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SHAKSPERE & TYPOGRAPHY

By
William Blades



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The INTRODUCTION



n the good old days when printing was better recognized as a mystery than as an art, one could call a printer 'a man of letters' without being guilty of a pun. Books were for the few then, and the man who would print them must be somewhat of a scholar himself.

To-day, amid the whirr of many presses, and the hurrying to and fro of the printing office, the printer finds little or no time for literary pursuits, despite the fact that printing is, in very truth, the handmaid of literature. It is the more admirable, therefore, when a successful printer attains to a degree of scholarship—particularly scholarship in matters that enlighten and dignify his own handicraft.

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Such a printer was *William Blades*. During fifty years of active business life he contributed to the history of printing, a goodly number of books and a mass of miscellaneous articles. Among these is the most complete and authoritative life of Caxton, England's first printer, representing an immense amount of study and research.

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The book from which the following pages are reprinted is perhaps the least familiar of Blades' works, and it evidently was written as a literary recreation. The thought that reading it may afford recreation to those busied about the making of books, and the comparative scarcity of the only edition, are the excuses for reprinting the more interesting portion.

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The first chapter (merely a resumé of the theories that have been advanced by various professions and callings to claim Shakspeare for their own) has been omitted; likewise the appendix, which is a suggestion that many of the obscurities in the text of Shakspeare may be cleared up by a study of the typographical errors in the first editions. With these exceptions, the work is given here entire, and, it is hoped, in such form as accords with the spirit of the author, whose tastes were those of the scholarly printer.

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Editorial Dept.
The Winthrop Press,
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The PREFACE

The First Chapter of this Tractate is designed to show, in a succinct manner, the numerous and contradictory theories concerning Shakspeare's special knowledge, the evidence for which has been created by 'selecting' certain words and phrases from the mass of his writings.

The Second and Third Chapters, erected on a similar basis of 'selection', are intended to prove that Shakspeare had an intimate and special knowledge of Typography.

Old Printers can still call to mind that period of our history when a stalwart Pressman, on his way to work, ran considerable risk in the streets of London of being seized by another kind of pressmen, viz., the Press-gang, and forced nolens volens into the service of the King. Some readers (not Printers) may think that I have exercised over quotations from Shakspeare's works a similar compulsion, by pressing into my service passages whose bearing is by no means in a typographical direction. They may even go so far as to strain somewhat the self-accusation of Falstaff (Henry IV, iv, 2), and bring against me the charge that

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I have misused the King's press most damnably, by printing such evidences.

I can only reply that if, notwithstanding a careful consideration of the proofs here laid before him, the reader should consider my case 'not proven', I must submit with all humility to his penetration and judgment.

At the same time, since my proofs that Shakspeare was a Printer are at least quite as conclusive as the evidence brought forward by others to demonstrate that he was Doctor, Lawyer, Soldier, Sailor, Catholic, Atheist, Thief, I would claim as a right that my opponent, having rejected my theory that he was a Printer, should be consistent, and at once, reject all theories which attribute to him special knowledge, and repose upon the simple belief that Shakspeare, the Actor and Playwright, was a man of surpassing genius, of keen observation, and never-failing memory.

W. B.





I. SHAKSPERE IN THE PRINTING OFFICE

IN November, 1589, the company acting at the Blackfriars Theatre thought it would be advantageous to their interests to send in to the Privy Council a memorial, certifying that they had never given cause of displeasure by introducing upon the stage 'matters of State or Religion'. The actors who signed this memorial styled themselves 'Her Majesty's Poor Players', and among them appears the name of William Shakspeare. We here meet the Poet's name for the first time after he had left his home at Stratford-on-Avon, about four years previously. What his employment had been in the intervening period is a question which few of his biographers have cared to ask, and which not one has answered.

It is usually supposed that immediately upon his arrival in London he became in some way associated with the Stage,—but there is no evidence of this. On the contrary, we shall give reasons for believing that coming to London poor, needy, and in search of employment, he was immediately taken into the service of Vautrollier the Printer.

