



A CONCISE  
 H I S T O R Y  
 O F  
 P R I N T I N G .

THE ORIGIN.

**A**S it is propos'd to confine this historical account of the ART of PRINTING, as now practis'd in EUROPE, to Letters cast in Metal, we shall wave that of Printing on Pages cut in Blocks of Wood, and what is generally suppos'd to have been in use among the CHINESE many ages before the present method was introduced into EUROPE.

The present Art is but three hundred and thirty years old ; and it long remained an undetermined point between the city of MENTZ in GERMANY, and the city of HAERLEM in HOLLAND, concerning the place where, and the person by whom, this divine art was first invented and practis'd ; but, at this

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this time the majority of voices have determined the dispute in favour of MENTZ; however, we shall give both their pleas.

It is said to be First attempted at MENTZ, between the years 1440 and 1450, by JOHN FUST or FAUST, JOHN MEYDENBUCH, and JOHN GENESTEISCH surnamed GUTTEMBERG. It was long a controverted question, by many learned antiquarians, whether GUTTEMBERG or FAUST was the Inventor of that Art, till happily the original instrument was found; whereby it appears, that the latter only associated the others with him for the sake of their purses, he not being able to proceed without, on account of the great expences attending the cutting of the blocks of wood; which, after they were once printed from, became entirely useless for any other work. This instrument, which is dated Nov. 6, 1455, is decisive in favour of GUTTEMBERG; but the honour of single types, made of metal, is ascribed to FAUST, wherein he received great assistance from his servant and son-in law PETER SCHOFFER, 'who devised the puncheons, matrices, and moulds, for casting them, on which account he was taken into partnership by his father-in-law, who, in 1455, had a quarrel with, and separated from, GUTTEMBERG. Those who have asserted that FAUST was the first inventor of printing, have given for a reason, that they have never seen any book with GUTTEMBERG's name to it; without considering, that their first essays in printing, both by blocks and moveable types, being sold for manuscripts, were anonymous, the invention being by them intended to be kept secret; nor was it divulged till their disagreement, by which time FAUST had made himself master of the art, and GUTTEMBERG was not able to proceed in it alone, owing to his circumstances.

The inhabitants of HAERLEM assert that LAURENSZ JANSZ KOSTER of that city was the inventor of Printing, about the year 1430; but that, in the infancy of the invention, he used wooden blocks, yet after some time he left off that method and cut letters on steel, which he sunk in copper matrices,

and

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Philip Luckombe

Excerpt

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and fitting them into iron moulds, he cast single letters of metal in those matrices. They assert also, that his companion and assistant, JOHN GUTTEMBERG, stole away his tools while he was at church, and with them went to MENTZ, where he set up and practised the art. They say much of a book intitled *De Spiegel*, printed at HAERLEM, in Dutch and Latin, which is there yet to be seen; and insist on that book to have been the first that ever was printed, but yet, as it has no date, there are no positive proofs to ground their assertion on.

The learned Dr. Willis, of Oxford, made a studious inquiry into the Origin of this invention, and in the following concise manner delivered his opinion: "About the year 1450 the Art of Printing was invented and practised in GERMANY, but whether first at MENTZ or HAERLEM is not determined; for it appears upon an impartial inquiry, that those who had it in consideration before it was brought to perfection, disagreeing among themselves, separated company, and some of them at HAERLEM, and others at MENTZ, pursued the practice of their former employ, at one and the same time."

There is at MENTZ, on the front of the house wherein GUTTEMBERG lived, the following inscription, which was put up in the year 1507.

JOANNI GUTTEMBERGENSI  
MOGUNTINO,  
QUI PRIMUS OMNIUM LITERAS ÆRE  
IMPRIMENDAS INVENIT,  
HAC ARTE DE ORBE TOTO BENE MERENTI;  
YVO VINTIGENSIS  
HOC SAXUM PRO MONUMENTO POSUIT.

JO. CHRIST. SEIZ's blind partiality to HOLLAND has led him into so many mistakes in his Historical Narrative of the Invention of Printing, which is little more than a revival of the old legend of ADRIAN JUNIUS, and so stuffed with forgeries and calumnies, tending to deprive both GUTTEMBERG

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and FAUST of the honour of being the first inventors of the Art of Printing, the æra of which he carries as far back as the year 1428, attributing it, without the least foundation, to one LAURENSZ JANSZ, surnamed KOSTER of HAERLEM, that it may with safety be rejected.

