



NOTES ON LETTER DESIGN

By Frederic W. Goudy



THE value of an old book—that is, the printed book of the XV century—does not so much lie in its age as in the fact that it most perfectly reflects the mannerisms and intimacies of its own times, and by comparison marks the evolution from old to new. Especially is this apparent in the types then used which, with a few exceptions, were legible and without eccentricity.

For over four hundred years letter founders have tried to improve the forms of type characters, with but little success, the same degeneration in letter forms taking place as that degeneration which marked the work of printers who followed the Italians.

At the beginning of the XVI century, while printing had developed largely, the arts of illumination and writing had suffered correspondingly and in consequence little or no progress was made toward improving the existing forms of letters or creating new designs for types. Early printers found their models, many of great merit, in the hand written books of

the time, and they attempted to make their productions as beautiful as the manuscript books with which they were so familiar. This familiarity developed that good taste which was carried into printing, as the same artistic considerations controlled the books produced by the new art. Their types were simple in character and designed for real use.

As printing spread, the printers who were in most instances the letter founders and occasionally the designers, found it easier or more expedient to copy type faces already in use, with the inevitable loss in character and distinction of design.

Henry Stevens, in the privately printed little volume *Who spoils our New English Books* says that “there are no less than ten parties directly interested in this question, and that one, several, or all may justly be accused if not convicted, as participants in the decadence of book making in England,” but in his list of ten, why does he omit the founder of letters, whose product may spoil a good book in spite of the combined efforts or merits of the ten he arraigns? Letter

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founders to-day are more interested in the commercial side of their business than they are in the artistic side of the craft which is so dependent on them. They advertise a type design as new when it is merely newly described, and as beautiful and legible, before it has been tested for these things. Type must be finely and boldly designed to be beautiful. In the majority of cases where these points are claimed for a type, it will be found that the claims rest on their perfect finish, exact lining or ranging, perfection of curve, precise angles, straightness of stem, or sharpness of serif and hair line. None of these points give beauty or legibility although they may be present in a type both beautiful and legible. Finish is a merit only when it improves, but if made at the expense of design it constitutes a defect.*

Ruskin's universal law "that neither architecture nor any other noble work of man can be good unless it be imperfect" applies no less to our type designs. Types are made to use, and when spontaneous in design the natural irregularities and deficiencies are signs of life and sources of beauty, giving credit to the designer for careful craftsmanship according to his ability. The demand for the perfection is evidence of a misunderstanding of the true ends of art.

When a letter designer has expressed himself in a drawing that *adequately* conveys all he has conceived, and made with a thorough knowledge of the technical possibilities and limitations of type-founding, then all else he does toward finish and refining, not necessary to the expression of the design itself, is waste effort.

* By "finish" is here meant to refer to the design of a letter, not the mechanical accuracy in adjustment of line, set, etc., of the type body itself, these things are usually all that could be wished.

Letters are not designed, the essential forms are fixed and have not changed materially since first cut in stone or used in the written or printed book, and especially is this true of the Roman capitals cut over two thousand years ago. These are as clearly legible to our eyes as they were to the ancients, and the capitals of to-day vary but little from them except in matter of proportion.

Our lower-case alphabet in its present form is a development by the early printers from the Carolingian minuscules which contain the *essential* root forms, they being the survival of the old classical alphabet. These root forms are fixed, and for a designer to change them is to attempt to force on readers a new literary currency, for our alphabet constitutes a circulating medium for the "voices through which the myriad lisps of the earth find perfect speech." The letter artist may take those forms and give distinction, character and beauty to each, depending on the personality of the craftsman; his knowledge of form, his good taste, giving an interest, beauty, or character, according to his talent.

Most types are legible by habit only. We have learned to read, I had almost said by intuition, and it is time that thought were given to the revision and recasting of our type designs in the spirit in which they were originally created. The secret of the beautiful types of the Renaissance lies solely in the fact that they reflected the personality of men passionately in earnest, unconscious of definite style, but full of that sense of logic and control which characterized the Renaissance itself, revising and recasting the alphabet in the light of reason with due regard for beauty and proportion.