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THOMAS VAUTROLLIER, entitled in his patents 'typographus Londinensis, in claustro vulgo Blackfriars commorans', was a Frenchman who came to England at the commencement of Queen Elizabeth's reign. He was admitted a brother of the Stationers' Company in 1564, and commenced business as Printer and Publisher in Blackfriars, working in the same premises up to the time of his death, which occurred in 1588. His character as a scholar stands high, and his workmanship is excellent. He had a privilege, or monopoly, for the printing and sale of certain books, as all the chief Printers then had. Shortly before his death he married his daughter to Richard Field, who for this reason, and because he succeeded to the premises and business of the widow, is erroneously supposed by Ames to have served his apprenticeship to Vautrollier. But why bring in the name of Richard Field? The reply is important. Field was Shakspeare's own townsman, and being of about the same age and social rank, the boys probably grew up together as playfellows. Field's father, Henry Field, was a Tanner at Stratford-on-Avon, and Halliwell says 'a friend of Shakspeare's family'. Early in 1578 young Field came up to London, and at Michaelmas was apprenticed for seven years to George Bishop, Printer and Publisher. Being in the same trade as Vautrollier, Field would naturally become acquainted with him; and in 1588, a year after he was out of his time, he married Vautrollier's daughter. Here, then, we seem to have a missing link supplied in the chain of Shakspeare's history. In 1585 Shakspeare came up to London in a 'needy' state. To whom would he be more likely to apply than to his old playmate Richard Field. Field, a young man nearly out of his apprenticeship, on terms of intimacy with Vautrollier, could do nothing better than recommend him to the father of his future wife. Once introduced we may be sure that Shakspeare, with his fund of wit and good humour, would always be a welcome guest; and that this friendly feeling was maintained between him and the Vautrollier-Field families receives confirmation from the fact that Richard Field, who succeeded to the shop and business soon after the death of his father-in-law, actually put to press the two first printed works of the great Poet, the 'Venus and Adonis', 1593, and the 'Lucrece', 1594.

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Here then, in Vautrollier's employ, perhaps as a Press-reader, perhaps as an Assistant in the shop, perchance as both, we imagine Shakspeare to have spent about three years upon his first arrival in the metropolis. Placed thus in Blackfriars, close to the Theatre, close to the Taverns, close to the Inns of Court, and in what was then a fashionable neighbourhood, Shakspeare enjoyed excellent opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of men and manners.

Field did not succeed Vautrollier immediately upon his death. His widow endeavoured for some time to carry on the business alone; but for some unknown reason the Stationers' Company withheld their license; and after a fruitless effort to obtain it, she was succeeded by her son-in-law. These business changes would probably be the occasion of which Shakspeare eagerly availed himself to join the Players at the neighbouring theatre.

The Sonnets, although not printed until 1609, are generally acknowledged to be among Shakspeare's earliest efforts, and we cannot help imagining that Sonnet XXIV was written while in the employment of Vautrollier; or at any rate, while the shop, hung round with prints, was fresh in the Poet's memory. May be some of their warmth was inspired by the charms of the buxom widow herself who was apostrophised by the Poet when wishing her

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To find where your true image *pictured* lies,
Which in my bosom's *shop* is hanging still,
That hath his *windows* glazed with thine eyes.

Sonnet xxiv.

At any rate, we have here in three lines as many metaphors, and all derived from just such employment as we suppose Shakspeare at that time to have been engaged in.

Then, again, to a Printer's widow, not over young, what more telling than the following reference?

Or what strong hand can hold Time's swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in *black ink* my love may still shine bright.
Sonnet lxvi.

Note here, that the jet black ink which everybody admires in old manuscripts was much too thick for a running hand, and had long been superseded by a writing fluid which, in the 16th century, was far from equalling the bright gloss of Printing Ink.

Before turning to the internal evidence supplied by Shakspeare's writings in support of our theory, let us glance at the list of works printed and published by Vautrollier, and see if Shakspeare reflected any trace of their influence upon his mind. [Pg 16]

From Herbert's 'Typographical Antiquities' we find that in the 'Shop' would be the two following works:

A brief Introduction to Music. Collected by P. Delamote, a Frenchman; Licensed.

London, 8vo., 1574.

Discursus Cantiones; quæ ab argumento sacræ vocantur, quinque et sex partivm. Autoribus Thoma Tallisio et Guilielmo Birdo. Cum Privilegio.

London, oblong quarto, 1575.

Delamote's Introduction, as well as the Sacred Songs by Tallis and Bird, were Vautrollier's copyright, and we have already seen how intimate an acquaintance Shakspeare had with music. Might not the above works have been the mine from which he obtained his knowledge?

Of religious works, Vautrollier printed and published several, all in accordance with the principles of the great Reformation, and the writer who argued that from his intimate knowledge of the tenets of Calvin, Shakspeare must have been himself a Calvinist, would have found sufficient explanation of his special knowledge in the following books from Vautrollier's press: [Pg 17]

The Neu Testament, with diversities of Reading and profitable annotations. An epistle by J. Calvin, prefixed.

4to., 1575:

Institutio Christianæ Religionis, Joanne Caluino authorè.

8vo., London, 1576: and

The Institution of Christian Religion [not in Herbert's Ames] written in Latine, by Mr. John Calvine, and translated into English by Thomas Norton. Imprinted at London, by Thomas Vautrollier.

8vo., 1578.

