

PRINTING TYPES

THEIR HISTORY, FORMS, AND USE

A STUDY IN SURVIVALS

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

*“Nunca han tenido, ni tienen las artes otros
enemigos que los ignorantes”*

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used by the Caslon ornaments of keeping type quality through all their graceful em apart from the innumerable offerings ers' craft as a unique group. . . . From the point of view of the pressman, as practical working types for impressing ink into paper, they may be claimed to be better, so far as English and American designs are concerned, than any type-flowers made since their period. The proportion of printing surface to open paper . . . is excellently adapted for the purposes of clean, sharp impression. Certain ones have elements broken by tint-lines into a clear-printing gray, and it will be observed that this tint is not the gray of copper-plate, but has the weight and solidity of a printing surface backed by metal" (*figs. 265 and 266*).

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BASKERVILLE is the other great name in eighteenth century English type-founding. Here we have a very different influence emanating from a very different kind of man. His types were not so good as Caslon's, though to an untrained eye their fonts seem much alike; but the slight touch of over-delicacy which the Baskerville letter possessed was finally to develop a rival which would drive Caslon's type, for a time, from the field. Baskerville's characters had this advantage—that they were in line with the tendency toward lighter type-forms which was coming over European printing; and although his fonts never had much vogue in England, they did have an enormous influence on the later development of English type-forms, and on the type-forms of Europe.

John Baskerville was born in 1706. He was first a writ-

ing-master at Birmingham, and then turned to the trade of japanning—of trays, snuff-boxes, etc.—in which he made a good deal of money. In 1750, he began to interest himself in typography. "M. Baskerville," says Fournier, "a private individual of means, has established at Birmingham, the town where he lives—renowned for its metal manufactures—a paper-mill, printing-office, and type-foundry. He has spared neither pains nor expense to bring these to the highest perfection. His types are cut with much spirit, his italics being the best in any foundry in England, though the roman characters are a little too broad. He has already published some editions printed from these new types, which, for brilliancy, are real masterpieces. Some are upon hot-pressed paper, and although they are a little fatiguing to the eye, one cannot deny that they are the most beautiful things to be seen in this sort of work."¹ What Caslon did for types, Baskerville, aided by the novel form of his letters, his black ink, and hot-pressed rag paper, did for eighteenth century presswork. His way of printing was so closely connected with the effects of his fonts that they cannot be considered apart from it.

In printing a book, Baskerville had ready a succession of hot copper plates, and between such plates each wet sheet was inserted as it left the press—something no eighteenth century printer had up to that time attempted. "The high finish of these hot-pressed sheets—the 'gloss' of his paper—compared with that on modern papers, does not seem to us very noticeable. His contemporaries, however, thought otherwise, and the Abbé de Fontenai, in a notice of Baskerville, describes it as "so glossy and of such a perfect polish that one would suppose the paper made of silk rather than of linen." It is easier to understand his surprise

¹ *Manuel Typographique*, Vol. II, p. xxxix.

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at Baskerville's restraint in the use of decoration, for at that date most books did not depend for their effect on typography, but chiefly on engravings, or else woodcut ornaments or typographic flowers. This absence of plates in Baskerville's books struck men of that day very forcibly. "Con-
tent with the simplicity of typographic art," says De Fontenai, "the English printer has had no need to borrow aid from engraving; nor do we find in the editions that he has so far published—which are admirable—plates, vignettes, tail-pieces, ornamental letters, or, in short, any of those accessories which serve as passports, so to speak, for a worthless lot of French verse which, without this useful precaution, would meet its just desert—oblivion."¹

Baskerville spent seven or eight years in experimenting with designs for type before a page of a book was printed, and he made not merely his own types (cut for him by a certain John Handy), but also his ink, and if he did not make his own paper, he superintended its manufacture. His first book, the Latin Virgil, which came out in 1757, established his reputation. And in 1758, Baskerville followed up this success with a Milton in two volumes royal octavo—a somewhat indifferent performance—which is chiefly interesting for the preface (*fig.* 267) that he wrote for it.

"Amongst the several mechanic Arts that have engaged my attention," he says, "there is no one which I have pursued with so much steadiness and pleasure, as that of Letter-Founding. Having been an early admirer of the beauty of Letters, I became insensibly desirous of contributing to the perfection of them. I formed to my self Ideas of greater accuracy than had yet appeared, and have endeavoured to produce a Sett of Types according to what I conceived to be their true proportion.

¹ De Fontenai's *Dictionnaire des Artistes*, Paris, 1776, Vol. I, p. 156.

"Mr. Caslon is an Artist, to whom the Republic of Learning has great obligations; his ingenuity has left a fairer copy for my emulation, than any other master. In his great variety of Characters I intend not to follow him; the Roman and Italic are all I have hitherto attempted; if in these he has left room for improvement, it is probably more owing to that variety which divided his attention, than to any other cause. I honor his merit, and only wish to derive some small share of Reputation, from an Art which proves accidentally to have been the object of our mutual pursuit.

"After having spent many years, and not a little of my fortune in my endeavours to advance this art; I must own it gives me great Satisfaction, to find that my Edition of Virgil has been so favourably received. The improvement in the Manufacture of the Paper, the Colour, and Firmness of the Ink were not overlooked; nor did the accuracy of the workmanship in general, pass unregarded. If the judicious found some imperfections in the first attempt, I believe the present work will shew that a proper use has been made of their Criticisms: I am conscious of this at least, that I received them as I ever shall, with that degree of deference which every private man owes to the Opinion of the public,

"It is not my desire to print many books; but such only as are books of Consequence, of intrinsic merit, or established Reputation, and which the public may be pleased to see in an elegant dress, and to purchase at such a price as will repay the extraordinary care and expence that must necessarily be bestowed upon them. Hence I was desirous of making an experiment upon some one of our best English Authors, among those Milton appeared the most eligible."

Besides the fine and famous series of classical and English authors that Baskerville continued to print on the

account, he had other irons in the fire. He cut Greek types—and very bad they were—for Oxford. He was appointed printer to the University of Cambridge, and produced editions of the Bible and Prayer Book—some of them most imposing—though his types did not seem “solid” enough for this kind of work. I have chosen one or two typical volumes for description of his types and type-setting. The first one is the Virgil, which (in Macaulay’s phrase) “went forth to astonish all the librarians of Europe.”

This book was issued in square quarto. The title-page is set in lines of widely spaced capitals—a very characteristic feature of Baskerville’s work. His rather condensed italic capitals are employed for two lines only (*fig.* 268). These italic capitals are used for running-titles, and elsewhere—the F, K, J, N, Q, Y, Z being peculiarly “Baskerville” in design. The book is set in great primer type, leaded. The folios and numbers to lines of the text employ a very calligraphic and rather disagreeable form of arabic figure. The book is printed on hot-pressed smooth paper, in my copy partly wove and partly laid. Very easy to read, the volume nevertheless does not seem to me a particularly agreeable or *beautiful* book, partly on account of its type, but chiefly because the type-page is too large for its paper, and the headings and running-titles, in restless italic capitals, become too much of a feature (*fig.* 269). The volume sold at a guinea, and among the subscribers was Benjamin Franklin, who took six copies. Perhaps among them was the copy given by him to the Library of Harvard College, of which he wrote (in April, 1758) that “It is thought to be the most curiously printed of any book hitherto done in the world.” However that may be, it is a very typical example of Baskerville’s merits and defects.

In *The Works of the Late Right Honorable Joseph Addi-*