This brings us to the consideration of the forms of types. Broadly speaking,

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letters must be either Italian (Roman) or Gothic in design. Whether they are based on the circle or on the square, whether they are old-style or modern matters little, as the essential features are the same. To-day

the Gothic or black letter is little used as a text letter, being mainly reserved for those books or lines where the decorative effect is felt to be of more importance than easy legibility. As to "old-style" or "old face" as usually spoken of in England, and modern faces, the chief difference lies in the matter of *proportion*, both being substantially the same in form. In the old style there is greater variety in widths of individual letters, the thickening of the curves in the round letters not being in the center of the curves as in modern, but above or

below the center, according as it occurs on right or left. Contrary to the usual custom of the founders, these curves are *not* geometrical, but are carefully considered quantities, varying in each letter, and giving a character which no mechanical construction can possibly impart. In the modern faces these curves

and stems are usually fatter, the hair lines and serifs thinner, than the old-style, and giving a more dazzling effect in print with consequent strain and loss in legibility.

Words are not read by conscious

recognition of the separate characters that compose them, but by the ready comprehension of groups of *dissimilar* characters which convey to the mind the thought of the author without loss by the way, as the eye is not compelled to distinguish each character as it would if each of those characters contained elements of similarity. Properly related and proportioned units may be varied and still harmonious, not beautiful as individual characters, but beautiful in combination. There should be an element of rhythm but no attempt to interpose or substitute

a beauty or interest in the types for their own sake.

In passing from a general survey of letter designing to a more personal note, in referring to some of my own designs I trust I may be acquitted of egotism. In calling attention to the exhibits of my work shown herewith, it is with the

ON THE PLAZA



ONE August day I sat beside
A café window, open wide
To let the shower-freshened air
Blow in across the Plaza, where
In golden pomp against the dark
Green leafy background of the Park,
Saint Gaudens' hero gaunt and grim,
Rides on with Victory leading him.

The wet black asphalt seemed to hold
In every hollow pools of gold,
And clouds of gold and pink and grey
Were piled up at the end of day
Far down the cross street, where one tower
Still glistened from the drenching shower.

A weary white-haired man went by,
Cooling his forehead gratefully
After the day's great heat. A girl,
Her thin white garments in a swirl
Blown back against her breasts and knees,
Like a Winged Victory in the breeze,

[11

Sherman Type, designed by F. W. Goudy
Page of "A Painter's Holiday," by Bliss Carman, published by
F. F. Sherman, New York

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sole thought of making a point or explaining an idea rather than any exploitation of my own skill, and in the hope that the history involved may be of some interest.

My first drawing for type was made as early as the fall of 1896, while I was a bookkeeper in Chicago, and was a pencil sketch of an alphabet of *capitals* which was sent to Mr. Phinney of the Dickinson Type Foundry, Boston, now a branch of the American Type Founders Company, asking him if it was of use to his concern. To my surprise, some days later a letter came inclosing a check for a sum altogether out of proportion to the labor involved, but too little to mention here. This design afterward appeared, and indeed is still shown in the specimen books of the Foundry as the "Camelot," a name given to it by Mr. Phinney. I later sold Mr. Phinney another design which, so far as I know, has never appeared. My success with the Boston Foundry led me to submit some drawings to Mr. Clarence Marder, of the Chicago branch, beginning a friendship which I am happy to say still holds, and to his interest in my work and fund of information I am largely indebted for any success in this field that has come to me. To the Chicago Foundry I sold a sheet of ornaments, and a type design that was lost. This type design was more or less of the same character as the Post and its variations. Later, for Mr. Walter Marder of the Chicago branch, I drew the DeVinne Roman. For a period of two or three years I did little in type designing, having resumed bookkeeping in Detroit; but losing my position in 1899, I returned to Chicago and took up general designing, devoting myself especially to the study of lettering and decorative design in relation to typography. In the lean years

