

# **A BRIEF SURVEY OF PRINTING: HISTORY AND PRACTICE**

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A brief survey of printing: history and practice by Stanley Morison & Holbrook Jackson

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**STANLEY MORISON & HOLBROOK JACKSON**

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BY  
STANLEY MORISON  
&  
HOLBROOK JACKSON



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NOTE

*A small portion of the following outline appeared in a more condensed form in a printing supplement issued with the Manchester Guardian May 23 . 1922*

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## A SKETCH OF PRINTING HISTORY

### § 1

#### THE BEGINNINGS

The form of the written book, the ancestor of the printed book, was the lineal descendant through many stages of the author's own personal copy. The scribes imitated the author and the printers imitated the scribes. Hence it is that the title page, the running headline, the chapter division, and the index are not to be found in early printed books. Progress in so revolutionary an invention as printing was necessarily slow. The scribes naturally hated its merciless rivalry, and the Church, though quick to seize upon the invention for the printing of indulgence-certificates, liturgical, legal, and theological works, took care to control the new craft. The State itself was suspicious of sedition. Schoolmasters, however, seem to have welcomed the craft with enthusiasm, and the favourite grammatical treatise, called the *Donatus* from its author's name, Aelius Donatus, enjoyed a considerable vogue. It was apparently the first book printed with movable types, and fragments of many early editions testify to its very considerable

circulation. Gutenberg printed it in 1448 or so. Broadsheets and bibles, psalters, law books, and commentaries followed. Slowly but surely the scribe was superseded. At first the printer kindly left him a space at the chapter heads for a decorated initial, to be inserted at the scribe's leisure. Red and blue paragraphing was also jobbed out to the writers, but when two-colour printing became practicable the rubricators were out of work, and sought refuge in the establishments of bookbinders, where they filled in their time as rulers of the page, i.e., they squared the book with thin red rules. Finally this supererogatory work was taken from them and they disappeared altogether. It took the printers sixty years or more in which to emancipate the book from the manuscript tradition and to place their craft upon an independent basis. The title-page began as a mere two-line text printed high up on the page. The printer's trade-mark or device, a pictorial woodcut, subsequently became an integral part of the title-page, and, while the printer's name was to continue in its position at the end of the book, it became usual to foot the title-page with the name of the bookseller or publisher. In the sixteenth century the spread of learning, the heat of controversy, and the stimulus of commercial gain did much to develop the craft. The activity of the Aldi at Venice in the field of these plain