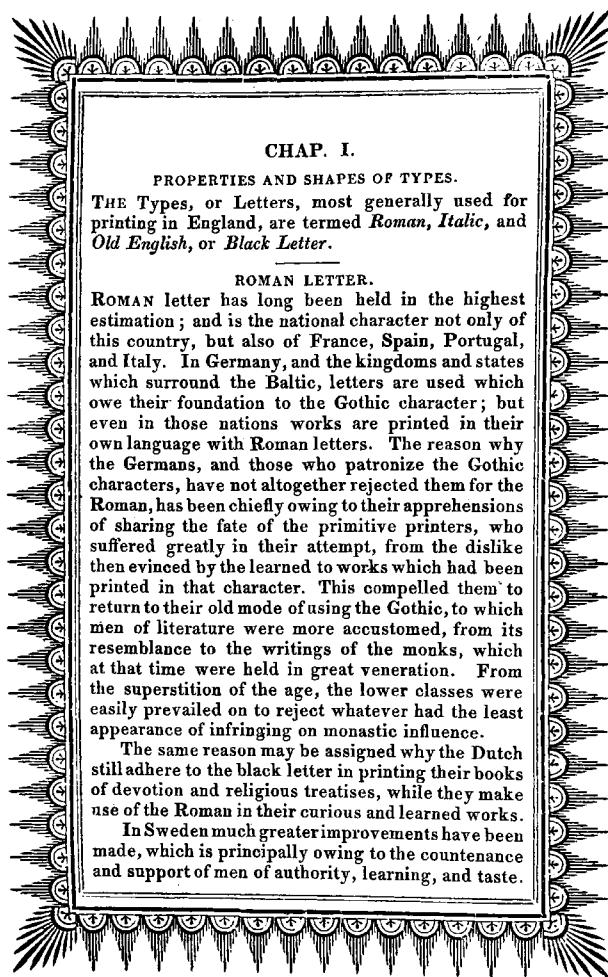


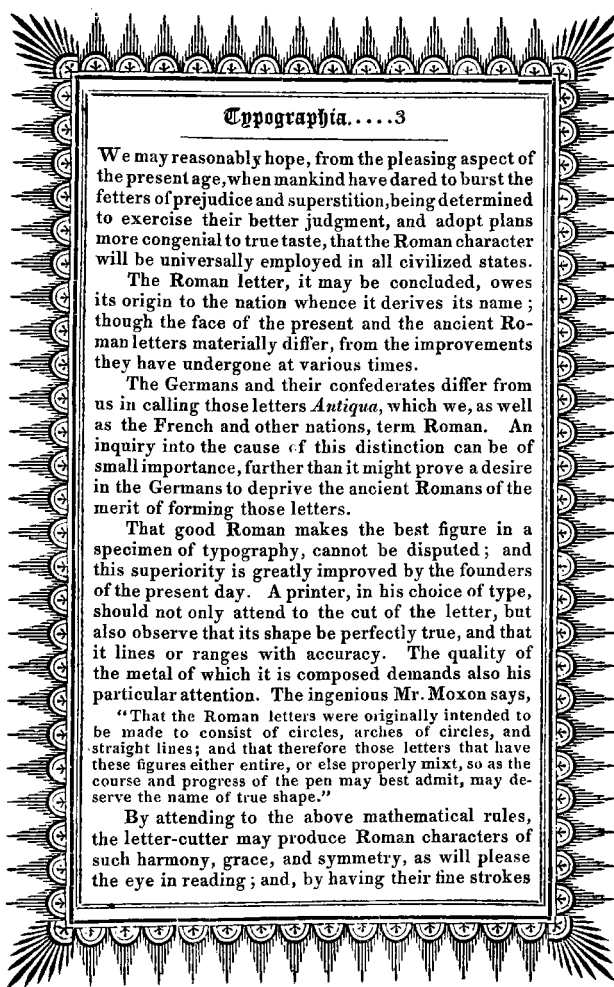
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978-1-108-04778-4 - Typographia, or The Printers' Instructor: Volume 2

John Johnson

Excerpt

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4...*Typographia.*

and swells blended together in due proportion, will excite admiration in those who may take the pains of comparing the smaller with the larger sized letters. But to assert positively what foundery can boast of true shaped letters would be speaking with too much presumption; since it is agreed, even by able penmen, that none can strike two letters of the same signification, so as, upon the strictest examination, to have the same likeness. If, therefore, it is impossible to write a true duplicate upon paper, it may be excused in those who attempt it in steel: for, were it practicable to copy so as to make it impossible to discover the least deviation from the original, letter-cutters too would then be able to supply accented letters, and such as are contained in ligatures, of the exact shape and symmetry with those of the main alphabet, though even these should have nothing but the fancy of the artist in support of their being true shaped.

