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**SOME NOTES ON EARLY WOODCUT BOOKS, WITH
A CHAPTER ON ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS,
BY WILLIAM MORRIS**

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From Terence's Eunuchus, Ulm, Conrad Dinckmut, 1486

ON THE ARTISTIC QUALITIES OF THE WOOD-
CUT BOOKS OF ULM AND AUGSBURG IN THE
FIFTEENTH CENTURY. 

The invention of printing books, and the use of wood-blocks for book ornament in place of hand-painting, though it belongs to the period of the degradation of mediæval art, gave an opportunity to the Germans to regain the place which they had lost in the art of book decoration during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This opportunity they took with vigour and success, and by means of it put forth works which showed the best and most essential qualities of their race. Unhappily, even at the time of their first woodcut book, the beginning of the end was on them; about thirty years afterwards they received the Renaissance with singular eagerness and rapidity, and became, from the artistic point of view, a nation of rhetorical pedants. An exception must be made, however, as to Albert Dürer; for, though his method was infected by the Renaissance, his matchless imagination and intellect made him thoroughly Gothic in spirit. Amongst the printing localities of Germany the two neighbouring cities of Ulm and Augsburg developed a school of woodcut book ornament second to none as to character, and, I think, more numerous than any other. I am obliged to link the two cities, because the early school at least is common to both; but the ornamented works produced by Ulm are but few compared with the prolific birth of Augsburg.

It is a matter of course that the names of the artists who designed these wood-blocks should not have been recorded, any more than those of the numberless illuminators of the lovely written books of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; the names under which the Ulm and Augsburg picture-books are known are all those of their printers. Of these by far the most distinguished are the kinsmen (their degree of kinship is not known), Gunther Zainer of Augsburg and John Zainer of Ulm. Nearly parallel with these in date are Ludwig Hohenwang and John Bämmler of Augsburg, together with Pflanzmann of Augsburg, the printer of the first illus-

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trated German Bible. Anthony Sorg, a little later than these, was a printer somewhat inferior, rather a reprinter in fact, but by dint of reusing the old blocks, or getting them recut and in some cases redesigned, not always to their disadvantage, produced some very beautiful books. Schoensperger, who printed right into the sixteenth century, used blocks which were ruder than the earlier ones, through carelessness, and I suppose probably because of the aim at cheapness; his books tend towards the chap-book kind.

The earliest of these picture-books with a date is Gunther Zainer's *Golden Legend*, the first part of which was printed in 1471; but, as the most important from the artistic point of view, I should name: first, Gunther Zainer's *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (undated but probably of 1471); second, John Zainer's *Boccaccio De Claris Mulieribus* (dated in a cut, as well as in the colophon, 1473); third, the *Æsop*, printed by both the Zainers, but I do not know by which first, as it is undated; fourth, Gunther Zainer's *Spiegel des Menschlichen lebens* (undated but about 1475), with which must be taken his *German Belial*, the cuts of which are undoubtedly designed by the same artist, and cut by the same hand, that cut the best in the *Spiegel* above mentioned; fifth, a beautiful little book, the story of Sigismonda and Guiscard, by Gunther Zainer, undated; sixth, *Tuberinus, die geschicht von Symon*, which is the story of a late German Hugh of Lincoln, printed by G. Zainer about 1475; seventh, John Bämmler's *Das buch der Natur* (1475), with many full-page cuts of much interest; eighth, by the same printer, *Das buch von den 7 Todsünden und den 7 Tugenden* (1474); ninth, Bämmler's *Sprenger's Rosencranz Bruderschaft*, with only two cuts, but those most remarkable.

To these may be added as transitional (in date at least), between the earlier and the later school next to be mentioned, two really characteristic books printed by Sorg: (a) *Der Seusse*, a book of mystical devotion, 1482, and (b) the *Council of Constance*, printed in 1483; the latter being, as far as its cuts are concerned, mainly heraldic.

At Ulm, however, a later school arose after a transitional

book, Leonard Hol's splendid Ptolemy of 1482; of this school one printer's name, Conrad Dinckmut, includes all the most remarkable books: to wit, *Der Seelen-wurzgarten* (1483), *Dasbuch der Weisheit* (1485), the *Swabian Chronicle* (1486), Terence's *Eunuchus* (in German) (1486). Lastly, John Reger's *Descriptio Obsidionis Rhodiæ* (1496) worthily closes the series of the Ulm books.

It should here be said that, apart from their pictures, the Ulm and Augsburg books are noteworthy for their border and letter decoration. The Ulm printer, John Zainer, in especial shone in the production of borders. His *De Claris Mulieribus* excels all the other books of the school in this matter; the initial S of both the Latin and the German editions being the most elaborate and beautiful piece of its kind; and, furthermore, the German edition has a border almost equal to the S in beauty, though different in character, having the shield of Scotland supported by angels in the corner. A very handsome border (or half-border rather), with a zany in the corner, used frequently in J. Zainer's books [by the by, in Gritsch's *Quadragesimale*, 1475, this zany is changed into an ordinary citizen by means of an ingenious piecing of the block], e. g., in the 1473 and 1474 editions of the *Rationale* of Durandus, and, associated with an interesting historiated initial O, in Alvarus, *De planctu Ecclesiæ*, 1474. There are two or three other fine borders, such as those in Steinhewel's *Büchlein der Ordnung*, and Petrarch's *Griseldis* (here shown), both of 1473, and in Albertus Magnus, *Summa de eucharistiæ sacramento*, 1474. A curious alphabet of initials made up of leafage, good, but not very showy, is used in the *De Claris Mulieribus* and other books. An alphabet of large initials, the most complete example of which is to be found in Leonard Hol's *Ptolemy*, is often used and is clearly founded on the pen-letters, drawn mostly in red and blue, in which the Dutch 'rubrifiers' excelled. [Another set of initials founded on twelfth century work occurs in John Zainer's folio books, and has some likeness to those used by Hohenwang of Augsburg in the *Golden Bibel* and elsewhere, and perhaps

was suggested by these, as they are not very early (c. 1475), but they differ from Hohenwang's in being generally more or less shaded, and also in not being enclosed in a square.] This big alphabet is very beautiful and seems to have been a good deal copied by other German printers, as it well deserved to be. [The initials of Knoblotzer of Strassburg and Bernard Richel of Basel may be mentioned.] John Reger's Caoursin has fine handsome 'blooming-letters,' somewhat tending toward the French style.

In Augsburg Gunther Zainer has some initial I's of strap-work without foliation: they are finely designed, but gain considerably when, as sometimes happens, the spaces between the straps are filled in with fine pen-tracery and in yellowish brown; they were cut early in Gunther's career, as one occurs in the *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*, c. 1471, and another in the *Calendar*, printed 1471. These, as they always occur in the margin and are long, may be called border-pieces. A border occurring in *Eyb, ob einem manne tzu nemen ein weib* is drawn very gracefully in outline, and is attached, deftly enough, to a very good S of the pen-letter type, though on a separate block; it has three shields of arms in it, one of which is the bearing of Augsburg. This piece is decidedly illuminators' work as to design.

Gunther's *Margarita Davidica* has a border (attached to a very large P) which is much like the Ulm borders in character. A genealogical tree of the House of Hapsburg prefacing the *Spiegel des Menschlichen lebens*, and occupying a whole page, is comparable for beauty and elaboration to the S of John Zainer above mentioned; on the whole, for beauty and richness of invention and for neatness of execution, I am inclined to give it the first place amongst all the decorative pieces of the German printers.

Gunther Zainer's German Bible of c. 1474 has a full set of pictured letters, one to every book, of very remarkable merit: the foliated forms which make the letters and enclose the figures being bold, inventive, and very well drawn. I note that these excellent designs have received much less attention than they deserve.

In almost all but the earliest of Gunther's books a handsome set of initials are used, a good deal like the above-mentioned Ulm initials, but with the foliations blunter, and blended with less of geometrical forms: the pen origin of these is also very marked.

