

The Crystal Goblet

SIXTEEN ESSAYS ON TYPOGRAPHY

BY BEATRICE WARDE

SELECTED AND EDITED

BY HENRY JACOB

CLEVELAND AND NEW YORK
THE WORLD PUBLISHING COMPANY

MCMLVI

Z
116
W24
1956b

First published in the USA in 1956
by the World Publishing Company
Cleveland and New York

Made in Great Britain

~~655.04~~

~~W265c~~

LIBRARY
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	5
AN APPROACH TO TYPOGRAPHY	
THE CRYSTAL GOBLET <i>of</i> PRINTING SHOULD BE INVISIBLE	11
THE NATURE OF THE BOOK	18
THE DESIGN OF BOOKS	31
TYPOGRAPHY AS A VOCATION	
DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT	49
THE ARTIST AND TYPOGRAPHY — A WORD OF WARNING	62
TYPOGRAPHY IN ART EDUCATION	67
ARTISTS AND CRAFTSMEN, I, II, & III	93
THE PRIDE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP	115
TRAINING IN TASTE	123
TRADITION AND PROGRESS	
TRADITION AND PROGRESS IN PRINTING	129
ON THE CHOICE OF TYPEFACES	137
THE TYPOGRAPHY OF THE BIBLE	150
AN ANTHOLOGY OF VERSE	
AS A TYPOGRAPHIC PROBLEM, I & II	165
IMPROVING THE COMPULSORY BOOK	180
SOME NOTES ON THE	
BRITISH TYPOGRAPHIC REFORMATION, 1919-39	187
THIRTY-TWO OUTSTANDING DATES	202
<i>Sources of Essays</i>	211
<i>List of Selected Writings</i>	213
<i>Index</i>	215

258850

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Author and publisher wish to express their appreciation to Messrs Lund Humphries & Co. Ltd, The Monotype Corporation Ltd, Messrs George Newnes Ltd, *Signature* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, by whose courtesy certain of the author's essays are published in this volume. Pages 154-5 and 156-7 are reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press.

INTRODUCTION

★

IN THE EARLY NINETEEN-THIRTIES, in the small but lively world of typographic learning, there was some grieving over the disappearance from title-pages of the name of Paul Beaujon, who had achieved a reputation by works of research, particularly one which tracked down the origin of the 'Garamond' type. I was the chief mourner; having created the pseudonymous 'Beaujon' out of whole cloth, I had been deriving great pleasure from the success with which his name, attached to articles first in the *Fleurion* and later elsewhere, had deceived those who were not prepared to believe that a woman could write anything worth reading about type.

But Beaujon's capacity to write had got me into an office job which left no time for researches in the British Museum or elsewhere. You may read, if you penetrate so far into this book, the tale of how the London Company that engaged that mysterious Frenchman, sight-unseen, to edit its learned house journal, *The Monotype Recorder*, found that it had acquired the services of an American disciple of the late Henry Lewis Bullen, who in turn had been a friend and disciple of T. L. de Vinne. Both those masters had dedicated their scholarship to the service and inspiration of the printing trade — in the days when Americans were not yet calling it their 'graphic arts industry'.

I am not saying that Mr Beaujon committed suicide in order that his *alter ego* B.W. might be free to harangue audiences of

INTRODUCTION

printers' apprentices, art students, hard-working layout men, members of the Printers' Managers and Overseers' Association, librarians, print-ignorant laymen, and others to whom the essays in this book are addressed. Like Enoch Soames, he will one day be seen again in the British Museum. But none of his writings appears in this book.

What you *will* find here is a collection made by Mr Henry Jacob of certain articles and speeches of mine in which I have tried to pass on, to people who seemed to need it, the help that I have derived from moments in conversation with most of the masters of typography of this century. I mean the sort of help that you never get from plugging away at textbooks or learning details the hard way at the drawing-board or type-case. I can think of three people — Bruce Rogers, T. M. Cleland and Stanley Morison — whose most casual *obiter dicta* over the coffee-cups may whisk you to the top of Mount Pisgah for a view of that whole blessed borderland (not to say buffer state) that lies between the empire of Letters on the one side and that of what we nowadays call Art on the other. I can think of others — Bullen, Updike, and that inimitable octogenarian J. P. Thorp come first to mind — whose utterance of ten words in parenthesis over lunch could disperse any amount of technical mist and give you the feeling that the whole business of communicating ideas through the graphic word is real and exciting. These and many other people will be ventriloquizing in the pages that you have here; and so unselfconscious were their off-hand utterances at the time of notation, that each of them, at some later date, innocently congratulated me on having hit the nail on the head in a printed article.

I understand that Mr Jacob's selection was influenced by the

INTRODUCTION

number of thumb-prints, or other evidences of hard wear, that he was able to find on various clippings and fugitive pamphlets that had been carried about in the pockets of teachers of printing, foremen of composing rooms and others whose thumbs bore traces of printer's ink. To a writer there could be no more gratifying kind of 'printing' than that which such thumbs transfer to paper.

On looking through the resulting book, I am conscious that most of what it says has been summed up in the opening pages — a rewriting of a lecture to what is now known as the Society of Typographic Designers, formerly the British Typographers Guild. But it is the sort of thing which has to be said over again in other terms to many other kinds of people who in the nature of their work have to deal with the putting of printed words on paper — and who, for one reason or another, are in danger of becoming as fascinated by the intricacies of its techniques as birds are supposed to be by the eye of a serpent.

Hence, this is not a textbook of typography of printing. To the layman, the man who has only the vaguest idea of how the little black marks ever got there on the page, it may be no more than a chance to listen-in while one voice, and the echoes of other and wiser voices, say things over the clink of coffee-cups which indicate why so many intelligent people nowadays do bother to hail different designs of type by name as if they were ships or horses, and why one can say that it is not all a simple matter of decanting the wine of Meaning into any sufficiently transparent tumbler which the nearest printer happens to be able to hold out for it. Thus the members of the Library Association, to whom the paper on 'The Design of Books' was addressed, are people who must have some practical and even

INTRODUCTION

technical language in which to argue about all sorts of examples of crank or experimentalist design which crop up in children's books and elsewhere. The P. M. & O. Association to which I have referred needed — and called upon me for — the hard-headed arguments on the relation of design to management which begin on page 49. Working compositors helped me to get some realism into the articles in which I deplored some of the effects on those proud craftsmen of the emergence in this century of the professional print designer and his little brother, the amateur layout man. Mr Jacob could not, and I would not excise various passages which date.

If there is a word in this book which overlaps what you can find in the textbooks or learned monographs, blame the compiler. But if there is a sentence in it that cannot in its context make some sort of sense to the average citizen who knows nothing about printing, I shall be the one to reproach. The good citizen is supposed to feel some responsibility for the health of industrial design in his country; the literate man is expected to think with grateful interest of that invention which turned literacy from a separate profession into Everyman's birthright. Well, the history of industrial design begins with medieval goldsmiths cutting model letters for printers' types; and among all its present-day manifestations none is more significant than that which has been going on, literally under our noses, on the printed page.

B.W.

AN APPROACH TO TYPOGRAPHY

THE CRYSTAL GOBLET
OR
PRINTING SHOULD BE INVISIBLE

★

IMAGINE THAT YOU HAVE before you a flagon of wine. You may choose your own favourite vintage for this imaginary demonstration, so that it be a deep shimmering crimson in colour. You have two goblets before you. One is of solid gold, wrought in the most exquisite patterns. The other is of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble, and as transparent. Pour and drink; and according to your choice of goblet, I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine. For if you have no feelings about wine one way or the other, you will want the sensation of drinking the stuff out of a vessel that may have cost thousands of pounds; but if you are a member of that vanishing tribe, the amateurs of fine vintages, you will choose the crystal, because everything about it is calculated to *reveal* rather than to hide the beautiful thing which it was meant to *contain*.

