

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE SOCIETY  
OF ANTIQUARIES OF LONDON, AT AN  
EXHIBITION OF EARLY PRINTED BOOKS, TO  
WHICH IS SUBJOINED AN ADDRESS, DELIVERED  
AT AN AXHIBITION OF ILLUMINATED  
MANUSCRIPTS, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12TH,  
1861, THURSDAY, JUNE 6TH, 1861**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649271955

An address delivered before the Society of antiquaries of London, at an exhibition of Early Printed Books, to which is subjoined an address, delivered at an exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts, Thursday, December 12th, 1861, Thursday, June 6th, 1861 by William Tite

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Cover @ 2017

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# **WILLIAM TITE**

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ADDRESS  
DELIVERED BEFORE  
THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES  
OF LONDON,  
ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12TH, 1861,  
AT AN EXHIBITION OF

**Early Printed Books.**

TO WHICH IS SUBJOINED

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY, JUNE 6TH, 1861,

AT AN EXHIBITION OF

**Illuminated Manuscripts.**

BY

WILLIAM TITE, M.P. F.R.S., V.P.S.A.



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LONDON:  
M.DCCC.LXII.  
[NOT PUBLISHED.]

250. h. 175.

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IT HAP'D ME TO BEHOLD  
UPON A BOOKE, WRITTEN WITH LETTERS OLD,  
AND THEREUPON A CERTAIN THING TO LERNE—  
FOR OUT OF THE OLD FIELDS, AS MEN SAITH,  
COMETH AL THIS NEW CORNE FRO YERE TO YERE;  
AND OUT OF ~~Old~~ <sup>Old</sup> BOOKES, IN GOOD FAITH,  
COMETH AL THIS NEW SCIENCE THAT MEN LERE.  
BUT NOW TO PURPOSE AS OF THIS MATIERE—

CHAUCER'S ASSEMBLY OF FOULES.

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## AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF LONDON,

AT AN EXHIBITION OF

### Early Printed Books.

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GENTLEMEN:—

On the 6th of June last, I had the gratification of addressing you in these Apartments, at an Exhibition of Mediæval Illuminated Manuscripts which was probably the most extraordinary display of the kind ever witnessed. To those of our Associates and Friends who are familiar with such productions, and can discriminate the peculiar ages and countries, Schools of Art, and religious symbolisms, contained in their pictorial decorations, they must have been inexpressibly beautiful;—but the sight of them delighted also a great number of other Visitors, subsequently admitted by the Fellows of this Society;—who might not equally appreciate them, either as Antiquaries or admirers of Ancient Art.

The Exhibition which is placed before you to-night, is of a far less fascinating and attractive character, *externally*, but it is of the highest intrinsic value; since it really represents the Progress of Humanity in Religious-knowledge, Literature, Science, and the Arts of Life. On merely glancing at the Typographical treasures before you, every one must feel the powerful force of the words of Foxe the Martyrologist, which may be most appropriately recited to you almost as my Lay-text, on this occasion—  
“HEREBY TONGUES ARE KNOWN, KNOWLEDGE GROWETH, JUDGMENT INCREASED, BOOKS ARE DISPERSED, THE SCRIPTURE IS READ, STORIES BE OPENED, TIMES COMPARED, TRUTH DISCUSSED, FALSEHOOD DETECTED AND WITH FINGER POINTED OUT, AND ALL THIS THROUGH THE BENEFIT OF PRINTING.”

The ages of our specimens of Illuminated Manuscripts at the former Exhibition, extended over Seven Centuries; but the numerous volumes which are before you to-night, hardly reach to Two Hundred years, although the earliest of them belong to the Heroic Undated period of the History of Typography. They have been most liberally furnished by our Fellows and Friends; and I have myself also had the gratification of contributing to the collection. Without attempting to anticipate anything which any Gentlemen may be prepared to offer to this Meeting in illustration of particular specimens,—you will perhaps kindly allow me to commence our proceedings, by addressing you with a few general remarks on these Monuments of Ancient Typography, which may serve to point out more explicitly the principal features of interest in this collection: and these appear to me to be resolved into the Four Classes following:—

- I. BLOCK-BOOKS.
- II. EARLY PRINTED BOOKS.
- III. HOLB.—ILLUSTRATED GOTHIC HOURS.
- IV. TYPOGRAPHICAL CURIOSITIES.