that followed little opportunity to turn out types was offered, until the hand-lettered advertisements which I was doing for Hart, Schaffner and Marx, Marshall Field & Co., Pabst Brewing Co., and other large concerns attracted the attention of Mr. Powell, the advertising manager for Schlesinger & Mayer, who commissioned me to make drawings for a type face such as I had used in a series of thirty newspaper advertisements for the Pabst Brewing Co. Mr. Powell paid me for my drawings and later made an arrangement with the American Type Founders Co. to cut the face, giving Schlesinger & Mayer the first use of four sizes of the new letter in their newspaper advertisements. I suggested that it be called "Pabst" after Col. Fred Pabst of Milwaukee, and he very kindly gave permission to use his name. This is the true story of the letter that has sold largely both here and abroad. I have a copy of a "Katalog" of the Berlin Secession, 1908, printed in "Pabst" with the statement boldly made that it was printed "in deren Original Haarlemmer Type."

Some months after the cutting of the Pabst Roman, which cutting, by the way, was an achievement in rapid production, only about five weeks elapsing between the placing of the order for a design and lodging of actual types in newspaper offices, I drew for the Chicago branch the Pabst Italic. Prior to the production of the Pabst Roman, I lettered for Mr. W. W. Denslow "Denslow's Mother Goose," published by McClure, Phillips. This letter later appeared as "Hearst," produced by the Inland Foundry, without benefit of clergy as to paternity however. Some months after the cutting of the Pabst, Mr. Powell, who had suggested it, took a position with the firm of Mandel Bros.,

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and I had no opportunity to turn my designs into type until the handwriting was offered in the form of ornaments which I was called upon to design for the *Chicago Examiner* and *Mark, March*. The *Chicago Examiner*, the *Chicago Post*, the *Chicago Evening Co.*, *Pabst Brewing Co.*, and other local concerns all acted the part of the *Chicago Examiner*. Mr. Powell, the advertising manager for Schlesinger & Mayer, who had employed me to make drawings for the face such as I had used in a series of Chicago newspaper advertisements for the *Pabst Brewing Co.* Mr. Powell paid me for my drawings and later made an arrangement with the American Type Foundry Co. to cut the face, giving Schlesinger & Mayer the first use of the letters of the new letter in their newspaper advertisements. I suggested that it be called "Pabst" after Col. Emil Pabst of Milwaukee, and he very graciously gave permission to use his name. This is the true story of the letter that has sold largely both here and abroad. I have a copy of a "Katalog" of the Berlin Exposition, 1908, printed in "Pabst" with the statement boldly made that it was printed "in deren Original Haarlemer Type."

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and I followed him to New York City, where I was employed by the *Chicago Examiner* as a general designer. I remained in New York City until 1890, when I returned to Chicago and took up general designing, devoting myself especially to the study of lettering and decorative design in relation to typography. In the ten years

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CATALOGUE OF A LOAN
EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS
BY OLD DUTCH MASTERS
HELD AT THE METROPOL-
ITAN MUSEUM OF ART IN
CONNECTION WITH THE HUDSON-
FULTON CELEBRATION · SEPTEMBER ·
NOVEMBER · MCMIX · BY WILHELM
R. VALENTINER · CURATOR OF DEC-
ORATIVE ARTS

PUBLISHED BY THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART · NEW YORK · MCMX

