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WILLIAM BULMER

by

H. V. MARROT

There is a remarkable dearth of great names in the history of British typography. In no way can our representatives compete with their foreign contemporaries: for Aldus, the Estiennes, and the Elzevirs we have the Tonsons; for Garamond and the Enschedés we have Caslon; and for Jenson and Schweinheim and Pannartz we have Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde. At the realization how small a proportion of foreign masters and how large a proportion of English, who might have been mentioned, is contained in this enumeration, the contrast will appear sufficiently obvious and lamentable. After all, Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde have an undeniable and enduring claim upon our gratitude and respect; but our interest in them is and must be partly sentimental and partly archaeological. Our admiration for them is conditioned by a number of factors which strictly speaking are irrelevant; and between them and Baskerville, is there a name which may be regarded as in any sense familiar except to the expert or the student?

This sad and curious circumstance is not easily susceptible of explanation. As a nation we are proverbially 'slow in the up-take'; but it is difficult to correlate with this immemorial trait the comparative shortness of the interval between the invention of the art of printing and its introduction into this country. Equally notorious is the impermeability, the almost majestic insolence, of our indifference to pure art in any form whatsoever; yet even this amiable foible cannot quite satisfy the enquirer. If, indeed, it be true that *ars est celare artem*, it is easily, if somewhat cynically, arguable that we are justified thereby in assigning to our public taste (I do not speak of the few artistic enthusiasts of every kind who undoubtedly do exist) the first rank in penetrative and selective criticism, by reason of the completeness with which any element of art must be disguised whenever a bid is made for

public approval; yet there *was* a time. . . . The Elizabethan public can scarcely with justice be accused of insensitiveness, yet its printing output was negligible enough; and that of later decades remained unaffected either one way or the other by the agonizing spasms of Puritanism which oppressed or morbidly stimulated almost every other normal activity.

But be the ulterior cause what it may (and we will leave the enquiry to be pursued by the curious whose leisure is greater than ours), the qualities which were the definite and immediate factors forming the disability of English printing up to the time of Baskerville may be detected with sufficient ease and certainty. Briefly, here they are: undistinguished types; undistinguished typography; vile presswork; indifferent paper.

This may appear a sweeping statement, but really the exceptions to its strictures are few enough and far between. Occasionally one comes across such a book as the first edition of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594), where (in the title-page, at any rate) the type is larger and shapelier and more widely spaced than usual, giving it an unwonted degree of gracefulness; or else the first collected edition of Congreve (1710) and Nelson's *Address to Persons of Quality and Estate* (1715), where again the fount is larger than usual, but massive this time and very like Caslon's, admirably imposed and balanced to a nicety by the wide margins of superfine paper. But once more there is a qualification: this praise (in the case of *Congreve* and *Nelson*) can only be given to the *large paper* copies—the ordinary editions are very ordinary indeed, so that the printers seem to have blundered into typographical success merely by the unconscious observance of a principle which they had not had the wit to formulate. The utter impossibility of producing a first-rate book without good paper was consistently ignored in this country, and only the comparatively small output of thick paper copies of eighteenth-century works give any satisfaction in this respect; consequently such superb books as (for example) the *Themistius* in Greek and Latin which came from the Imprimerie Royale under Mabre-Cramoisy were quite beyond our reach. But fine paper is nevertheless *essential* to fine book-making, and such men as Bensley and Bulmer themselves, for all the good qualities of the founts which they used, were to furnish examples of this truth. As a rule the papers

which they used were impeccable; indeed, in the *Poems of Goldsmith and Parnell* of 1795 (which we shall discuss later), Bulmer concludes his Preface with a special mention of the Whatman paper used: but in Maurice's *Elegiac Poem* on the death of Sir William Jones of the same year, Martin's beautiful fount loses enormously in effect on the no worse than medium paper employed. Finally, a mere allusion to the notoriously disgraceful presswork which was the disfigurement of thousands of books will be its sufficient condemnation.

Into the midst of all this—when Richardson¹, Fielding, and Smollett were perpetuating this lamentable tradition in books which were the glory of English literature and the shame of English printing—sprang the writing-master Baskerville with his new calligraphic fount and his hot-pressed paper. The date of his first work, *The specimens of Virgil with Proposals*, 1754, and still more the year 1757, when that volume, his first book, appeared, mark perhaps the second most important crisis in the history of English typography. For the first time England could rival—and equal—France. Baskerville was the rival of Fournier and, together with that rival, the inspiration of Bodoni, who was to rescue Italy from the slough of despond in which she had long since embedded herself. His founts were a definite improvement on those of Caslon in finish, grace, and beauty. Their chief defect was an excess of femininity—a fault remedied in the modern version now happily coming into fashion and, better still, into commercial use. Indeed there is an undeniable flavour of the private press about him, and this, though it explains why his books are collected under the head of 'Books from Famous Presses,' while Bulmer's and Bensley's are not, makes a comparison infinitely to the advantage of the latter. Like Aldus and the Estiennes, Baskerville was his own publisher, while Bulmer and Bensley were pure Commercial Printers, at the service of any who might choose to employ them; and it is in the fact that the success with which they plied their trade did not strike a blow at the heart of their artistic integrity or self-respect that their glory lies. Still, Baskerville was the

¹ It is not meant to imply that any of these authors save Richardson was responsible for the typographical deficiencies of these works: Richardson, however, was his own printer, and ought to have known better.

father and the mother of fine printing in this country, for which the debt we owe him is difficult to overestimate; and the lack of appreciation and constant financial troubles which oppressed him to the end of his life are a matter for genuine regret.

For the moment apathy prevailed, although the seed had been sown, and a new spirit in typography was beginning to grow manifest. Instead of the scrubby little books in which, as we said, Richardson, Smollett, and Fielding had made their bow, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and *Sentimental Journey* and Dr Johnson's *Western Islands* might be given credit at least for a certain dignity and spaciousness, if not for any positive typographical virtue¹.