This last contains an Epistle to the Reader by John Calvin, as well as an address headed *Typographus Lectori*. Of each of the above works several editions were published.

In one of his pedantic speeches Holofernes exclaims:

Venetia! Venetia!
Chi non te vede non ti pretia.
Old Mantuan! Old Mantuan! who understandeth thee not, loveth thee not.
Love's Labour Lost, iv, 2.

Where did Shakspeare learn his Italian, which, although then a court language, he quotes but rarely, and in an awkward manner? Surely at second-hand, and probably quoting the phrases current at the period, or still more probably from conning in his spare moments: [Pg 18]

An Italian Grammer, written in Latin by M. Scipio Lentulo: and turned into Englishe by Henry Grantham. Typis Tho. Vautrolerij.

London, 16mo., 1578.

This was put to press again in 1587. In Vautrollier's 'shop' he would also have often in his hands:

Campo di Fior; or else the Flourie field of foure Languages, for the furtherance of the learners of the Latine, French, English, but chiefly of the Italian tongue. Imprinted at London, by Thos. Vautrollier, dwelling in the Black

Friers by Ludgate.

16mo., 1583.

Here, again, we have a very extensive Italian vocabulary upon all common subjects quite sufficient for an occasional quotation; as to the plots taken from Italian sources, such as 'Romeo and Juliet', it seems to be now generally admitted that Shakspeare in every instance followed the English translations.

But Shakspeare knew also a little French, and uses a few colloquial sentences here and there. In one play indeed, *Henry V*, iii. 4, there is a short scene between the Princess and her attendant, in alternate French and English, which reads almost like a page of a Vocabulary. Shakspeare's knowledge of Latin was apparently about the same in extent; and for the uses to which he has applied both tongues, the *Flourie Field of Four Languages*, already quoted as the source of his Italian, would be quite sufficient. If not, he had the opportunity of consulting under his master's roof

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A Treatise on French Verbs.

8vo., 1580.

A most easie, perfect, and absolute way to learne the Frenche tongue.

8vo., 1581; and

Phrases Linguæ Latinæ. 8vo., 1579;

the last compiled from the writings of that great Printer, Aldus Manutius.

Some of Shakspeare's biographers have maintained that he must have been acquainted with Plutarch and other classical writers, because he quotes from their works. Dr. Farmer in his masterly essay on the learning of Shakspeare, has shown that the Poet took all his quotations, even to the blunders, from the edition of Plutarch, in English, printed and published by Vautrollier, a year or two before we suppose that Shakspeare entered into his service:

[Pg 20]

Plutarch's Lives, from the French of Amyott, by Sir Tho. North. Licensed.

Folio, 1579.

Moreover, Vautrollier, who was a good scholar, appears to have had a great liking for Ovid. He printed *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, *Ovid's Epistles*, and *Ovid's Art of Love*. Now it is a notable fact that although Shakspeare, unlike contemporary writers who abound in classical allusions, scarcely ever mentions a Latin poet, and still more seldom a Greek poet, yet he quotes Ovid several times:

As Ovid, be an outcast quite abjured.

Taming of the Shrew, i, 1.

Tit. Lucius, what book is that she tosseth so?

Luc. Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's Metamorphoses.

Titus, iv, 1.

I am here with thee and thy goats as the most capricious poet, honest Ovid was among the Goths.

As You Like It, iii, 3.

Ovidius Naso was the man.

Love's Labour Lost, iv, 2.

Of *Cicero's Oration* Vautrollier issued several editions, and had the privilege 'ad imprimendum solum' granted him; and to this work also, on at least two occasions, Shakspeare refers:

[Pg 21]

Hath read to thee
Sweet poetry and Tully's Orator.

Titus, iv, 1.

Sweet Tully.

2 Henry VI, iv, 1.

The fact to be noted with reference to these classical quotations is this: Shakspeare quotes those Latin authors, and those only, of which Vautrollier had a 'license'; and makes no reference to other and popular writers, such as Virgil, Pliny, Aurelius, and Terence, editions of whose works Vautrollier was not allowed to issue, but all of which, and especially the last, were great favorites in the sixteenth century, as is shown by the numerous editions which issued from the presses of Vautrollier's fellow-craftsmen.

Among other publications of Vautrollier was an English translation of *Ludovico Guicciardini's Description of the Low Countries*, originally printed in 1567. In this work is one of the earliest accounts of the invention of printing at Haarlem, which is thus described in the Batavia of Adrianus Junius, 1575. 'This person [Coster] during his afternoon walk, in

the vicinity of Haarlem, amused himself with cutting letters out of the *bark* of the beech tree, and with these, the *characters* being inverted as in seals, he printed small sentences.' The idea is cleverly adapted by Orlando:

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these trees shall be my *books*,
And in their *barks* my thoughts I'll *character*.
As You Like It, iii, 2.