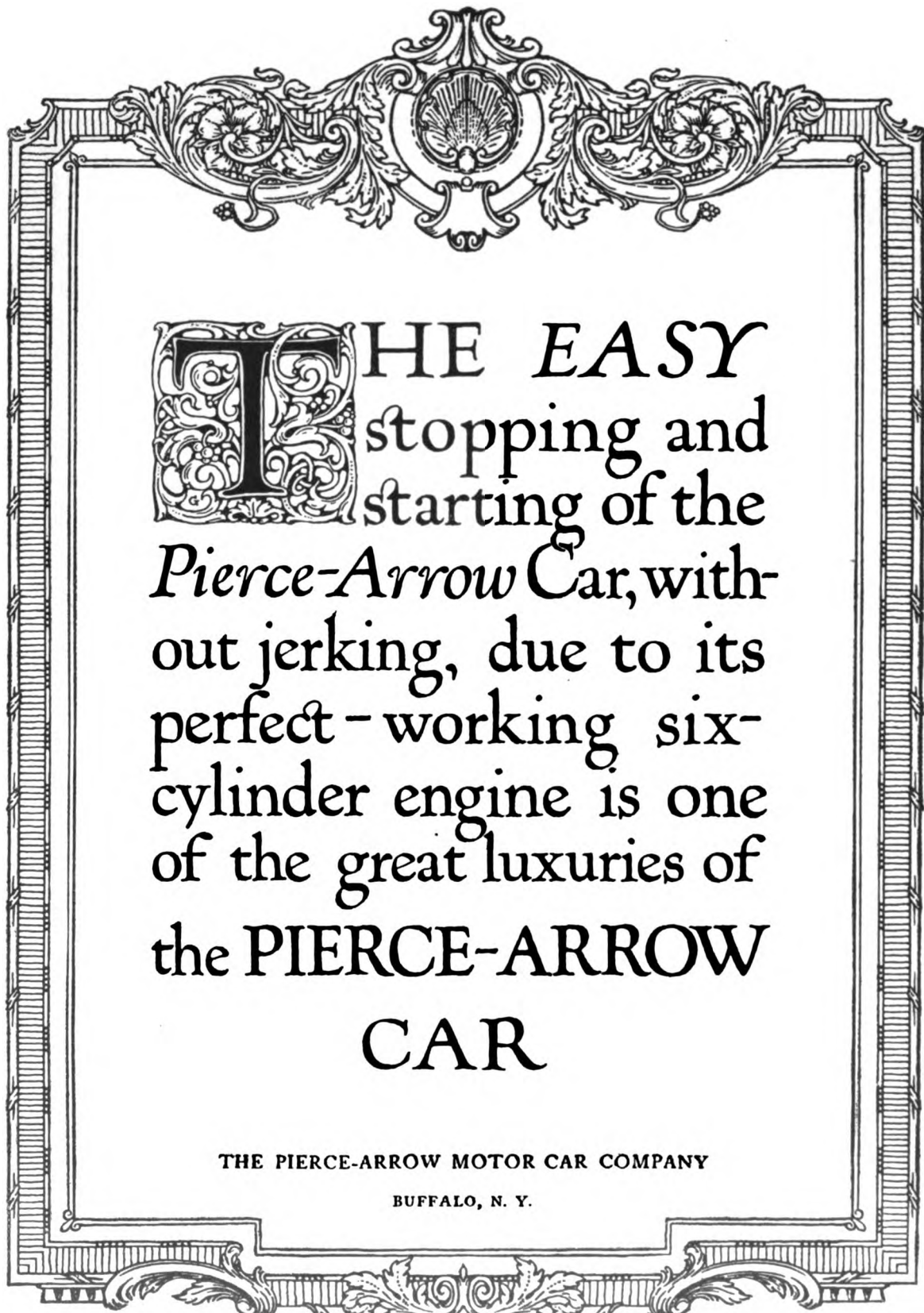
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smaller group standing farther in the background, so that there results as upper contour a flat diagonal curve, typical of the Baroque style. This diagonal arrangement was employed by van Goyen and the earlier landscapists, but a comparison with Hobbema's work reveals the darker side of the picture as much emptier in their case, the later master preoccupying himself more with the filling of this plane.

Jan van der Heyden stands related to Aert van der Neer, an artist of the foregoing period, in the similarity of their conception, although they differed widely in their choice of subject—van der Heyden restricting himself to the portrayal of buildings and architectural views. Both are characterized by a typically Dutch love of detail, to the delineation of which they bring as much love and interest as they expend upon the larger forms. This peculiarity of the Dutch painters, which seems consistent with the smallness of their native land and the narrow circumstances in which most of them lived, was already discernible in the Fifteenth Century, beginning with the art of the van Eycks, who were of Dutch origin, and in the Seventeenth Century is but an unconscious perpetuation of their manner. It was not given to all the Dutch artists to combine this care for detail with a sure feeling for the whole, but van der Heyden was among the fortunate exceptions. The admirable work owned by Mr. Davis shows his love of detail in the perfecting of every little brick in the wall, while he by no means sacrifices the general harmony, presenting a firm, well-balanced architectural composition.