In calling your attention to BLOCK-BOOKS, I am, of course, not about to instruct THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES in the signification of the term; and still less do I intend to enter on the multitude of minute Variations existing in the different extant copies of those books, which have been preserved by the elaborate investigations of Heineken and Papillon; Ottley, Singer, and Dibdin; Berjeau and Sotheby. But in order not to pass over so interesting a portion of the History of Printing without some illustration, I will request permission to say a few words on a point closely connected with them, which has frequently occupied my consideration, though it has been hitherto but little discussed. I refer to the very obscure nature of the Block-Books themselves to such as were unlearned:—and of this I can give no better illustration than the most popular, and perhaps best known of those Books, THE BIBLIA PAUPERUM.

The First Edition of that work consists of Forty folio Engravings on wood, ingeniously composed of subjects and the effigies of personages taken from The Old and New Testaments; of which a series of Fac Similes was published by M. J. P. Berjeau in 1859. In his Introduction to that volume, he says that “the *Biblia Pauperum*, the Poor Man’s Bible, is so called, because it was intended, by presenting a mere summary of some of the most important characteristics of both The Old and New Testaments, and by speaking with its figures to the eyes of the unlearned, to popularise the contents of a work so expensive by its bulk, that, before the invention of printing, the possession of a copy was only within the reach of a very small number of rich individuals or monastic corporations.”

This statement appears to me to be but a part of the truth only; as any one may be disposed to admit, who will look at the very artificial arrangement of the prints in this curious book. It is to be observed also, that the text with which it is interspersed, would be as obscure as ever to the unlearned poor; and it is not exceedingly elucidatory to even such as can



read it; but it requires either to be explained or carefully considered, so that all the interesting parallels and connections in the several pictures may be rightly apprehended.

A copy of M. Berjeau's edition of this work is placed before you: and you will see that the Engravings are uniformly divided into three horizontal lines, which are again separated into three compartments; a gothic architectural frame-work enclosing the whole. In the centre above, is the turret of the edifice, having two arches or windows, in which appear two half-length figures of Prophets, with their names beneath them, and some appropriate passage taken from their prophecies inscribed on long scrolls below. In the vacant space on each side of the tower, is an inscription in very rude gothic letters, full of difficult contractions, in which the subjects in the next division below are briefly expressed from the books of The Old Testament and the Gospels. The second stage of the building contains in the centre one great event taken from the life of Jesus Christ; having on the left a typical subject from The Old Testament, and on the right another taken from the Gospels; and beneath each of the latter are two explanatory lines of rhyming Latin verses. In the lowest stage of all the pictures, are two more arches like those above, with the figures of two other prophets, having their names, scrolls inscribed with their prophecies, and explanatory verses in rhyming Latin printed beneath them.

Although all these subjects and inscriptions are intimately dependent on, and illustrate, each other, I would now, with great deference submit the enquiry, *Whether it be possible, that the Uninstructed Poor could derive much benefit from these pictures, without having the connection of the several parts explained and the text read to them?* But if we can have the charity to think it likely, that even before the Reformation, there might have been pious and zealous Missionaries who travelled through the forests and remote districts, carrying with them these rude prints, discoursing on them to the peasants, and then occasionally leaving one to be stuck on a cottage-wall;—we can at once understand how naturally the name of "The Poor Man's Bible" originated, and how that by means of it "to the Poor the Gospel was preached."

M. Berjeau observes, that although this book has been long known in Germany, France, and England, by its popular title, in the language peculiar to each nation, as well as by the Latin *Biblia Pauperum*,—that name has been frequently disputed by bibliographers, on the ground that the engravings really represent the historiated windows of the Convent of Hirschan in Swabia. He appears to have shewn that this is not probable as an historical fact; but it must be admitted that the compositions have in them very much of fenestral-art, and might possibly have been really taken from the windows of some church or religious house, where the brethren were accustomed to explain the subjects painted on them to occasional visitors. All such historical windows may be made most interesting by explanation: as may be seen in the text to the "*Vitraux Peints de la Cathédrale de Bourges*," a splendid publication illustrated by MM. Martin and Cahier; and even in the strange bizarre volume set forth by Thomas Gent in 1762, which he called "*The most delectable, scriptural, and pious*

*History of the famous and magnificent Great Eastern Window, according to beautiful portraiture, in St. Peter's Cathedral, York. Impressed by the Author in St. Peter's Gate."*

But if the *Biblia Pauperum*, with the contents of which, as generally derived from The Holy Scriptures, all might be supposed to be familiar, so much information is required,—what must have been the extent of teaching wanted to enable even ordinary persons, before the middle of the Fifteenth century, to understand and to profit by the pictures of two other celebrated Block-Books, called *Ars Memorandi*, and *Historia Virginis Mariæ ex Cantica Canticorum*? The first of these was designed to convey by the means of a large figure, typical of one of the Evangelists, accompanied by a number of pictorial emblems,—a knowledge of the principal events recorded in his Gospel. In the absence of the originals, let any one look in proof of this argument at the large fac-similes given by Mr. Sotheby and Dr. Dibdin's *Bibliotheca Spenceriana*, or even at the greatly improved reductions of all the four Evangelical effigies, which will be found in the *Bibliographical Decameron*, Vol. I. Third Day, p. 132-135.