We now close the brief historical sketch which seemed necessary to put the careers of such men as Bulmer and Bensley into their proper perspective. The records of William Bulmer's life are only rivalled in scantiness by those of his rival Thomas Bensley—a circumstance, however, not unprecedented in the case of printers, whose work, being less personal than that of artists in other media, is hardly of such a nature as to lead their contemporaries to make any exertion either of curiosity or of memory with regard to their personalities. Bulmer was born at Newcastle, and there served his apprenticeship, contracting a friendship with the famous Thomas Bewick. In his *Memoir* Bewick is provokingly cursory on the subject; all he says is this:

"Amongst the acquaintances I made at the workshops of Gilbert and William Gray, was William Bulmer, afterwards rendered famous as the proprietor of the Shakespeare Printing Office, in Cleveland Row, London, who was the first that set the example, and soon led the way, to fine printing in England. He used, while he was an apprentice, to prove the cuts I had executed. In this he was countenanced by his master, John Thompson, who was himself extremely curious and eager to see wood engraving succeed; for at that time the printing of woodcuts was very imperfectly known."

We may, however, console ourselves for Bewick's ill-timed reticence by

¹ Sterne's books are actually smaller than Fielding's or Smollett's; but this one would never believe if one did not know it. T. Becket was part publisher of much of Sterne's work; fifty years later he was still in business, and we shall see later on what sort of work he was then putting out.

the story (source unknown) of their two-mile walks every morning to a farmhouse at Elswick, followed by orgies of "Goody Coxen's hot rye-cake and buttermilk." On migrating to London, Bulmer worked for the publisher, John Bell, whose books maintain an extraordinarily high level of delicate charm. About 1787 occurred the crucial event in his career: his accidental introduction to George Nicol, the King's bookseller, then projecting his magnificent Shakespeare. Nicol had already engaged William Martin as type-cutter, and with the results of this craftsman's skill and taste, Bulmer was set up at the *Shakespeare Press* in Cleveland-row, St James's. In 1819 or thereabouts he retired prosperously "to a genteel residence at Clapham Rise," and on September 9th, 1830, in his 74th year, he died, being buried at St Clement Danes, Strand, a week later.

Now, in reviewing at this convenient stage Bulmer's career as a whole, before proceeding to a more detailed examination of his work, it is impossible to avoid a comparison and contrast with his counterpart Bensley. In the consideration of English typography and printing at this period they remain firmly bracketed together in the mind as the two outstanding figures—united, indeed, as much (in one sense) by their differences as by their similarities. In this connection there are two main facts which it is both interesting and important to remember.

In the first place, although their lives were of very nearly equal length (with the advantage in favour of Bulmer), Bensley's career as an independent printer is considerably the longer of the two. The *Illustrations of Original Drawings by Holbein* appeared in 1792, while Bensley's imprint may be found as early as 1785; and while that of 'Bulmer and Nicol'¹ gives way to that of Nicol alone about 1822 or 3, Bensley's name is to be found as late as 1824, and only in 1825 do we find the imprint of 'Mills, Jowett, and Mills, (Late Bensley,) Bolt Court, Fleet Street.'² Thus, Bulmer's imprint covers a range

¹ This imprint does not appear till 1820, about the time of (if anything, a little later than) Bulmer's retirement. He may, therefore, very likely have been no more than a sleeping partner.

² Yet in 1818 appears the imprint 'Bensley and Sons.' In 1828 we find 'B. Bensley, Andover,' which suggests one of the 'Sons' in question (a son

of about 28 years as against Bensley's 39. This discrepancy is not without its importance. In the first place, it is far greater than is generally supposed; in the second, it implies a considerably larger, hence presumably (though not necessarily) more important, output on Bensley's part than on Bulmer's; in the third, it explains the greater variability of Bensley's work than Bulmer's; for Bulmer's worst is not so bad as Bensley's. Bulmer sprang, as it were, like

of Thomas's he certainly was, as will appear). Presumably he or they must have left the paternal firm between 1818 and 1824; otherwise it is difficult to account for the resumption of the solitary 'T. Bensley' by 1824. B. Bensley is to be found ten years later (1838) at Phipps' Bridge, Mitcham. In 1842 he reappears at Woking, being responsible for the printing of the re-issue, in that year, of Dibdin's *Bibliomania*. He appends an interesting personal note, of which the following extracts throw light both on the question immediately under discussion and on other subjects to be touched on later; they are also not without their comic aspect:

"... during the life-time of so many able printers as now exercise their calling in the metropolis, it would be invidious to particularize eminence in our profession (whereas among our immediate predecessors it is, perhaps, just to say that there were only *two* printers of great celebrity, the late *Mr. Bulmer* and my father). . . . [Thirty years ago the printer] could command neither good *presses*, *types*, nor *ink*, &c.—paper being then almost the only matter to be had in perfection. . . . Our *letter* may safely be pronounced, if not perfect, as near perfection as it will ever reach. . . . The inking-roller at the hand-press was adopted, and offered to the printers generally, by my friend, Mr. Applegarth, shortly after *steam-printing* was introduced by my father . . . and, further, it is not a very tempting subject to the son of him who was led to devote the energies of the latter years of his active life, and the well-earned fortune which his great typographical celebrity had secured, to the adoption of a mode of printing which, how much soever it may benefit newspaper proprietors and others—certainly has done anything but benefit his family; and has thus added another instance to the many on record of the ill success attending the patronage of inventors."

The last paragraph may be a hit at the *Times* which (*vide* D.N.B.) adopted certain improvements of Bensley's; it also provides a plausible explanation why Bensley was not able to retire nearly as soon as Bulmer.

