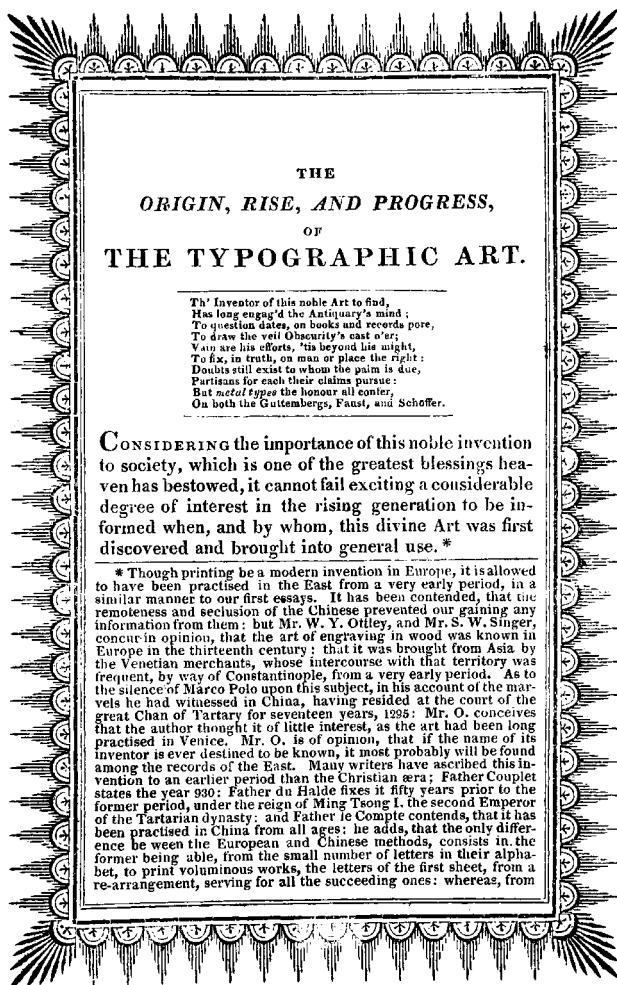


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"To the art of printing," says Dr. Knox, "it is acknowledged we owe the Reformation. It has been justly remarked, that if the books of Luther had been multiplied only by the slow process of the hand-writing, they must have been few, and would have been easily suppressed by the combination of wealth and power: but, poured forth in abundance from the press, they spread over the land with the rapidity of an inundation, which acquires additional force from the efforts used to obstruct its progress.

the prodigious number of characters in the Chinese alphabet, (some accounts state them at eighty thousand) they contend, that it is much easier and less expensive to have their pages cut on wood; thus having as many blocks as there are leaves in the book. Father du Halde gives the following particulars relative to Chinese printing:

"The work intended to be printed is transcribed by a careful writer, upon thin transparent paper: the engraver glues each of these written sheets, with its face downwards, upon a smooth tablet of pear or apple-tree, or some other hard wood; and then, with gravers and other instruments, he cuts the wood away in all those parts upon which he finds nothing traced; thus leaving the transcribed characters ready for printing: in this manner he prepares as many blocks as there are written pages. He then prints the number of copies immediately wanted; for he can always print more, if they are required, without the labour of re-composition necessary in typography: nor is any time lost in correcting the proof-sheets, for, as he is guided in his engraving by the strokes of the written copy, or perhaps the original of the author himself, it is impossible for him to make any mistakes, if the copy is written with exactness. When once, however, the blocks are engraved, the paper is cut, and the ink is ready, one man with his brush can, without fatigue, print ten thousand sheets in a day.* The block to be printed must be placed level, and firmly fixed. The man must have two brushes; one of them of a stiffer kind, which he can hold in his hand, and use at either end. He dips it into the ink, and rubs the block with it; taking care not to wet it too much, or to leave it too dry; if it were wetted too much, the characters would be blurred; if too little, they would not print. When the block is once got into a proper state, he can print three or four sheets following without dipping his brush into the ink. The second brush is used to rub over the paper, with a small degree of pressure, that it may take the impression: this it does easily, for, not being sized with alum, it receives the ink the instant it comes in contact with it. It is only necessary that the brush should be passed over every part of the sheet with a greater or smaller degree of pressure, and repeated in proportion as the printer finds there is more or less ink upon the block. This brush is soft, and of an oblong form."