The volume of impressions from Engraved blocks designed from the *Canticles*, consists of Thirty-two subjects, in which the Spouse and the Church are considered as being visibly typified in the person of the Blessed Virgin. This spiritualising would require much careful instruction by the teachers of the common people: especially if Mr. Sotheby's explanation of it may be admitted, that it was "one of the earliest promulgated auxiliaries to the Reformation of the Church." I cannot leave this very remarkable volume without observing to you that, notwithstanding the grotesqueness of the designs, they are full of curious costume, architectural antiquities, and representations of manners. The female figures also, are often delineated with wonderful grace and beauty, as may be seen in Mr. Sotheby's fac-similes, and in M. Berjeau's reproduction of the whole series of prints, published in 1860, both of which are placed before you.

All the Block-Books of this Heroic Age of Printing were not, however, quite so obscure. The volume called *Ars Moriendi*, at once addressed itself to all understandings, in the grotesque figures of a dying person in his bed, attacked by the remembrance of his former sins and follies, and present infirmities and temptations, in the visible forms of hideous fiends: counteracted by earthly comfort, and spiritual assistance and hope, in the form of friends, ministers, and angels. Such thoughts would be readily understood by all, however rudely they might be expressed.

These volumes, as well as all the other Block-Books hitherto discovered, are most accurately described and excellently represented in numerous specimens in the late Mr. S. Leigh Sotheby's fine work on the subject, published in 1858, and already referred to. The first of them which is noticed is entitled *Sancti Johannis Apocalypsis*, and it contains a series of Forty-eight engraved pages, intended to represent pictorially the Visions recorded in St. John's Book of the Revelations. I have placed before you for exhibition a copy of this very curious work, in which the prints are coarsely though characteristically coloured.

I will not pursue the subject of Block-Books any further than to observe, that the specimens of them which are now extant, appear to be between twenty and thirty in number; exhibiting, however, very numerous editions, as shewn by the many distinct variations in the re-engravings of the same subjects. This circumstance indicates their extreme popularity; and it seems also to prove that the prints were frequently dispersed separately: as the possession of the whole series would generally be out of the reach of the common people in Holland and Germany, however low might have been their original price.

All these volumes belong to the Undated and most ancient part of the History of Foreign Printing, before the Invention of Moveable Types had led to the production of works more substantially valuable and useful. Those which were printed in the transition-period were partly Block-books, and some others are now accepted as having belonged to the very earliest volumes produced by Separate Types. These appear to have consisted of the works of grammatical instruction usually known by the name of *Donatus*, the tutor of St. Jerome, who compiled the grammar by which he was taught the Latin language.

The real History of the Typographical Art must be dated, so far as any probable period can be assigned to it, from the general Use of Moveable Types; and the appearance of Books produced in different Cities, with a certain Year, and the Imprint of a certain Place attached to them: for almost as soon as the wonderful Invention was known to exist, all the principal European States became desirous of benefiting by it. The periods of undisputed dated specimens of books printed at these places, is under half a century: and perhaps it will not be inappropriate to this subject if I recite to you some of them, as they are recorded in Dr. Henry Cotton's excellent *Typographical Gazetteer* published in 1825.

MENZT—1457	BRUGES AND BRESCIA—1473
COLOGNE—1466	BRUXELLES AND WESTMINSTER—1474
ROME—1467	LEYDEN—1476
OXFORD—1468	ANTWERP AND LONDON—1480
VENICE AND MILAN—1469	LEIPZIG—1481
PARIS—1470	HARLAEM AND MAGDEBURG—1483
BOLOGNA, FLORENCE, AND	UTRECHT—1484
STRASBURG—1471	MADRID—1499

These notices bring us to the Second division of this Address, which comprises EARLY PRINTED BOOKS: but under that title I propose to confine myself to an account of such as were produced in This Country; with a few observations on the Introduction of the Art of Printing into England, as naturally leading us to WILLIAM CAXTON.

It must be very well known to all our friends who are acquainted with Ancient Typography, that there exist *Eight Copies of a Volume indisputably bearing the Imprint of Oxford, and dated 1468, but Without any Name of the Printer.* This is usually called "THE OXFORD BOOK;" and