LECTURE I.

OXFORD.

In the two series of lectures that I had the pleasure of delivering in Cambridge as Sandars Reader in 1899 and 1904, I dealt with the printers, stationers, and bookbinders of Westminster and London from 1476 to 1535, the period from the introduction of printing into England by William Caxton to the death of his successor, Wynkyn de Worde. In the present series I propose to turn to the provincial towns and trace the history of the printers, stationers, and bookbinders who worked in them from 1478, when printing was introduced into Oxford, up to 1557.

I have extended the period to 1557, because in that year a charter was granted to the re-formed Company of Stationers, and in this charter was one very important clause, " Moreover we will, grant, ordain, and constitute for ourselves, and the successors of our foresaid queen, that no person within this our kingdom of England, or dominions thereof, either by himself, or by his journey-men, servants, or by any other person, shall practise or exercise the art or mystery of printing, or stamping any book, or any thing to be sold, or to be bargained for within this our kingdom of England, or the dominions

A   1

thereof, unless the same person is, or shall be, one of
the society of the foresaid mystery, or art of a stationer
of the city aforesaid, at the time of his foresaid print-
ing or stamping, or has for that purpose obtained our
licence, or the licence of the heirs and successors of
our foresaid queen."

The effect of this enactment was virtually to put
an end to all provincial printing, and with the exception
of a few Dutch books, printed under a special privilege
at Norwich between 1566 and 1579, and a doubtful
York book of 1579, no printing was done outside
London until 1584-5, when the Universities of
Cambridge and Oxford once more started their presses.

Within the period I have chosen, printing was
exercised in ten towns, and the presses fall roughly
into three groups. The first contains Oxford, St
Alban's, and York, the second Oxford's revived press,
Cambridge, Tavistock, Abingdon, and the second St
Alban's press, and the last group Ipswich, Worcester,
and Canterbury. Besides these there are one or two
towns which, while not having presses of their own, had
books specially printed for sale in them, as for example
Hereford and Exeter, where the resident stationer
commissioned books from foreign printers. And lastly,
there must be noticed the places which have been
claimed as possessing a press on account of false or mis-
leading imprints, such as Winchester and Greenwich.

The first book issued from the Oxford press, the
Expositio in symbolum apostolorum, a treatise by
Tyrannius Rufinus on the Apostles' Creed, was finished
on the 17th of December 1478. By an error of the
printer an x was omitted from the figures forming the

date in the colophon, and thus the year was printed as
m.cccc.lxviii. [1468] in place of m.cccc.lxxviii. [1478],
and round this false date a wonderful legendary story
was woven some two hundred and fifty years ago.

In 1664 a certain Richard Atkyns published a
tract, entitled *The Original and growth of Printing*,
written to prove that printing was a prerogative of
the Crown. To strengthen his case he quoted this
Oxford book, produced, as he claimed, much earlier
than anything by Caxton, and also told a wonderful
story of the introduction of printing into England, said
to have been derived from a manuscript in the archives
at Lambeth Palace.

According to this account, Thomas Bourchier, Arch-
bishop of Canterbury, having heard of the invention of
printing at Haarlem, where John Gutenberg was then
at work (a strange fact which might simplify the
researches on early printing!), persuaded Henry VI. to
endeavour to introduce the art into England. For this
purpose, Robert Turner, an officer of the Robes, taking
Caxton as an assistant, set out for Haarlem, where,
after infinite trouble and considerable bribery, a work-
man named Frederick Corsellis was persuaded to
return with them to England. On his arrival he was
sent under a strong guard to Oxford, and there set up
his press, under the protection of the King.

It is needless to say that the whole story is a
fabrication, and a curiously clumsy one. At the
beginning of 1461 Henry VI. was deposed by Edward,
so that these events must have taken place in or before
1460, and it is strange, with all the materials ready,
nothing should be done for nearly ten years. The

information about Gutenberg, who invented printing at
Mainz and was never outside Germany, being engaged
at printing in Haarlem, is preposterous. Lastly, no
trace of the documents has ever been found. It is
strange how Atkyns should have fixed on the name
Corsellis for his mythical printer, for this uncommon
name was that of a family of wealthy Dutch merchants
settled in London at the time. Just ten years after
the publication of Atkyns' book, a Nicholas Corsellis,
lord of the manor of Lower Marney, Essex, was buried
in the church there, and on his tomb are some verses
beginning,

> " Artem typographi miratam Belgicus Anglis
>   Corsellis docuit."

Are we to infer from this that the family was a party
to the fraud ?