Mr. Otley states, that the Chinese do not use presses, because the delicate texture of their paper would not bear the impression of an European press: On this point I must differ from Mr. O. and beg to refer him, as a proof of its being used in this country, to the numerous impressions taken from wood engravings, as well as to entire works.

In order to establish the great antiquity of the art in China, Du Halde cites the following, as given by an old author, from the pen of the celebrated Emperor Van Fong, who flourished 1120 years before Christ:

"As the stone Me," (a word signifying ink in the Chinese language) "which is used to blacken the engraved characters, can never become white; so a heart blackened by vices will always retain its blackness."

The above passage has led several writers to conclude, that printing was known in the East more than three thousand years ago.

* Mr. Otley observes, "Had this number been stated in figures, I should have given the printer credit for having introduced a cipher extraordinary, in honour of Chinese industry. The account is absolutely incredible."

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He who undertook to prevent the dispersion of the books once issued from the press, attempted a task no less arduous than the destruction of the hydra. Resistance was vain, and religion was reformed: and we, who are chiefly interested in this happy revolution, must remember, amidst the praises bestowed on Luther, that his endeavours had been ineffectual, unassisted by the invention of Faustus.*

How greatly the cause of religion has been promoted by the art, must appear, when it is considered, that it has placed those sacred books in the hand of every individual, which, besides that they were once locked up in a dead language, and could not be procured without great difficulty. The numerous comments on them of every kind, which tend to promote piety, and to form the Christian philosopher, would probably never have been composed, and certainly would not have extended their beneficial influence, if typography had still been unknown. By that art, the light, which is to illuminate a dark world, has been placed in a situation more advantageous to the emission of its rays: but if it has been the means of illustrating the doctrines, and enforcing the practice of religion, it has also, particularly in the present age, struck at the root of piety and moral virtue, by propagating opinions favourable to the sceptic and voluptuary. It has enabled modern authors wantonly to gratify their avarice, their vanity, and their misanthropy, in disseminating novel systems subversive of the dignity and happiness of human nature: but though the perversion of the art is lamentably remarkable in those volumes which issue, with offensive profusion, from the vain, the wicked, and the hungry, yet this good results from the evil, that as truth is great and will prevail, she must derive fresh lustre, by displaying the superiority of her strength in the conflict with sophistry.

“Thus the art of printing, in whatever light it is viewed, has deserved respect and attention. From the ingenuity of the contrivance, it has ever excited mechanical curiosity; from its intimate connection with learning, it has justly claimed historical notice; and from its extensive influence on morality, politics, and religion, it is now become a subject of very important speculation.

“But, however we may felicitate mankind on the invention, there are perhaps those who wish, that, together with its compatriot art of manufacturing gun-powder, it

* The learned Doctor, in bestowing his praise on the inventor of printing, should have recollected, that Faustus never worked at the art, he merely supplied the money; and, therefore, has very little title to the invention.

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had not yet been brought to light. Of its effects on literature, they assert, that it has increased the number of books, till they distract rather than improve the mind; and of its malignant influence on morals, they complain, that it has often introduced a false refinement, incompatible with the simplicity of primitive piety and genuine virtue. With respect to its literary ill-consequences, it may be said, that though it produces to the world an infinite number of worthless publications, yet true wit and fine composition will still retain their value, and it will be an easy task for critical discernment to select these from the surrounding mass of absurdity: and though, with respect to its moral effects, a regard to truth extorts the confession, that it has diffused immorality and irreligion, divulged with cruel impertinence the secrets of private life, and spread the tale of scandal through an empire; yet these are evils which will either shrink away unobserved in the triumphs of time and truth over falsehood, or which may, at any time, be suppressed by legislative interposition."

This discovery having been made so lately as the fifteenth century, it is matter of surprise that no certain record has been handed down fixing the precise time when, the person by whom, and the place whence this Art received its birth. The abilities of the literary Antiquaries of different nations have been called forth, in order that the palm may be ceded to those, who not only merited so well of their own country, but also of every other portion of the civilized globe. These researches have not satisfactorily determined the point; the affair still remains involved in a certain degree of mystery; although it must be admitted, that great probability appears in the theories of some of those who have investigated this difficult subject. We shall notice the different claims, and leave the Reader to form his own conclusion.