No inconsiderable part of the happiest achievements in Dutch landscape painting was the result less of the direct study of nature than of the yearning to depict scenery with which the artist was not daily familiar, as evinced in the portrayal of woodland scenes. In this manner Cuyp and a whole group of artists painted landscapes of an Italian character through their longing for more smiling skies which they had perhaps never, or at best only fleetingly, known. This very personal mood, which completely pervades Aelbert Cuyp's pictures, stands very close to our modern spirit. His subjects are of the utmost simplicity, often even prosaic—a view of the Maas with a couple of sail-boats and a lofty sky, or a meadow with cows at



THE EASY
stopping and
starting of the
Pierce-Arrow Car, with-
out jerking, due to its
perfect-working six-
cylinder engine is one
of the great luxuries of
the PIERCE-ARROW
CAR

THE PIERCE-ARROW MOTOR CAR COMPANY
BUFFALO, N. Y.

Border and Lettering by F. W. Goudy, for Calkins & Holden, New York

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and had me draw another letter combining, in a way, the features of both Pabst and Hearst. This letter was cut and marketed by the Keystone Foundry of Philadelphia and named the "Powell."

A SPECIMEN OF THE NORMAN CAPITALS

About this time I became interested in private printing and drew and had cut for my own use my first attempt at a book letter; this I called the "Village" after the Village Press of which Mrs. Goudy and I were proprietors. This font consisted of about 80 characters—16-point in size—and was used in all the books we printed excepting two.

On the night of January 10, 1908, the Village Press was totally destroyed by fire, together with the stock of type, etc., but the matrices were fortunately

in a safe in the office of the superintendent of the building and were uninjured. Last year (1910) these matrices, with exclusive rights to the design, were sold to Mr. Frederic Sherman of New York, and the first use of the type since the passing of the Village Press is the sumptuous "Catalogue of Dutch Paintings" published by the Metropolitan Museum under direction of Mr. Sherman, a page of which is here shown.

Before leaving Chicago in 1904, I drew the Copperplate Gothics for the American Type Founders Co., and a book face not as yet cut. After coming East I drew the Cushing Old Style Italic, and in the spring of 1910

Mr. Sherman commissioned me to make him another book face, to be known as the "Sherman." This letter is the purest in line and form that I have drawn, a special effort being made to eliminate any element of eccentricity. It has been cut in 14-point only as yet, with small caps, but an Italic to accompany will be provided later. Mr. Sherman has selected five poems by Bliss Carman as the trial impression of this new type, a page of which is shown here.

In 1907 the Lanston Monotype Co. asked me to design a letter for them, and I accepted the commission with all the assurance in the world, but I soon found that drawing for a machine with arbitrary body widths was

a serious handicap in following my preliminary sketch, showing character of letter proposed. I drew the design over and over again before finally sub-