Bear with me in this long-winded and fragrant metaphor; for you will find that almost all the virtues of the perfect wine-glass have a parallel in typography. There is the long, thin stem that obviates fingerprints on the bowl. Why? Because no cloud must come between your eyes and the fiery heart of the liquid. Are not the margins on book pages similarly meant to obviate the necessity of fingering the type-page? Again: the glass is colourless or at the most only faintly tinged in the bowl, because the connoisseur judges wine partly by its colour and is

impatient of anything that alters it. There are a thousand mannerisms in typography that are as impudent and arbitrary as putting port in tumblers of red or green glass! When a goblet has a base that looks too small for security, it does not matter how cleverly it is weighted; you feel nervous lest it should tip over. There are ways of setting lines of type which may work well enough, and yet keep the reader subconsciously worried by the fear of 'doubling' lines, reading three words as one, and so forth.

Now the man who first chose glass instead of clay or metal to hold his wine was a 'modernist' in the sense in which I am going to use that term. That is, the first thing he asked of this particular object was not '*How should it look?*' but '*What must it do?*' and to that extent all good typography is modernist.

Wine is so strange and potent a thing that it has been used in the central ritual of religion in one place and time, and attacked by a virago with a hatchet in another. There is only one thing in the world that is capable of stirring and altering men's minds to the same extent, and that is the coherent expression of thought. That is man's chief miracle, unique to man. There is no 'explanation' whatever of the fact that I can make arbitrary sounds which will lead a total stranger to think my own thought. It is sheer magic that I should be able to hold a one-sided conversation by means of black marks on paper with an unknown person half-way across the world. Talking, broadcasting, writing, and printing are all quite literally forms of *thought transference*, and it is this ability and eagerness to transfer and receive the contents of the mind that is almost alone responsible for human civilization.

If you agree with this, you will agree with my one main idea,

i.e. that the most important thing about printing is that it conveys thought, ideas, images, from one mind to other minds. This statement is what you might call the front door of the science of typography. Within lie hundreds of rooms; but unless you start by assuming that *printing is meant to convey specific and coherent ideas*, it is very easy to find yourself in the wrong house altogether.

Before asking what this statement leads to, let us see what it does not necessarily lead to. If books are printed in order to be read, we must distinguish readability from what the optician would call legibility. A page set in 14-pt. Bold Sans is, according to the laboratory tests, more 'legible' than one set in 11-pt. Baskerville. A public speaker is more 'audible' in that sense when he bellows. But a good speaking voice is one which is inaudible *as a voice*. It is the transparent goblet again! I need not warn you that if you begin listening to the inflections and speaking rhythms of a voice from a platform, you are falling asleep. When you listen to a song in a language you do not understand, part of your mind actually does fall asleep, leaving your quite separate aesthetic sensibilities to enjoy themselves unimpeded by your reasoning faculties. The fine arts do that; but that is not the purpose of printing. Type well used is invisible *as type*, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas.

We may say, therefore, that printing may be delightful for many reasons, but that it is important, first and foremost, as a means of doing something. That is why it is mischievous to call any printed piece a work of art, especially fine art: because that would imply that its first purpose was to exist as an expression of beauty for its own sake and for the delectation of the senses.

Calligraphy can almost be considered a fine art nowadays, because its primary economic and educational purpose has been taken away; but printing in English will not qualify as an art until the present English language no longer conveys ideas to future generations, and until printing itself hands its usefulness to some yet unimagined successor.

There is no end to the maze of practices in typography, and this idea of printing as a conveyor is, at least in the minds of all the great typographers with whom I have had the privilege of talking, the one clue that can guide you through the maze. Without this essential humility of mind, I have seen ardent designers go more hopelessly wrong, make more ludicrous mistakes out of an excessive enthusiasm, than I could have thought possible. And with this clue, this purposiveness in the back of your mind, it is possible to do the most unheard-of things, and find that they justify you triumphantly. It is not a waste of time to go to the simple fundamentals and reason from them. In the flurry of your individual problems, I think you will not mind spending half an hour on one broad and simple set of ideas involving abstract principles.

I once was talking to a man who designed a very pleasing advertising type which undoubtedly all of you have used. I said something about what artists think about a certain problem, and he replied with a beautiful gesture: 'Ah, madam, we artists do not think — we *feel*!' That same day I quoted that remark to another designer of my acquaintance, and he, being less poetically inclined, murmured: 'I'm not *feeling* very well today, I *think*!' He was right, he did think; he was the thinking sort; and that is why he is not so good a painter, and to my mind ten times better as a typographer and type designer than

the man who instinctively avoided anything as coherent as a reason.

I always suspect the typographic enthusiast who takes a printed page from a book and frames it to hang on the wall, for I believe that in order to gratify a sensory delight he has mutilated something infinitely more important. I remember that T. M. Cleland, the famous American typographer, once showed me a very beautiful layout for a Cadillac booklet involving decorations in colour. He did not have the actual text to work with in drawing up his specimen pages, so he had set the lines in Latin. This was not only for the reason that you will all think of, if you have seen the old typefoundries' famous *Quousque Tandem* copy (i.e. that Latin has few descenders and thus gives a remarkably even line). No, he told me that originally he had set up the dullest 'wording' that he could find (I dare say it was from *Hansard*), and yet he discovered that the man to whom he submitted it would start reading and making comments on the text. I made some remark on the mentality of Boards of Directors, but Mr Cleland said, 'No: you're wrong; if the reader had not been practically forced to read — if he had not seen those words suddenly imbued with glamour and significance — then the layout would have been a failure. Setting it in Italian or Latin is only an easy way of saying "This is not the text as it will appear".'

Let me start my specific conclusions with book typography, because that contains all the fundamentals, and then go on to a few points about advertising.

The book typographer has the job of erecting a window between the reader inside the room and that landscape which is the author's words. He may put up a stained-glass window of

marvellous beauty, but a failure as a window; that is, he may use some rich superb type like text gothic that is something to be looked at, not *through*. Or he may work in what I call transparent or invisible typography. I have a book at home, of which I have no visual recollection whatever as far as its typography goes; when I think of it, all I see is the Three Musketeers and their comrades swaggering up and down the streets of Paris. The third type of window is one in which the glass is broken into relatively small leaded panes; and this corresponds to what is called 'fine printing' today, in that you are at least conscious that there is a window there, and that someone has enjoyed building it. That is not objectionable, because of a very important fact which has to do with the psychology of the subconscious mind. This is that the mental eye focuses *through* type and not *upon* it. The type which, through any arbitrary warping of design or excess of 'colour', gets in the way of the mental picture to be conveyed, is a bad type. Our subconsciousness is always afraid of blunders (which illogical setting, tight spacing and too-wide unleaded lines can trick us into), of boredom, and of officiousness. The running headline that keeps shouting at us, the line that looks like one long word, the capitals jammed together without hair-spaces — these mean subconscious squinting and loss of mental focus.

And if what I have said is true of book printing, even of the most exquisite limited editions, it is fifty times more obvious in advertising, where the one and only justification for the purchase of space is that you are conveying a message — that you are implanting a desire, straight into the mind of the reader. It is tragically easy to throw away half the reader-interest of an advertisement by setting the simple and compelling argument

in a face which is uncomfortably alien to the classic reasonableness of the book-face. Get attention as you will by your headline, and make any pretty type pictures you like if you are sure that the copy is useless as a means of selling goods; but if you are happy enough to have really good copy to work with, I beg you to remember that thousands of people pay hard-earned money for the privilege of reading quietly set book-pages, and that only your wildest ingenuity can stop people from reading a really interesting text.