Ludwig Hohenwang, who printed at Augsburg in the seventies, uses a noteworthy set of initials, alluded to above, that would seem to have been drawn by the designer with a twelfth century MS. before him, though, as a matter of course, the fifteenth century betrays itself in certain details, chiefly in the sharp foliations at the ends of the scrolls, etc. There is a great deal of beautiful design in these letters; but the square border round them, while revealing their origin from illuminators' work, leaves over-large whites in the backgrounds, which call out for the completion that the illuminator's colour would have given them. Bämmler and the later printer Sorg do not use so much ornament as Gunther Zainer; their initials are less rich both in line and design than Gunther's, and Sorg's especially have a look of having run down from the earlier ones: in his *Seusse*, however, there are some beautiful figured initials designed on somewhat the same plan as those of Gunther Zainer's Bible.

Now it may surprise some of our readers, though I should hope not the greatest part of them, to hear that I claim the title of works of art, both for these picture-ornamented books as books, and also for the pictures themselves. Their two main merits are first their decorative and next their story-telling quality; and it seems to me that these two qualities include what is necessary and essential in book-pictures. To be sure the principal aim of these unknown German artists was to give the essence of the story at any cost, and it may be thought that the decorative qualities of their designs were accidental, or done unconsciously at any rate. I do not altogether dispute that view; but then the accident is that of the skilful workman whose skill is largely the result of tradition; it has thereby become a habit of the hand to him to work in a decorative manner.

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To turn back to the books numbered above as the most important of the school, I should call John Zainer's *De Claris Mulieribus*, and the *Æsop*, and Gunther Zainer's *Spiegel des Menschlichen lebens* the most characteristic. Of these my own choice would be the *De Claris Mulieribus*, partly perhaps because it is a very old friend of mine, and perhaps the first book that gave me a clear insight into the essential qualities of the mediæval design of that period. The subject-matter of the book also makes it one of the most interesting, giving it opportunity for setting forth the mediæval reverence for the classical period, without any of the loss of romance on the one hand, and epical sincerity and directness on the other, which the flood-tide of renaissance rhetoric presently inflicted on the world. No story-telling could be simpler and more straightforward, and less dependent on secondary help, than that of these curious, and, as people phrase it, rude cuts. And in spite (if you please it) of their rudeness, they are by no means lacking in definite beauty: the composition is good everywhere, the drapery well designed, the lines rich, which shows of course that the cutting is good. Though there is no ornament save the beautiful initial S and the curious foliated initials above mentioned, the page is beautifully proportioned and stately, when, as in the copy before me, it has escaped the fury of the bookbinder.

The great initial 'S' I claim to be one of the very best printers' ornaments ever made, one which would not disgrace a thirteenth century MS. Adam and Eve are standing on a finely-designed spray of poppy-like leafage, and behind them rise up the boughs of the tree. Eve reaches down an apple to Adam with her right hand, and with her uplifted left takes another from the mouth of the crowned woman's head of the serpent, whose coils, after they have performed the duty of making the S, end in a foliage scroll, whose branches enclose little medallions of the seven deadly sins. All this is done with admirable invention and romantic meaning, and with very great beauty of design and a full sense of decorative necessities.

As to faults in this delightful book, it must be said that it is somewhat marred by the press-work not being so good as it should have been even when printed by the weak presses of the fifteenth century; but this, though a defect, is not, I submit, an essential one.

In the *Æsop* the drawing of the designs is in a way superior to that of the last book: the line leaves nothing to be desired; it is thoroughly decorative, rather heavy, but so firm and strong, and so obviously in submission to the draughtman's hand, that it is capable of even great delicacy as well as richness. The figures both of man and beast are full of expression; the heads clean drawn and expressive also, and in many cases refined and delicate. The cuts, with few exceptions, are not bounded by a border, but amidst the great richness of line no lack of one is felt, and the designs fully sustain their decorative position as a part of the noble type of the Ulm and Augsburg printers; this *Æsop* is, to my mind, incomparably the best and most expressive of the many illustrated editions of the Fables printed in the fifteenth century. The designs of the other German and Flemish ones were all copied from it.

Gunther Zainer's *Spiegel des Menschlichen lebens* is again one of the most amusing of woodcut books. One may say that the book itself, one of the most popular of the Middle Ages, runs through all the conditions and occupations of men as then existing, from the Pope and Kaiser down to the field labourer, and, with full indulgence in the mediæval love of formal antithesis, contrasts the good and the evil side of them. The profuse illustrations to all this abound in excellent pieces of naïve characterisation; the designs are very well put together, and, for the most part, the figures well drawn, and draperies good and crisp, and the general effect very satisfactory as decoration. The designer in this book, however, has not been always so lucky in his cutter as those of the last two, and some of the pictures have been considerably injured in the cutting. On the other hand the lovely genealogical tree above mentioned crowns this book with abundant honour, and the best of the cuts are so good

that it is hardly possible to rank it after the first two. Gunther Zainer's *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis* and his *Golden Legend* have cuts decidedly ruder than these three books; they are simpler also, and less decorative as ornaments to the page, nevertheless they have abundant interest, and most often their essential qualities of design shine through the rudeness, which by no means excludes even grace of silhouette: one and all they are thoroughly expressive of the story they tell. The designs in these two books by the by do not seem to have been done by the same hand; but I should think that the designer of those in the *Golden Legend* drew the subjects that 'inhabit' the fine letters of Gunther's German Bible. Both seem to me to have a kind of illuminator's character in them. The cuts to the story of Simon bring us back to those of *Spiegel des Menschlichen Lebens*; they are delicate and pretty, and tell the story, half so repulsive, half so touching, of 'little Sir Hugh,' very well. I must not pass by without a further word on Sigismund and Guiscard. I cannot help thinking that the cuts therein are by the same hand that drew some of those in the *Æsop*; at any rate they have the same qualities of design, and are to my mind singularly beautiful and interesting.

Of the other contemporary, or nearly contemporary, printers Bämmler comes first in interest. His book *von den 7 Todsünden*, etc., has cuts of much interest and invention, not unlike in character to those of Gunther Zainer's *Golden Legend*. His *Buch der Natur* has full-page cuts of animals, herbs, and human figures exceedingly quaint, but very well designed for the most part. A half-figure of a bishop 'in pontificalibus' is particularly bold and happy. Rupertus a sancto Remigio's *History of the crusade* and the *Cronich von allen Konigen und Kaisern* are finely illustrated. His *Rosencranz Bruderschaft* above mentioned has but two cuts, but they are both of them, the one as a fine decorative work, the other as a deeply felt illustration of devotional sentiment, of the highest merit.

The two really noteworthy works of Sorg (who, as aforesaid, was somewhat a plagiaristic publisher) are, first, the

Seusse, which is illustrated with bold and highly decorative cuts full of meaning and dignity, and next, the Council of Constance, which is the first heraldic woodcut work (it has besides the coats-of-arms, several fine full-page cuts, of which the burning of Huss is one). These armorial cuts, which are full of interest as giving a vast number of curious and strange bearings, are no less so as showing what admirable decoration can be got out of heraldry when it is simply and well drawn.