We are aware that a variety of opinions exist respecting true-shaped letters; therefore we shall abstain from entering into a controversy upon that head, being persuaded of the impossibility of bringing a number of persons into the same way of thinking. As the Germans are justly entitled to the merit for the invention of typography and metal types, so are the Dutch famed for their improvement of the latter: which was held in the highest estimation for many years, till they were rivalled by our countrymen; from which period Dutch letter ceased to be imported for our use.

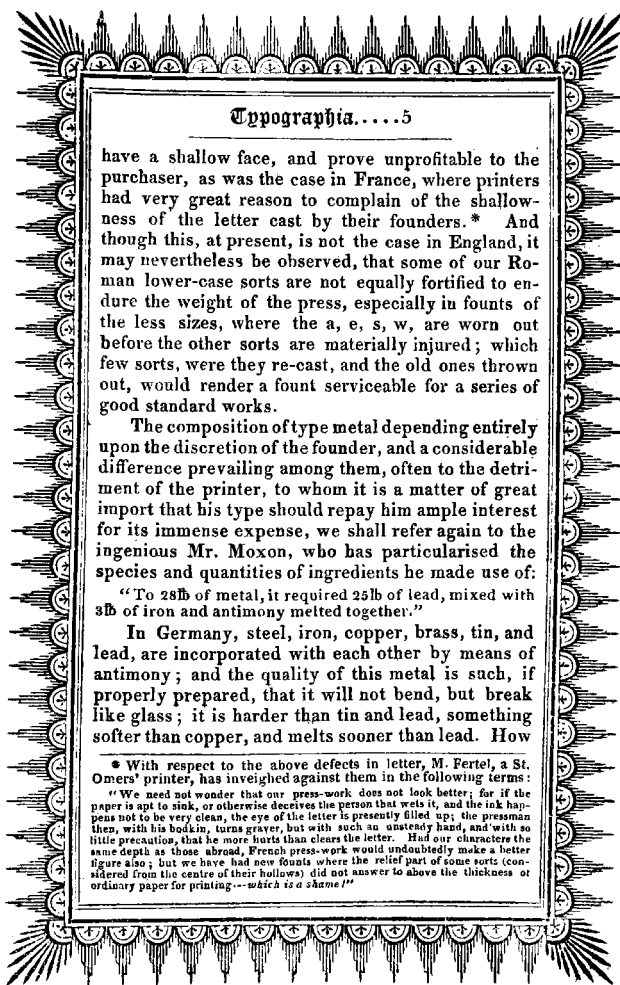
It is equally important that types should have a deep face, which will depend upon the depth of the punches, their hollows being in proportion to the width of the respective letters, and likewise that the punches are sunk into the matrices; for should there be a defect in this respect, the letter, of course, will