Printing demands a humility of mind, for the lack of which many of the fine arts are even now floundering in self-conscious and maudlin experiments. There is nothing simple or dull in achieving the transparent page. Vulgar ostentation is twice as easy as discipline. When you realize that ugly typography never effaces itself, you will be able to capture beauty as the wise men capture happiness by aiming at something else. The 'stunt typographer' learns the fickleness of rich men who hate to read. Not for them are long breaths held over serif and kern, they will not appreciate your splitting of hair-spaces. Nobody (save the other craftsmen) will appreciate half your skill. But you may spend endless years of happy experiment in devising that crystalline goblet which is worthy to hold the vintage of the human mind.

THE NATURE OF THE BOOK

★

ACCORDING TO CONTEXT, the English word 'book' may denote anything from a concrete object of a certain recognizable form (e.g. 'a handsomely bound book') to a literary work of a certain minimum length (e.g. 'a book that has been translated into six languages'). The word 'book' and its cognates in other Teutonic languages may or may not derive from a word meaning 'beech' or 'tablets of beech wood', but the earliest Teutonic form *boks*, in the plural, meant 'writing tablets', presumably slabs or billets of wood inscribed, or ready to be inscribed, with runic symbols. The Old English form *boc*, even in its early and now obsolete sense of 'written deed, charter', at least referred to a document rather than to the mere material on which the document was written. Nevertheless, the Teutonic words for 'book' can still be applied to a volume of blank leaves, and Dr Johnson's attempt to define 'book' simply as a kind of material object ('a volume in which we read or write') would sound reasonable to any English craftsman-bookbinder, and to some book collectors. On the other hand, the Latin word *liber*, though it originally meant 'bark or rind' (of a tree, or of the papyrus plant, as a writing material), soon took on the almost exclusive meaning of 'literary work, treatise', and the entirely different words, *tabellae*, *pugillares*, were used for the sets of tablets and the blank parchment booklets that served the ancient Romans as notebooks and copybooks.

THE NATURE OF THE BOOK

The Oxford English Dictionary brings the English word 'book' into line with *liber*, *biblion*, etc, by excluding the blank book from the general definition of book as 'a written or printed treatise or series of treatises, occupying several sheets of paper or other substance fastened together so as to compose a material whole'. That nearly covers the great variety of physical forms in which books have been set forth and read in different countries at different times, though 'fastened together' would not strictly apply to the oldest form of all — the series of clay tablets, enclosed in a labelled container, on which the Babylonians set forth literary works by impressing characters in the moist clay with a wedge-shaped tool. Books have been written or incised on dried strips of palm-leaf lashed together with a thong (India), and on plates of metal (Burma), and on birch-bark. The modern printed book, like its medieval manuscript prototype, is made up of separate sheets folded to form leaves, with the quires or gatherings of leaves sewn together at the back ready for the outer binding. A sheet (whether of paper or vellum) folded once makes two large leaves or four pages 'folio'; a second fold gives the smaller but still impressive 'quarto' format, and so on.

The word 'volume' (from *volumen*, scroll) is a reminder that in classic times, and as long as pagan literature continued to be read in the Christian era, the normal form of the book was the scroll — a continuous band of papyrus, attached at each end to a stiff roller. The narrow parallel columns of text passed under the reader's eyes as he unwound the scroll with one hand and wound it with the other hand around the outer roller. Papyrus was made from the pith of the papyrus reed, which then grew abundantly in the Nile. Thin strips of the fibrous substance were

laid side by side; a second layer was laid down with the strips at right angles, and by some art now lost the two layers were so gummed and pressed together as to make a very flexible writing material. The sheets, each some sixteen inches wide, were pasted edge to edge to form blank rolls of more or less standard length. If the text fell short of that length the scribe could cut off the extra material, and if the text was too long he could paste on an extra sheet. Some Egyptian scrolls were more than a hundred feet long and as tall as sixteen inches, but the normal length of about twenty-six feet, and the normal height of six to nine inches, took into account the reader's convenience in handling the scroll. The reverse side of the material was normally left blank. Prose columns were about thirty-eight characters wide, and the lines were written in capital letters without the use of punctuation or spaces between words. *Libri* came to mean not only written works but also divisions of a long work into easily handled volumes, whence the 'books' of the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, etc. But the books of the Bible began, and can still be thought of, as separate books in every sense.

The ancestor of the scroll book was probably the inscribed banner of papyrus hung from the walls of the Egyptian temple. In one respect the scroll form stands nearer to the painted or carved public inscription than any modern book: it could, if necessary, be wholly opened up for simultaneous inspection by a number of people, or laid partly open on a wide lectern (reading shelf) so as to expose twelve or more parallel columns — a convenience in public recitation. But the essential characteristic of the book, then as now, was its portability — the fact that it could be carried about, possessed, enjoyed, and decorated to the private owner's taste. It is easy to see how the brittleness

of papyrus justified the form of the scroll, and why there was no transition as there was in the Far East from the scroll proper to the *orihon* or pleated ribbon of tough rag paper that could be stab-fastened at the back to make a book of double leaves. What is less easy for modern readers to understand is the fact that parchment, a much tougher material made from animal skins (including the fine 'vellum' made from calf-skin) was more or less despised in classic times. The *codex* form of book, our familiar 'bound book' of leaves, was made practicable by the coming of parchment before the second century B.C., but the *volumen* remained the preferred form until the fourth century of the Christian era; so much so that a will leaving all the testator's books to a certain heir could be interpreted as referring only to scrolls, not to mere pamphlets and other items in the parchment *codex* form. The only survival of the *volumen* in modern use is the manuscript Scroll of the Law which is deposited in the Ark of every synagogue. Like the scrolls of the ancient Hebrews, it is written on parchment.

The *codex* form may have evolved from the notebook of classic times, a set of tablets normally made of wood coated with wax to serve as a kind of slate. By the first century of our era notebooks and booklets were being made of parchment, but it was not until the fourth century that the scroll — and the pagan literature with which that form was so firmly associated — gave way to the *codex* form, which the Christians strongly preferred. Since the *codex* or modern form uses both sides of the material, it can accommodate twice as many words as the scroll. An abnormally long or tall scroll was clumsy and fatiguing to the reader's hand; a bound book can be very thick without being unmanageable. Above all, the latter form is far

more suitable for quick reference to any particular passage. The fourth-century *Codex Sinaiticus* of the Bible has four columns to the page — a carry-over from the scroll tradition of narrow parallel columns.

In the Roman publishing office, the 'plant', the equivalent of the modern battery of composing- and printing-machines, consisted of human beings purchased and trained to write rapidly to the dictation of an overseer. After the fall of Rome, the responsibility for making and multiplying books passed to the monastic scriptoria. Functionalists of the dark ages gave us our present means of visually indicating the sense of SO I ASKED A SMITH as 'So I asked a smith', or 'A. Smith', as the case may be. To the Benedictine scribes we owe the most efficient of all aids to legibility, the dual (a, A) alphabet with nearly all the minuscule letters clearly differentiated from the capital forms. The ancestor of the modern printer's 'lower-case' roman was the minuscule standardized throughout the empire of Charlemagne by the English poet and scholar, Alcuin of York.

From the tenth century onward, a new and incalculably important writing-material was finding its way into western Europe: rag paper, which is almost as durable as parchment, much cheaper, and not limited in quantity by the availability of animal skins. Above all, paper was ideally suited for the multiplication of images or messages by impression from an inked relief surface, i.e. printing.