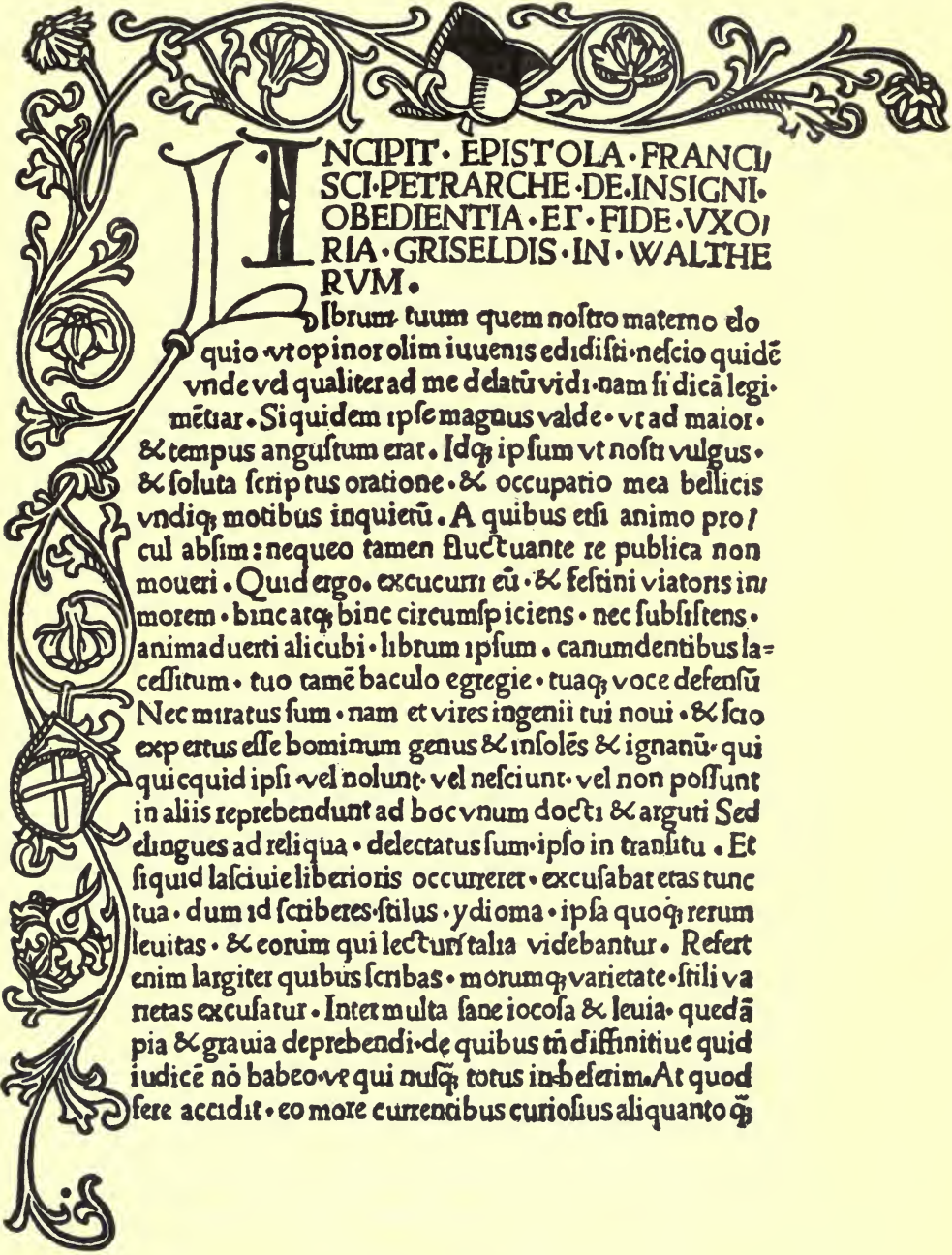
To Conrad Dinckmut of Ulm, belonging to a somewhat later period than these last-named printers, belongs the glory of opposing by his fine works the coming degradation of book-ornament in Germany. The *Seelen-wurzgarten*, ornamented with seventeen full-page cuts, is injured by the too free repetition of them; they are, however, very good; the best perhaps being the Nativity, which, for simplicity and beauty, is worthy of the earlier period of the Middle Ages. The *Swabian Chronicle* has cuts of various degrees of merit, but all interesting and full of life and spirit: a fight in the lists with axes being one of the most remarkable. *Das buch der Weisheit* (Bidpay's Fables) has larger cuts which certainly show no lack of courage; they are perhaps scarcely so decorative as the average of the cuts of the school, and are somewhat coarsely cut; but their frank epical character makes them worthy of all attention. But perhaps his most remarkable work is his Terence's *Eunuchus* (in German), ornamented with twenty-eight cuts illustrating the scenes. These all have backgrounds showing (mostly) the streets of a mediæval town, which clearly imply theatrical scenery; the figures of the actors are delicately drawn, and the character of the persons and their action is well given and carefully sustained throughout. The text of this book is printed in a large handsome black-letter, imported, as my friend Mr. Proctor informs me, from Italy. The book is altogether of singular beauty and character.

The *Caoursin* (1496), the last book of any account printed at Ulm, has good and spirited cuts of the events described, the best of them being the flight of Turks in the mountains.

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One is almost tempted to think that these cuts are designed by the author of those of the Mainz Breidenbach of 1486, though the cutting is much inferior.

All these books, it must be remembered, though they necessarily (being printed books) belong to the later Middle Ages, and though some of them are rather decidedly late in that epoch, are thoroughly 'Gothic' as to their ornament; there is no taint of the Renaissance in them. In this respect the art of book-ornament was lucky. The neo-classical rhetoric which invaded literature before the end of the fourteenth century (for even Chaucer did not quite escape it) was harmless against this branch of art at least for more than another hundred years; so that even Italian book-pictures are Gothic in spirit, for the most part, right up to the beginning of the sixteenth century, long after the New Birth had destroyed the building arts for Italy: while Germany, whose Gothic architecture was necessarily firmer rooted in the soil, did not so much as feel the first shiver of the coming flood till suddenly, and without warning, it was upon her, and the art of the Middle Ages fell dead in a space of about five years, and was succeeded by a singularly stupid and brutal phase of that rhetorical and academical art, which, in all matters of ornament, has held Europe captive ever since.



INCIPIT · EPISTOLA · FRANCI
SCI · PETRARCHÆ · DE · INSIGNI ·
OBEDIENTIA · ET · FIDE · VXORI
RIA · GRISELDIS · IN · WALTHERVM ·

Librum tuum quem nostro materno elo
quio vt opinor olim iuuenis edidisti nescio quidē
vnde vel qualiter ad me delatū vidi nam si dicā legi
mētūar Si quidem ipse magnus valde vt ad maior
& tempus angustum erat Idq; ipsum vt nostri vulgus
& soluta scriptus oratione & occupatio mea bellicis
vndiq; motibus inquietū A quibus etsi animo pro
cul absim nequeo tamen fluctuante re publica non
moueri Quid ergo excucurū eū & festini viatoris in
morem binc atq; binc circumspiciens nec subsistens
animaduerti alicubi librum ipsum canum dentibus la
cessitum tuo tamē baculo egregie tuaq; voce defensū
Nec miratus sum nam et vires ingenii tui noui & scio
expertus esse hominum genus & insolēs & ignanū qui
quicquid ipsi vel nolunt vel nesciunt vel non possunt
in aliis reprehendunt ad hoc vnum docti & arguti Sed
elinguēs ad reliqua delectatus sum ipso in transitu Et
si quid lasciuie liberionis occurreret excusabat etas tunc
tua dum id scriberes stilus ydioma ipsa quoq; rerum
leuitas & eorum qui lecturi talia videbantur Refert
enim largiter quibus scribas morumq; varietate stili va
rietas excusatur Inter multa sane iocosa & leuia quedā
pia & grauia deprebendi de quibus tū diffinitive quid
iudice nō habeo vt qui nusq; totus in beserim At quod
fere accidit eo more currentibus curiosius aliquanto q̄

Archa testamēti p̄figavit b̄taz v̄ginē mariā. Exo. 25
Die arch des alten gefacz hat bezewt Mariam.



From Gunther Zainer's *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*,
Augsburg, C. 1471



From Gunther Zainer's *Ingold, Das Golden Spiel*,
Augsburg, 1472

SOPHONISBA

MASMISSA LELIVS



Argia

polonites

1473



A

rgia greca mulier ab antiquis argiuorū
 regibus generosam ducens originē adraști
 regis filia fuit: & spectabili pulchritudine
 sua: ori de se cū temporaneis letum spectacu

From John Zainer's Boccaccio de Claris Mulieribus,
 Ulm, 1473

Ewangelium.