Athena from the head of Zeus; he was ready provided, by Nicol's care, with a superb type—with which, incidentally, all his best work was done: while Bensley had to discover Vincent Figgins for himself. Indeed, Bensley's earliest performances are almost incredibly undistinguished. *The Adventures of the Six Princesses of Babylon* (1785), the earliest work of his I have discovered, is a miracle of typographical obliviality; and Moffat's *Hippocrates* (1788), White's *Selborne* (1789), Huddesford's *Salmagundi* (1791), and Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* (1791, 2nd ed.) are little better. But it must in fairness be remembered that these works considerably antedate anything identifiable of Bulmer's: it is possible to heap Bensley's juvenile sins as a load of reproach on his head, while Bulmer remains snugly anonymous.

The second great *rapprochement* between the two printers lies in the consistent masculinity of Bulmer as against the equally consistent femininity of Bensley. (I speak of their earlier period, that in which their best work was done, before the grisly modern-face deluge had overwhelmed them; after which, any success of theirs was apt to be a pure typographical triumph over the founts they had to work with.) Martin's admirable fount we shall examine presently: here we need only demonstrate its inherent virility, attested by the masculine typographical handling which it (probably subconsciously) imposed on Bulmer, and which makes his large books so much more numerous and successful than his small books: whereas Figgins's rotund type is more successful when light and small than when swollen out for such large works as the *Seasons* of 1798, Hume's *History*, and Macklin's *Bible*; and these volumes, fine as they are, are less admirable than (for example) those little ravishments, *Townshend's Poems* (1796), Dubois's *The Wreath* (1799), and *The Enchanted Plants* (1800). (Again I speak only of their characteristic periods.) In a word, one is irresistibly reminded: "male and female created He them."

We now come to the actual examination of Bulmer's performances. All through his career—though more especially in its early stage, when he used the founts by which Martin is known—it is Bulmer's types which give his work its unmistakable and idiosyncratic flavour. Bensley's Figgins types were at once less daringly original in conception and more widely paralleled; so that it is possible to mistake for Bensley's the best work of such secondary

A S P E C I M E N

By ROBERT MARTIN, BIRMINGHAM.

No. 1

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O
P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Double Pica Roman.

TANDEM aliquando, Quirites! L. Catilinam
furentem audacia, scelus anhelantem, pestem
patriæ nefarie molientem, vobis atque huic urbi
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Double Pica Italic.

TANDEM aliquando, Quirites! L. Catilinam, fu-
rentem audacia, scelus anhelantem, pestem patriæ ne-
farie molientem, vobis atque huic urbi ferrum flammamque
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

English Roman.

TANDEM aliquando, Quirites! L. Catilinam, furentem audacia,
scelus anhelantem, pestem patriæ nefarie molientem, vobis atque
huic urbi ferrum flammamque minitantes, ex urbe vel eiecimus, vel
emissimus, vel ipsum egredientem persecuti sumus. abiit excessit, evalsit,
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Small Pica Roman.

TANDEM aliquando, Quirites! L. Ca-
tilinam furentem audacia, scelus
anhelantem, pestem patriæ nefarie molien-
tem, vobis atque huic urbi ferrum flammam-
que minitantes, ex urbe vel eiecimus, vel
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T

Long Primer Roman.

TANDEM aliquando, Quirites! L. Ca-
tilinam, furentem audacia, scelus anhe-
lantem, pestem patriæ nefarie molientem, vo-
bis atque huic urbi ferrum flammamque mini-
tantes, ex urbe vel eiecimus, vel emissimus
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U

Small Pica Italic.

TANDEM aliquando, Quirites! L. Cat-
linam, furentem audacia, scelus anhelantem,
pestem patriæ nefarie molientem, vobis atque huic
urbi ferrum flammamque minitantes, ex urbe vel
eiecimus, vel emissimus, vel ipsum egredientem
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V

Long Primer Italic.

TANDEM aliquando, Quirites! L. Catilinam,
furentem audacia, scelus anhelantem, pestem
patriæ nefarie molientem, vobis atque huic urbi fer-
rum flammamque minitantes, ex urbe vel eiecimus,
vel emissimus, vel ipsum egredientem verbis persecuti
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X

No. 2

No. 3

No. 4

No. 5

The specimen (reduced) of Robert Martin, Birmingham 1780

practitioners as Roworth, Hansard, McMillan, Gillet, and even Davison when the spirit moved him. Further, Bulmer possessed the virtual monopoly of Martin's types: in his preface to *The Press* (1803), McCreery says: "I am enabled to boast of being the first who has participated with Mr. Bulmer in the use of these types"—and, as we shall see, an inferior variety at that. It will therefore be appropriate to consider Bulmer's output from this point of view before proceeding to appraise him as typographer. We shall begin with Martin's type in its purity, trace its eventual deterioration, and finally examine the modern-face types with which, tempered by an occasional return into the past, Bulmer accomplished the remainder of his career.

Martin's original fount is unquestionably one of the very best ever evolved, both for intrinsic beauty and for its unequalled combination of marked individuality with general applicability. The infinitesimal peculiarities which impart to a fount its characteristic flavour almost defy analysis; and that flavour, description: but the result is visible to all but the quite unpractised eye. Martin was of Baskerville's school, but in his hands that master's sweet and readable, but somewhat enervate and pot-bellied, letter becomes hardly recognizable, so great and so important are the modifications which it undergoes. It is transformed into a nervous masculine letter of which the power and vigour are manifest in every stroke of its restrained floridity. Baskerville's loose and sprawling fount disappears to make room for one taller and narrower in proportion, hence squarer, shewing thus far a distinct anticipation of 'modern-face,' and suggesting a close knowledge, if not an actual imitation, of Bodoni's work between 1780 and 1790. Owing to this concentration, the 'ornamental' part of each letter, of which a distinct survival from the script-form can be traced in the subdued exuberance of a curve or a serif (in the k and g, for example), becomes compressed, and has to move, as it were, quickly and sharply in a relatively confined space, and it is this which gives certain of Martin's letters their 'curly' effect. The main Baskerville element retained by Martin (which, indeed, is easily traceable) is the characteristic calligraphic closeness with which the letter follows and reproduces thick and thin strokes as they would naturally be made by the pen—a quality naturally to be expected of Baskerville the writing-master. This is

