

A MAKER OF ONE-MAN BOOKS

TYPOGRAPHY has always been of vital interest to me. I was reared in the midst of paper, type, and ink. My earliest recollection is watching my father set type, and print on an old Washington hand-press. He had a great love for the printing of the early craftsmen, which he said had never been excelled; it was his contention that modern book printers should follow in their footsteps.

For twenty years I labored to get the quality of old typography into books that I was producing. I used the so-called hand-made paper from Italy, my type was of special design, and the printing was executed with care. But my books always lacked the charm of the old volumes. I have seen through the press upward of two hundred different books, but none of them ever pleased me. They were just so much paper with a type impression—that was all.

The Italian book printers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have never been excelled. Their paper, even after four hundred years, shows a richness in tone and texture which the modern paper makers have never equaled. The type possesses a freedom of stroke unknown to-day. The margins and type arrangements are always satisfying, and the presswork displays a brilliance and firmness that suggests sculpture.

These old books from the presses of Aldus and Nicolas Jenson haunted me. Why could I not, in this age, produce as fine typography as these fifteenth-century artisans?

Surely, with all the mechanical ingenuity of to-day in paper making, type founding, and printing, one should be able to equal, if not excel, the old typographers.

I went to Italy, and studied paper making by hand; then to Vienna, where I entered the Institute of Graphic Arts, the oldest of its kind in the world. I studied type design at the Academy of Industrial Arts in Vienna, and then went to London, where I entered the Royal Technical College, making a specialty of tool making.

After a number of years I returned to America, to try my hand again at book printing. My efforts were still unsatisfactory.

The trouble was this: I had been buying paper that had been made in another part of the world, by men who knew or cared nothing about the books I was making. The type I had been using, although of

my own design, had been made in a great commercial type foundry by men uninterested in my work. All that I had been doing (like the rest of the printers) was to set the mechanically made type and imprint it on the paper of which I had no part in the making. I had been simply printing books—not making them.

I came to the conclusion that if I wanted to arrive at the peculiar excellence of the old printers I must work with their methods. This involved many difficulties: I had to learn paper making and typography as the ancients did. I began collecting old books and prints on these subjects, for text books.

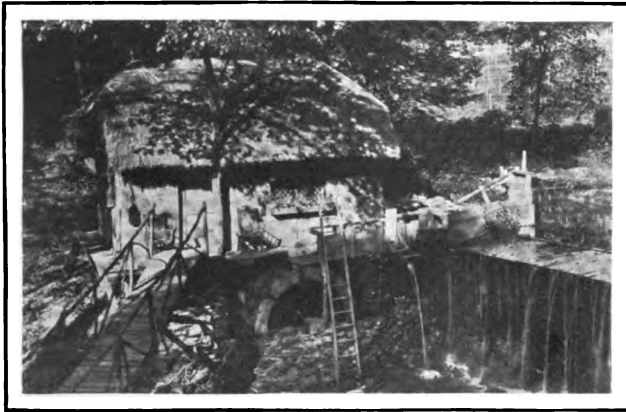


Dard Hunter

The only man known to have made a book entirely by hand. He made the paper, the type, and the implements in the manner of the fifteenth-century printers



Pages From One of Hunter's Hand-Made Books



Hunter's Paper Mill and Mill Pond

I then found that I must have my own paper mill and my own type foundry, as well as printing room. My working materials for book production had been paper and type; now they were to be linen and cotton rags, bar-steel, copper, lead, tin, and antimony.

Near my home at Chillicothe, Ohio, I found a brook, a bank of which had been used as a mill site two hundred years ago. The old mill dam was still intact. I built a small mill myself, which I patterned after a Devonshire cottage. It was thatched with rye straw which I had grown on my small farm. I equipped this miniature mill with appliances such as had been used by the fifteenth-century paper makers. An old, creaky wooden water wheel reduced the linen and cotton rags to a fibrous pulp from which I made each sheet of paper separately in a hand mold.