In illo tempore
dixit Ihesus
discipulis suis.
Si quis diligit
me sermonem
meum seruabit
et pater meus
diliget eum et ad
eum ueniemus.
iohis. xiiij. ca.
In der zeit / sagt
sprach Ihesus
zu seinen iugern
vn d sprach wer

mich lieb hat der behaltet mein red. vnd mein vater

From Gunther Zainer's Epistles and Gospels,
Augsburg, C. 1474



From Gunther Zainer's Spiegel D. Menschl. Lebens,
Augsburg, C. 1475



¶ Nach dem aber vnd er den weg nahend hargm mit dem vnschuldigen kind komet was/vnd sich allent

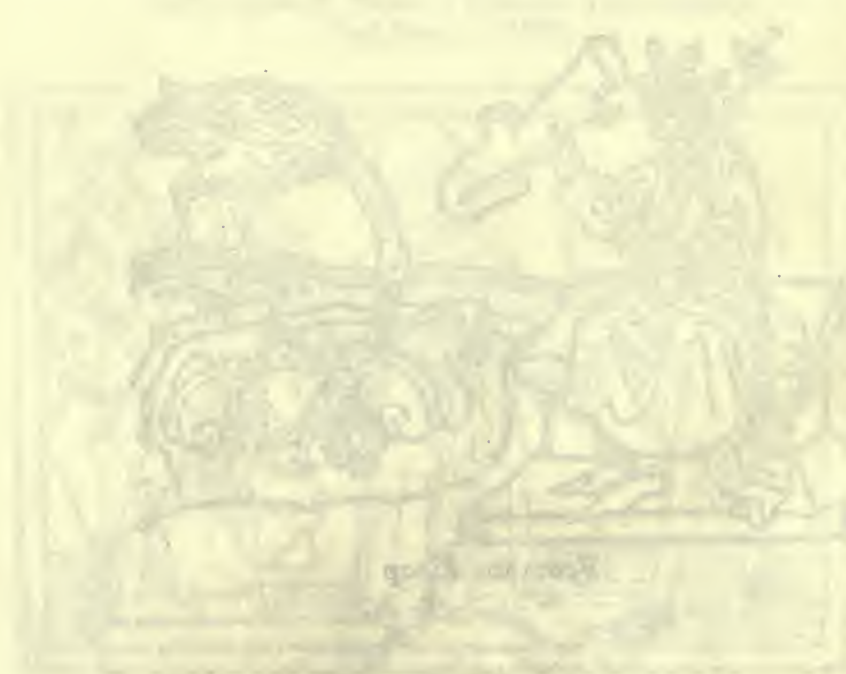
From Gunther Zainer's *Tuberinus, Geschichte von Dem Heiligen Kind Symon*, Augsburg, C. 1475



From the *Æsop*



THE
LONDON
MAGAZINE
AND
LITERARY REVIEW
FOR
1851



THE WOODCUTS OF GOTHIC BOOKS

I shall presently have the pleasure of showing you in some kind of sequence a number of illustrations taken from books of the 15th, and first years of the 16th centuries. But before I do so I wish to read to you a few remarks on the genesis and the quality of the kind of art represented by these examples, and the lessons which they teach us.

Since the earliest of those I have to show is probably not earlier in date than about 1420, and almost all are more than fifty years later than that, it is clear that they belong to the latest period of Mediæval art, and one or two must formally be referred to the earliest days of the Renaissance, though in spirit they are still Gothic. In fact, it is curious to note the suddenness of the supplanting of the Gothic by the neo-classical style in some instances, especially in Germany: e. g., the later books published by the great Nuremberg printer, Koberger, in the fourteen-nineties, books like the "Nuremberg Chronicle," and the "Schatzbehalter," show no sign of the coming change, but ten years worn, and hey, presto, not a particle of Gothic ornament can be found in any German printed book, though, as I think, the figure-works of one great man, Albert Dürer, were Gothic in essence.

The most part of these books, in fact all of them in the earlier days (the exceptions being mainly certain splendidly ornamented French books, including the sumptuous books of "Hours"), were meant for popular books: the great theological folios, the law books, the decretals, and such like of the earlier German printers, though miracles of typographical beauty, if ornamented at all, were ornamented by the illuminator, with the single exception of Gutenberg's splendid "Psalter," which gives us at once the first and best piece of ornamental colour-printing yet achieved. Again, the dainty and perfect volumes of the classics produced by the earlier Roman and Venetian printers disdained the help of wood blocks, though they were often beautifully illuminated, and it was not till after the days of Jenson, the Frenchman who brought the Roman letter to perfection, it was not till Italian typography began to decline, that illustration

by reproducible methods became usual; and we know that these illustrated books were looked upon as inferior wares, and were sold far cheaper than the unadorned pages of the great printers. It must be noted in confirmation of the view that the woodcut books were cheap books, that in most cases they were vernacular editions of books already printed in Latin.

The work, then, which I am about to show you has first the disadvantage of the rudeness likely to disfigure cheap forms of art in a time that lacked the resource of slippery plausibility which helps out cheap art at the present day. And secondly, the disadvantage of belonging to the old age rather than the youth or vigorous manhood of the Middle Ages. On the other hand, it is art, and not a mere trade "article;" and though it was produced by the dying Middle Ages, they were not yet dead when it was current, so that it yet retains much of the qualities of the more hopeful period; and in addition, the necessity of adapting the current design to a new material and method gave it a special life, which is full of interest and instruction for artists of all times who are able to keep their eyes open.

All organic art, all art that is genuinely growing, opposed to rhetorical, retrospective, or academical art, art which has no real growth in it, has two qualities in common: the epical and the ornamental; its two functions are the telling of a story and the adornment of a space or tangible object. The labour and ingenuity necessary for the production of anything that claims our attention as a work of art are wasted, if they are employed on anything else than these two aims. Mediæval art, the result of a long unbroken series of tradition, is preëminent for its grasp of these two functions, which, indeed, interpenetrate then more than in any other period. Not only is all its special art obviously and simply beautiful as ornament, but its ornament also is vivified with forcible meaning, so that neither in one or the other does the life ever flag, or the sensuous pleasure of the eye ever lack. You have not got to say, Now you have your story, how are you going to embellish it?

Nor, Now you have made your beauty, what are you going to do with it? For here are the two together, inseparably a part of each other. No doubt the force of tradition, which culminated in the Middle Ages, had much to do with this unity of epical design and ornament. It supplied deficiencies of individual by collective imagination (compare the constantly recurring phases and lines in genuine epical or ballad poetry); it ensured the inheritance of deft craftsmanship and instinct for beauty in the succession of the generations of workmen; and it cultivated the appreciation of good work by the general public. Now-a-days artists work essentially for artists, and look on the ignorant layman with contempt, which even the necessity of earning a livelihood cannot force them wholly to disguise. In the times of art, they had no one but artists to work for, since every one was a potential artist.

Now, in such a period, when written literature was still divine, and almost miraculous to men, it was impossible that books should fail to have a due share in the epical-ornamental art of the time. Accordingly, the opportunities offered by the pages which contained the wisdom and knowledge of past and present times were cultivated to the utmost. The early Middle Ages, beginning with the wonderful caligraphy of the Irish MSS., were, above all times, the epoch of writing. The pages of almost all books, from the 8th to the 15th century, are beautiful, even without the addition of ornament. In those that are ornamented without pictures illustrative of the text, the eye is so pleased, and the fancy so tickled by the beauty and exhaustless cheerful invention of the illuminator, that one scarcely ventures to ask that the tale embodied in the written characters should be further illustrated. But when this is done, and the book is full of pictures, which tell the written tale again with the most conscientious directness of design, and as to execution with great purity of outline and extreme delicacy of colour, we can say little more than that the only work of art which surpasses a complete Mediæval book is a complete Mediæval building. This must be said, with the least

qualification, of the books of from about 1160 to 1300. After this date, the work loses, in purity and simplicity, more than it gains in pictorial qualities, and, at last, after the middle of the 15th century, illuminated books lose much of their individuality on the ornamental side; and, though they are still beautiful, are mostly only redeemed from commonplace when the miniatures in them are excellent. But here comes in the new element, given by the invention of printing, and the gradual shoving out of the scribe by the punch-cutter, the typefounder, and the printer. The first printed characters were as exact reproductions of the written ones as the new craftsmen could compass, even to the extent of the copying of the infernal abbreviations which had gradually crept into manuscript; but, as I have already mentioned, the producers of serious books did not at first supply the work of the illuminator by that of the woodcutter, either in picture work or ornament. In fact, the art of printing pictures from wood blocks is earlier than that of printing books, and is undoubtedly the parent of book illustration. The first woodcuts were separate pictures of religious subjects, circulated for the edification of the faithful, in existing examples generally coloured by hand, and certainly always intended to be coloured. The earliest of these may be as old as 1380, and there are many which have been dated in the first half of the 15th century; though the dates are mostly rather a matter of speculation. But the development of book illustration proper by no means puts an end to their production. Many were done between 1450 and 1490, and some in the first years of the 16th century; but the earlier ones only have any special character in them. Of these, some are cut rudely and some timidly also, but some are fairly well cut, and few so ill that the expression of the design is not retained. The design of most of these early works is mostly admirable, and as far removed from the commonplace as possible; many, nay most of these cuts, are fine expressions of that pietism of the Middle Ages which has been somewhat veiled from us by the strangeness, and even grotesqueness which has

mingled with it, but the reality of which is not doubtful to those who have studied the period without prejudice. Amongst these may be cited a design of Christ being pressed in the wine press, probably as early as the end of the 14th century, which may stand without disadvantage beside a fine work of the 13th century.