a quality indispensable in the designing of fine types; and it is the virtue of Martin's fount (shared by a few other fine transitional faces, such as certain of Bodoni's) that it combines the good qualities both of 'old-face' and 'modern-face': tempering the excessive rotundity of the old tradition, while avoiding, by means of its calligraphic faithfulness and of its triangular and slightly scalloped serifs, the two vices which were to make of the thorough-going 'modern-face' a thing at which to shudder. The flat 'hair-line' serifs were to remove the last vestiges of attractiveness, and the abandonment of calligraphic truth—for the thick, sharply-ending, down-strokes of that same 'modern-face' are quite arbitrary in conception, and only in the vaguest manner inspired by any memory of how type-design was born—was to aggravate unpardonable ugliness by the addition of outrageous falsity.

The impression made by Martin's fount was described above as one of restrained floridity. Inadequate as any such description must of necessity be, its accuracy may easily be tested by reference to such works as Repton's *Theory and Principles of Landscape Gardening* (1794), Boydell's *Milton* (1794), the monumental *Shakespeare* and the *Holbein*. Meanwhile, a brief analysis of such details as seem to be the most important in imparting to the fount its peculiar character may be desirable.

The hollowing of the serifs mentioned above is specially noticed in the capitals. The B and D terminate in what may almost be described as miniature horns, and the same effect is to be observed in E and L. Where the serifs are more sharply detached, as in H and I, a glance through a magnifying glass will shew the same slight hollow in the base of the triangle formed by each serif¹. Thus the eye, in running along the base of a line of these capital letters, detects a definite, though slight, 'scalloped' effect: by which alone many of Bulmer's early title-pages become at once recognizable. It must be added that this hollowing varies in degree in the different letters (not always consistently) and is more marked in the capitals than in the lower-case; indeed, perfectly flat serifs will occasionally be found among the latter, usually when the type is old and battered out of its true shape: but

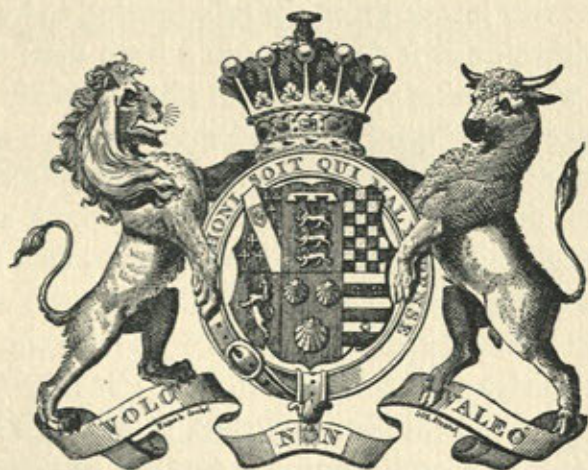
¹ It is, indeed, by no means imperceptible to the unaided eye.

THE
FATHER'S REVENGE,

A
TRAGEDY:

WITH OTHER POEMS;

BY
FREDERICK EARL OF CARLISLE.



LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. BULMER AND CO.
Shakspeare Printing Office,
RUSSEL-COURT, CLEVELAND-ROW, ST. JAMES'S.
1800.

it occurs in the great majority of cases—often enough, at any rate, to affect very markedly the printed page as a whole¹. While we are on the subject of serifs, it is worth remarking that their triangularity is one of the chief characteristics of Martin's fount which mark it off from 'modern-face' in spite of its tendency towards the square shapes of that abomination, and render that tendency harmless and even beneficial. The most remarkable lower-case letters are a, e, f, g, k, r, and y; in a lesser degree b, d, o, p, s, t, and v are worthy of attention. The a, with its slanting elliptical counter set low on the ascender which makes a wide flat curve above it; the e, with its very small flat counter in proportion to the broad curve of the descender, making a piquant contrast with the remarkably big round counters of b, d, o and p; the f and long f, in which this characteristic curve is still more striking; the g, with its exceptionally close calligraphic faithfulness (the thickening in the curves of the pinched upper counter being markedly vertical, that of the big flattish lower counter being equally clearly horizontal) and with its little curly carry-on; the k, perhaps the most striking of all, with the angle of the oblique strokes set very low down on the tall ascender, and with the lower oblique stroke thickening as it descends into a huge serif; the r, with its horizontal stroke which makes up in curliness what it lacks in size (perhaps the clearest instance of the "quick and sharp movement in a relatively confined space" mentioned above); the s, with its thin sharply-curving ends and thick down-stroke; the v and y with their wide generous angles and (in the latter case) straight tail ending in a bulb: all these, by their peculiar 'racy' quality, help to fix the character of a very individual and very charming type.

This is the finest and most important Martin type: it is to be found in most of the early and handsome Bulmer books. The *Poems of Goldsmith and Parnell* (1795) serves as an excellent reference, because it is comparatively common, hence easy of access, because it contains an unusual variety of sizes of this type, as well as the italic fount, and because of the manifesto

¹ The serifs are more consistently flat than usual in R. P. Knight's *The Landscape* (1794): the reader may amuse himself by judging for himself the effect this has on the general appearance.

THE
FATHER'S REVENGE.

ACT I. SCENE I.

A CLOISTER IN THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE, OPENING IN FRONT
TO A DISTANT VIEW OF MOUNT VESUVIUS. A FLIGHT OF
STEPS ON THE SIDE LEADING TO THE CHAPEL. THE ORGAN
AND VOICES ARE HEARD FROM WITHIN.

