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sion, is there to be a continuance of the old to the new war, or a radical transformation? The pain becomes almost unendurable, and I can only stave it off by plunging into some kind of work, which yet must bear upon it.¹⁰

The work he plunged into was, of course, the writing of *The International Anarchy*.

Vernon Lee does not seem to have been able to publish anything of consequence on the subject of peace and war at this time. Dickinson's letters to her show, however, that the fault (if it was a fault) may well have been the publishers', not hers. The letters reflect her intelligent sympathy with Dickinson's achievement, and the fact that she was genuinely interested in working for the same good cause.



OF TYPOGRAPHY AND THE HARMONY OF THE PRINTED PAGE

translated* from the French of Charles Ricketts

By RICHARD K. KELLENBERGER

IN a renewal of interest in handicrafts, the art of book-making would, at first sight, appear to be the easiest to revitalize. Its limited technique, the placing a black line on white paper, the relationship of this line to the stroke of a pen, adjusted merely to the work of the engraver (both in printing and in wood-engraving), this

¹⁰ Quoted in Forster, p. 192.

* In our issue for November 1951, Librarian James Humphry III announced Colby's acquisition of a copy—the only copy in the State of Maine (and one of only five copies in New England)—of *De la Typographie et l'harmonie de la Page imprimée* by Lucien Pizzarro and Charles Ricketts. This work was to have been printed by Pizzarro for a French publisher, Floury, of Paris, but because of Pizzarro's ill health only the first eight pages of the book were set up by him at his Eragny Press and it was accordingly produced by Charles Ricketts at the Vale Press. So far as we know, *De la Typographie* has never until now appeared in English. It supplements Professor Kellenberger's similar translation of Ricketts' *William Morris et son Influence* (1898) which we printed in February 1952.

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does not involve the difficulties which are presented by more complicated or recalcitrant materials—difficulties such as are presented by the technique of weaving brocades or rugs, or of fitting together the pieces of a stained glass window. And yet, throughout the thirty years during which there has been, in handicraft circles in England, an intense preoccupation with the arts, the art of book-making is the last one to come on the scene. We shall not concern ourselves here with the purely artistic revival of interest in the line, or in the illustration of a book for itself. In all this artistic movement, the influence necessary for the transformation of the art of book-making might fail altogether to appear. In its quality as a special art, this art of illustration, however admirable it may be in itself, is only too often something merely added to the book, without any relation to the book-making process, without any connection with the character of the line in the printing and without any tonal relationship to it.

In the movement which, with all its aspects of research, took place thirty years ago, the drawn line was no longer the neutral “bank-note engraver’s” line found in the illustrations of former times. With a more ambitious line, one more responsive to the new requirements, composition had become more involved, as well as more varied, having in it an element of concentration which makes of the printed image a thing which speaks to the eye, but which was at the same time still too free to harmonize with the typography, since the line in printing is not a free line. The idea of adding to the traditional line something suggested by the craft of the original wood-engraver had not yet occurred to the type-designer; and since typography had lost—as all modern typography has lost—the characteristic features that come from the use of noble and artistic processes, it would have made any effort in this direction useless. The pre-Raphaelite illustration, strictly speaking, came to an end around 1870, and with it disap-

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peared the concentrated decorative element that we have found in it.

One finds the conscientious ideal of a harmonious book in two or three manuscripts by William Morris. His calligraphy may be seen in an illuminated *Virgil* which he and Burne-Jones planned—a project which unfortunately remains unfinished. It is to the efforts of these men that one must ascribe the renewal, in England, of interest in the intrinsic beauties of the book. From their concern with the precious, pushed as far as possible, from their work of “pure affection,” came a more profound knowledge of the resources of ornamentation and especially of the anatomy of the letter.

This was, moreover, an advantage that the first printers in the past had. As heirs of the tradition of beautiful writing, they had only to look back to the ancestral forms of letters used by the scribes of the tenth and eleventh centuries, to arrive, in this process of purification, at the superior Italian typography of the sixteenth century, which we call roman and from which comes our modern typography, through a process of corruption.

That happy epoch didn't last long. Typography lost the strength of the shape of its letters, it shrank, and beginning with the sixteenth century it became, even with Aldus, oval, and lost track of the work of the pen in an insipid or hasty purification of form at the hands of the engraver. Later still, all trace of the traditional disappeared, and typography became poor and bombastic, as in the nineteenth century.

The art of page-arrangement was lost a long time ago. A certain gaudy, emphatic absence of concentration replaced the sober processes of former times in handling a title in the make-up of a page.

There is a fatal law which determines the final effect of a given thing, not only through the point of departure but through an infinite number of causes and details which

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reveal either the pride or joy of the worker who acts simply and confidently in the direction of a necessary or admirable goal. In these very simple conditions, which may exist even without the direct influence of a superior intellect, we find results which are difficult to attain today without a considerable artistic effort. The secret of success does not lie entirely in these things but, nevertheless, this kind of environment, which is so necessary for facile creation, does condition and sustain the artist in these wonderful epochs. From time to time this combination has produced some exceptional books, which can be called masterpieces. These works, which are certain of arousing interest and understanding, completely lack those affected details which are used in Seventeenth Century and in contemporary frontispieces for the purpose of arousing people from their apathy or of flattering their vanity.