The next step towards book illustration brings us to the block-books, in which the picture-cuts are accompanied by a text, also cut on wood; the folios being printed by rubbing off on one side only. The subject of the origin of the most noteworthy of these books, the "Ars Moriendi," the "Lord's Prayer," the "Song of Solomon," the "Biblia Pauperum," the "Apocalypse," and the "Speculum Humanæ Salvationis," has been debated, along with the question of the first printer by means of movable types, with more acrimony than it would seem to need. I, not being a learned person, will not add one word to the controversy; it is enough to say that these works were done somewhere between the years 1430 and 1460, and that their style was almost entirely dominant throughout the Gothic period in Flanders and Holland, while it had little influence on the German wood-cutters. For the rest, all these books have great merit as works of art; it would be difficult to find more direct or more poetical rendering of the events given than those of the "Speculum Humanæ Salvationis;" or more elegant and touching designs than those in the "Song of Solomon." The cuts of the "Biblia Pauperum" are rougher, but full of vigour and power of expression. The "Ars Moriendi" is very well drawn and executed, but the subject is not so interesting. The "Apocalypse" and "The Lord's Prayer" are both of them excellent, the former being scarcely inferior in design to the best of the Apocalypse picture MSS. of the end of the thirteenth century.

We have now come to the wood-cuts which ornament the regular books of the Gothic period, which began somewhat timidly. The two examples in Germany and Italy, not far removed from each other in date, being the "Historie von Joseph, Daniel, Judith, and Esther," printed by Albrecht

Pfister, at Bamberg, in 1462; and the "Meditations of Turrecremata (or Torquemada)," printed at Rome by Ulric Hahn, in the year 1467, which latter, though taken by the command of the Pope from the frescoes of a Roman Church (Sta. Maria Sopra Minerva) are as German as need be, and very rude in drawing and execution, though not without spirit. But, after this date, the school of wood-carving developed rapidly; and, on the whole, Germany, which had been very backward in the art of illumination, now led the new art. The main schools were those of Ulm and Augsburg, of Mainz, of Strasburg, of Basel, and of Nuremberg, the latter being the later. The examples which I shall presently have the pleasure of showing you are wholly of the first and the last, as being the most representative, Ulm and Augsburg of the earlier style, Nuremberg of the later. But I might mention, in passing, that some of the earlier Basel books, notably Bernard Richel's "Speculum Humanæ Salvationis," are very noteworthy; and that, in fourteen-eighties, there was a school at Mainz that produced, amongst other books, a very beautiful "Herbal," and Breydenbach's "Peregrinatio," which, amongst other merits, such as actual representations of the cities on the road to the Holy Land, must be said to contain the best executed woodcuts of the Middle Ages. Of course, there were many other towns in Germany which produced illustrated books, but they may be referred in character to one or other of these schools. In Holland and Flanders there was a noble school of wood-cutting, delicately decorative in character, and very direct and expressive, being, as I said, the direct descendant of the block-books. The name of the printer who produced most books of this school was Gerard Leeuw (or Lion), who printed first at Gouda, and afterwards at Antwerp. But Colard Mansion, of Bruges, who printed few books, and was the master of Caxton in the art of printing, turned out a few very fine specimens of illustrated books. One of the most remarkable illustrated works published in the Low Countries—which I mention for its peculiarity—is the "Chevalier Deliberé" (an allegorical poem on the death

of Charles the Rash), and I regret not being able to show you a slide of it, as it could not be done satisfactorily. This book, published at Schiedam in 1500, decidedly leans towards the French in style, rather than the native manner deduced from the earlier block-books.

France began both printing and book illustration somewhat late, most of its important illustrated works belonging to a period between the years 1485 and 1520; but she grasped the art of book decoration with a firmness and completeness very characteristic of French genius; and also, she carried on the Gothic manner later than any other nation. For decorative qualities, nothing can excel the French books, and many of the picture-cuts, besides their decorative merits, have an additional interest in the romantic quality which they introduce: they all look as if they might be illustrations to the "Morte D'Arthur" or Tristram.

In Italy, from about 1480 onward, book illustrations became common, going hand-in-hand with the degradation of printing, as I said before. The two great schools in Italy are those of Florence and Venice. I think it must be said that, on the whole, the former city bore away the bell from Venice, in spite of the famous Aldine "Polyphilus," the cuts in which, by the way, are very unequal. There are a good many book illustrations published in Italy, I should mention, like those to Ulric Hahn's "Meditations of Turrecremata," which are purely German in style; which is only to be expected from the fact of the early printers in Italy being mostly Germans.

I am sorry to have to say it, but England cannot be said to have a school of Gothic book illustration; the cuts in our early printed books are, at the best, French or Flemish blocks pretty well copied. This lamentable fact is curious, considered along with what is also a fact: that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the English were, on the whole, the best book decorators.

I have a few words to say yet on the practical lessons to be derived from the study of these works of art; but before I say them, I will show you, by your leave, the slides

taken from examples of these woodcuts. Only I must tell you first, what doubtless many of you know, that these old blocks were not produced by the graver on the end section of a piece of fine-grained wood (box now invariably), but by the knife on the plank section of pear-tree or similar wood—a much more difficult feat when the cuts were fine, as, e. g., in Lützelberger's marvellous cuts of the "Dance of Death."

[Mr. Morris then showed a series of lantern slides, which he described as follows:]

1. This is taken from the "Ars Moriendi," date about 1420. You may call it Flemish or Dutch, subject to raising the controversy I mentioned just now.

2. The "Song of Solomon," about the same date.

3. From the first illustrated book of the Ulm school. The Renowned and Noble Ladies of Boccaccio. It begins with Adam and Eve. The initial letter is very characteristic of the Ulm school of ornament. The trail of the serpent forms the S, and in the knots of the tail are little figures representing the seven deadly sins.

4. Another page from the same book. "Ceres and the Art of Agriculture." One of the great drawbacks to wood block printing in those times was the weakness of the presses. Their only resource was to print with the paper very wet, and with very soft packing, so that the block went well into the paper; but many books, and this amongst others, have suffered much from this cause.

5. Another page of the same book. The date is 1473.

6. This is from an Augsburg book. "Speculum Humanæ Vitæ," written by a Spanish bishop, which was a great favourite in the Middle Ages. It gives the advantages and disadvantages of all conditions of life. This block contains a genealogical tree of the Hapsburg family, and is an exceedingly beautiful piece of ornamental design, very well cut.

7. From the same book; representing not the "Five Alls," with which you are familiar, but the "Four Alls;" the gentleman, the merchant, the nobleman, and the poor man, who is the support of the whole lot, with his toes coming

through his shoes. This is a fine specimen of printing of Gunther Zainer. The initial letters are very handsome in all these Augsburg books.

8. There is a picture of the Unjust Lawyer, from the same book, taking money from both sides. The date of this book is about 1475.

9. From "Æsop's Fables," a reproduction of the "Ulm Æsop," by Antony Sorg, of Augsburg (but the pictures are printed from the same blocks), the "Fly on the Wheel," and the "Jackdaw and Peacock." These designs for the Æsop pictures went all through the Middle Ages, with very little alteration.

10. "King Stork and King Log," from the same book.

11. This is from the Table-book of Bidpay, by Conrad Dinckmuth, who carried on the early glories of the Ulm school in a later generation; about 1486.

12. The Parrot in a Cage, with the ladies making a sham storm to cause the poor bird to be put to death. Dinckmuth did some very remarkable work: one of the best of which was a German translation of the "Eunuchus" of Terence; another the "Chronicle of the Swabians."