Lastly, it would be an interesting task to compare the Mad Folk of Shakspeare, most of whom have the melancholy fit, with

A Treatise of Melancholie: containing the Causes thereof and Reasons of the Strange Effects it worketh in our Minds and Bodies.

London, 8vo., 1586.

This was printed by Vautrollier, and probably read carefully for press by the youthful Poet.

The disinclination of Shakspeare to see his plays in print has often been noticed by his biographers, and is generally accounted for by the theory that reading the plays in print would diminish the desire to hear them at the theatre. This is a very unsatisfactory reason, and not so plausible as the supposition that, sickened with reading other people's proofs for a livelihood, he shrunk from the same task on his own behalf. His contemporaries do not appear to have shared in the same typographical aversion. The plays of Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher were all printed in the life-time of their authors. Francis Quarles had the satisfaction and pride of seeing all his works in printed form, and showed his appreciation and knowledge of Typography by the following quaint lines, which we quote from the first edition, *literatim*:

[Pg 23]

On a Printing-house.
The world's a *Printing-house*: our words, our thoughts,
Our deeds, are *Characters* of sev'rall sizes:
Each *Soule* is a *Compos'ter*; of whose faults
The Levits are *Correctors*: Heav'n revises;
Death is the *common Press*; fr^o whence, being driven,
W' are gathered *Sheet* by *Sheet*, & bound for *Heaven*.
From *Divine Fancies*, 1632, lib. iv, p. 164.



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II. THE TECHNICALITIES OF PRINTING, AS USED BY SHAKSPERE

NATURE endows no man with knowledge, and although a quick apprehension may go far toward making the true lover of Nature a Botanist, Zoologist, or Entomologist, and although the society of 'Men of Law', of Doctors, or of Musicians may, with the help of a good memory, store a man's mind with professional phraseology, yet the *opportunity* of learning must be there; and no argument can be required to prove that, however highly endowed with genius or imagination, no one could evolve from his internal consciousness the terms, the customs, or the working implements of a trade with which he was unacquainted. If, then, we find Shakspeare's mind familiar with the technicalities of such an art as Printing—an art which, in his day, had no such connecting links with the common needs and daily pleasures of the people, as now—if we find him using its terms and referring

frequently to its customs, our claims to call him a Printer stand upon a firmer base than those of the Lawyer, the Doctor, the Soldier, or the Divine; and we have strong grounds for asking the reader's thoughtful attention to some quotations and arguments, which, if not conclusive that Shakspeare was a Printer, afford indubitable evidence of his having become at some period of his career practically acquainted with the details of a Printing Office. We propose, then, to carefully examine the works of the Poet for any internal evidence of Typographical knowledge which they may afford.

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But here, at the outset, we are met by obvious difficulties. Would Shakspeare, or any poet have made use of trade terms and technical words, or have referred to customs peculiar to and known by only a very small class of the community in plays addressed to the general public? They might have been familiar enough to the mind of the writer, but would certainly have sounded very strange in the ears of the public. Shakspeare was too artistic and too wise to have committed so glaring a blunder. His technical terms are used unintentionally, and with the most charming unconsciousness. Therefore, when we meet with a word or phrase in common use by Printers, it is so amalgamated with the context, that although some other form of expression would have been chosen had not Shakspeare been a Printer, yet the general reader or hearer is not struck by any incongruity of language.

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What simile could be more natural for a Printer-poet to use or more appropriate for the public to hear than this:

Your mother was most true to wedlock, prince;
For she did *print* your royal father off,
Conceiving you.

Winter's Tale, v, 1.

Here, surely, the Printer's daily experience of the exact agreement between the face of the type and the impression it yields must have suggested the image.

Printers in Shakspeare's time often had patents granted them by which the monopoly of certain works was secured; and unscrupulous printers frequently braved all the pains and penalties to which they were liable by pirating such editions. It is this carelessness of consequences which is glanced at by Mistress Ford when debating with Mistress Page concerning the insult put upon them by the heavy old Knight, Sir John Falstaff:

He cares not what he puts into the Press when he would put us two.

Merry Wives, ii, 1.

What printer is there who has put to press a second edition of a book working page for page in a smaller type and shorter measure but will recognise the Typographer's reminiscences in the following description of Leontes' babe by Paulina:

[Pg 28]

Behold, my Lords,
Although the *print* be little, the whole *matter*
And *copy* of the father ...
The very *mould* and *frame* of hand, nail, finger.

Winter's Tale, ii, 3.

Is it conceivable that a sentence of four lines containing five distinct typographical words, three of which are especially technical, could have proceeded from the brain of one not intimately acquainted with Typography? Again, would Costard have so gratuitously used a typographical idea, had not the Poet's mind been teeming with them?