In the face of the general current exhaustion the bibliophile is tempted, for want of a tradition, to create the beautiful and the new by means of an art which has no real connection with the materials of the art of book-making. In comparison with the ugliness and dullness of contemporary printing, classic simplicity in the setting-up of the pages and of the titles may appear to the eye of the bibliophile as an affectation of the archaic. Similarly, the unattractiveness of printed letters may also force him to believe that any return to the written letter itself, that any attempt at a logical understanding of its forms, that any effort to purify them through the careful work of the tool in correcting the writing (for the printed letter is no longer a written letter) would likewise be a return to the archaic, for modern typography doesn't show the influence of formative processes, nor does it reveal any logic in the anatomy of forms, nor does it have any special element of beauty.

The sense of design of an artist must indeed be disturbed by the use of heavy and thin lines, by the poor jointings

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and the compact forms of ordinary letters, all indicative of false taste. His personal taste may well dictate broader or simpler ideas in the understanding of the forms. There is, moreover, his dislike for the tiny flourishes which have been introduced for goodness-knows-what reasons and through which such letters have ceased to belong to the basic forms of the alphabet.

It is only by seeking inspiration at the sources of these letters and by an understanding of the processes necessary to remake them that the means can be found to revitalize typography and to add to it an element of harmony which it lacks at present. The defects which we have noted come primarily from the need to economize on space in order to save money; an economy, it should be added, which has been pushed so far that words have become almost illegible if it were not for the immoderate use of white spaces between them.

Since the artists who have become tradesmen, sculptors or painters have shown less interest, the element of design has disappeared in the industry. As a matter of fact, the refinement required by a specific bibliophile, in a special edition, has taken on the form of a little ornate novelty in the composition as worked out by the artisan, or even of a quite commonplace detail in the format.

Now, let us remember, as we stated above, that once a tradition has been lost, one is tempted to create the beautiful and the new by means of an art that has no connection with the art of book-making. As a result, the illustration begins to dominate and becomes something apart from the text, a sort of metal engraving or even an etching. But this is not right; for not every illustration, no matter how admirable it may seem in itself, is suitable as the ornamentation of a book that is conceived of in a harmonious fashion. These illustrations, once properly related to the typographical forms, should constitute in the set-up of the pages that they are to decorate the high note,

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the luminous point within the harmony of the page, without, however, being separated from it. The patient and understanding decorator will find, wherever there is any lacuna in the final page-setting, ample opportunity to display the resources of his ingenuity and the exquisite tact of his work.

The most beautiful pages of the earliest books had no printed decorations, and the task of the illuminator was to inject a note of gaiety and of grace in those places where the printed reproduction of the engraving was technically so difficult that it could not compete with the charm of painted ornamentation. When printed decoration and forms were added to the text, there resulted new difficulties, and also new resources which these old printers, as real artists, exploited to the fullest.

The art of decoration was somewhat exhausted and had petered out towards the end of the Fifteenth Century. The fantasy one finds in the use of decoration at this epoch, though it may appear quite fresh to us today, shows too often the influence of contemporary ornamentation which is characteristic of the other arts such as sculpture and painting (and here I have in mind Italy). Moreover, in France the extremely minute and somewhat dull work that one finds in the gothic art towards its decline reveals such a particular technique dealing with very special forms on limited surfaces that it can serve only as a source of study and is not to be imitated. Any period of a truly living art reveals a broad comprehension of the use of motives that would be suitable for a particular format or a particular matter; consequently, it is all the more to be regretted that the art of book-making appeared on the scene at a time when the art of decoration was beginning to decline. During periods that are even more exhausted, that are really too far developed, the printed page is outlined with a pediment of a temple, with a brocaded design, or with a painting in relief, and the illustration of a book

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becomes but a means to trick the eye through an optical illusion.

Like the architect, the printer can express the nature of his thought only by the use of white and black, and it is only through such limited means that he reveals gaiety or austerity. With the use of ornament he can force the note of color but only in a suggestive way: a volume of Baudelaire can have the same superb and ornate effect as an ecclesiastical work; a few small flowers on an edition of *La Pléiade* would give the proper appearance to a book which is considered from the point of view of art.

And now with a view towards keeping ornamentation within its proper limited rôle, let us no longer use motives that are painted in a free manner or that are painted "from stencils," and, above all, "let us no longer use Japanese chrysanthemums." The architectural touch of the Japanese is too little understood; the *kérimon* is an ornament and the running line is typical of the writing of that country but does not belong to ours. The symbolic element and the personal element have supplied Japanese art, as they would any truly living art, with decorative motives such as the pagoda, such as the curved line of some of the foliage typical of that country, all of which we see reproduced in the designs of roofs and cornices. Here, in Europe during the Middle Ages, the emotional transports of a spiritual materialism produced as decorations for the forests of popular trees that were hewed into the rock of our cathedrals the rhythmic whorls of the vine, of the mystical rose and of the legendary hawthorn such as we see carved in the guipure of Sainte-Chapelle. But the requirements of the decorations were never sacrificed. In this respect the art of yesteryear is superior to living art.

The illustration should accompany the book as gesture or *décor*, and it might also add to it an element of visual poetry.

London, June 24, 1896