a definite fact, and from this date begins the real history of printing with moveable type. From what we know of the operations of type-founding to-day we can see that it must have taken many years of experiment and of failure to enable the printer of the 1454 Indulgence to arrive at the final solution of the problem. From the press of Mainz also was produced the first Latin Bible, originally known as the Mazarine Bible,

afterwards described as the Gutenberg Bible, and now called by all good doubting bibliographers the "forty-two line Bible," which title commits no one. This Bible was printed before August, 1456, as a copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale has a rubricator's date of that year. In 1457 appeared the Mainz Psalter, the first book to bear the name of its printer, the name of the place where it was printed, and the date of its production. To add to this, it contained the first attempts at colour printing and the first ornamental initials. The printers were Johann Fust and Peter Schöffer, and this Psalter, together with the other books from their press, showed a great advance from the work of the two first presses in Mainz.

The work of these pioneer printers must have been much hampered by the poverty of their implements. There is little doubt that the earliest press used was a simple linen-press, and a small one at that. The ink was an invention, if not in itself, in its application. With these poor instruments, and with type that must without doubt have been irregular and badly cast, the pioneers of the printing art produced the magnificent works which remained perhaps unequalled, and certainly not surpassed, for many years.

From the Mainz press, with its colour-printed initials, we pass to Strassburg. Here as early as 1460, and perhaps two years earlier, Johann Mentelin was printing and using a type which began to show the first modification towards the round or Roman type. Everything up to this time had been printed in the type which is known generically as the Gothic or Black Letter type. About the year 1464 a press was established at Strassburg which used a definite Roman type. The printer, formerly known as the "R" printer, owing to the curious form of the capital R in the fount of type he used, and whose books were originally confused with those of Mentelin, is now identified as Adolph Rusch, the son-in-law of Mentelin. The first Roman type, therefore, is found in Germany, although we have to look to Italy for its later development. The next press to be mentioned as showing development in the art is that of Albrecht Pfister, of Bamberg. Pfister is a mysterious person, being connected in some way with the earliest presses in Mainz, and by some is looked upon as the printer of the "thirty-six line Bible," which by most bibliographers is attributed to the printer of the 1454 Indulgence. The interesting point about Pfister is that seven out of the nine books from his press are illustrated with woodcuts, and form the first attempt

at book illustration. None of them can be placed later than 1462. No more illustrated books occur until about 1470.

The next important event is the establishment of printing in Italy. Sweynheym and Pannartz, two German craftsmen, started work in Subiaco, near Rome, in 1465. They used a type which was not Gothic and not quite Roman, and is generally described as Semi-Roman. It was not based on the same style of writing as the first German Roman, as will be seen when the two are compared. Two years later, in 1467, when these printers moved to Rome, their type became still more Roman in character; but it was not until 1471 that the new character, which was really the older form of letter (this is recognised by the Germans, who to this day call it Antiqua), reached its highest point, in the type used by Nicolas Jensen, a Frenchman, who printed at Venice. This type, perfect in outline and balance, has held its artistic supremacy to the present day. The Roman type failed, however, in its competition with the Gothic, which held the field all over Europe during the fifteenth century.

Up to 1465 the Gothic and the Roman were the only type-faces in use. In that year Greek type was used by Sweynheym and Pannartz at Subiaco, and by Fust and Schöffer at Mainz. Previously a space had been left where a Greek quotation was required, and it had been written in by hand, or in some cases stamped in. The first book to contain a full Greek text was printed by Ferrandus at Brescia about 1473. It was the "Batrachomuomachia" of Homer, and the book also contained a Latin translation of the work. The development of Greek printing was rapid in Italy, but slow in the other countries of Europe.

Printing began in Switzerland about 1468 at Basel, and in 1470 in France at Paris. It is strange that Paris was so late in introducing the printing press, as there is no doubt that specimens of the art had been seen there in 1466, and it is believed that Jensen was sent by Charles VII to learn the new art as early as 1458. On his return to Paris, finding his patron, the king, dead, and encountering considerable opposition from the scribes and copyists, he went to Italy and ultimately established his press at Venice. The first Paris press was established under the patronage and by the exertions of professors of the University of Paris, and the press itself was set up within the precincts. The printers, of course, were Germans, and their work was largely reprints of classical texts. The Roman type used by these printers was of a very high artistic character, Mr. Gordon Duff, in fact,

going so far as to say that it far surpasses Jensen's in beauty. By 1473 printing was definitely established in the Low Countries, both Utrecht and Alost producing dated books in that year. In 1475 occurs the first use of Hebrew type. Piove di Sacco and Reggio di Calabria in Italy, and Esslingen in Germany, were the towns where it was first used. Many Hebrew presses were set up in Italy during the last quarter of the fifteenth century, and several in Spain and Portugal.

In 1475 the art reached Austria, and in the same year Spain. The first book printed in England was issued from the press of William Caxton in 1477. The false date 1468 appears in an Oxford edition of Rufinus on Jerome's exposition of the symbols of the Apostles. This date has given rise to a considerable amount of controversy. Richard Atkyns in 1664 alleged that this book was printed by Frederick Corsellis, a workman from the press of Haarlem, who was bribed to come to England by order of Henry VI. This story was based on a manuscript alleged to be in the Library at Lambeth Palace. No one, however, has seen that manuscript from Atkyns' time to the present day, and as it is certain that the book dated 1468 was printed in 1478 by the first Oxford printer, I think it may be taken that the existence of the said manuscript is very doubtful. However, the king (Charles II) believed Atkyns' story and gave him the patent for law-book printing. The press in England was not responsible for any great advance in the art—in fact, English printing of the fifteenth century was of a comparatively low order.

About 1481 or 1482 music is found printed with type. In 1473 a few notes were printed by C. Fyner at Esslingen. The principal use of music was in service books, and it was always printed in two impressions up to the end of the fifteenth century. The notes are generally in black and the stave lines in red. The earlier printers either left a blank space for the rubricator to write in the music, as in the 1457 Psalter, or in a few cases printed in the stave lines, leaving the notes to be added later by hand.

A further addition to the resources of the art was the cutting of Slavonic type, which is found in at least two varieties in Cracow in 1491 and at Cettinje, Montenegro, before the close of the century. A Secretary type following closely the French law hand is found used at Paris and Rouen in the last decade of the century. A Rouen book printed for Richard Pynson, of London (Statham's Abridgment), is a good specimen of this type.