The story, however, was revived about the middle of
the eighteenth century, when Osborne, the bookseller, in
his catalogue of June 1756 offered for sale an edition of
Pliny's Letters, printed by Corsellis at Oxford in 1469.
In his note he added that the printer had produced
other works in 1470, and that fragments of a Lystrius
of this date were known. Herbert continues the story
as follows : "This raised the curiosity of the book
collectors, who considered this article as a confirmation
of what R. Atkins had asserted about printing at Oxford.
They all flocked to Osborne's shop, who instead of the
book, produced a letter from a man of Amsterdam filled
with frivolous excuses for not sending them to him.
They were disappointed, and looked on the whole as a
Hum ; however, the *Plinii Epistolæ* and *G. Lystrii
Oratio* afterwards appeared at an auction at Amsterdam

and were bought for the late Dr Ant. Askew, and were sold again at an auction of his books by Baker and Leigh in Feb. 1775."

These two books passed apparently to Denis Daly, then to Stanesby Alchorne, afterwards to Lord Spencer, and are now in the Rylands Library. The forgeries were made by a certain George Smith, much given to that class of work, and passed on to Van Damme, a bookseller of Amsterdam, who sold the Pliny to Askew for fifteen guineas. The inscriptions in the books are the clumsiest forgeries, which could not deceive anyone, while the books themselves were apparently printed at Deventer, early in the sixteenth century, by a well-known printer, Richard Paffroet. Listen now to the remarks of the erudite Dr Dibdin in the Biblio- theca Spenceriana. "Meerman has a long and amusing note concerning Van Damme and George Smith, from which it would appear that the latter had imposed upon the bookseller, Van Damme, in the annexed subscription to the volume, and that Van Damme acknowledged the imposition to one Richard Paffraet of Deventer. If this be true, the Dutch bibliopole acted a very dishonest part in selling the volume to Dr Askew for fifteen guineas!" If instead of long arguments about the types of the books or the probabilities of the dates, they had considered the books themselves, it might surely have occurred to them that it was at least unlikely that the physician, Gerard Lystrius, a friend and contemporary of Erasmus, should have published a work in 1470, while the next work issued by him did not appear until 1516. Besides the forged imprint, the Lystrius has at the end a long spurious note in Dutch purporting to be

written by J. Korsellis in 1471, stating that the book
had been sent him by his brother, Frederic Corsellis,
from England. In order to kill two birds with one
stone, the writer drags into the note the mythical
inventor of printing, Laurens Janszoon Coster.

Oxford's claim to having introduced printing into
England was first disputed by the Cambridge University
librarian, Dr Conyers Middleton, in his *Dissertation on
the Origin of Printing*, published in 1735. He origi-
nated the theory that a numeral x had fallen out of
the date or been accidentally omitted, and, after citing
several early examples of such a mistake, continued :
"But whilst I am now writing, an unexpected Instance
is fallen into my hands, to the support of my Opinion ;
an Inauguration Speech of the Woodwardian Professor,
Mr Mason, just fresh from our Press, with its Date
given ten years earlier than it should have been, by the
omission of an x, viz. MDCCXXIV., and the very blunder
exemplified in the last piece printed at Cambridge,
which I suppose to have happen'd in the first from
Oxford." Middleton also brought forward what has
remained the strongest argument against the authen-
ticity of the date, the occurrence in the book of
ordinary printed signatures, which are found in no
other book until several years later. Finally, he pointed
out the very great improbability of the interval of
eleven years between the book of 1468 and the two
books of 1479. The last person to cling to the 1468
date, doubtless from a sense of duty, is Mr Madan of
the Bodleian. In his exhaustive work on the early
Oxford press, after having fully put forward the
arguments for and against, he sums up the situation as

follows : " The ground has been slowly and surely
giving way beneath the defenders of the Oxford date,
in proportion to the advance of our knowledge of early
printing, and all that can be said is that it has not
yet entirely slipped away. It is still allowable to
assert that the destructive arguments, even if we
admit their cumulative cogency, do not at the present
time amount to proof."

Another earlier writer on this question ought to be
mentioned, Samuel Weller Singer, since he wrote a
small book entirely confined to the question of the
authenticity of the date. It was entitled " *Some account
of the book printed at Oxford in* 1468. *In which is
examined its claim to be considered the first book printed
in England*." A small number of copies were privately
printed ; and the author came to the conclusion that,
in his own words, " The book stands firm as a monument
of the exercise of printing in Oxford, six years older
than any book of Caxton's with date." Singer is said
to have changed his views on the subject later on, and
to have called in and destroyed as many copies as
possible. His book may be classed as a curiosity for
another reason. The original issue was said to consist
of fifty copies privately printed, and as many copies as
possible were afterwards destroyed by the author, yet
it is a book of the commonest occurrence in second-
hand catalogues.