Two reasons may be assigned for this obscurity; viz. the imperfect state of printing while it remained in the possession of its inventor. 2d. Pecuniary motives induced the first printers (from the large sums which

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were usually paid for manuscripts) to sell their works as such ; so that printing was, for a period, as much the *counterfeit* as the *substitute* for writing, it being a *fac-simile* of the most approved Scribes. The few persons concerned kept the art a secret for some time, till their funds not being sufficient to answer the necessary expenses, these ingenious men were thus compelled to associate with persons of property, from the union of whose names a degree of doubt has arisen to whom the merit really belongs.

A competition for this distinguished honour now took place between Haerlem, Meutz, Strazburg, and Venice ; partisans arose in favour of Laurensz Jansz Coster of Haerlem ; John Guttemberg and others of Mentz ; Guttemberg and Mentilius of Strazburg ; and Nicolas Janson of Venice. Those who advocated the cause of Janson relinquished the contest, when they discovered that books were printed prior to those generally attributed as Janson's earliest productions. The opinion which states Strazburg to have been the birth-place of the art, is as little satisfactory ; a division of sentiment exists as to the inventor at this place, some asserting that Mentilius printed as early as 1447 ; others ascribing the discovery to John Guttemberg, or Geinsfleisch, junior.

* Nicolas Janson, or Jansonius, born in France, was originally an engraver of coins and medals at Paris in the sixteenth century. In the year 1468, King Charles VII. having received private information of the invention at Mentz, he sent Janson to obtain a knowledge of the art. Having succeeded, he returned to France, when he found his patron was dead ; upon which he retired to Venice, and commenced letter-founder and printer : he excelled in all branches of the art, and more than are united with it. He first determined the form and proportion of the present Roman character : his editions are still in great request on account of the neatness and beauty of his types. The first production of his press is a scarce work in quarto, intitled 'Decor Puellarum,' the date of which is 1471 ; the same year he published 'Gloria Mulierum,' in Italian, a proper sequel to the former. There are found several editions of Latin Classics which he printed during the subsequent ten years : it is conjectured that he died about 1481, this being the date of his last production.

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The claims of Laurentius* Coster of Haerlem depend principally on the authority of the celebrated Historian of Holland, Hadrianus Junius, or Adrian Young, who was born at Horn, in 1511, and took up his residence at Haerlem, in 1560; he was rector of the Latin school, and also teacher of natural philosophy at Haerlem. In January, 1575, he finished his work, intituled *Batavia*, and died on the 16th of June the same year: this work appeared in 1578, from which it is considered that all Coster's partisans have taken their ground of argument. The following particulars are supposed to have been written in 1568:

* Laurentius was born at Haerlem, about the year 1370, and executed several departments of magistracy in that city. Those writers are mistaken who assign to him the surname of Coster, or assert that the office of *seditus* was hereditary in his family. In a diploma of Albert of Bavaria, in 1389, in which, among other citizens of Haerlem, Laurentius' father is mentioned by the name of Joannes Laurentii filius. Beroldus is called *seditus*, who was surely of another family; and in 1396, and 1398, Henricus a Lunen enjoyed that office; after his resignation, Count Albert conferring on the citizens the privilege of electing their *seditus*, they then chose Laurentius; who was afterwards called Coster from his office, and not from his family name, as he was descended from an illegitimate branch of the Gens Brederodia. The elegance of his house may testify that he was a man of property. His works were printed on separate moveable wooden types fastened together by threads. It may be thought improbable, that so ingenious a man should not have proceeded farther than the invention of wooden types; it may be answered, he printed for gain, not for reputation; for wooden types could be made sooner and cheaper than metal. His press was shaped like the common wine-presses. He printed some copies of all his books on paper and vellum. It has been erroneously stated, that he quitted the profession, and died broken-hearted: but it is certain, that he did not live to see the art brought to perfection. He died in 1440, aged 70; and was either succeeded by his son-in-law Thomas Peter, or by their immediate descendants, Peter, Andrew, and Thomas; who were old enough to conduct the business, the eldest being at least twenty-three. Laurentius has acquired a name in the annals of printing, the Dutch affirming him to be the inventor of that art, about 1430, but this claim is obstinately disputed. It is said that the city of Haerlem advanced no pretensions to the merit of its invention for the space of 130 years after the first exercise of this art at Mentz. The learned Meerman, counsellor and pensionary of Rotterdam, zealous for the honour of his country, supported the cause of Haerlem with all the sagacity and erudition that could be exerted, in a work intituled, '*Origines Typographicæ*,' 2 vols. 8vo. printed at the Hague, in 1765; an abridgment of which is given in '*Bowyer and Nichols's Origin of Printing*.'