The earliest printed books (*circa* 1455) in Europe were scarcely distinguishable from the manuscripts of the period; but the knowledge that they were mechanical copies struck off from the same printing-surface brought about a profound and permanent change in the whole notion of what constituted a book.

For the first time it became possible to think of two copies (or two thousand) as 'the same book' in more than the literary sense. Henceforth two copies could be word for word, point for point, interchangeably 'the same'. The assumption that they can be so is the foundation of editorial scholarship, and it came from the Far East.

The traditional date for the invention of paper in China is A.D. 105. Printing (from wood-blocks) evolved in China from the use of seals for the authentication of documents and stamps for multiplying charms. The earliest printed book of which any copy has survived is the Buddhist *Diamond Sutra* (A.D. 868), a scroll sixteen feet long formed by pasting printed sheets of paper end to end. Unlike any of the earliest European printed books, it bears a publisher's imprint and date. The only extant copy is in the British Museum, which also possesses the oldest-known copy (A.D. 949) of a printed book of folded pages — another Buddhist work, in which the long strip of the scroll has been pleated into the oblong shape of the modern book.

During the Han dynasty, the Confucian classics had been cut in stone and publicly displayed in such a way that they could be copied by anyone, even an illiterate, without the slightest risk of variance; that is, by taking paper 'rubblings' from the incised stone tablets. That method of copying texts had the merit of being infallible; once the master-inscription was certified as correct, any copy rubbed off from it would be a mechanically true copy. In A.D. 932 it was proposed to revise and publish the Confucian classics by a method which was apparently thought of as a cheap substitute for the stone tablet, and one which had that same supreme advantage of eliminating the risk of error in copying: namely, printing from wood-

blocks cut in reverse. Printing was being fostered by the scholars for the sake of its accuracy, with scarcely any reference to its speed as a copying method.

Printing, by the oriental method of taking rubbed impressions from wood-blocks, was being practised in Europe for some generations before the invention, midway of the fifteenth century, of what we now think of as printing — with a press and movable metal type. From the making of single wood-cut prints, such as an image of St. Christopher, and of *sets* of similar printed things (playing cards), it was an easy step to the primitive block-book. This cheap and relatively ephemeral sort of publication combined wood-cut illustrations with texts similarly cut in relief with a knife. But this method was never used for the production of important scholarly works. The fact that the wood-block was practically unalterable, and thus a safe way of authenticating an approved text, had no such weight with the medieval European scholars as it had had in the Far East.

The printing-press, which makes the copy by mechanically distributing even pressure all over the inked relief surface, is a western invention. Round about 1440 Johann Gutenberg of Mainz was engaged in experiments which presumably involved an adaptation of the principle of the wine-press, and some means of casting separate metal types with characters formed by engraving metal punches (model letters) in relief. There was also the need to create a new kind of ink viscous enough to be used on metal. Movable type had been used in China and Korea, but the Chinese system of ideographic writing, which requires as many as forty thousand different characters-words, had sterilized the invention. The most important of all western inventions, that of alphabetical writing, made the task

of the first European typefounders relatively easy. From a few fragments it is possible to conjecture that Gutenberg's interest was in multiplying cheap school-books such as the Latin grammar of Donatus. Before 1450 Gutenberg returned from Strassburg to Mainz, where the new invention received the backing of a man with financial power and a bold mind, Johann Fust. The first production of the partnership was a folio Vulgate of forty-two lines to the column. It was issued before the year 1456, both in vellum and in paper copies. The kind of angular black letter favoured by the northern scribes lent itself peculiarly well to cutting in metal, and at first glance the earliest printed books could be mistaken for manuscripts. Fust and Schoeffer, however, were not trying to pass off forgeries. In their superb Psalter in 1457 the colophon (publisher's postscript) boasts that the entire book, coloured decorated initials and all, was produced 'by the ingenious invention of printing and stamping . . . without any ploughing with a pen'. It is one of the handsomest volumes ever printed, and is the first in Europe to bear an imprint and a date.

Books printed before the year 1500 are called incunabula, that is, products of the 'cradle' years of the new art. With the exception of books of private devotions, they are in the larger formats, folio and quarto. The pocket edition was created in 1501 by Aldus Manutius, the most influential printer-publisher of all times. His press at Venice was a centre of the New Learning. While the humanist scholars were fostering the printing of books predominantly for the sake of the accuracy of the method, the friars and clergy were clamouring for books in the mother tongues and in everyday, as distinct from classical, Latin; and to this latter group the possibility of swift

simultaneous multiplication, for an ever-expanding popular market, was the outstanding advantage of the new method. One can only conjecture how many editions of popular booklets, primers, etc, were printed and read to pieces before the year 1500. As printing spread, literacy spread, and the increase of books in the vernacular eventually killed Latin as an international language.

The rudimentary title-page, giving the name and author of the book on what had been one of the blank leaves at the front, appeared as early as 1470, but the complete modern title-page with the name, date and place of publication was not firmly established until the early sixteenth century. Other pages which the publisher classes as 'prelims' — the half-title, the table of contents, etc — developed as the market for printed books widened to take in those who were not professional literates. Books with plates separately printed from copper engravings became common in the sixteenth century. Religious wars and censorship in the seventeenth century brought down the standards of book production. In that century the ephemeral book or pamphlet merged into the earliest form of printed periodical, and since that day the regular readers of periodicals (newspapers and magazines) have greatly outnumbered the readers of books.

In the eighteenth century, particularly in France and England, the cult of the 'fine edition' spread amongst the upper classes, but the possibility of providing cheap books for the masses was first opened up by the early nineteenth-century inventions of the paper-making machine and the power-driven printing-machine (1812). Although pretentious 'gift book' editions abounded in the nineteenth century, the main emphasis was on

rapid multiplication. The leather binding gave way to the cloth-board case, and the invention, in the second half of the nineteenth century, of chemically-treated wood-pulp paper provides another milestone in the history of the book, since modern book paper is of a sort which disintegrates with the passing of time. The fine editions printed by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press 1891-6 revived interest in the aesthetics of the physical book, and in more recent times the design and typography of the trade edition has attracted the attention it deserves.

The ambivalence of the word 'book' continues to embarrass the lexicographers. In the casual question 'Is that X's new book that you have in your hand?' the two extremes of meaning meet and are trickily elided. 'That' (concrete object) has been recognized as a book by its physical shape without reference to the contents, and the question is whether that book (bound volume) is or is not a copy (one of many indistinguishable printed and bound examples) of any edition of a particular literary work which the speaker refers to as 'X's new book'. The literary work is something immaterial which can be transferred from one physical container to another without losing its identity. A bundle of typewritten sheets, or a stack of gramophone records for the blind, can be said to 'contain' X's new book. But the printed and bound volume represents the particular kind of material container that the author had in mind from the moment he was sure that the thing he was writing was not a short story, not an essay, not anything that could be read through in ten minutes, but 'a book': that is to say, the sort of treatise which can be most efficiently read or consulted in book form. Hence it is natural for the reader to say 'That is X's new book' when the object referred to is any bound copy

of any edition of the specified work — even though two different editions (e.g. British and American) may differ in title, in format (relative size and shape), in orthography, in typographic design, in the treatment of the binding or case, in 'style' (in the printer's sense: consistent use of punctuation signs, capitals, etc) and in other respects. More important than any of these physical differences are the two main facts: (a) that each edition was made specially to convey that particular work to its potential readers, and (b) that the writer himself, or whoever was responsible for the contents, was influenced from the start by his knowledge of the conventional shape of the physical book and his desire that the work should eventually appear in that recognizable shape, though it might first be published piecemeal in consecutive numbers of a periodical. Even when the contents consist of poems or other works which have appeared separately, or of letters that were not written for publication, someone has had to 'make them into a book' in the literary sense; and that involves two references to the form of the physical book. In the first place, the work would not have been thought of as a 'book' unless there had been enough matter to justify publication in book form; a volume of less than sixteen leaves or thirty-two pages, including those which the publisher calls 'prelims', would have to be bulked out with blank leaves for the binder's sake, and even then would be thought of as a booklet rather than as a book. The public generally has some rough idea of the minimum number of pages, or the minimum thickness, to be expected of any particular kind of treatise or compilation that is published as a book. In the second place, the compiler or editor is to some extent guided by his knowledge of the form of the printed book and the way

it is handled by its readers. That knowledge helps him to decide, for example, whether an editorial comment should go on the same page as a footnote, or at the back of the volume as an appendix, or be incorporated in the preface. If illustrations are essential or desirable, the editorial work of selecting the subjects may be influenced by physical considerations, e.g. whether it is possible to use illustrative 'plates' (leaves or sheets printed separately and inserted by the binder) or whether the pictures must be 'in text' (blocks and type printed together in one forme).

