

THE GUTENBERG BIBLE AS A TYPOGRAPHICAL MONUMENT

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On the right bank of the Danube, about fifty miles west of Vienna, lies the town of Melk, with a population numbering something less than three thousand. The town is probably of Celtic origin, and was well known to the Romans. An isolated granite rock towers above it for two hundred feet, & on this rock there has stood since 1089 a Benedictine Abbey. The Abbey has always had an important place in both the secular and the ecclesiastical history of Lower Austria, and it appears in the Nibelungenlied and in other epics and chronicles. From 1702 to 1736 a new building in the baroque style was erected by the fifty-second abbot, and its large scale and commanding position make it one of the finest edifices on the upper river. A handsome hall holds the abbatial library of 70,000 volumes, a

library rich in manuscripts and in early printed books. Of incunabula alone (i.e. of books printed before 1501) it has no fewer than 868 (four times as many as Yale), and the catalogue of these rarities published in 1901 includes two German Bibles & twenty Latin Bibles printed in the Fifteenth Century. One of these Latin Bibles the librarian describes in brief fashion, but he adds to his description the words "A true jewel." To him who understands, his restraint was eloquent, for he had before him one of the finest copies of the first Bible ever printed, and in our western civilization the first book ever printed. It is the coming of this Bible to Yale that we are celebrating to-day.

The Great War made changes at Melk as in other parts of Austria, and the monks sold the Bible last year to Mr. Edward Goldston, a London bookseller. Mr. Goldston consigned it

to the Anderson Galleries in New York, where it was sold on February 15th last to Dr. Abraham S. Wolf Rosenbach, the well-known New York & Philadelphia dealer, for \$106,000. From Dr. Rosenbach it was bought by Mrs. Edward S. Harkness of New York, who gave it to Yale in memory of Mrs. Stephen V. Harkness, the donor of our Memorial Quadrangle. The Bible is a fitting memorial of a princely giver.

This is not the time and place to consider the surpassing importance of the book as the first printed edition of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. My purpose is to consider the book as a typographical monument, and to this consideration I invite your attention for a few minutes.

To understand the significance of this, the first printed book, we must think of the long centuries of thought & endeavor that led up to it. We must think of the development of speech, of the words that Archbishop Trench has called "fossil his-

tory." We must think of the methods of recording and conveying ideas—the pictographs, the phonetic representation of syllables, the alphabet. We must think of the materials used throughout the ages in writing—bark and leaves; cones and cylinders and bricks of clay; potsherds; tablets of wax & wood and ivory and stone; cloth, parchment, vellum, leather, papyrus, paper. We must think of the hundreds of thousands of scribes who have given their lives to the preservation & transmission of the best that man has thought or done. Gutenberg, with his printed book, stands at the end of a long line of ministers to the intellectual life, but his own contribution was not less than any that preceded it.

The art of printing was not born with Gutenberg. In a sense it was an ancient art. Bricks and lamps and vases were stamped in early times with the names of their makers; seals & signet rings were in common use; dies were made for goldsmiths & bookbinders; stencils were

cut; designs were impressed on leather & cloth & wall paper. Wooden blocks were engraved for the printing of devotional pictures and of playing cards; and on many of these blocks the engraver cut words as well as designs. In China, Japan, and Corea books were printed from blocks for many centuries before Gutenberg, the Tripitika, or Buddhist Canon (a collection comparable to our own sacred books, and extending to 130,000 pages) being printed in 972. Movable types, too, of wood or porcelain or bronze, were in use there at a very early date, but there is no evidence of direct connection between printing in the Far East and the beginnings of printing in the West. These beginnings are obscure and uncertain, and there are those who deny Gutenberg's priority as the inventor of movable type in Europe. There is some evidence that Coster or others printed in Holland from movable types before this Bible was printed, but there is no proof of it. In any case Gutenberg's fame is not dimmed.

Leif Ericson discovered America before Columbus, but it was Columbus who gave the New World to the Old. Watt did not invent the steam engine, but it was he who first made it a force in the world. If Gutenberg was not the first to use movable types, it was he who first made European typography a practical thing.