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"About 120 years ago, Laurence Zanssen Coster, inhabited a decent and fashionable house in the city of Haerlem, situated on the market-place opposite the royal palace. The name of Coster was assumed, and inherited from his ancestors, who had long enjoyed the honourable and lucrative office of Coster or Sexton to the church. This man deserves to be restored to the honour of being the first inventor of printing, of which he has been unjustly deprived by others, who have enjoyed the praises due to him alone. As he was walking in the wood contiguous to the city, which was the general custom of the richer citizens and men of leisure, in the afternoon and on holydays, he began to cut out letters on the bark of the beech; with these letters he entamped marks upon paper in a contrary direction, in the manner of a seal; until at length he formed a few lines for his own amusement, and for the use of the children of his brother-in-law. This succeeding so well, he attempted greater things; and being a man of genius and reflection, he invented, with the aid of his brother, or son-in-law, Thomas Pieterison, a thicker and more adhesive ink, as the common ink was too thin and made blotted marks. With this ink he was able to print blocks and figures, to which he added letters. I have seen specimens of his printing in this manner: in the beginning he printed on one side only. This was a Dutch book, entitled *Spiegel enser Behoudenisse*. That it was one of the first books printed after the invention of the art, appears from the leaves, which are pasted together, that the naked sides might not be offensive to the eyes; and none at first were printed in a more perfect manner. As this new species of traffic attracted numerous customers thus did the profits arising from it increase his love for the art, and his diligence in the exercise of it.

He engaged workmen, which was the source of the mischief. Among these workmen was one Jan — whether his surname be that of Fanst,* or any other, is of no great importance to me; as I will not disturb the

* Authors disagree with respect to the person who committed this robbery. There can be no reason for supposing Faust to have been the thief, he being a wealthy citizen of Mentz, who assisted the first printers with money; and though he afterwards was proprietor of a printing-office, it does not appear that he ever worked; therefore, it is improbable that he was a servant of Laurentius. Scriverius fixes the theft on John Guttemberg, who is said to have resided at S razzburg from 1436 to 1444. Some suppose the robber to have been John Maideubachius, others John Petersheimius, but most probably it was John Geinsfleisch, sen. whom Kohlerus states came to Mentz in 1441, and not before.

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dead, whose consciences must have smote them sufficiently while living. This Jan, who assisted at the printing-press under oath, after he had learned the art of casting the types,† setting them, and other articles belonging to the art, and thought himself sufficiently instructed, having watched the opportunity, as he could not find a better, he packed up the types and the other articles on Christmas eve, while the family was engaged in celebrating the festival, and stole away with them. He first fled to Amsterdam, thence to Cologne, until he could establish himself at Mentz, as a secure place, where he might open shop, and reap the fruits of his knavery. It is a known fact, that within the twelve months, that is, in the year 1440, he published the *Alexandri Galli Doctrinale*, a grammar at that time in high repute, with *Petri Hispani Tractatus Logicis*, with the same letters which Laurens had used. These were the first products of his press. These are the principal circumstances that I have collected from creditable persons, far advanced in years, which they have transmitted like a flaming torch from hand to hand; I have also met with others who have confirmed the same," &c. &c.

The particulars here recorded, he states to have received from his tutor, Nicholas Galius, an old gentleman of very tenacious memory, who related that, when a boy, he had often heard one Cornelius, a book-

† There certainly appears a strange inconsistency in the different statements respecting this robbery. A majority of writers agree that it took place in 1441; whereas, it is universally allowed that Laurentius died in 1440. It is likewise asserted, that the thief conveyed away metal types: but it evidently appears, that Laurentius never used any other than wooden ones, which circumstance has induced some writers to doubt the fact all together. The account is certainly a very natural and pleasing one, if we divest it of the above and a few other inconsistencies. It has also been urged, that a printing-press, with all its implements, would be very inconvenient articles to convey away privately: it is stated, in answer to the latter, that it was not requisite he should carry off the press. His practical knowledge of the machine would enable him to retain a perfect model in his mind, sufficient for his purpose; a few of the moveable wooden types might be packed up at a time when the other workmen were not only absent, but otherwise engaged: their bulk could be no bar to concealment through the night, nor prevent their being carried off early the next morning, as soon as the city gates were open; and the day subsequent to the robbery being a holiday, would probably secure his retreat before the theft could be discovered. It is necessary to observe, that in the confusion of names which follow this event in the history of printing, the thief has been suffered to escape, and the crime attributed to an innocent person.