13. The "Schatzbehalter," published by Koburger, of Nuremberg, 1491. Although so late, there is no trace of any classical influence in the design. The architecture, for instance, is pure late German architecture.

14. From the same book, "Joshua Meeting the Angel," and "Moses at the Burning Bush."

15. A page, or part of a page, from the celebrated Nuremberg Chronicle, printed by Koburger in 1493. This is, in a way, an exception to the rule of illustrated books being in the vernacular, as it is in Latin; but there is also a German edition.

16. Another specimen of the same book.

17. From a curious devotional book, "Der Seusse," printed by Antony Sorg, at Augsburg, about 1485.

18. Another page, which shows the decorative skill with which they managed their diagram pictures.

19. An example of the Flemish school, and characteristic

of the design of white and black, which is so often used both by the Florentine and the Flemish wood-cutters. It is from a life of Christ, published by Gerard Leeuw in 1487.

20. Another page from the same book. There are certainly two artists in this book, and the one on the left appears to be the more pictorial of the two; though his designs are graceful, he is hardly as good as the rougher book illustrator. Gerard Leeuw had a very handsome set of initial letters, a kind of ornament which did not become common until after 1480.

21. Another one from the same book.

22. From another Flemish book, showing how the style runs through them all. St. George and the Dragon; from "A Golden Legend," 1503.

23. One of French series, from a very celebrated book called "La Mer des Histoires." It begins the history of France a little before the deluge. It is a most beautiful book, and very large. One would think these borders were meant to be painted, as so many "Books of Hours" were, but I have never seen a copy which has had the borders painted, though, as a rule, when the borders are meant to be painted, it is not common to find one plain.

24. Another page from the same book; but the slide does not do justice to it. I will here mention that one failing of the French publishers was to make one picture serve for several purposes. The fact is, they were more careful of decoration than illustration.

25. Another French book by a French printer, the "Aubres des Batailles," which illustrates that curious quality of romance which you find in the French pictures. It is true that many of these cuts were not made for this book; in fact, they were done for another edition of the Chevalier Delibré, the Flemish edition of which I have mentioned before, for some have that name on them.

26. Another from the same book.

27. Another good example of the French decorative style. It is from Petrarch's "Remedy of either Fortune." This is the author presenting his book to the king, and is often used in these French books.

28. From another French book of about the same date (the beginning of the sixteenth century), "The Shepherd's Calendar," of which there were a great number of English editions, even as late as 1656, the cuts being imitated from these blocks.

29. A page from one of the beautiful "Books of Hours," which were mostly printed on vellum, every page of which is decorated more or less with this sort of picture. Here is the calendar, with the signs of the Zodiac, the work of the months, the saints that occur in it, and games and sports; on the other side is the Sangraal. This book is throughout in the same style — wholly Gothic. It was printed in 1498, and about twenty years after these service-books became very much damaged by having Renaissance features introduced from German artists of the time.

30. Another page from the same book. The Resurrection, and the raising of Lazarus are the principal subjects.

31. Nominally an Italian woodcut; the book was printed at Milan, but this cut is probably of German design, if not execution.

32. From a very beautiful book in the Florentine style. One of the peculiarities is the copious use of white out of black.

33. Another from the same — "The Quatre reggio," 1508.

34. Another, very characteristic of the Florentine style, with its beautiful landscape background.

35. This is one in which the ornament has really got into the Renaissance style. It is a sort of "Lucky Book," with all sorts of ways of finding your fortune, discovering where your money has gone, who is your enemy, and so on. One of the Peschia books, actually printed at Milan, but of the Venetian school.

36. From a book of the Venetian style, about the same date. I show it as an example of the carefulness and beauty with which the artists of the time combined the border work with the pictures. There is something very satisfactory in the proportion of black and white in the whole page.

Now you have seen my examples, I want once more to impress upon you the fact that these designs, one and all,

while they perform their especial function—the office of telling a tale—never forget their other function of decorating the book of which they form a part; this is the essential difference between them and modern book illustrations, which I suppose make no pretence at decorating the pages of the book, but must be looked upon as black and white pictures which it is convenient to print and bind up along with the printed matter. The question, in fact, which I want to put to you is this, Whether we are to have books which are beautiful as books; books in which type, paper, woodcuts, and the due arrangement of all these are to be considered, and which are so treated as to produce a harmonious whole, something which will give a person with a sense of beauty real pleasure whenever and wherever the book is opened, even before he begins to look closely into the illustrations; or whether the beautiful and inventive illustrations are to be looked on as separate pictures imbedded in a piece of utilitarianism, which they cannot decorate because it cannot help them to do so. Take, as an example of the latter, Mr. Fred. Walker's illustrations to "Philip" in the "Cornhill Magazine," of the days when some of us were young, since I am inclined to think that they are about the best of such illustrations. Now they are part of Thackeray's story, and I don't want them to be in any way less a part of it, but they are in no respect a part of the tangible printed book, and I do want them to be that. As it is, the mass of utilitarian matter in which they are imbedded is absolutely helpless and dead. Why it is not even ugly—at least not vitally ugly.

Now the reverse is the case with the books from which I have taken the examples which you have been seeing. As things to be looked at they are beautiful, taken as a whole; they are alive all over, and not merely in a corner here and there. The illustrator has to share the success and the failure, not only of the wood-cutter, who has translated his drawing, but also of the printer and the mere ornamentalist, and the result is that you have a book which is a visible work of art.

You may say that you don't care for this result, that you wish to read literature and to look at pictures; and that so long as the modern book gives you these pleasures you ask no more of it; well, I can understand that, but you must pardon me if I say that your interest in books in that case is literary only, and not artistic, and that implies, I think, a partial crippling of the faculties; a misfortune which no one should be proud of.

However, it seems certain that there is growing up a taste for books which are visible works of art, and that especially in this country, where the printers, at their best, do now use letters much superior in form to those in use elsewhere, and where a great deal of work intending to ornament books reasonably is turned out; most of which, however, is deficient in some respect; which, in fact, is seldom satisfactory unless the whole page, picture, ornament, and type is reproduced literally from the handiwork of the artist, as in some of the beautiful works of Mr. Walter Crane. But this is a thing that can rarely be done, and what we want, it seems to me, is, not that books should sometimes be beautiful, but that they should generally be beautiful; indeed, if they are not, it increases the difficulties of those who would make them sometimes beautiful immensely. At any rate, I claim that illustrated books should always be beautiful, unless, perhaps, where the illustrations are present rather for the purpose of giving information than for that of giving pleasure to the intellect through the eye; but surely, even in this latter case, they should be reasonably and decently good-looking.

Well, how is this beauty to be obtained? It must be by the harmonious coöperation of the craftsmen and artists who produce the book. First, the paper should be good, which is a more important point than might be thought, and one in which there is a most complete contrast between the old and the modern books; for no bad paper was made till about the middle of the sixteenth century, and the worst that was made even then was far better than what is now considered good. Next, the type must be good, a matter

in which there is more room for excellence than those may think who have not studied the forms of letters closely. There are other matters, however, besides the mere form of the type which are of much importance in the producing of a beautiful book, which, however, I cannot go into to-night, as it is a little beside my present subject. Then, the mere ornament must be good, and even very good. I do not know anything more dispiriting than the mere platitudes of printers' ornaments—trade ornaments. It is not uncommon now-a-days to see handsome books quite spoiled by them—books in which plain, unadorned letters would have been far more ornamental.

Then we come to the picture woodcuts. And here I feel I shall find many of you differing from me strongly; for I am sure that such illustrations as those excellent black and white pictures of Fred. Walker could never make book ornaments. The artist, to produce these satisfactorily, must exercise severe self-restraint, and must never lose sight of the page of the book he is ornamenting. That ought to be obvious to you, but I am afraid it will not be. I do not think any artist will ever make a good book illustrator, unless he is keenly alive to the value of a well-drawn line, crisp and clean, suggesting a simple and beautiful silhouette. Anything which obscures this, and just to the extent to which it does obscure it, takes away from the fitness of the design as a book ornament. In this art vagueness is quite inadmissible. It is better to be wrong than vague in making designs which are meant to be book ornaments.