The first printed book upon record is The Book of Psalms, by JOHN FAUST, of MENTZ, and PETER SCHOEFFER, in 1457, on the 14th of August. However, after this first essay, they are supposed to have printed Durand's Rationale Divinorum, in 1459, and the Latin vocabulary, intitled Catholicon, in 1460: but what signalized FAUST, and his art most, was the first printed Bible, which he began in 1450, and finished in 1460; when FAUST, carrying a parcel of printed copies of it to Paris, and offering them to sale as Manuscripts, had the misfortune to be imprisoned, under suspicion of dealing with the Devil; because the French could not otherwise conceive how so many books should so exactly agree in every letter and point; nor could he obtain his liberty till he had discovered the method by which they were done. In 1466 he printed a quarto edition of Tully's Offices, and the year following another edition of the same book, as may be seen in the catalogues of the scarce and curious books belonging to the Libraries of both our Universities.

From HAERLEM it passed to ROME, in 1467; and in 1468 it was carried to VENICE and PARIS. Hitherto the proficient in this new art had proceeded no further than in the common alphabet, suited to the vulgar and Latin tongues. The Gothic alphabet, as it most resembled the Manuscripts of those times, was the first attempt; then some of the Italian princes introduced the Roman alphabet; and, in a short time, brought it to that perfection, that, in the beginning of the year 1474, they cast a letter not much inferior to the best types of the present age; as may be seen in a Latin grammar, written by Omnibonus Leonicensus, and printed at Padua, on the 14th of January, 1474; from whom our grammarian Lilly has taken the entire scheme of his grammar, and transcribed the greatest part there-

of,

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of, without paying any regard to the memory of this author. At last, the Italic alphabet came much in vogue : but there were no Greek types till about the year 1476, when the Italian printers cast them upon the same principles as they had done the other alphabets : yet we are not able to ascertain, whether this was first introduced by the Venetians, Milanese, or Florentines, each of them claiming the reputation of that improvement: tho' it is universally allowed that two Jewish Rabbins, Joshua and Moses, were the first who published the Hebrew character in separate types at Saccino, a little city in the duchy of Milan, in the year 1480.

About the end of the 16th century, the Vatican and Paris printers introduced the Syriac, Arabian, Persian, Armenian, Coptic or Egyptian characters ; which, with several other Chinese and Indian types, have been improved and published by the printers in London.

This art has also passed from Europe to Goa, and the Philippine islands in Asia ; to Lima, Mexico, Boston, New York, &c. in America, and to Morocco in Africa. Besides, amongst other curiosities, and pieces of antiquity, a reverend Clergyman has convinced us of the vulgar error, which reports, that Printing is rigorously prohibited throughout the Turkish empire, by shewing the " Capitulations and Articles of Peace between the King of Great Britain and the Sultan of the Ottoman empire, printed at Constantinople, by Abraham Gabai Chafnahat, Anno 1663."

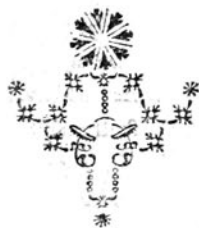
Thus we have briefly shewn where, and by whom, the Art of Printing with separate types was invented ; and, also, how it was at first dispersed : we shall therefore proceed to the account of the Practice of this Art in England.

In what uncertainty the history of the first use of Printing in England is, may be seen by the following imperfect detail. Some of our Almanac makers tell us that Printing was first used in England, A. D. 1443, about seven years before it was practised, or, about three years after it was first thought of :

others

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others say, not till after 1459. The workmen of the Printing-press, at the Theatre in Oxford, in a paper printed by them August 23, A. D. 1729, affirm, that the noble Art and Mystery of Printing was first invented in the year 1430, and brought into England in the year 1447; a mistake, perhaps, for 1474. The learned Mr. Collier assures us, that the Mystery of Printing appeared ten years sooner at the University of Oxford, than at any other place in Europe, Haerlem and Mentz excepted; which fixes the introduction of it there so early as 1457: since it is certain, that it appeared at Rome, and elsewhere in Europe, in 1467; though by the date, put in the margin, he seems willing to have had it thought, that it did not appear at Oxford before 1464. The diligent collector of the Annals of Printing, supposes this Art first brought into England in 1460; and Mr. Bailey implicitly follows Atkyns's romance of the introduction of it in King Henry VIth's reign, or before 1460. But the generality of our English chroniclers, who mention it, tell us, that Printing was first practised by Mr. Caxton, in 1471, at Westminster, under the patronage of the Abbot.





INTRODUCTION OF THE ART  
 INTO  
 ENGLAND.

THE late learned and ingenious Dr. CONYERS  
 MIDDLETON, Principal Librarian of Cambridge,  
 printed in 1735, a curious Dissertation concern-  
 ing the Origin of Printing in England, from  
 whence we have extracted the following account.