I will do it, sir, in print.

Love's Labour Lost, iii, 1.

The deep indentation made on the receiving paper when the strong arm of a lusty pressman had pulled the bar with too great vigour is glanced at here:

Think when we talk of horses that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.

Henry V, Chorus.

The frequency with which the words *print* or *imprint* are used is very noticeable:

[Pg 29]

The story that is *printed* in her blood.

Much Ado about Nothing, iv, 1.

I love a ballad in *print*.

Winter's Tale, iv, 4.

She did *print* your royal father off conceiving you.

Winter's Tale, v, 1.

You are but as a *form* in wax, by him *imprinted*.

Midsummer-Night's Dream, i, 1.

His heart ... with your *print impressed*.

Love's Labour Lost, ii, 1.

I will do it, sir, in *print*.
Love's Labour Lost, iii, 1.

This weak *impress* of love.
Two Gentlemen of Verona, iii, 2.

To *print* thy sorrows plain.
Titus Andronicus, iv, 1.

Sink thy knee i' the earth;
Of thy deep duty, more *impression* show.
Coriolanus, v, 3.

Some more time
Must wear the *print* of his remembrance out.
Cymbeline, ii, 3.

The *impressure*.
Twelfth Night, ii, 5.

He will *print* them, out of doubt.
Merry Wives of Windsor, ii, 1.

We quarrel in *print*, by the book.
As You Like It, v, 4.

Let it *stamp* wrinkles in her brow.
Lear, i, 4.

His sword death's *stamp*.
Coriolanus, ii, 2.

Hear how deftly Title-pages are treated:

Sim. Knights,
To say you're welcome were superfluous.
To place upon the *volume* of your deeds,
As in a *title-page*, your worth of arms,
Were more than you expect, or more than's fit.
Pericles, ii, 3.

Hear, too, Northumberland, who thus addresses the bearer of fearful news:

This man's brow, like to a *title-leaf*,
Foretells the nature of a tragic *volume*.
2 Henry IV, i, 1.

Evidently Shakspeare had a good idea of what a Title-page should contain.

From Title to Preface is but a turn of the leaf, and its introductory character is thus noticed:

Is but a *Preface* of her worthy praise,
The chief perfections of that lovely dame.
1 Henry VI, v, 5.

We must not forget a well-known passage about the introduction of Printing to England, which has caused much discussion. It is where Jack Cade accuses Lord Saye:

Thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar-school: and whereas, before, our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally, thou hast caused printing to be used; and, contrary to the king, his crown, and dignity, thou hast built a paper mill.

2 Henry VI, iv, 7.

The early-invented fable of Faustus, and the assistance given him by the Devil in the multiplication of the first printed bibles (certainly a most short-sighted step on the part of his Satanic Majesty) had got fixed in the minds of the populace, and created among the ignorant a prejudice against the Printing-press, and it was to this feeling Jack Cade appealed. All our Chroniclers place the erection of a Printing-press in England some years too early, but no one except Shakspeare has put the date so far back as 1450, the date of Jack Cade's insurrection: it is simply a blunder; but it was the Printing-press and its introduction to this country that was in the Author's brain, and the *exact* date of that event was unknown, being probably as difficult to arrive at then as it is now.^[1]

We have already noticed in how simple a manner originated that grand discovery which, instead of one perishable manuscript, produced numberless printed books, and thus enabled mankind to perpetuate for ever the knowledge they had gained. The real superiority of the

Press over the pen was the easy multiplication of copies, and this was the idea in the Poet's brain when he wrote:

She carved thee for her seal and meant thereby
Thou shouldst *print more* nor let that copy die.
Sonnet xi.

Type-founding has in these days arrived at such perfection, that most of the blemishes and faults common in Shakspeare's time are now unknown. Under the old system of hand moulds a type founder was sure when commencing work to cast a certain number of imperfect letters, because until the mould by use got warmed, the liquid metal solidified too soon, and the body or shank of the type was shrunk, and became no inappropriate emblem of an old man's limbs whose hose would be

[Pg 33]

A world too wide for his shrunk shank.
As You Like It, ii, 7.

The names of the various sizes of type in the sixteenth century were few compared with our modern list; Canon, Great Primer, Pica, Long Primer, and Brevier almost complete the catalogue; and however familiar Shakspeare may have been with their names, it is difficult to imagine any scene in which these technical names could be introduced with propriety. Yet, of one, Nonpareil, a new small type first introduced from Holland about 1650, and which for its beauty and excellence was much admired, Shakspeare seems to have conceived a most favorable idea. Prospero, praising his daughter, calls her 'a Nonpareil' (*Tempest, Act iii, Sc. 2*); Olivia is the 'Nonpareil of beauty' (*Twelfth Night, Act i, Scene 5*); and Posthumus speaks of Imogen as the 'Nonpareil of her time' (*Cymbeline, Act ii, Scene 5*).