Enter the Archbishop, Anselmo, and Monks, in procession

ARCHBISHOP.

MOVE forward to the chapel—you, Anselmo,
Remain with me—I'll speedily attend you ;
For yet cold age must not retard my duty.

[Exeunt all but the Archbishop and Anselmo.]

contained in Bulmer's preface. It is worth while to quote the most important part of this preface, as evidence of the deliberate and self-conscious interest in a revival of practical typography now once more manifesting itself:

"To raise the Art of Printing in this country from the neglected state in which it had long been suffered to continue, and to remove the opprobrium which had but too justly been attached to the late productions of the English press, much has been done within the last few years; and the warm emulation which has discovered itself amongst the Printers of the present day, as well in the remote parts of the kingdom as in the metropolis, has been highly patronized by the public in general. The present volume, in addition to the SHAKESPEARE, the MILTON, and many other valuable works of elegance, which have already been given to the world, through the medium of the Shakespeare Press, are particularly meant to combine the various beauties of PRINTING, TYPE-FOUNDING, ENGRAVING, and PAPER-MAKING; as well with a view to ascertain the near approach to perfection which those arts have attained in this country, as to invite a fair competition with the best Typographical Productions of other nations. . . . Much pains have been bestowed on the present publication, to render it a complete specimen of the Arts of Type and Block-printing."

The significance of all which is too marked to need comment, in view of what has already been said. The smallest size of Martin's fount here displayed is decidedly rare: all three sizes are very successful. The italic type is insipid, and its lack of character is of course accentuated by contrast with the corresponding roman fount; still, it has one virtue lacked by many better italics, such as Garamond's: it has a perfectly uniform slope, all ascenders and descenders being perfectly parallel.

We now come to the second form of Martin's type, which may be seen in a volume that follows naturally upon the mention of *Goldsmith and Parnell: The Press, A Poem Published as a specimen of Typography*, by John McCreery (1803). The type is still the same in design, but it is already debased. It is thicker, and comparatively devoid both of life and of the calligraphic faithfulness from which that life is derived. In his preface the Author says: "I am enabled to boast of being the first who has participated

How soon he began to write verses we are not informed, there being few dates in his poems; but it is certain that he was no early candidate for literary fame. He had reached the age of fifty years, before he presented any of his works to the publick, or was the least known. In the year 1727, he published his first volume of Poems; the merit of which, like most collections of the same kind, is various. Dr. Johnson says, that “ though, perhaps, he has not, in any mode of poetry, “ reached such excellence as to raise much envy, it may “ commonly be said, at least, that he ‘ writes very well for “ a gentleman.’ His serious pieces are sometimes elevated, and his trifles are sometimes elegant. In his verses “ to Addison, the couplet which mentions *Clio*, is written “ with the most exquisite delicacy of praise: it exhibits “ one of those happy strokes that are seldom attained. “ In his Odes to Marlborough, there are beautiful lines; “ but in the second ode, he shows that he knew little of “ his hero, when he talks of his private virtues. His “ subjects are commonly such as require no great depth “ of thought, or energy of expression. His fables are “ generally stale, and therefore excite no curiosity. Of “ his favourite, *the Two Springs*, the fiction is unnatural, and the moral inconsequential. In his tales,

From *The Chase* (Bulmer 1792)

THE
MISERIES OF HUMAN LIFE;
OR THE
GROANS OF TIMOTHY TESTY, AND
SAMUEL SENSITIVE.
WITH
A FEW SUPPLEMENTARY SIGHS FROM
MRS. TESTY.
IN TWELVE DIALOGUES.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM MILLER, ALBEMARLE-STREET,
BY W. BULMER AND CO. CLEVELAND-ROW.
1806.

THE
MISERIES OF HUMAN LIFE.

DIALOGUE THE FIRST.

Testy and Sensitive.

Sensitive.

WELL, Mr. Testy, and how are things going with you?

Testy. How!—why just as they always have gone—downwards—backwards—crookedly—spirally—any how but upwards, or straight forwards;—and, 'faith, if I may judge from the ruefulness of your visage, neighbour Sensitive, *your* affairs are not moving in a much handsomer direction.

Sen. Handsomer!—O, Mr. Testy! if there be any other direction still more hideous, you

with Mr. BULMER in the use of these types" (Martin's). It is easy to understand Bulmer's pre-eminence when one realizes that so long as Martin's fount existed in its original beauty he had, as we have seen, the monopoly of it.

From now on, we are unhappily faced with an uneven but steady debasement. As early as 1800, Syme's *Embassy to Ava* shews a smallish size of type in which this falling-off is accentuated. There is hardly any calligraphic quality left. The preliminary pages, printed in larger type, of the second variety we have noted, is tolerable; but the text is only faintly, vaguely Martinesque. In 1801, in the very uncommon Bulmer edition of du Roveray's *Rape of the Lock* (this series is almost invariably found printed by Bensley) we get Martin and modern-face mixed on the title-page. The imprint is in special thick 'small caps,' which are very characteristic of Bulmer's later period and appear here for almost the first time. They are rather fat, but clear and, for modern-face, very pleasing. Together with the double rule, which we shall notice in considering Bulmer's typography, they make Bulmer's later title-pages recognizable almost at a glance. The only printer who produced at all similar work is Ballantyne; and he may be reckoned the (bad) third of the eminent printers of the period: witness (as regards this similarity) the different editions of Beresford's *Miseries of Human Life* which they printed, and (as regards Ballantyne's abilities) the excellent work he did for Scott¹.