Thus the prevailing notion of how a physical book of any kind ought to look exercises some influence over the writer or editor. The degree to which the specific contents influences the physical form varies according to the circumstances of publication. At one end of the scale one finds the publisher's 'series', e.g. of cheap reprints such as Everyman's Library, where works of fiction and non-fiction are given the same standard format and typographic style: though even here the size of type and the amount of leading (channel of white space between the lines) may differ slightly from one 'title' (separate work) to another, according to whether it is desired to bulk out an exiguous text or to condense an abnormally long one. At the other end of the scale is the 'fine edition' designed to be the ideally suitable and pleasant embodiment of that particular literary work. In between lies the normal trade edition. ('Edition' means any number of copies printed from the same setting of type.) Even before the trade publisher has read the manuscript and calculated the number of words, he has a clear idea of the format, and some general idea of the maximum and minimum bulk or thickness which the volume should have in a given format. That much is known in advance from the general

nature of the contents, e.g. whether it is a novel, biography, book of verse, etc. The work of designing the trade edition consists first of all of making the volume look like the *kind* of book that it is, and secondly of giving the specific work every advantage which the publisher can afford to give it in the way of special design and treatment. The primary distinction is between books for reading and books for reference: in the latter group the designer is permitted to use bold type, abnormally small type, parallel columns and other devices which would be offensive in a volume meant for continuous reading.

Anyone connected with what is called the world of books will admit that no two trades or professions in that world use the word 'book' in precisely the same sense; that is, with the same degree of emphasis as between the abstract ('I am writing a book') and the concrete (e.g. the craftsman-bookbinder's 'I am rebinding an old book'). The literary critic's, the publisher's, the printer's, the bookseller's, and the librarian's senses shade one into another, but are sufficiently different to cause no misunderstandings. Similarly, the general term 'book-lover' can be stretched far enough in one direction to cover the omnivorous reader who is tolerant of the lowest standards of book production, and far enough in the other direction to include the book collector who amasses miniature books as such, or fine limited editions irrespective of their subjects. Either extremist is likely to exert an unhealthy influence both on the state of letters and on the general standards of book production. Where there is no market save for cheap mass-produced books, literature suffers; when too much public attention is paid to the freakish or extra-luxurious book, the normal trade edition receives less attention and criticism than it deserves.

THE DESIGN OF BOOKS

★

IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE to bring together some facts from the past, and from that part of the immediate past which we think of as 'the present', that would help us to envisage possible changes in the appearance, or price, or physical behaviour of books during the decades to come — say, during the middle-aged man's lifetime. There is a practical reason for doing this, and the exercise will be no less practical if the possibilities fail to appear as probabilities. In a century which has brought so many radical changes in methods of transport, manners, costume, and so on, we need to examine any object which has been as it were carried over from the nineteenth or some earlier century, so that we may at least find out what there is about its design that has brought it intact through such a landslide.

We have all seen the pantomime comedian dropping a trayful of dishes, then finding that one has somehow failed to break, and finishing it off with a hammer. That is a well-worn comic gag which must appeal particularly to those who make a sort of religion of Modernism — for instance, those designers, architects, and writers to whom novelty is a stock-in-trade, and living tradition no more than a rival or barrier to their personal ambitions. What would not appeal to such people at all would be the sight of the clown hammering at some precious goblet of gold or bronze; dinting it perhaps, maltreating it, but failing to establish the notion that because everything else on the tray

proved breakable, this too must be shattered at all costs. I am sorry to say that most of the determinedly modernistic books that I have seen in the past twenty-five years look to my normal eyes more like badly-dinted survivals of the ancient goblet than like newly-conceived vessels for ideas. But the failure of these attempts is no evidence that the modernizers are going to give up in despair. People who have been hypnotized by the future to the extent of despising any free gift from the past, are not at all quick to profit by their past mistakes.

What makes this important is the likelihood that some of the next tangible results of their passion for change at all costs will come into your hands; and they will demand from you far more articulate criticism and discussion than you ordinarily devote to the physical appearance of a book. There are certain common phrases which really ought to be accepted as unanswerable objections when they come from the habitual book reader — a person who is supposed to look *into* a book, not to look *at* it. No such reader should be forced to particularize in technical language his simple report that a book is 'not easy to read', or 'typographically distracting'. But when a printed book is deliberately put forward as a new departure in design, its typographer may not be in the mood to accept such a dismissal. Nor will he necessarily be able to see why the most damning of all criticisms is simply the phrase 'unfamiliar-looking' — not easy to recognize *as* a book, not quickly distinguishable from a piece of advertising matter such as a catalogue. He may still need to be told that the very first thing that any printed message has to do, from a book or newspaper to a leaflet, is to give the beholder advance notice of the *kind of thing* it is. You will see ugly seed-catalogues today side by side with handsome ones

intelligently designed; you will, I hope, despise the ugly ones and rejoice over the good ones; but if you ever find a seed-catalogue that looks like a Bible, or a newspaper, or a political pamphlet, then you will not simply be displeased but actually confused and obscurely shocked. The primary duty of the printer — a duty handed down from the days of Gutenberg — is to 'style' the job so that it shall look like what it is; the unrecognizable seed-catalogue, if you ever do come across it, will have been designed by some layman and produced over the indignant demurrer of its printer.

It is a pity to have to delay our consideration of tendencies which might actually affect the format of the printed book in order to clear away the confusions which are now being created by the small *avant-garde* of typography in their quest for a new, or as they would like to have it called, 'the modern' style of book presentation. But to show why this clarification seems to me important, let me give an excerpt from a letter which I recently received from one of America's most distinguished graphic artists, Mr T. M. Cleland, who along with Mr Bruce Rogers may be said to represent the continuity of the Western European tradition in the American graphic arts and the arts of the book. Whereas Mr Rogers has been content to enrich that tradition with a succession of famous volumes, leaving the novelty-seekers to try to match them in their own harsher idiom, Mr Cleland has declared open war on what he calls 'the era initiators'. He reports having received

'... a circular which if your neck is flexible enough to stand turning your head at an angle of 45° to your torso, and you have set enough type in your time to be able to read it upside down and backwards, will reveal the fact that the document

advertises a book entitled "books for our time" (Capitalization not mine) and that it costs \$5.50 and is published by a venerable and dignified institution. It also states with truly astonishing prescience that this book marks the beginning of an era. So many different eras have been begun by so many professional era starters that it is hard to see how there will be room for them all. This is a book of essays by a number of the most eminent priests and prophets of this era, and, you guessed it! one in particular by era initiator Armitage entitled "attitudes behind design".