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The exactitude and precision of everything connected with the arrangement of printing from types is curiously hinted at by Touchstone, when describing the preciseness of the Courtiers' quarrels:

We quarrel *in print by the book*.
As You Like It, v, 4;

that is, no step was taken except according to acknowledged rules.

It often happens when a book comes to its last sheet that the text runs short, and two or three blank or vacant pages remain at the end. In the middle of one of these it is usual to place the typographer's imprint. What compositor is there who has rejoiced in such *fat* pages^[2] but will not at once recognise the following allusion:

The *vacant* leaves thy mind's *imprint* will bear,
And of this *book* this learning mayst thou taste.
Sonnet lxxvii.

People with a grievance write now-a-days to the Newspapers, in hope of redress. In Shakspeare's time the only method to make wrongs public and to show up abuses was by the *Broadside*, in prose or rhyme, passing from hand to hand. Many of these have survived to the present day, and are treasured up as curious relics of a by-gone age. They were frequently libellous and grievously personal, and hence the point of Pistol's remark:

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Fear we broadsides?
2 Henry IV, ii, 4.

We must not think here that the naval 'broadside'—a volley of guns from the broadside of a ship—is meant. Shakspeare does not use the word once in that sense, nor was it a conversational word in his time. That Pistol was indeed thinking of a printed broad sheet is evident from the whole sentence, which, although composed of disjointed exclamations continues with the following expressions, both strongly suggestive of the Composing room or Reader's closet:

Come we to full points here? and are etceteras nothing?
2 Henry IV, ii, 4.

'Come we to full points here?' This question is often a puzzler for both Compositor and Reader. Indeed, few things cause more disagreements between Author and Printer than the very loose ideas held by the former concerning punctuation. Some writers, like Dickens in his early days, insist upon ornamenting their sentences with little dashes and big dashes, with colons where commas should be, and with

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Points that seem impossible.
Pericles, v, 1.

In vain does the Printer declare that in altering the Author's unregulated punctuation,

No levelled malice infests one *comma*,
Timon, i, 1,

the irate Author exclaims, that he

Puts the *period* often from his place,
Lucrece, l. 565,

and adds, 'Follow

My *point* and period ... ill or well.
Lear, iv, 7.

You find not the apostrophes, and so miss the accent.
Love's Labour Lost, iv, 2.

Wherefore stand you on nice points?
3 Henry VI, iv, 7.

The Printer has no resource but compliance, which, however, unless the affront be very severe, will soon [Pg 37]

Stand a comma 'tween their amities,
Hamlet, v, 2,

and thus heal the breach, and end all happily with mutual

Notes of Admiration.
Winter's Tale, v, 2.

'And are etceteras nothing?' What a typographical question! and probably the only occasion on which so unpoetical a figure has done duty in any drama. The &c. makes an insignificant appearance in either MS. or type, and yet how often it stands for whole pages of matter. Hence the point of the question.

If a book is folio, and two pages of type have been composed, they are placed in proper position upon the imposing stone, and enclosed within an iron or steel frame called a 'chase', small wedges of hard wood termed 'coigns' or 'quoins' being driven in at opposite sides to make all tight.

By the four opposing coigns,
Which the world together joins.
Pericles, iii, 1.

This is just the description of a forme in folio where two quoins on one side are always opposite to two quoins on the other, thus together joining and tightening all the separate stamps. In a quaint allegorical poem, published anonymously about the year 1700, in which the mystery of man's redemption is symbolised by the mystery of Printing, the author commences thus: [Pg 38]

Great blest Master Printer, come
Into thy Composing-room;

and after 'spiritualising' the successive operations of the workman thus touches upon the quoins:

Let the Quoins be thy sure Election,
Which admits of no Rejection;
With which our Souls being joined about,
Not the least Grace can then fall out.

Here, the idea of joining together by quoins so that nothing shall fall out, is just the same as in the couplet quoted from Shakspeare.

The tightening of these quoins by means of a wooden-headed mallet,

(There is no more conceit in him than is in a mallet,
2 Henry IV, ii, 4),

is called 'locking up', an exclusively technical term. The expression, however, occurs in 'Measure for Measure', IV, 2,

Fast locked up in sleep,

where the idea conveyed is the same.

The 'Forme' worked off and the metal chase removed, leaving the pages 'naked', affords the Poet the following simile, which although not carrying to the popular ear any typographical meaning, was doubtless suggested by Shakspeare's former experience of the workshop: [Pg 39]

And he but *naked* though *locked up* in steel.
2 Henry VI, iii, 2.