It was a constant opinion delivered down by our Historians,  
 That the Art of Printing was introduced and first practised in  
 England by WILLIAM CAXTON, a Mércer and Citizen of  
 London; who, by his travels abroad, and a residence of many  
 years in Holland, Flanders, and Germany, in the affairs of  
 trade, had an opportunity of informing himself of the whole  
 method and process of the art; and by the encouragement of  
 the great, and particularly of the abbot of Westminster, first  
 set up a press in that Abby, and began to print books soon  
 after the year 1471.

This was the tradition of our writers; till a book, which had  
 scarce been observed before the Restoration, was then taken  
 notice of by the curious, with a date of its impression from  
 Oxford, anno 1468, and was considered immediately as a clear  
 proof and monument of the exercise of printing in that Univer-  
 sity, several years before CAXTON began to practise it.

This

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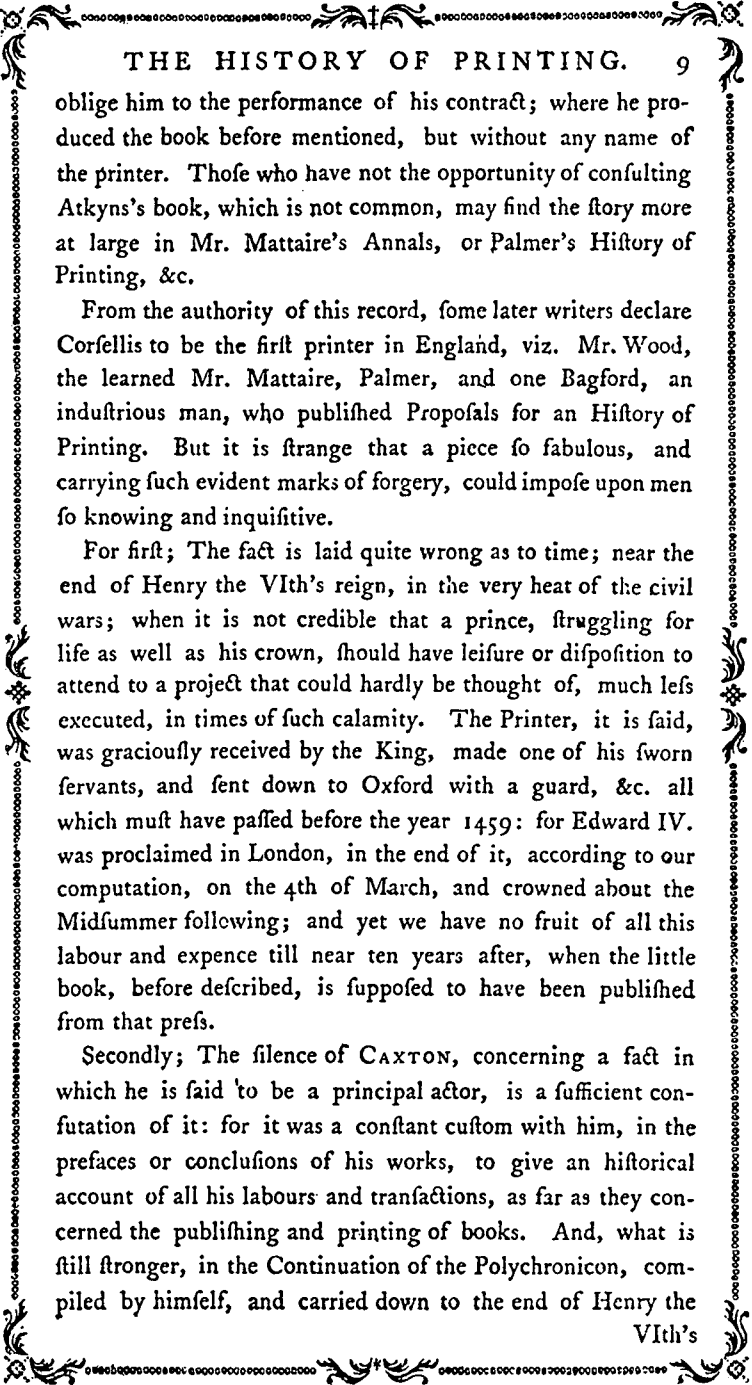
This book, which is in the Public Library at Cambridge, is a small volume of forty-one leaves in quarto, with this title: “Eposicio Sancti Jeronimi in Simbolum Apostolorum ad Papam Laurentium:” and at the end, “Explicit exposicio, &c. Impressa Oxonie, & finita An. Dom. M.CCCC.LXVIII. xvii die Decembris.”