He then devotes a few well-chosen words to that essay. I will not quote them, but I will tell you that his reason for pointing his rapier specifically at Mr Merle Armitage of New York is not one of personal dislike. What gives Mr Armitage the privilege of being singled out for the pillory or any other public platform is not so much his manifestoes or experiments as the circumstance that he was then the President of the American Institute of Graphic Arts, a body which has the same responsibility for choosing and honouring the best-designed and best-produced printed books of the year in America, that the National Book League has in Great Britain. A man in such a position as that, anywhere in the world, must automatically invite praise or derision as the case may be, by associating himself with those who anticipate the verdicts of posterity. If he merely expresses impatience with the past and a desire to work out forms more acceptable to present tastes, he is on that safe ground which is roped off for the announced experimentalist. But if he sets up as an 'era initiator' he moves on to very boggy ground indeed — that ground called the future: and we are

bound to judge his work more strictly. There can be no more drastic test of the survival-value of tradition than repeated examination of the alternative new forms — to the point where they lose their mere shock-value and can be considered dispassionately on the very merits they claim: efficient function, fitness for purpose, success in conveying graphically something of the spirit of our own time and the supposed future.

By that fair test I have yet to find an *avant-garde* book that offers any serious threat to the conventions of book style; but I have found many that actually pour ammunition into the traditionalists' hands. Thus a book may be printed in sans-serif type because its designer is one of those aesthetic nudists who think anything looks better, or at least more 'modern', for being stripped. But serifs are by no means inessential ornaments: they enable us to distinguish cap. I from lower-case l and arabic numeral 1, they strengthen the descending mainstrokes by forming a buttress against the halation of light from the white paper, they unobtrusively mark the line on which lower-case characters are ranged, and they are essential in preventing such a word as 'Illicit' from looking silly. Sans-serif, moreover, like its fellow-Victorian jobbing-type called Egyptian, is inefficient as a book type because the lower-case characters have no 'stress' or variation of curve-thickening.

I give you these points, complete with their typographic terminology, for your convenience when you are next shown a book in sans-serif by someone who is too persistent to be dismayed by the simple statement that you 'somehow didn't care for it'. But you and I know that the business of the book designer is to give the book readers (from the youngster with his primer to the old man in spectacles) something that they do

'care for' — tranquil-looking pages that render up their content with the least possible interference.

Similarly, an exaggerated gutter margin at the expense of the margins where your thumbs rest, or a folio number just where you would never look for it, or a nudistic omission of the running-head (so that you cannot tell what book is so enthralling the girl next to you on the bus seat), or a use of decorative rule that makes your eyes ache, are more likely to be resented as typographic 'interference' than welcomed as evidences that creative designers are rescuing the printed book from its servile position as a mere channel of literary communication and treating it as a means of aesthetic self-expression.

I am thinking of one futuristic book which shows how far wrong a designer can go when he imagines that the book of the future is going to allow him any perceptible room for self-expression — let alone the vast amount of room that this one presupposes. The mere callous squandering of white paper on this experiment reminds me that the real book of the future is going to be a paper-famine book: one in which every subtle and self-effacing trick known to professional typographers will have to be used to retain some air of ease, dignity and distinction, and above all familiarity, in overcrowded pages of thin, poor-quality paper with the sort of casing board that buckles because it is too thin. Let the contrast between this unreal 'futuristic' book and the grim future just envisaged serve to remind us how important it is, in discussing anything to do with the future, to get down to basic principles and inquire what sort of thing is really happening and beginning to happen today — to the readers and potential readers of books, whose tastes and necessities will inexorably shape the books of the future.

So we turn now to something more characteristic of 'the spirit of our time': the new respect with which major typographic designers are looking upon the cheap paper-back book. Formerly their covers were decorated but their texts were evidently handed over to the printer with no more instruction than to get the whole of the 'matter' into a given maximum number of pages — with the implication that readers who were so poor as to be forced to put up with paper covers would never grumble at dull and cheap-looking typography. Fifteen years ago, Mr Allen Lane, launching the Penguin Books, instructed his first typographic designer, Mr Edward Young, to make the series look worthy of its general object — that of providing readers with good literature in civilized and attractive dress 'for the price of a packet of Players'. There is the Penguin *Odyssey*, of which more than half a million copies have already been sold at what is nowadays less than the price of a packet of Players. It was designed — as was the charming series of the Penguin Shakespeare — by Mr Jan Tschichold, once the leading exponent of the 'Bauhaus' style of *avant-garde* typography, but now the most distinguished convert to typographic traditionalism. There are examples of other books issued under the Penguin aegis, designed by Mr Hans Schmoller, another internationally recognized typographer. A generation ago men of Mr Schmoller's talent were fixing their eyes upon the 'fine' limited edition as the ideal problem for the designer: the 'trade' book was only beginning to profit by the epoch-making series of demonstration offered by the Nonesuch Press, that machine composition, machine-made paper, photo-mechanical illustration, and machine casing could, in the hands of an honest and adroit designer, convey something of the luxury

and more than all of the convenience-in-reading of the luxurious 'hand-printed' volumes inspired by the Kelmscott Press in the 'nineties. Today the lesson has been learnt. The Penguin Shakespeare presents in general format and typography no very striking difference from an Aldine Classic of four hundred and fifty years ago (minus its individual leather binding). At least it is far nearer to that august prototype than was any cheap sixpenny of, say, the year 1910.

What is 'new' about the handsomely-designed cheap book is its determination to treat the literate Man-in-the-Street with the kind of respect — based on the assumption that such a man has some instinctive appreciation of good design — which Aldus's generation felt for even the poorest travelling-scholar who had thrown himself upon the newly-revived classics. In a decade in which young married people have to be reminded that there are such things as bookcases amongst the essentials of living-room furniture, any effort to make the cheap book look covetably charming can be welcomed by every profession and industry of the book world. The book of the future will not be necessarily what the book of today is in France — paper-bound; but if the habit of buying and owning books is to gain ground, the paper-back must continue to be taken very seriously as the hardest and, in some ways, the most rewarding challenge that confronts the typographers today.

When we look back upon the whole history of the book, from the earliest days of the reed-written papyrus scroll or *volumen*, we find one period — the third and fourth centuries of our era — when two radically different kinds of physical object, the *volumen* and the bound *codex*, existed side by side. At the beginning of that time of transition, the *codex* scarcely counted

as a 'real book'; it had more the position of the modern pamphlet or pocket reference-book. A century later it was the scroll that had ceased to be thought of as a 'real book'. Midway of the fifteenth century came the printing-press and the whole notion of the 'Edition', or mass-producing identical copies corrected in advance. Now within our lifetime has appeared a new kind of scroll, not yet recognized as such or thought of as a 'real book' by anyone. It is a tightly-wound reel of celluloid film printed with innumerable pictures, and we may recognize in it, for good or evil, the first fully-mechanized book; for, as the pictures are unreel by machine, shadow images on a screen act out and speak out anything from a lecture to a performance that is dramatic in form but often more related to the novel (e.g. in its ability to re-create atmosphere and local colour) than to the 'stage play' proper.

The point of my mentioning this roll of celluloid here is that it does do much that the conventional book does, in the way of communicating ideas, but that it almost wholly eliminates that need to co-operate by a conscious effort of will which characterizes 'reading', i.e. decoding arbitrary symbols such as the letters of the alphabet. Reading is a kind of performance, involving skill and familiarity. The present and future generation of book readers will be accustomed from childhood to being 'read to out loud' — by the radio and by that cinema machine which mechanically does the 'performing' (nearly the equivalent of reading) as its wheels turn. The new long-playing gramophone records come even nearer to the parallel road of multiplied sound messages, to the multiplied sight messages which we call printed books.