¹ *Pace* Mr B. Bensley, that Ballantyne was even contemporaneously regarded as nearly as good as his greater rivals is shewn in the parody of Dibdin's *Bibliomania* called *Bibliosophia*, by the Rev. J. Beresford of *Miseries of Human Life* fame. In this volume (its date, 1810) he has burlesque 'proposals' for a wildly farcical *de luxe* edition of *The History of Tom Thumb the Great*, which begin:

"With respect to THE TYPE . . . Messrs. BULMER, BENSLEY, and BALLANTYNE, will severally receive a requisition to task their founts in the rival construction of ADETTE, which shall be, if possible, worthy of its destination;—and He whose effort shall be pronounced victorious, by a body of infallible Inspectors, who will be convened as Umpires, shall be THE PRINTER."

Bibliosophia was itself printed by Bulmer. The same writer, in the second

But the decadence with which we are dealing may be most succinctly and strikingly illustrated by the consideration of the following series of duodecimos (mostly by Mathias) which Bulmer printed for T. Becket¹ over a period of thirteen years. The first, *Odes, English and Latin, reprinted 1798, not published*, is an agreeable and delicate little work employing a small size of the second Martin fount. In the *Rime Scelte di Francesco Petrarca* (1801) we find a hybrid title-page similar to that of *The Rape of the Lock*; the text is in a narrow and delicate modern-face, with just a very faint trace of Martin-esque feeling; and the preface is in a largish, wide, and very clear modern-face of which the main feature is the flat rectangular serif-less top of the t. This same type, in a thicker form, was used by Bulmer himself in *Bentley's Letters* (1807), and by Bensley in Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope* (7th edition, 1803) and *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809), and was to grow popular a few years later in its smaller and far more unattractive sizes. In the third book, *Componimenti Lirici de' Più Illustri Poeti d'Italia* (1802), the Martin type has been banished even from the title-page; the text is similar to that of its predecessor. At this comparatively low level we stay through the remainder of the series: *Storia dell' Accademia degli Arcadi* (1804), *Della Ragion Poetica* (1806), *Aggiunta di Componimenti Lirici* (1808), and *Le Rime di Francesco Petrarca* (1811): if anything the production gets a little more objectionably mercantile in appearance with the passing of time. Of course this degradation was not uniform and un-

volume of the *Miseries*, quotes our (and his) printer in the following somewhat flattering "groan":

"The mental famine created among poor students by the modern luxury of the press—hot-pressed paper—Bulmer's types—vignettes in every page, &c. . . ."

Undeniable testimony, this, to Bulmer's repute amongst his contemporaries.

¹ For an account of this interesting figure in English literary and bibliographical annals see John Taylor's *Records of My Life*, Vol. i. pp. 383-4. He was part publisher of the *Sentimental Journey* more than 40 years before the books we are now noticing: a study of his output during his exceptionally long career would be almost equivalent to a summary history of English printing of the period about 1765 to 1810.

interrupted. In 1807 Bulmer produced Maurice's *Richmond Hill*, using a large size of Martin's fount, and made a lovely book of it. But Maurice was on the staff of the British Museum, and evidently very particular: another book of his, *Westminster Abbey*, was also printed by Bulmer, and is equally successful from our point of view. It is difficult to miss the suggestion that a great deal depended on the client as well as on Bulmer; that it was always open to the man who paid the piper to call the tune, Bulmer being perforce indifferent—or at least philosophical—however good or bad the taste shewn might be. Besides, though one does not know, one cannot but suspect that, like everyone else, Bulmer and Bensley liked to be in the fashion, and were proud of their new, up-to-date, and almost hideous founts¹.

In 1814 appeared Mathias's imposing two-volume edition of Gray. The text of the poems is in the type alluded to above with the flat-topped t; that of the letters is in a fattish and rather uninteresting type with a somewhat remarkable slightness of distinction between thick and thin strokes—the apotheosis of the uncalligraphic. It has, however, always to be remembered that in such works as this (and very often in smaller and less luxurious books as well) the paper used is good, and the typography possesses a certain dignity; so that the average Bulmer book of this period, though comparatively unaesthetic in its appeal, is not without its points, especially when one remembers the nothing less than filthy monstrosities simultaneously being given to the world by Tegg and his kind. But in 1816 we get Mungo Park's *Journal*, printed in a very fat and heavy letter², where the difference between the thin and thick strokes is unnaturally accentuated (by the very great thickness of the thicks)—the *reductio ad absurdum* of the falsifying exaggeration of calligraphy. Fortunately such lapses on Bulmer's part are exceedingly rare.

We have now perhaps spoken in enough detail of Bulmer's types. Pausing only to signalize the admirable work done by Bulmer, with, later on, the assistance of his eventual successor, Nicol, in such works as the *Bibliotheca*

¹ We have already seen that this was precisely the attitude of Bensley *fil.*

² Park seems to have been unlucky in not getting Bulmer's best work: his earlier book, *Travels...in Africa, 1795-7* (1799), is very similar to Symes' *Ava* (see above), only a little worse.

Spenceriana and *Ædes Althorpianae*, we will, as a matter of interest, touch upon the last two or three of Bulmer's books. The first edition of Thomas Hope's celebrated novel *Anastasius*, over which Byron shed tears, appeared in 1819, printed by Bulmer in a small and not particularly impressive modern-face letter¹. Oddly enough, it is the only novel the present writer has ever seen which was printed by Bulmer; and Bensley appears to have printed one less than his rival. That the two most celebrated printers of the time should practically never have been employed in this branch of literature is as startling as it is inexplicable; but the fact remains. In the same year is to be found the *Ode to the Duke of Wellington, and other Poems* of the infant prodigy R. C. Dallas, Byron's friend and correspondent—a work neither more nor less typographically distinguished than *Anastasius*. By 1820 the single Bulmer imprint has disappeared, to be replaced by that of Bulmer and Nicol: in *The Profligate*, by Watson Taylor, privately printed in that year, we even find our old friend the Shakespeare Press re-emerging conspicuously in the imprint.