Again, as the artists' designs must necessarily be reproduced for this purpose, he should never lose sight of the material he is designing for. Lack of precision is fatal (to take up again what I have just advanced) in an art produced by the point of the graver on a material which offers just the amount of resistance which helps precision. And here I come to a very important part of my subject, to wit, the relation between the designer and the wood-engraver; and it is clear that if these two artists do not understand one another, the result must be failure; and this understanding

can never exist if the wood-engraver has but to cut servilely what the artist draws carelessly. If any real school of wood-engraving is to exist again, the wood-cutter must be an artist translating the designer's drawing. It is quite pitiable to see the patience and ingenuity of such clever workmen, as some modern wood-cutters are, thrown away on the literal reproduction of mere meaningless scrawls. The want of logic in artists who will insist on such work is really appalling. It is the actual touches of the hand that give the speciality, the final finish to a work of art, which carries out in one material what is designed in another; and for the designer to ignore the instrument and material by which the touches are to be done, shows complete want of understanding of the scope of reproducible design.

I cannot help thinking that it would be a good thing for artists who consider designing a part of their province (I admit there are very few such artists) to learn the art of wood-engraving, which, up to a certain point, is a far from difficult art; at any rate for those who have the kind of eyes suitable for the work. I do not mean that they should necessarily always cut their own designs, but that they should be able to cut them. They would then learn what the real capacities of the art are, and would, I should hope, give the executing artists genuine designs to execute, rather than problems to solve. I do not know if it is necessary to remind you that the difficulties in cutting a simple design on wood (and I repeat that all designs for book illustrations should be simple) are very much decreased since the fifteenth century, whereas instead of using the knife on the plank section of the wood, we now use the graver on the end section. Perhaps, indeed, some of you may think this simple wood-cutting contemptible, because of its ease; but delicacy and refinement of execution are always necessary in producing a line, and this is not easy, nay it is not possible to those who have not got the due instinct for it; mere mechanical deftness is no substitute for this instinct.

Again, as it is necessary for the designer to have a feeling for the quality of the final execution, to sympathise with

the engraver's difficulties, and know why one block looks artistic and another mechanical; so it is necessary for the engraver to have some capacity for design, so that he may know what the designer wants of him, and that he may be able to translate the designer, and give him a genuine and obvious cut line in place of his pencilled or penned line without injuring in any way the due expression of the original design. Lastly, what I want the artist — the great man who designs for the humble executant — to think of is, not his drawn design, which he should look upon as a thing to be thrown away when it has served its purpose, but the finished and duly printed ornament which is offered to the public. I find that the executants of my humble designs always speak of them as "sketches," however painstaking they may be in execution. This is the recognised trade term, and I quite approve of it as keeping the "great man" in his place, and showing him what his duty is, to wit, to take infinite trouble in getting the finished work turned out of hand. I lay it down as a general principle in all the arts, where one artist's design is carried out by another in a different material, that doing the work twice over is by all means to be avoided as the source of dead mechanical work. The "sketch" should be as slight as possible, i. e., as much as possible should be left to the executant.

A word or two of recapitulation as to the practical side of my subject, and I have done. An illustrated book, where the illustrations are more than mere illustrations of the printed text, should be a harmonious work of art. The type, the spacing of the type, the position of the pages of print on the paper, should be considered from the artistic point of view. The illustrations should not have a mere accidental connection with the other ornament and the type, but an essential and artistic connection. They should be designed as a part of the whole, so that they would seem obviously imperfect without their surroundings. The designs must be suitable to the material and method of reproduction, and not offer to the executant artist a mere thicket of unnatural difficulties, producing no result when

**Notes
on
Woodcut
Books**

finished, save the exhibition of a tour de force. The executant, on his side, whether he be the original designer or someone else, must understand that his business is sympathetic translation, and not mechanical reproduction of the original drawing. This means, in other words, the designer of the picture-blocks, the designer of the ornamental blocks, the wood-engraver, and the printer, all of them thoughtful, painstaking artists, and all working in harmonious coöperation for the production of a work of art. This is the only possible way in which you can get beautiful books.

**SOME NOTES ON THE ILLUMINATED BOOKS OF
THE MIDDLE AGES.**

The Middle Ages may be called the epoch of writing par excellence. Stone, bronze, wooden rune-staves, waxed tablets, papyrus, could be written upon with one instrument or another; but all these—even the last, tender and brittle as it was—were but makeshift materials for writing on; and it was not until parchment and vellum, and at last rag-paper, became common, that the true material for writing on, and the quill pen, the true instrument for writing with, were used. From that time till the period of the general use of printing must be considered the age of written books. As in other handicrafts, so also in this, the great period of genuine creation (once called the Dark Ages by those who had forgotten the past, and whose ideal of the future was a comfortable prison) did all that was worth doing as an art, leaving makeshifts to the period of the New Birth and the intelligence of modern civilisation.

Byzantium was doubtless the mother of mediæval caligraphy, but the art spread speedily through the North of Europe and flourished there at an early period, and it is almost startling to find it as we do in full bloom in Ireland in the seventh century. No mere writing has been done before or since with such perfection as that of the early Irish ecclesiastical books; and this caligraphy is interesting also, as showing the development of what is now called by printers "lower-case" letter, from the ancient majuscular characters. The writing is, I must repeat, positively beautiful in itself, thoroughly ornamental; but these books are mostly well equipped with actual ornament, as carefully executed as the writing—in fact, marvels of patient and ingenious interlacements. This ornament, however, has no relation in any genuine Irish book to the traditional style of Byzantium, but is rather a branch of a great and widespread school of primal decoration, which has little interest in the representation of humanity and its doings, or, indeed, in any organic life, but is contented with the convolutions of abstract lines, over which it attains to great mastery. The most obvious example of this kind of art may be found in the carvings of the Maoris of New Zealand;

but it is common to many races at a certain stage of development. The colour of these Irish ornaments is not very delightful, and no gold appears in them. [Example: "The Book of Kells," Trinity College, Dublin, &c.]

This Irish caligraphy and illumination was taken up by the North of England monks; and from them, though in less completeness, by the Carlovingian makers of books both in France and even in Germany; but they were not content with the quite elementary representation of the human form current in the Irish illuminations, and filled up the gap by imitating the Byzantine picture-books with considerable success [Examples: Durham Gospels, British Museum, Gospels at Boulogne, &c.], and in time developed a beautiful style of illumination combining ornament with figure-drawing, and one seat of which in the early eleventh century was Winchester. [Example: Charter of foundation of Newminster at Winchester, British Museum.] Gold was used with some copiousness in these latter books, but is not seen in the carefully-raised and highly-burnished condition which is so characteristic of mediæval illumination at its zenith.

It should be noticed that amongst the Byzantine books of the earlier period are some which on one side surpass in mere sumptuousness all books ever made; these are written in gold and silver on vellum stained purple throughout. Later on again, in the semi-Byzantine-Anglo-Saxon or Carlovingian period, are left us some specimens of books written in gold and silver on white vellum. This splendour was at times resorted to (chiefly in Italy) in the latter half of the fifteenth century.

The just-mentioned late Anglo-Saxon style was the immediate forerunner of what may be called the first complete mediæval school, that of the middle of the twelfth century. Here the change for the better is prodigious. Apart from the actual pictures done for explanation of the text and the edification of the "faithful," these books are decorated with borders, ornamental letters, &c., in which foliage and forms human, animal, and monstrous are blended with

the greatest daring and most complete mastery. The drawing is firm and precise, and it may be said also that an unerring system of beautiful colour now makes its appearance. This colour (as all schools of decorative colour not more or less effete) is founded on the juxtaposition of pure red and blue modified by delicate but clear and bright lines and "pearlings" of white, and by the use of a little green and spaces of pale pink and flesh-colour, and here and there some negative greys and ivory yellows. In most cases where the book is at all splendid, gold is very freely used, mostly in large spaces—backgrounds and the like—which, having been gilded over a solid ground with thick gold-leaf, are burnished till they look like solid plates of actual metal. The effect of this is both splendid and refined, the care with which gold is laid on, and its high finish, preventing any impression of gaudiness. The writing of this period becoming somewhat more definitely "Gothic," does not fall short of (it could not surpass) that of the previous half-century.