The researches of later years, carried out more
scientifically, have produced some definite information.
In the first place, the source of the type in which the
book is printed has been ascertained. It was used in
1477 and 1478 at Cologne by a printer named Gerard

ten Raem, who printed five books with it ; a *Vocabularius
Ex quo* issued in October 1477, two issues of a *Modus
Confitendi* published in January and October 1478 and
a *Donatus* and *Æsopus moralizatus*, both without date.
These books are very rare ; the only one in the British
Museum or Bodleian being the *Donatus*. The Rylands
Library contains the *Modus Confitendi* with the October
date. The University Library possesses the *Modus*
of January and the unique copy of the *Æsop*.

Now not only are the types of the Oxford and
Cologne printers identical, but both men made similar
mistakes in the use of certain capitals, and we find
both in the *Modus Confitendi* and in the *Expositio* a
capital H frequently used in place of a capital P. This
must be regarded as more than a mere coincidence and
strong evidence of a connexion between the two
presses. The Oxford printer also printed his capital
Q sideways in his earliest book.

The printing of the Cologne *Modus Confitendi* was
finished "in profesto undecim millium virginum," that
is on October 20; that of the Oxford *Expositio* on
December 17. This gives an interval of eight weeks
between the issue of the two books, a time much too
short to allow of the same printer having produced
both books, even if there were not other reasons
against it. Who then was the printer from Cologne
who introduced printing into Oxford? I think we
are quite justified in believing that he was the
Theodoric Rood de Colonia, whose name is first found
in an Oxford book of 1481. Mr Madan considers it
would be unsafe to assume that Rood was the printer
of the first three books, no doubt because the type

in which they are printed disappeared absolutely and
was never used again. But analogous cases are not
unknown. For his first book the St Alban's printer
used a beautiful type which, except as signatures in
two other books, never appeared again.

It is extremely unfortunate that a source from
which we might no doubt have learnt something about
the introduction of printing into Oxford, and some
details about the first printer, seems irrevocably lost.
This is the volume of the registers of the Chancellor's
court covering the period between 1470 and 1497. In
the volumes that remain, which contain records of
all proceedings brought before the court, there are
numerous references to stationers, and it may be taken
as another piece of evidence against the 1468 date
that there is no reference whatever to printing or
printers between the years 1468 and 1470.

The two books which followed the *Expositio* are
a Latin translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* of
Aristotle by Leonardus Brunus Aretinus, and a treatise
on original sin by Ægidius de Columna. The first, a
quarto of one hundred and seventy-four leaves, is dated
1479, but no month is mentioned. By this date the
printer had discovered which way up a capital Q should
stand, and we find it always correctly printed, though
some minor mistakes of the *Expositio* are continued,
such as using a broken lower-case h sometimes for a b
and sometimes, upside down, for a q. The general
printing of the book was however improved, and the
lines more evenly spaced out to the right-hand edge.

The second book, the treatise of Ægidius, *De peccato
originali*, is dated March 14, 1479, but this date may

be taken as 1479-80. In this book we find red printing
introduced for the first and last time in an Oxford
book. It is by far the rarest of the early Oxford
books, perhaps on account of its small size, for it
contains only twenty-four leaves, and the three copies
known were all bound up in volumes with other tracts.
The Bodleian copy belonged to Robert Burton and came
to the library with his books ; that in Oriel College
Library was in a volume with the *Expositio* and some
foreign printed quartos, which, though kept together,
was rebound in the eighteenth century. The third
copy, now in the Rylands Library at Manchester, was,
until about thirty years ago, in a volume with the
Expositio and three foreign printed tracts, including an
edition of Michael de Hungaria's *Tredecim sermones*, a
book which has at the end a curious sermon containing
a notice of the ceremony of incepting in theology at
Oxford and Cambridge, with a few sentences in Eng-
lish. The volume had belonged to a certain A. Hylton
in the fifteenth century, and was in its original
stamped binding, a very fine specimen of contemporary
Oxford work. The volume was sold in an auction
about 1883, and the purchaser ruthlessly split up the
volume and disposed of the contents. The two Oxford
books found their way into Mr Quaritch's hands, who
sold the *Expositio* to an American collector, while the
Ægidius was bought by Lord Spencer to add to the
fine series of Oxford books at Althorp.

These first three Oxford books form a perfectly
distinct group. In them but one fount of type is used,
and they are without any kind of ornament. It is,
however, quite impossible to suppose that an interval