The primary idea of 'locking up' had, doubtless, reference to 'armour'; the secondary to printing, as shown by the use of the word 'naked'.

The forme then went to the Press-room, where considerable ingenuity was required to make 'register'; that is, to print one side so exactly upon the other, that when the sheet was held up to the light the lines on each side would exactly back one another. The accuracy of judgment required for this is thus glanced at:

Eno. But let the world rank me in *register*
A master-leaver and a fugitive.
Antony and Cleopatra, iv, 9.

When the green-eyed Othello takes his wife's hand and exclaims:

Here's a young and sweating devil,
Othello, iii, 4,

we fail at first to catch the idea of the Poet in calling a hand a 'devil'; but take the word as synonymous with 'messenger', and we see at once how the moist plump palm of Desdemona suggested to the intensely jealous husband the idea of its having been the lascivious messenger of her impure desires. In this sense of 'messenger', the word 'devil' has a special fitness; for it is, and always has been among Printers, *and Printers only*, another word for 'errand-boy'. In olden times, when speed was required, a boy stood at the off-side of the press, and as soon as the frisket was raised, whipped the printed sheet off the tympan. When not at work, he ran on messages between printer and author, who, on account of his inky defilement, dubbed him 'devil'. All Printers' boys go now by the same name:

[Pg 40]

Old Lucifer, both kind and civil,
To ev'ry Printer lends a Devil;
But balancing accounts each winter,
For ev'ry Devil takes a Printer.

Moxon, in 1683, quotes it as an old trade word, and it was doubtless the same in Shakspeare's time, a century earlier, as it is now two centuries later. But where could Shakspeare have picked up the word if not in the Printing-office?

Any one accustomed to collate old MSS. must have noticed how very seldom the copyist would, in transcribing, add nothing and omit nothing. If what the scribe considered a good idea entered his mind while his pen was travelling over the page, he was a very modest penman indeed, if he did not incorporate it in the text. From this cause, and from genuine unintentional blunders, the texts of all the old authors had become gradually very corrupt—a source of great trouble to the early Printers. With this in his mind Shakspeare defines it as one of the qualities of Time

[Pg 41]

To blot old books and alter their contents.
Lucrece, l. 948.

Many of Vautrollier's publications must have been printed from discolored old manuscripts; and these papers Shakspeare, if he read 'proof' for his employer, would have to study carefully. Does he call this to mind in Sonnet XVII?

My papers yellowed with their age.

Was it, after admiring some beautifully illuminated Horæ, that he wrote:

O that record could with a backward look,
E'en of five hundred courses of the sun;
Show me your image in some antique book,
Since mind at first in character was done.
Sonnet lix.

[Pg 42]

Does the Poet refer to its wonderfully burnished gold initials, and the red dominical letters which he must often have seen in the printed calendars, when he exclaims in tones of admiration:

My red dominical—my golden letter!
Love's Labour Lost, v, 2.

The old calendar had a *golden number* and a *dominical letter*, but not a *golden letter*, which last must refer specifically to the practice of gilding important initials. 'Golden Letters' are mentioned in 'King John', III, 1, and in 'Pericles', IV, 4, while the red initials, which were common to both manuscripts and printed books of the fifteenth century, are made by Shakspeare the death warrant of the unfortunate Clerk of Chatham, against whom is brought the fatal accusation that he

Has a book in his pocket with red letters in 't.
2 Henry VI, iv, 2.

In Shakspeare's time, as we have already noticed (p. 41, ante), the press laboured under great restrictions. All books with a profitable circulation were monopolised by favored stationers or printers who held special patents or licenses from the Crown. Thus Reynold Wolfe, in 1543, held a monopoly of all books printed in Hebrew, Greek, or Latin. Seres was privileged to print all psalters, primers, and prayer books; Denham might print the New Testament in Welch; others held grants for scholastic or legal books, for almanacs, and even for broadsides, or as the grant says 'for any piece of paper printed on one side of the sheet only'. In these favored books it was customary to place the patent granting the monopoly at the end, as a 'caveat' for other printers, and occasionally the phrase 'Cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum' would appear in a conspicuous part of the title. Among the printers in

[Pg 43]

London, who secured such special privileges, was Vautrollier, Shakspeare's presumed employer. 'In the sixteenth year of Elizabeth, 19th June, 1574', says Ames, 'a patent or license was granted him which he often printed at the end of the New Testament'; this was a monopoly of Beza's New Testament which Vautrollier had the privilege 'ad imprimendum solum', for the term of ten years. We have already seen the curious connection between the products of Vautrollier's press and the writings of Shakspeare, and we now plainly perceive what was floating in the Poet's brain when he placed the following speech in Biondello's mouth, who urges Lucentio to marry Bianca, while her father and the pedant are discussing the marriage treaty:

[Pg 44]

Luc. And what of all this?