From this time a very gradual change—during which we have to note somewhat more of delicacy in drawing and refinement of colour—brings us to the first quarter of the thirteenth century; and here a sundering of the styles of the different peoples begins to be obvious. Throughout the twelfth century, though there is a difference, it is easier to distinguish an English or French book from a German or Italian by the writing than by the illumination; but after 1225 the first glance on opening the book will most often cry out at you, German, Italian, or French-English. For the rest, the illuminations still gain beauty and delicacy, the gold is even more universally brilliant, the colour still more delicious. The sub-art of the rubricator, as distinguished from the limner and the scribe, now becomes more important, and remains so down to the end of the fifteenth century. Work of great fineness and elegance, drawn mostly with pen, and always quite freely, in red and blue counter-changed, is lavished on the smaller initials and other subsidiaries of the pages, producing, with the firm black writ-

ing and the ivory tone of the vellum, a beautiful effect, even when the more solid and elaborate illumination is lacking. During this period, apart from theological and philosophical treatises, herbals, "bestiaries," &c., the book most often met with, especially when splendidly ornamented, is the Psalter, as sung in churches, to which is generally added a calendar, and always a litany of the saints. This calendar, by the way, both in this and succeeding centuries, is often exceedingly interesting, from the representations given in it of domestic occupations. The great initial B (Beatus vir qui non) of these books affords an opportunity to the illuminator, seldom missed, of putting forth to the full his powers of design and colour.

The last quarter of the thirteenth century brings us to the climax of illumination considered apart from book-pictures. Nothing can exceed the grace, elegance, and beauty of the drawing and the loveliness of the colour found at this period in the best-executed books; and it must be added that, though some work is rougher than other, at this time there would appear, judging from existing examples, to have been no bad work done. The tradition of the epoch is all-embracing and all-powerful, and yet no single volume is without a genuine individuality and life of its own. In short if all the other art of the Middle Ages had disappeared, they might still claim to be considered a great period of art on the strength of their ornamental books.

In the latter part of the thirteenth century we note a complete differentiation between the work of the countries of Europe. There are now three great schools: the French-Flemish-English, the Italian, and the German. Of these the first is of the most, the last of the least, importance. As to the relations between England and France, it must be said that, though there is a difference between them, it is somewhat subtle, and may be put thus: of some books you may say, This is French; of others, This is English; but of the greater part you can say nothing more than, This belongs to the French-English school. Of those that can be differentiated with something like certainty, it may be said that

the French excel specially in a dainty and orderly elegance, the English specially in love of life and nature, and there is more of rude humour in them than in their French contemporaries; but he must be at once a fastidious and an absolute man who could say the French is better than the English or the English than the French.

The Norwich Psalter, in the Bodleian Library; the Arundel, Queen Mary's, and Tennyson Psalters, in the British Museum, are among the finest of these English books: nothing can surpass their fertility of invention, splendour of execution, and beauty of colour.

This end of the thirteenth century went on producing splendid psalters at a great rate; but between 1260 and 1300 or 1320 the greatest industry of the scribe was exercised in the writing of Bibles, especially pocket volumes. These last, it is clear, were produced in enormous quantities, for in spite of the ravages of time many thousands of them still exist. They are, one and all, beautifully written in hands necessarily very minute, and mostly very prettily illuminated with tiny figure-subjects in the initials of each book. For a short period at the end of this and the beginning of the next century many copies of the Apocalypse were produced, illustrated copiously with pictures, which give us examples of serious Gothic designs at its best, and seem to show us what wall-pictures of the period might have been in the North of Europe.

The fourteenth century, the great mother of change, was as busy in making ornamental books as in other artistic work. When we are once fairly in the century a great change is apparent again in the style. It is not quite true to say that it is more redundant than its predecessor, but it has more mechanical redundancy. The backgrounds to the pictures are more elaborated; sometimes diapered blue and red, sometimes gold most beautifully chased with dots and lines. The borders cover the page more; buds turn into open leaves; often abundance of birds and animals appear in the borders, naturalistically treated (and very well drawn); there is more freedom, and yet less individuality in this

work; in short the style, though it has lost nothing (in its best works) of elegance and daintiness—qualities so desirable in an ornamental book—has lost somewhat of manliness and precision; and this goes on increasing till, towards the end of the century, we feel that we have before us work that is in peril of an essential change for the worse. [In France “Bibles Historiaux,” i. e., partial translations of the Bible, very copiously pictured, were one of the most noteworthy productions of the latter half of the century. The Bible taken in the tent of the French King at the battle of Poitiers, now in the British Museum, is a fine example.] The differentiation, too, betwixt the countries increases; before the century is quite over, England falls back in the race [though we have in the British Museum some magnificent examples of English illumination of the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, e. g., “The Salisbury Book;” a huge Bible (Harl. i., e. ix.) ornamented in a style very peculiarly English. The Wyclifite translation of the Bible at the Museum is a good specimen of this style], and French-Flanders and Burgundy come forward, while Italy has her face turned toward Renaissance, and Germany too often shows a tendency toward coarseness and incompleteness, which had to be redeemed in the long last by the honesty of invention and fitness of purpose of her woodcut ornaments to books. Many most beautiful books, however, were turned out, not only throughout the fourteenth, but even in the first half of the fifteenth century. [“The Hours of the Duke of Berry” (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), and the “Bedford Hours,” in the British Museum, both French, are exceedingly splendid examples of this period.]

The first harbinger of the great change that was to come over the making of books I take to be the production in Italy of most beautifully-written copies of the Latin classics. These are often very highly ornamented; and at first not only do they imitate (very naturally) the severe hands of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but even (though a long way off) the interlacing ornament of that period. In these

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books the writing, it must be said, is in its kind far more beautiful than the ornament. There were so many written and pictured books produced in the fifteenth century that space quite fails me to write of them as their great merits deserve. In the middle of the century an invention, in itself trifling, was forced upon Europe by the growing demand for more and cheaper books. Gutenberg somehow got hold of punches, matrices, the adjustable mould, and so of cast movable type; Schoeffer, Mentelin, and the rest of them caught up the art with the energy and skill so characteristic of the mediæval craftsman. The new German art spread like wildfire into every country of Europe; and in a few years written books had become mere toys for the immensely rich. Yet the scribe, the rubricator, and the illuminator died hard. Decorated written books were produced in great numbers after printing had become common; by far the greater number of these were Books of Hours, very highly ornamented and much pictured. Their style is as definite as any of the former ones, but it has now gone off the road of logical consistency; for divorce has taken place between the picture-work and the ornament. Often the pictures are exquisitely-finished miniatures belonging to the best schools of painting of the day; but often also they are clearly the work of men employed to fill up a space, and having no interest in their work save livelihood. The ornament never fell quite so low as that, though as ornament it is not very "distinguished," and often, especially in the latest books, scarcely adds to the effect on the page of the miniature to which it is a subsidiary.

But besides these late-written books, in the first years of printing, the rubricator was generally, and the illuminator not seldom, employed on printed books themselves. In the early days of printing the big initials were almost always left for the rubricator to paint in in red and blue, and were often decorated with pretty scroll-work by him; and sometimes one or more pages of the book were surrounded with ornament in gold and colours, and the initials elaborately finished in the same way.

The most complete examples of this latter work subsidiary to the printed page are found in early books printed in Italy, especially in the splendid editions of the classics which came from the presses of the Roman and Venetian printers.

By about 1530 all book illumination of any value was over, and thus disappeared an art which may be called peculiar to the Middle Ages, and which commonly shows mediæval craftsmanship at its best, partly because of the excellence of the work itself, and partly because that work can only suffer from destruction and defacement, and cannot, like mediæval buildings, be subjected to the crueller ravages of "restoration."

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HERE END THE NOTES ON EARLY WOOD-CUT
BOOKS BY WILLIAM MORRIS. OF THIS BOOK
THERE HAVE BEEN PRINTED ONE HUNDRED
AND TWENTY COPIES BY CLARKE CONWELL
AT THE ELSTON PRESS: FINISHED THIS TWEN-
TIETH DAY OF FEBRUARY, MDCCCII. SOLD
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