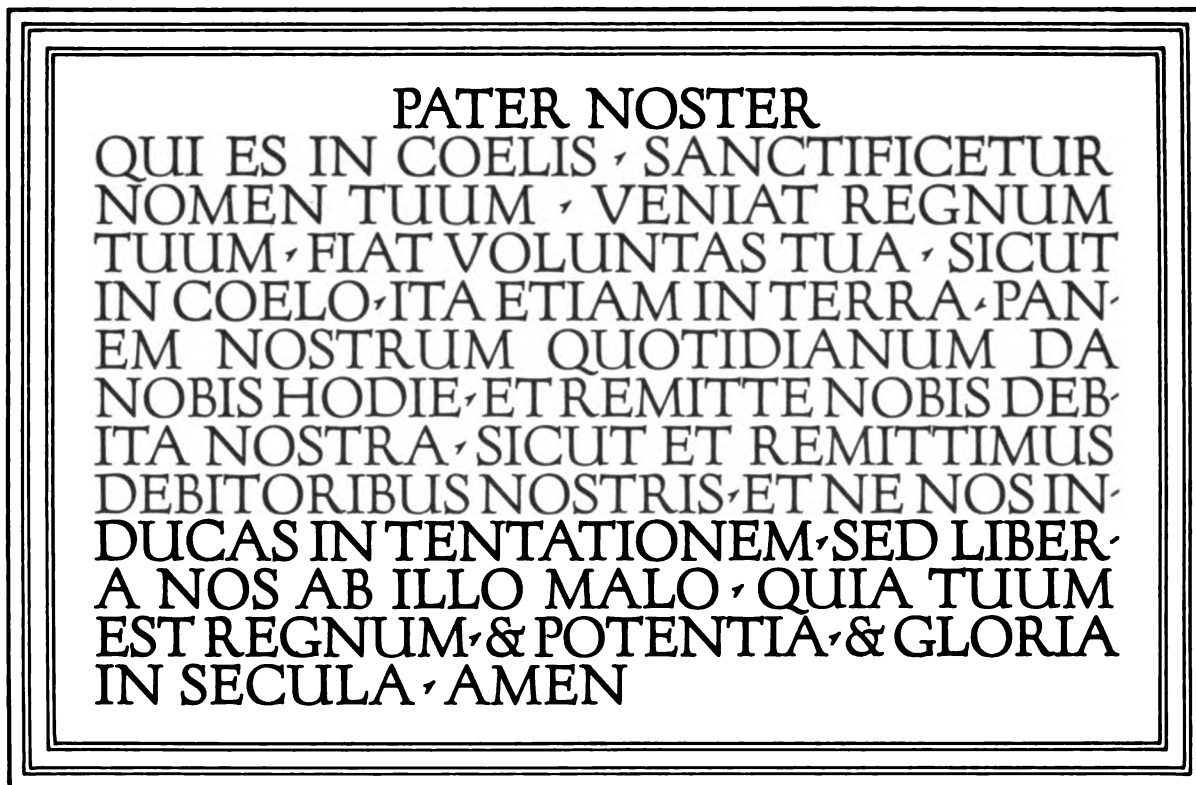
mitting it to the tender mercies of Mr. MacKay. This letter is known generally as the "Gimbel," used largely in the newspaper advertisements of Gimbel Bros., New York, and is cast in all sizes, Roman and Italic, possible to the Monotype. French Old Style was my inspiration for this letter.

AUTOMOBILE
ADVERTISING COMPANY
381 FOURTH AVENUE
NEW YORK



Gimbel Roman and *Italic* innovations in type design

The first page of these notes is the first showing of a letter designed for a folio volume of eight stories by H. G. Wells, to be published by Mitchell Kennerley (N. Y.) this fall. It has been



Eighteen-point Forum Type

set by Mrs. Goudy, and is intended to show a solider, compacter page than Caslon, but with little more color in the letters than in that celebrated type so admirably presented by Mr. Gilliss's article in the February GRAPHIC ARTS. This letter, the "Kennerley," is cut as yet in 18-point only, but 14 and 12 point sizes are in progress. It was drawn between February 10 and 18 and cut and cast by March 18, a record!

"Forum Title" was drawn the same week as the "Kennerley" and is the letter that interests me most, as it is

based on rubbings made last summer from stone-cut inscriptions in various cities of Italy.