There is this much point in recognizing the cinema film as a

brand-new and special kind of book, that such an admission helps us to see the 'real' book readers of today and tomorrow for what they are and have always been — a relatively small *élite*, people drawn from different income groups but distinguished by their ability to concentrate continuously on one fairly long piece of reading-matter. We no longer see that *élite* as one particular class like the clerical class of the Middle Ages; but at least we do see them as a group far more clearly than our Victorian ancestors did in the days when the new idea of universal compulsory literacy was raising a vision of the entire population being converted to the habit of reading printed books. If that wholesale conversion had even begun in our day — as it might conceivably have begun if Marconi and Edison had not stepped in — the first printing of a popular new book would now be round about a million copies and the 'book of the future', and of today, would have to be set in newspaper format, seven or eight columns of fine print to the page, because that is the cheapest way of printing fifty thousand words as a continuous text. There would also have been a revival of the practice of publication in monthly parts which was so useful at the time when a third of England's population was being swiftly converted to literacy. Just after the late war a German publishing firm was, in fact, forced by the paper famine to bring out books in newspaper format; and in 1943 the colossal editions of paper-backs devised for the United States troops gave us another picture of what the 'book of the future' might look like if it had to be churned out from a huge newspaper press with the greatest economy of paper. Those army books were in wide oblong format, set in double column to save space. They were not at all unreadable, but they had the

fatal handicap, to the 'real' book readers, of 'not looking like books', so that format had no permanent effect on 'paper-back' style.

I suspect that the proportion of real book readers out of the total population is not very much greater today than it was in the fifteenth century. Obviously the percentage of regular book readers to all others who have been taught to read has been steadily dwindling from something near 100 per cent to what it is now — say 10 per cent — since literacy ceased to be a special profession. That hard core of book readers will, I think, remain as unaffected by the temptations of cinema and radio as it was by the counter-attractions of the *jongleur*, the image-seller, the popular pulpiteer, the ballad-singer, and the village gossip of the days when illiteracy carried no stigma.

But how about the rest? It is possible to imagine a state of society in which it would pay the ruling-class of Intelligentsia to create two distinct categories of literacy, one for the civil servants or rulers, the other for the docile citizens whose I.Q. tests at the age of eleven had marked them down to that level on which reading is even now largely confined to short messages printed in *capital letters*: public notices, the headlines and picture-captions of newspapers, telegrams, the balloons in comic strips, the captions on films, and so on. In other words, to matter that can most efficiently be set forth in the twenty-six simple code-symbols called *capitals*. I am not joking when I say that certain tendencies in education today have only to be projected into the future — I believe the mathematician would say 'extrapolated' — to show us a vision of all children being taught to read by primers set in capital letters only and carried through to the age of eleven by primary school-books set in

capitals only, and then at eleven being tested and sorted out much as they are tested and sorted out today, but with the brightest ones not simply being shot into grammar schools and scholarships, but actually initiated as potential members of the governing class, into the great secret of reading texts set in a combination of capital letters with lower-case or 'small' letters. Then you could mobilize your docile masses, trust them to find their way by enamelled signs to the bomb shelters or tax-collectors' offices or public lavatories, feed them their news headlines and comic-book entertainment, and so on, while automatically preventing them from reading any book or other document that might start them thinking for themselves!

If one out of a thousand of these capital-letter readers happened to have the curiosity to teach himself to read lower-case so as to find out what his governors were saying to each other in those closely printed memoranda and textbooks, that rebel could easily be singled out for either up-grading or liquidation as the psychologists might advise.

I am making your flesh creep with this idea only because it presents such a logical and plausible *terminus a quo* for those whose proper and healthy dislike of inherited privilege and inherited wealth has driven them to the substitution of an aristocracy of intellect, or specifically the rule of the book-learned. Already we see these partisans making things as difficult as possible for the 'bright' children — e.g. haunting their days and nights with the spectre of scholarship examinations — while offering all sorts of concessions to the dullards by way of making their education easier, jollier, less dependent on reading and writing. Already in America learned authorities of Teachers' College (Columbia University) and notabilities of

the Parent Teachers' Association have made a success of an effort to fight fire with fire by publishing ten-cent comic books of their own, not quite as bloodthirsty as the run of such books and even having some tenuous connection with factual knowledge. Already, in this country, any elderly compositor will tell you that the apprentices of fifteen, who are now entering his necessarily literary craft, are slower readers, worse writers, and more abominable spellers than he has ever had to deal with before. They are, of course, children who didn't get singled out for the sweat and strain of the Intellectual Life at the age of eleven; the ones for whom things were made easy.

Call it satire if you will, to envisage the 'Common Man's' book of the future as a succession of pictures, comic-strip style, with 'balloons' and captions in capital letters only: but remember that the main purpose of satire is to show in advance, by logical exaggeration of present evidence, possibilities that are too easily thrust aside because we 'don't like to think of them'.

I believe that the library of the future will have to find room for various objects which will have been gradually recognized as 'special kinds of books' — long-playing records, reels of 16-mm. and other films, and microfilm-books with their scanners. But the objects that we now recognize as 'real books' will remain, and will remain as recognizable, in style and format, as their harassed publishers can possibly contrive to make them, since this is the worst possible moment for alienating the hard-core of book readers by defiant experimentalism. Letterpress printing (impression from raised metal characters) will not be superseded by planographic (offset litho) printing as long as the paper shortage imposes the use of relatively small

print, which needs all the clarity and sharpness of the letterpress process. The illustrated magazines could all be composed by the new machines that eliminate type-metal and photograph the text direct on film for lithographic reproduction without seriously affecting the book printers. Similarly, the spiral or Plastoic binding, which opens absolutely flat, is unlikely to be used for anything but cookery-books and the like; it is too costly, and it forbids adequate labelling down the spine.

No, the designers of books are not going to find any easy new departure or piece of machinery to give their work the stamp of modernity. Their problem will be to prevent the shortages from affecting the printed book in the way in which the coinage was affected after the Romans departed from Britain. You may have seen the pitiful little coins of that epoch, each a flicker of the dying torch of the classical world. You have at least seen the 'Wartime Economy Regulation' book of a few years ago — at its worst, where some publisher without any special knowledge of typography sent the manuscript to some printer unaccustomed to the special problems of book printing; and at its gallant best, when an adroit publisher used a space-saving but distinguished typeface in a small but 'large-appearing' size, with the 'prelims' reduced to the minimum but thoughtfully designed. You have witnessed in the past ten years or so a remarkable increase of general interest in typography, and you may well attribute it to the fact that readers (and those who work for readers) take more notice of the look of print when they discover what a difference can be wrought by an efficient typeface and competent 'machining' (actual impression), between two books that get the same number of words into the same number of pages.

The outstanding book designers of the future will, I believe, rise without dismay to the challenge of world shortages of materials. They will put more of their skill to the design of reference books, where the very smallest type sizes can be cunningly deployed to preserve the look of dignity and legibility. They must, if they are to live in a democracy, spend much more time on rescuing the school-book from the consequences of our ancestor's assumption that compulsory books can afford to look grim and repulsive. They will have little chance to work upon luxurious, beautifully-illustrated limited editions; but in children's books they will continue to find real justification for pictures and decoration — and, for once, the chance to decide the size of type by the age of the reader, not by the limits to which grown-ups are thought willing to strain their eyesight.