One remark is still to be made before we consider Bulmer as typographer: a word must be said on the almost invariable excellence of his press-work². The paper which he used varied in quality from the superfine Whatman of such luxurious productions as Boydell's *History of the River Thames* to the coarse and lifeless stuff on which Mungo Park's *Journal* is printed, though on an average it approximated more closely to the first than to the second. It need not be pointed out what an immense difference to the attainment of really brilliant press-work is made by the quality of the paper; but on the whole Bulmer maintains a very high level. Every man is, we may suppose, entitled to be judged by his best work; if Bulmer receives the benefit of this principle, such works as Boydell's *Thames* entitle him to a very great degree of credit.

¹ This was not the first work Bulmer had printed for Hope: see a later footnote.

² This is all the more to his credit, in view of the technical handicaps he had to encounter, as we saw in a previous footnote. Nor does his ink seem by any means as bad as Bensley's would make out.

THE
PROFLIGATE,
A COMEDY.



LONDON:

Printed at the Shakspeare Press,
BY W BULMER AND W. NICOL.

1820.

Lady L. Except my husband.

Sir Har. You little country gipsy, I thought you had outgrown these antiquated ideas. Would you wish that we should ride down St. James's Street every morning side by side, like a farmer and his wife jogging to market?

Lady L. I am not so weak; but like the farmer's wife, I may at least expect to be sometimes cheered by the attentions of a husband.

Sir Har. Lady Listless, I do not approve of this tone.

Lady L. Have I seen you, Sir Harry, until this moment, for these five days past?

Sir Har. For a very good reason. Have I not been at my hunting box at Sutton? Would you wish me to be always in your dressing-room?

Lady L. Certainly not. I merely wish that, as you have nothing but hunting, when you are at your place in the season, you could contrive to gratify me with a little more of your society now that we are in town.

Sir Har. This catechising style, madam, is quite new; no more of it. A querulous wife is the devil.

Lady L. I would rather be considered as an

We now come to the examination of Bulmer as typographer. First, as to his title-pages: on the whole, he may be pronounced inferior to Bensley in dexterity. The latter has some marvels of delicacy to shew in the brilliant use he makes of his light and feminine Figgins letter in such examples as *Poems* by Thomas Townshend (1796) and of his modern-face (which still nearly always remains lighter and more airy than Bulmer's)¹ in *Poems and Tales* by Miss. Trefusis (1808) and *Dramatic and Narrative Poems* by Lord Carysfort (1810). With few positive faults, Bulmer has not Bensley's genius for turning, by some characteristic and inimitable little piece of virtuosity, what might have been no more than a goodish average display of type into a homogeneous and extraordinarily engaging piece of art. For one thing, Bulmer had a bad habit of mixing Martin and modern-face in his title-pages, and—still worse—of employing them with no apparent reference to that used in the body of the text. In Henry Tresham's *Britannicus to Buonaparte* (1803), for example, he uses Martin for the whole of the title-page except *one line*; the dedication and introduction are in a large size of the same; while the text is in a frank modern-face with only slight traces of the old tradition remaining—a fount which is the adumbration of the fat modern-face of *Gertrude of Wyoming*. It is neither so fat, nor so thick-and-thin; but the flat-topped t is already shewing its cloven hoof. The title-page, except for the error of taste already mentioned, is satisfactory from an architectural point of view; it just misses what was Bulmer's characteristic weakness: that of over-leading the upper part of his title-page in proportion to the very concentrated imprint, which thus presents a squashed and overweighted appearance. However, in most of his later title-pages (especially in small or smallish volumes) he tended to remedy this fault by using stout small capitals for the imprint and surmounting it with the double rule (one thick, one thin) to which allusion has been made. This may be seen in Beresford's *Miseries of Human Life*. Ballantyne, who printed certain later editions, imitated this in his own title-pages. Occasionally we find an attempt

¹ Indeed, many of Bensley's modern-face founts seem to have grown out of his old-face letter; in Bulmer's case the transition is considerably more abrupt.

JULIA;
OR,
LAST FOLLIES.

—FRANGUNTUR CALAMI—



LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. BULMER AND CO.

1798.

LAST FOLLIES.

TO JULIA.

WITH A COPY OF THESE POEMS.

If this small gift shall Julia's hours beguile,
Excite from lips so sweet one gracious smile—
One passing cloud of melancholy chase,
From Love's blue eye, and Beauty's magic face;
I ask no more.—Enough my silver lyre,
If she but praise the verse, her charms inspire.



at what may roughly be called the Bensleyesque manner, as in Sir Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy* (White and Cochrane, 1810); but light as the title-page is in comparison with the norm, it reveals quite clearly that he had not really anything much to say in his title-pages; this one is neat and tidy, but nowhere achieves significance. Of course, the title-pages of the *Milton*, the *Thames*, and the rest of the early pieces of magnificence are effective: with such a type to play with, a man must have been actively, malignantly incompetent to avoid producing a certain effect—but that was all.

But, after all, Bulmer has his successes. The title-page of Beloe's anonymous *Julia; or, Last Follies* (1798) is exceedingly attractive. (It would perhaps be invidious to enquire how far the entirely admirable little Bewick vignette deserves the credit for this.) D'Israeli's *Inquiry into the Literary and Political Character of James I* (1816) provides Bulmer's best title-page of the ordinary species, so far as the writer's perception goes. The leading is much more nicely adjusted than usual, and the line of big Gothic letters provides a piquant yet discreet contrast with the half-line of small italic lower down. The imprint, too, is wider than usual, and consequently manages to avoid its normal rather sullen and browbeaten appearance. Bulmer's masterpiece of the 'show-piece' kind is, to the writer's mind, equally manifest. It is that of *The Father's Revenge, a Tragedy*, by Lord Carlisle (Byron's guardian and *bête noire*). The Martin letter is well handled, with a touch of fantasy in the italic capitals, and in the Gothic letter of the imprint. The superbly opulent engraved coat of arms is adjusted to a nicety below the last horizontal line above it, and a handsomely square effect results. As a whole it incontestably 'comes off' as a piece of virtuosity in the grand style. Incidentally, this is an excellent choice to make for the study of the Martin italic, as the whole of the prologue is thus printed, and there seem somehow to have been singularly few opportunities for the employment of this letter in Bulmer's books of the early period.