Little is known about Gutenberg's life, and most of what we know we gather from court records about loans and foreclosures. The known details are accessible in the ordinary reference books and in volumes like the recent Gutenberg Festschrift. He was born at Elfeld near Mainz in 1397 or 1398; lived for many years at Strasbourg, where he cut his type and cast his letters and improved his press; printed his books at Mainz between 1445 and 1456; was pensioned by the Archbishop of that city for his great services; and died there in 1468. His name does not appear on any book or sheet that he printed, and it is only by inference that we ascribe books to

him. Books did not have title-pages in his day, for the manuscripts from which they were copied did not have them; and while the rubricator or illuminator of a book would often add a colophon telling about himself and about his patron, it was but seldom that the scribe's name was mentioned, & the early printers followed the custom. Printers have always been a modest folk, & even in our own day it is the publisher's name that appears on the title-page, while the printer's name is on the back of the title or at the end of the book or is omitted. From a study of the types first used at Mainz it seems fairly certain, however, that Gutenberg printed a few smaller pieces before he did his Bible. There was a Sibylline Poem in German printed in 1445 or 1446; several editions of the Latin Grammar of Donatus (the most popular school book of the time) from 1446 on; an astronomical calendar for 1448; some single sheet indulgences giving privileges to those who contributed to the cost of the

war against the Turks; and possibly one or two other small pieces. It took courage, therefore, to print a whole Bible. The types that he cast for it were similar in material and in the method of their making to hand cast types of our own day, except that they had the black face and the angular outlines that we call Black Letter. The book has 641 leaves or twice that number of pages, and was intended to be bound in two volumes. It has neither pagination nor foliation, and is therefore difficult to collate, except by comparing one copy with another. The Harkness copy has been compared page by page with that in the National Library in Vienna and with that in the British Museum, and found perfect. It is also one of the earliest copies printed. Gutenberg began with forty lines to a page, and after the printing of a few pages changed to forty-two lines, so as to save paper; he also enlarged the edition, reprinting the first few pages with forty-two lines to the page; this one has only forty. How

long it took him to print the book, and when he finished it, we do not know. A copy in the National Library at Paris has a manuscript note saying that Heinrich Cremer, Vicar of the Church of St. Stephen at Mainz, had finished the rubricating and binding of that copy on the 24th of August, 1456. As Cremer's additions must have taken at least some weeks, the book must have been put on the market not later than the middle of that year. The text was divided into ten portions, each of which was printed independently, and six different presses were in use; but even with this number of workmen the book must have been begun in 1455, if not earlier. Bibliographers have, therefore, accepted 1455 as an approximate date for the book. The book is known to bibliographers as the Forty-two line Bible, to distinguish it from other Bibles of about the same time with a different number of lines to the page. It is also known as the Mazarine Bible, because it was the copy in Cardinal

Mazarin's library that first attracted the attention of the bibliographer. Dr. Paul Schwenke of Berlin estimates that there were not more than 170 copies printed on paper, of which a little over thirty survive; and that twenty were printed on vellum, of which eleven are extant.

There are nine copies of the book in America. One is in the New York Public Library; one in the library of the General Theological Seminary in New York City; two in the Morgan Library in New York; and one in the Huntington Library in Pasadena. Mr. Carl H. Pforzheimer of New York and Mr. Joseph E. Widener of Philadelphia have each a copy; and there is still another owned by a collector who desires to remain anonymous. The Melk-Harkness-Yale copy completes the count.

In 1500, less than half a century after the issue of the Gutenberg Bible, the art of printing had spread to every part of the continent. The sacking of Mainz in 1462

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scattered the printers first to other parts of Germany, and then to other countries. Nearly forty thousand different books or editions are listed as appearing before 1501, and some of these went into a large number of copies. In Venice alone two million volumes were printed before that year, & Mr. Alfred W. Pollard of the British Museum has estimated that twenty millions of books were put on the market during the Fifteenth Century. Nearly half a million

of these are still in existence.

After 1500 the printed book had to compete no longer with the manuscript, for most of the scribes were dead, & the absence of competition lowered the standard of printing. It is to this Bible, and to its immediate successors in Germany & Italy & France that we must turn for inspiration in the designing of type, in the arrangement of the page, & in the beauty of impression and ornament.

Andrew Keogh,

April 23, 1926.