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binder, (then upwards of eighty years of age, who had, when a youth, assisted at the printing-office of Coster,) describe with great earnestness the numerous trials and experiments made by his master in the infancy of the invention: when he came to that part of his narrative touching the robbery, he would burst into tears, and curse, with the greatest vehemence, those nights in which he had slept with so vile a miscreant; and that, were he still alive, he could with pleasure execute the thief with his own hands. Junius states, that he received a similar account from Quirinus Talesius, the Burgomaster, who declared that it was recited to him by the said Cornelius: the latter died in 1515.

Mr. Ottley gives the following chronology, in his *History of Engraving*, in justification of the statement of Junius:

“Junius, who was born in 1511, we will suppose, wrote his account of Coster in 1568.—He received this account when a young man, perhaps of twenty-five (An. 1536) from his tutor, Nicholas Galius, who we may conclude was then full sixty-seven years of age,—for Junius speaks of him as an old gentleman of very tenacious memory; and such a description would not be suited to a younger man. Galius, when a youth—say of eighteen years of age, which brings us to 1497—heard the relation, several times repeated, from the mouth of Cornelius, the bookbinder, who was then upwards of eighty—we will call him eighty-two—and Cornelius, when a young man of three-and-twenty, lived with Laurence Coster—that is, in the year 1428.

“This chronological calculation is far from unreasonably, whilst it accords sufficiently well with the general tenor of Junius’s statement, as well as the shorter account of Guicciardini. Indeed, if Laurence Coster, or Laurent Janszoon, by whichever name we call him, was the first inventor of typography; and if the example of his imperfect attempts did give rise to the more successful endeavours of the printers of Mentz—it necessarily follows, I think, that we must date the period of his discovery of moveable characters, within the first thirty years of the fifteenth century.

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Mr. O. is of opinion that Junius is in error, when he states that Quirinus Talesius received his information from the same Cornelius who worked for Coster, he imagines him to have been a son, or nephew, of the former; as Mr. Meerman found mention of *Cornelius the bookbinder* in the records of the church of S. Bavon, at Haerlem, under the years 1474, 1485, 1487, 1496, 1503, 1507, 1508, and 1515. If the chronology, observes Mr. Ottley, be correct, Cornelius must have been ninety in the year 1496; therefore, he concludes, that the latter dates refer to a younger Cornelius, the informant of Talesius.

Ulric Zell, father of the Cologne press, was a native of Germany, and is said to have gained his knowledge of the art at Mentz. In the *Cologne Chronicle* of 1499, he gives the following testimony:

“Item: this most revered art was first discovered at Mentz, in Germany; and it is a great honour to the German nation, that such ingenious men were found in it. This happened in the year of our Lord MCCCCXI; and from that time, till the year MCCCCL, the art, and what belongs to it, was rendered more perfect. In the year of our Lord MCCCCL, which was a golden year, then men began to print, and the first book printed was a Bible in Latin, and it was printed in a larger character than that with which men now print mass-books. Item: although this art was discovered at Mentz at first, in the manner in which it is now commonly used, yet the first example of it was found in Holland, in the Donatuses which were before printed there. And thence is derived the beginning of this art, and it is more masterly and subtle than the ancient manner was, and by far more ingenious. [The Chronicler,] says Mr. Dibdin, in his Bibliotheca Spenceriana, “goes on to refute the assertion advanced by Omnibonus, in the edition of Quintilian, of 1471, which makes Jenson the inventor of the art of printing; and thus proceeds:—but the first inventor of printing was a citizen of Mentz, and was born at Strasbourg, and was called John Gudenburch. Item: from Mentz, the before-mentioned art first came to Cologne, thence to Strasbourg, and thence to Venice.