In the arrangement of text, Bulmer is as definitely Bensley's superior as the reverse has been hitherto the case. In the proportionment of type-area and margin he is hard to beat. The soberly yet richly balanced magnificence of the prose portions of the *Milton* and of the *Thames* represent in their own

AN
INQUIRY
INTO THE
LITERARY AND POLITICAL CHARACTER
OF
James the First.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
CURIOSITIES OF LITERATURE, &c. &c.

BEATI PACIFICI. *The King's Motto.*

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET,
BY W. BULMER AND CO. CLEVELAND-ROW,
ST. JAMES'S.

1816.

way human perfection: type, paper, proportion, presswork, are all equally beyond reproach. It was not to be expected that in more frankly commercial and commonplace productions such a level should be maintained; but even such volumes as Archer Shee's *Commemoration of Reynolds* (1814), though not exactly what might be termed intoxicating, preserve an unassuming self-respect. In this particular instance long lines, with outside numerals, had to be printed without carrying-over on a very small octavo page; and this is at least done with the minimum sense of flurry. In the other difficult problem presented by verse—that of avoiding a straggling, shapeless effect—Bulmer is very successful in Gifford's *Ben Jonson* and *Massinger*: handsome demy octavo volumes in transitional types with the leading so adjusted as to avoid at once emptiness and excessive solidity. Mrs Lennox's translation of *Sully's Memoirs* (1810) is another excellent piece of book-making of the 'penny-plain' order. The title-page mixes Martin and modern-face, as so often; the text is in a vaguely reminiscient modern-face which is not disagreeable, and the colour of the pages as a whole (in a fresh copy of the book) is at once pleasing and restful. Dibdin's edition of *Utopia* (1808) is (in the *de luxe* impression, at least) of the 'twopence-coloured' variety. The title-page has two large wood-cut figures resembling caryatids standing on a frame in which is enclosed the minuscule imprint (this latter, perhaps, rather too small in proportion), and the two leaf ornaments are almost unexampled in Bulmer's other efforts. The introduction is in modern-face (nothing out of the way) and the text in Martin no. 1—a very late use¹. Top, side, and bottom margins are almost equal, and their great width excellently sets off the lovely type. The opulence of the book is enhanced by the repetition of the title-page, and of a page of type-facsimile in the text, on vellum.

To sum up: Bulmer's strength as a typographer lies in his ability to adjust with subtlety the weight, colour, and proportion of his pages; in this he shews the same degree of skill as Bensley in his best title-pages. There is

¹ Still later is 'Anastasius' Hope's *Costumes of the Ancients* (1809): the title-page is set in Martin, diluted, the list of plates in a small ignoble modern-face, and the text in a smallish size of Martin no. 1—very pretty indeed. The bulk of the book, it must be added, consists of plates.

nothing, for the most part, very showy about Bulmer's handling of his types, but he was perfectly capable of rising to an occasion as often as was required. What he does almost invariably display—and a far more consistently valuable asset it is—is *tact*. That he should have maintained this as his chief quality in an age when, firstly, the atmosphere of 'typographical revival' would naturally prove a constant inducement to ostentation, and, later, the rapid and general debasement of taste would inevitably have been held to condone in Bulmer the kind of loosening of stays in which almost all his contemporaries save Bensley indulged—that he should in face of this have remained, as a typographer, perfectly honest and perfectly well-bred is an important claim upon our regard. Such a man, if any, deserved success.

Since the beginning of this paper, a fresh source on Bulmer has come to my notice in Nichols' *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*¹. It is a picture of him, towards the close of his career, in his days of dignity and position, and for that reason may appropriately appear as our conclusion:

"Shortly after the Right Honourable Lord Sidmouth was appointed Secretary of State for the Home Department, he very handsomely presented Mr. Gifford² with the Paymastership of the Honourable Band of Gentlemen Pensioners, or Men at Arms,—a situation he enjoyed till the period of his death,—of which corps, Mr. Bulmer, his ancient typographer, had long been one of the oldest members. It was the practice of Mr. Gifford, whenever an Exchequer warrant was issued for the payment of the quarterly salaries of the Gentlemen of the Band, to inform its members, by a circular letter, that their salaries were in a course of payment; but on many of these occasions he was wont to depart from his usual routine, and indulge himself in a poetical notice to Mr. Bulmer. These notices were generally written on any blank or broken page he might accidentally find on the proof sheet of Shirley's Dramatic Works which he might be correcting at the instant,—a work he had long been employed in conducting through the Shakespeare press."

¹ Vol. vi. pp. 37-39.

² William Gifford, of the *Baviad*, *Maeviad* and *Quarterly Review*.

on William Bulmer

The dates of these verses lie about 1819-21. From the same volume we learn that about the latter year Bulmer's elder brother, as Senior Member of this society, was knighted on occasion of George IV's coronation, and became Sir Fenwick Bulmer.

So we leave him: rich, retired, the friendly correspondent of the eminent Mr Gifford, the brother of a man of title. A successful man, and the brother of a successful man, perhaps he took more pleasure in the credit Sir Fenwick had done the family name than in that which he himself had brought it. At least we cannot doubt his satisfaction could he be told, that he is established, with Bensley and Baskerville, in the great triumvirate of English Typography, and that few would venture positively to attack his title to an even higher position.