The appearance of this book has robbed CAXTON of a glory that he had long possessed, of being the Introducer of Printing to this kingdom; and Oxford ever since carried the honour of the first press. The only difficulty was, to account for the silence of history in an event so memorable, and the want of any memorial in the University itself, concerning the establishment of a new art amongst them, of such use and benefit to learning. But this likewise has been cleared up, by the discovery of a record, which had lain obscure and unknown at Lambeth-House, in the register of the see of Canterbury, and gives a narrative of the whole transaction, drawn up at the very time.

An account of this record was first published in a thin Quarto volume, in English; with this title, “The Original and Growth of Printing, collected out of History and the Records of this kingdom: wherein is also demonstrated, that Printing appertaineth to the Prerogative Royal, and is a Flower of the Crown of England. By Richard Atkyns, Esq; London, 1664.”

It sets forth in short, that as soon as the Art of Printing made some noise in Europe, Thomas Bouchier, Archbishop of Canterbury, moved King Henry VI. to use all possible means to procure it to be brought into England: the King approving the proposal, dispatched one Mr. Robert Turnour, an officer of the robes, into Flanders, furnished with money for the purpose; who took to his assistance WILLIAM CAXTON, a man of Abilities, and Knowledge of the Country; and these two found means to bribe and entice over into England one Frederick Corfellis, an Under-workman in the Printing-House at Harlem, where John Guttenberg had lately invented the Art, and was then personally at work: which Corfellis was immediately sent down to Oxford under a guard, to prevent his escape, and to oblige




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oblige him to the performance of his contract; where he produced the book before mentioned, but without any name of the printer. Those who have not the opportunity of consulting Atkyns's book, which is not common, may find the story more at large in Mr. Mattaire's Annals, or Palmer's History of Printing, &c.

From the authority of this record, some later writers declare Corfellis to be the first printer in England, viz. Mr. Wood, the learned Mr. Mattaire, Palmer, and one Bagford, an industrious man, who published Proposals for an History of Printing. But it is strange that a piece so fabulous, and carrying such evident marks of forgery, could impose upon men so knowing and inquisitive.

For first; The fact is laid quite wrong as to time; near the end of Henry the VIth's reign, in the very heat of the civil wars; when it is not credible that a prince, struggling for life as well as his crown, should have leisure or disposition to attend to a project that could hardly be thought of, much less executed, in times of such calamity. The Printer, it is said, was graciously received by the King, made one of his sworn servants, and sent down to Oxford with a guard, &c. all which must have passed before the year 1459: for Edward IV. was proclaimed in London, in the end of it, according to our computation, on the 4th of March, and crowned about the Midsummer following; and yet we have no fruit of all this labour and expence till near ten years after, when the little book, before described, is supposed to have been published from that press.

Secondly; The silence of CAXTON, concerning a fact in which he is said to be a principal actor, is a sufficient confirmation of it: for it was a constant custom with him, in the prefaces or conclusions of his works, to give an historical account of all his labours and transactions, as far as they concerned the publishing and printing of books. And, what is still stronger, in the Continuation of the Polychronicon, compiled by himself, and carried down to the end of Henry the VIth's

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Vith's reign, he makes no mention of the expedition in quest of a printer; which he could not have omitted had it been true: whilst in the same book he takes notice of the Invention and Beginning of Printing in the City of Mentz.

There is a further circumstance in CAXTON's History, that seems inconsistent with the record; for we find him still beyond sea, about twelve years after the supposed transaction, learning with great charge and trouble the Art of Printing; which he might have done with ease at home, if he had got Corfellis into his hands, as the recorder imports, so many years before: but he probably learnt it at Cologne, where he resided in 1471, and whence books had been first printed with a date the year before.

To the silence of CAXTON, we may add that of the Dutch writers: for it is very strange, as Mr. Chevillier observes, if the story of the record be true, That Adrian Junius, who has collected all the groundless ones that favour the pretensions of Haerlem, should never have heard of it.

But thirdly; The most direct and internal proof of its forgery, is its ascribing the Origin of Printing to Haerlem; where John Guttemberg the Inventor, is said to have been personally at work, when Corfellis was brought away, and the Art itself to have been first carried to Mentz by a Brother of one of Guttemberg's workmen: for it is certain, beyond all doubt, that Printing was first invented and propagated from Mentz. CAXTON's testimony seems alone to be decisive; who, in the Continuation of the Polychronicon, says, "About this time (viz. anno 1455,) the craft of empyrinting was first found in Mogouuce in Almayne, &c." He was abroad in the very country and at the time, when the first project and thought of it began, and the rudest essays of it were attempted; where he continued for thirty years, viz. from 1441 to 1471: and, as he was particularly curious and inquisitive after this new art, of which he was endeavouring to get a perfect information, he could not be ignorant of the place where it was first exercised.

This