Bion. I cannot tell; expect they are busied about a counterfeit^[3] assurance: Take your assurance of her *cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum*: to the church;—take the priest, clerk, and some sufficient honest witnesses.

Taming of the Shrew, iv, 4.

These protective privileges, 'ad imprimendum solum', instead of a benefit were a great hindrance to the growth of Printing. Many master-printers even then felt them to be so, and by all legal and sometimes illegal means, tried to procure the abolition of laws which were oppressive and restrictive. They saw works of merit die out of memory for want of enterprise in the patentee—they saw folly, in the shape of a Star-chamber, controlling skill; or as Shakspeare himself expresses it,

[Pg 45]

Art made tongue-tied by authority,
And Folly (doctor-like),^[4] controlling skill.
Sonnet lxvi.

Shakspeare abounds in kisses of every hue, from shadowy, frozen, and Judas kisses, to holy, true, gentle, tender, warm, sweet, loving, dainty, kind, soft, long, hard, zealous, burning, and even the unrequited kiss:

But my kisses bring again
Seals of love, but seal'd in vain.
Measure for Measure, iii, 1.

The 'burning' kiss might be thought passionate and even durable enough for any extremity—yet Shakspeare prefers, perhaps from an unconscious association of ideas, the durability of which *Printing* is the emblem when he makes the Goddess of Love exclaim:

Pure lips, sweet seals on my soft lips *imprinted*.
Venus and Adonis, l. 511.

The same idea of durability is expressed in the cry of Henry's guilty Queen, when parting with Suffolk:

[Pg 46]

Oh, could this kiss be *printed* on thy hand!
2 Henry VI, iii, 2.

The idea has been still further developed in the following anonymous quatrain:

A PRINTER'S KISSES.
Print on my lips another kiss,
The picture of my glowing passion.
Nay, this wont do—nor this, nor this;
But now—Ay, that's a *proof impression*.

Many of Vautrollier's publications went through several editions. In the 'Merry Wives', II, 1, Mistress Page says:

These are of the second edition,

and well can we imagine Shakspeare handing volumes to a buyer with the same remark, or asking some patron with whom he was a favourite:

Com'st thou with deep premeditated lines,
With written pamphlet studiously devised?
1 Henry VI, iii, 1.

as the author entered with a roll of 'copy' in his hand.

In the deep mine from which the foregoing quotations have been dug, many others would doubtless reward a more careful search. As it is, numerous allusions, which, though plain to a printer, would seem too forced to the general public, have been passed over. Enough, however, has probably been brought forward to justify the belief portrayed in the title-page, viz.: *That Shakspeare must have passed some of his early years in a Printing-office.*

[Pg 47]



Footnotes:

[1] *The exact date was probably as difficult to arrive at then as now.* The arrival of William Caxton in England may, with a certainty of being near the truth, be placed in 1475-6, the date 1474 given by most writers being a misconception of the language used by Caxton in the Preface to the Chess-book. The Art on its first introduction was looked upon suspiciously by the people, few of whom could read, its chief patrons being a few of the more educated among the nobles and the rich burghers of London. Another mistake is to suppose that Caxton printed in Westminster Abbey. His printing-office was a tenement to the south-east of the Abbey Church; its sign was the 'Red-pale', and Caxton rented it of the Abbot. There is evidence to show that Caxton and the Abbot were on distant terms of amity—none to show that the Ecclesiastic encouraged or patronised the Printer, notwithstanding Dean Stanley's assertions in a sermon lately preached by him in Westminster Abbey. The *only* occasion upon which Caxton mentions the Abbot is to this effect—that the Abbot, not being able himself to read a passage in old MS., sent it to Caxton, with a request that he would translate it. (See *The Life and Typography of William Caxton*, by William Blades. 2 vols., 4to. London, 1861-63.)

[2] *Fat Pages.* 'Fat' as a conventional word is not confined to Printers. 'A *fat* living' is a phrase not unknown among churchmen, and is used in the same sense by the compositor, who charges the master-printer for the *fat* pages, in which no work appears, at the same rate as if they were full.

[3] This word 'counterfeit' in the sense of 'reprint' or 'duplicate', is certainly not used now-a-days by English printers; yet I find this in Marahren's Parallel List of technical Typographical terms:—'Counterfeit, to, or to Reprint, v., Nachdrucken.—Ré-imprimer.' With Bibliographers the word is still retained; *e.g.* 'Lyons counterfeits of the Aldine editions.'

[4] *And Folly (doctor-like) controlling skill.* It is worth noting, that in none of the various volumes written to show Shakspeare's knowledge of medicine and medical men, has the truth of this passage been brought forward in evidence.

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