Next I set up a small type foundry, and, with no other tools or utensils than those that would have been used four hundred years ago, I cut the letter punches in steel, struck the matrices in copper, and cast the font of type in a hand mold. When there was sufficient water to turn the water wheel, I worked in the mill, and was able to make about seventy-five sheets of paper a day. When there was no water, I made type, as upward of a hundred thousand pieces were needed for my project.

When the paper and type were ready I printed the first book, using a press of the hand-lever type. The first book, an edition of two hundred, was finished in

1915. The second book, of which there were two hundred and fifty copies printed, was completed in 1916. Both of these volumes were made for the Chicago Society of Etchers, and were monographs on the art of etching. The entire work of paper making, type making, and printing occupied a period of seven years of work.

Even these books did not please me, but I more nearly approached the peculiar elusive art of the fifteenth-century typographers than I had ever done before. Perhaps it is better that I did not reach my ideal, for had this been accomplished life would have ceased to

be interesting. When we cease struggling we cease growing.

What the whole undertaking revealed to me most was the interest there is in the history of paper making and watermarking. I have been so absorbed with these subjects since my experimenting in paper making that I am writing a book, in two volumes, on the history of paper. For these books I hope to cut another font of type, and they will be printed on my own make of paper.

The hand molds on which the paper for my first two books was made, the letter punches, matrices, type, and tools that were used in their production are now in the Smithsonian Institution, at Washington, never to be used for printing again! The two books are there also, and on the label of the case in which they are housed may be read: "In the entire history of printing these are the first books to have been made in their entirety by the labor of one man." *Dard Hunter.*



Where Dard Hunter Prints and Binds His Books

Periodical Room
LITERATURE

THE MENTOR

March 1922



Painting by A. Menzel

Gutenberg Drawing the First Printed Sheets

THE ROMANCE OF RARE BOOKS

By Arthur B. Maurice

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A Maker of One-Man Books	Do Climates Change?
The Real Bookworm	The Woman Behind Trafalgar
The World's Finest Theater	The Story of Anatole France

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THE ROMANCE OF RARE BOOKS

By ARTHUR B. MAURICE

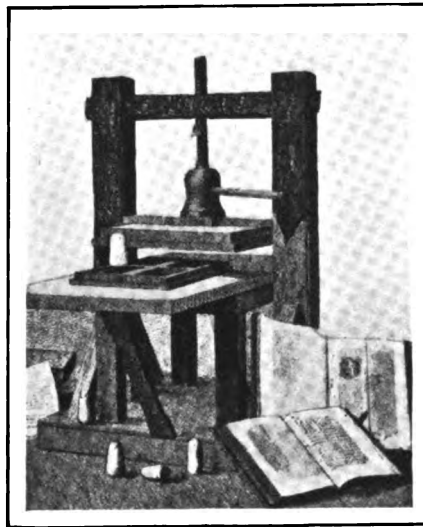
Former Editor of The Bookman

WHAT makes a book desirable and valuable? With certain qualifications the first and most self-evident reason is its rarity. No matter how odd and curious a volume may be, obviously it would have no value if there were so many copies of it in existence that it might be had for nothing or next to nothing. Rarity is a prime requisite; hence, rare book shops, rare book collectors, and the rare book mania.

But besides rarity there are many things that make a book desirable and stir collectors to competition for its possession. The tastes that determine values are often strange and freakish.

There is the orthodox taste which demands beauty with a certain antiquity, and which leans to the prod-

uct of the famous early presses, such as those of Caxton and Aldus and Elzevir. There is the taste which is attracted by the odd and unusual, such as the smallest book, or the book that has been perpetuated through some curious inaccuracy or blunder. Any one of these things, with rarity, may make a prize book in the market.



First Press Used by Gutenberg

Restored from fragments found in his workshop at Mainz, on the Rhine

To begin with the eccentricities, of which there have been a thousand and one since printing came in the middle of the fifteenth century. Take Bibles: There are the