We are here describing something much more difficult than a mere carrying-forward of the living tradition of book style and production. Since the difficulties of the task cannot be abated it is all the more important for those who represent the book-reading public to supply the moral support, the inspiring applause for good work, the informed criticism which gives the designer the courage to tackle the hardest job. Those librarians who are now studying the theory of typography and the technique of book production, and showing the public something of the secrets of these most self-effacing arts, are playing a vital part in buttressing the defences of the decently-produced book of today and of the future against the worst that can be done to it by the cranks and 'era starters' on the one hand, and on the other hand any demoralized publishers who might feel tempted to use their sorrows of shortage and rising costs as a blanket

AN APPROACH TO TYPOGRAPHY

excuse from any interest in seductive design. To a book-conscious public, to a public that is willing to rank book design and production amongst the arts while still remembering that they are nobly and gloriously *servile* arts dedicated to the communication of thought — to such a public, the future will still bring books that look as if they had been designed with pride and intelligence.

TYPOGRAPHY AS A VOCATION

THE ARTIST AND TYPOGRAPHY— A WORD OF WARNING

★

FOR SOME YEARS PAST it has been inadvisable, and in the near future will be disastrous, for any commercial artist to start upon his career without a fairly extensive and practical knowledge of how printed words get on paper. Those of us in the trade who think it a moral duty to help along promising young artists — if not with commissions, at least with practical advice — are all too familiar with the case of the highly-talented graduate of an art school whose portfolio of examples clearly shows that the only kind of printed thing which he has been able to envisage as an opportunity for his skill is the pictorial book-jacket. It never seems to occur to those innocents of the interwar years that, for one book publisher who might be looking for new talent on a book-jacket, there are at least five manufacturers badly in need of catalogue covers and decorative drawings with distinction and originality; or that for one editor of a magazine who would be willing to encourage an unknown and inexperienced illustrator, there are several who want the art department to be staffed with younger and more adventurous designers who could play bright stunts with make-up and lettering as well as decoration without making a hash of it.

The word artist no longer denotes anyone who practised the three liberal arts — grammar, logic, and rhetoric. To the general public it has come to mean 'a maker of pictures and

THE ARTIST AND TYPOGRAPHY

images', with the understanding that the making was hand-making and called for originality as well as skill. 'Art' refers either to the pictures and images themselves (as in the phrase 'he is collecting art') or to the making process (e.g. 'she is taking art'). One might as well accept this narrowed-down definition and ask what the artist as a picture-maker needs to know about type as part of his training for a livelihood.

Among art students there are some who are taking, or intend to take, a course in typographic design. Others are drawn towards the subject but are not sure whether they can afford to spend the time in so special a field when they are not primarily concerned with any branch of industrial art or design. In my opinion these people should by all means take the time to acquire a good theoretical grounding in typography.

Those who want to steer clear of commercial art and retain their independence and aesthetic integrity as pictorial or graphic artists are more likely than not to be forced to teach for a livelihood. If they teach in a vocational centre, that is, if they are going to help other artists to earn a living, then they should know enough about typographic design to guide younger men who are training to be commercial artists. If, on the other hand, they are undertaking the teaching of 'art' in a secondary school, meaning the appreciation of the arts as part of training for citizenship and the good life, then there will be no excuse for omitting the appreciation of typography from such a course. Buildings and printed words are the two kinds of specially designed objects that the citizen is forced to look at day after day whether he likes it or not. The cultural level of his community is more fairly judged from its architecture and its printed matter than from any other set of clues. For general training in good taste,

judgement, and the whys and wherefores of modern industrial design, no other practical field can be compared to that of typographic design for the richness and realism of its examples.

There is no doubt whatever that some critical study of the arts conduces to better citizenship and a more harmonious development of the personality. Those who hold the purse-strings of education have scarcely begun to realize how true this is; they are too often put off by the assumption that 'art' must, to begin with, mean picture-making and that 'good art' must mean the making of incomprehensible pictures in an atmosphere of defiant epigrams far removed from real life. Typography is never an inch removed from real life and is, therefore, well worth mentioning to those educational authorities who are terrified at the word 'art'.

But suppose that you will have no necessity to teach, suppose your genius or popularity sweeps you into the spotlight of fame and consequent independence. Could you then afford to know nothing about the making of the printed book? Let us think again.

One of the surest signs that an artist has 'arrived' in the estimation of wealthy connoisseurs and collectors is that he is invited to illustrate a fine limited edition. Not every publisher has the wherewithal to bring out a relatively unknown artist in the sort of edition that can properly be called 'finely printed': a phrase which means what it says and denotes above all flawless presswork, superb ink such as is never seen in large commercial editions, hand-made or mould-made paper, and handsome type in a generous size. Nor has every publisher the wit and ingenuity to make up for the lack of such luxury by thoroughly effective typographic design. If the book is a mess typographically, the

public may assume that the publisher had not much more vision in the choice of artist than he had in the choice of printer. Unless you know the difference between good printing as such and good typography as such, and between good and bad typographic effects, you will never realize in time what threatens to go wrong with that book on which part of your prestige may depend.

To those who are studying typography in the hope of practising as designers of printed matter, let me say that the skilled craft of type composition, acquired through long years of apprenticeship, involves not merely manual skill but very general knowledge of how to make different pieces of printing look the way they ought to look — how to make a title-page look like a title-page and not like a handbill, how to make a catalogue recognizable, and so on. During the past twenty years, there has been wide dissatisfaction with the styles handed down from Victorian days, and drastic restyling has been carried out, almost always by people outside the trade who had the advantage of being able to stand a step removed and see what the layman required. The best restyling of the pre-war years was the change of dress of *The Times* in 1931; the most significant of the post-war years was that of the City and Guilds Institute examination prospectus booklets. But the restyling period, or what has been called the 'typographic reformation,' has so far achieved its ends that from now onward any intelligent compositor, adequately trained in the principles of layout and print-planning, could organize the production of effective printed matter. The compositor turned 'typotect' — designer and undertaker of print in the sense that an architect is a designer and undertaker of building, with power to sub-contract work

— has an obvious advantage over the man who has never been a member of the printing trade. Any graduate of an art school who hopes to face that formidable rivalry would have to play his own trump card: the ability to illustrate and decorate brilliantly would be quite as much of an asset, in some circumstances, as the memory of a five or seven years' apprenticeship. But the makers of pictures and images have one handicap which they must realize and take pains to overcome. In the making of pictures, it pays a hundredfold to do something for the first time, to invent, to shock the ordinary man's eyes into new awareness. But in typography, that same effort can lead to all sorts of graphic monkeyishness, such as the tedious pretence that English can be written without recourse to capital letters.

Since we do not spell out words letter by letter in reading but grasp whole words as familiar shapes, we who read have very little patience with the man who is so frantically eager to call attention to himself as a typographer that he doesn't mind our having to puzzle over the question 'where is john brown?' until we guess whether 'john' has been hiding or sunbathing.

TYPOGRAPHY IN ART EDUCATION



IN THE SENSE IN WHICH architecture is an art, typography is an art. That is, they both come under the head of 'making or doing intentionally with skill'. But they are not one-man arts like painting or oratory. The thing made, the finished work, is in every case the work of a team. The cathedral and its lectern Bible, the house and the books on its shelves, the hospital and the surgical-instrument maker's illustrated catalogue, the shop-building and the billheads and leaflets that go out from it — all those are products of skill and creative intention, 'works' which can give keen pleasure to the perceptive eye when the intention is clear and good, the execution honest and adroit. But not one of them was begun and finished as a whole thing by one artist.

Every work of architecture, every work of typography, depends for its success upon the clear *conveyance* of intentions, in words and otherwise, from one human mind to others: from the man who is supposed to know how the finished thing should look and function, to a concert of specialists who are responsible not only to the master-designer but also to the public. Faulty masonry, or a misprint, is not simply a betrayal of the whole intention, it is also a matter of public concern. The coping-stone might kill a man, the misplaced comma might start a riot or a suit for libel.

Any attempt to criticize works of architecture or typography,