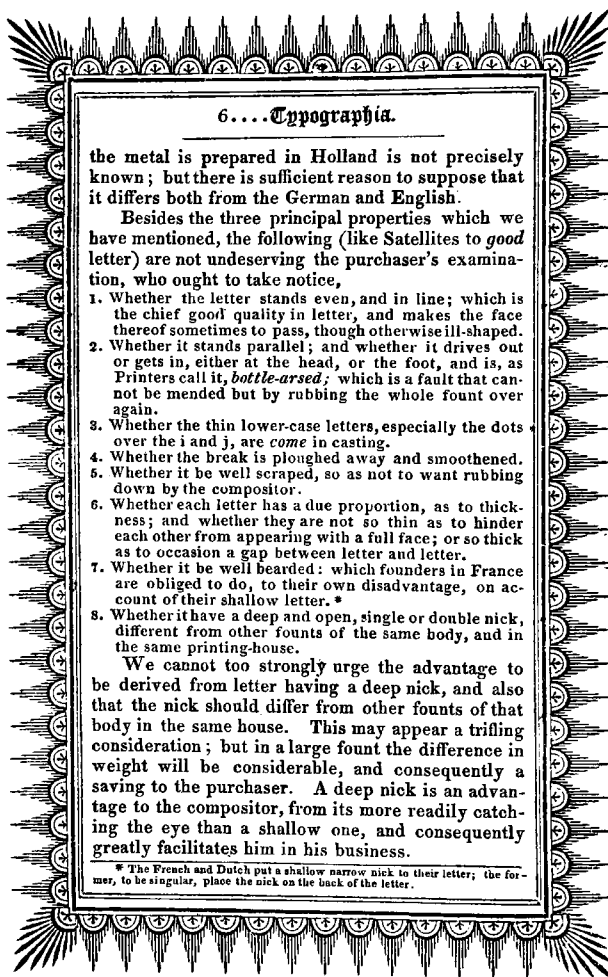
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Typographia. . . . 7

ITALIC LETTER.

For the invention of this letter we are indebted to Aldus Manutius, by birth a Roman, who erected a printing-office in Venice, 1496, where he introduced the Roman types of a neater cut, and gave birth to that beautiful letter which is known to most of the nations in Europe by the name of Italic; though the Germans, and their adherents, show themselves as ungenerous in this respect as they did with the Roman, by calling it Cursiv, in order to stifle the memory of its original descent, and deprive the Romans of the merit due to their ingenuity.

In the first instance it was termed Venetian, from Manutius being a resident at Venice, where he brought it to perfection; but not long after it was dedicated to the state of Italy, to prevent any dispute that might arise from other nations claiming a priority, as was the case concerning the first inventor of printing.

Italic was originally designed to distinguish such parts of a book as might be considered not strictly to belong to the body of the work, as Prefaces, Introductions, Annotations, &c. all which sub-parts of a work were formerly printed in this character; so that at least two-fifths of a fount was comprised of Italic letter.

At present it is used more sparingly, the necessity being supplied by the more elegant mode of introducing extracts within inverted commas, and poetry and annotations in a smaller-sized type. It is often serviceable in displaying a title-page, or distinguishing the head or subject-matter of a chapter from the chapter itself. To plead the necessity of Italic to distinguish proper names of persons and places, would be altogether needless; and argue, that the present age is less capable of apprehension than our forefathers, who knew the sense and meaning of words before Italic existed, at a period when one kind of type served for the title, body, and all the other parts of a work.

8... *Typographia*.

That this character was not designed to distinguish proper names, nor for several other uses to which it has been applied, can be readily proved, even from works printed in this country. Many have considered it as depriving Roman of its beauty, by loading it with Italic words and terms of common signification and meaning; and have thought it inconsistent to intermix letter of an erect position with that of an oblique inclination.

What Roman letter suffers by being interlarded with Italic, is of equal importance to this, when it is invaded by the former: because Roman having a much bolder appearance than Italic of the same body, takes advantage of the soft and tender face of the latter; which, in England, has arrived to a high degree of perfection. Is it not a pity that two such significant bodies as Roman and Italic, of which neither stands in need of the other, should often be so maimed, that it is difficult to discover which of them is most entitled to our decided preference?

It would be a desirable object, if the use of Italic could be governed by some rules. We shall here recommend to those authors who appear so solicitous, by their frequent introduction of Italic, that the beauty and essence of their writings may not be lost, to trust a little more to the discernment and understanding of their readers. That the frequent use of Italic is useless, and generally

* Upon the establishment of the Roman character, the Germans used it for proper names and words of Latin. But if the English adopted their idea, and put similar words in Italic, they are not upon an equal footing with the former; the Roman and German being of a parallel position, but Italic of an oblique inclination: The mixture of types has been attributed to the fancy of some author, whose work abounded with proper names either of persons or places; and, in order that such words might be more readily seen in the text, which would save him the trouble of reading over the whole work when he had occasion to make out an Index of the names contained in the matter, the names would appear more conspicuous to the reader, by being in a different character. That such a contrivance may have afterwards been looked upon as an improvement; or the printer may have supported the same, to make more use of his Italic, seems not altogether improbable.