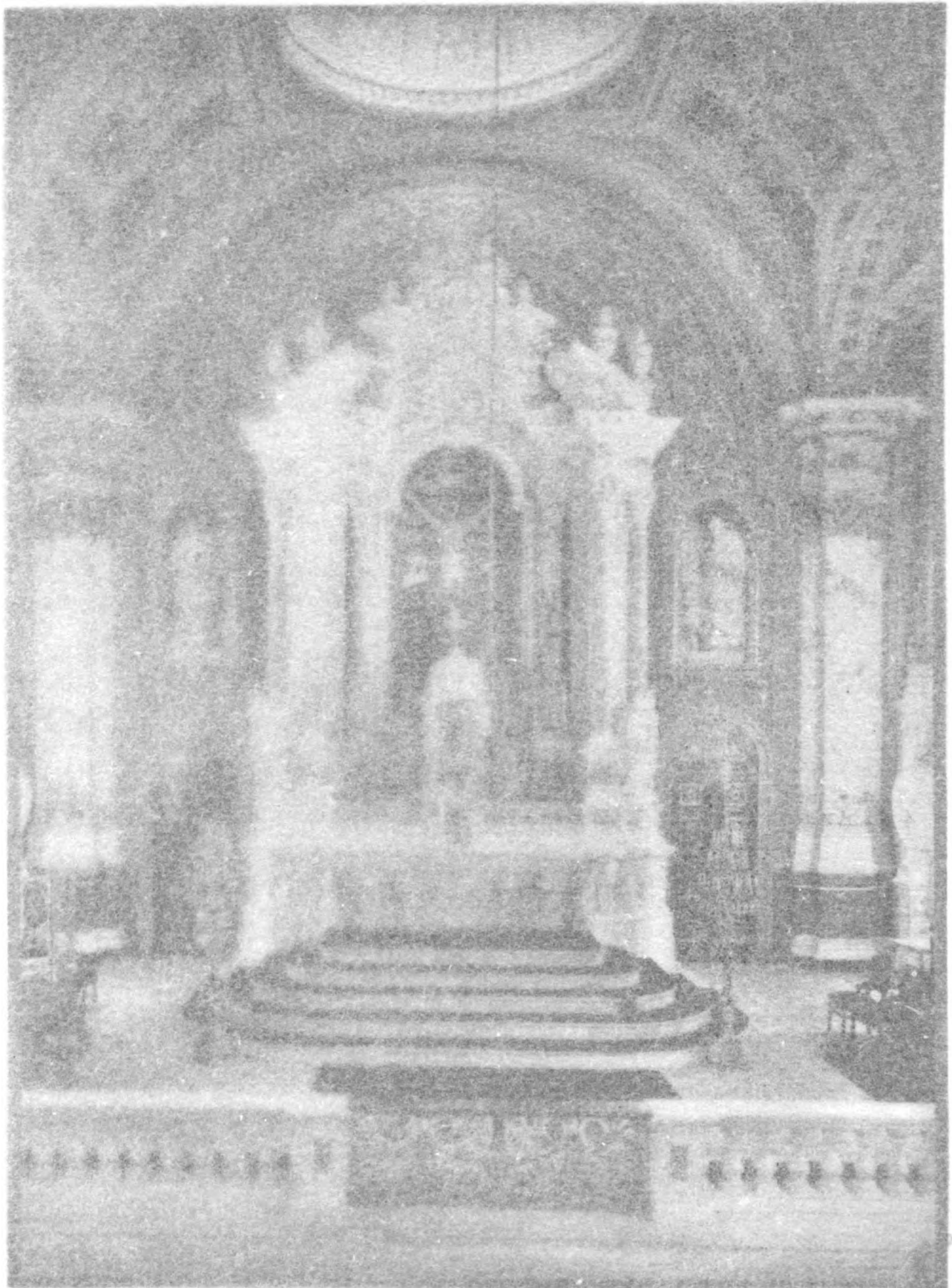
The "Norman" capitals first consisted of nine letters drawn for Norman T. A. Munder & Co., Baltimore, for use in an ink catalogue. The other letters of the alphabet were added later, and a lower case is now being prepared for cutting in several sizes.

In conclusion, if what I have set down here serves to awaken any interest in the matter of better types, I have done what I most desire.



In the first place art, strictly speaking, whether in the book, the picture, the marble, or the coin, is not the thing said, but rather the manner of its saying

JOHN C. VAN DYKE



INK IN ILLUSTRATION

To
the
The

by an ink which contributes depth and color quality. From
of Daprato Statuary Co., Chicago, designed and printed by

INTELLIGENTIA
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 REGNUM
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 NOBIS DEB-
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 ET NE NOS IN-
 SED LIBER-
 QUIA TUUM
 & GLORIA

— 100 —

recommended to
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 by A. S.
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