

THE LAMBETH MAZARINE TESTAMENT.

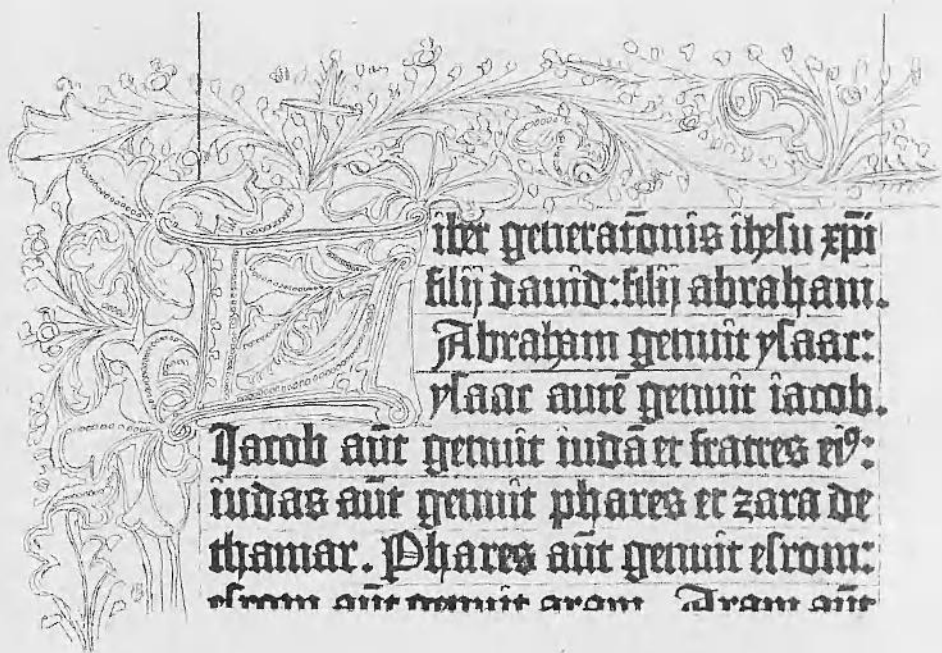
By the Rev. W. J. LOFTIE, F.S.A.

THE great obscurity which envelops the history of the invention of printing is well illustrated by the present volume.

We had occasion recently, under the guidance of Dr. Van der Linde's book on what he calls the "Haarlem Legend,"¹ to see how many collateral stories complicated the true story, and how hard a matter it has been to tell the true from the false. It is much better to make up our minds to the fact that the real history of the great invention is not known with any degree of certainty, and this, too, for a reason, which the discovery of the Testament at Lambeth puts prominently before us. It is this: The first printed books were made to look as like manuscripts as possible. They deceived the literary men of the 15th century, and they even deceived the bibliographers of the 18th century: the first, because they were not acquainted with printing, the second, because they were not thoroughly acquainted with writing of this character. We need not, therefore, be surprised to find that this book has always been reckoned at Lambeth as a manuscript, a fine manuscript, no doubt, but not in any way specially remarkable among the crowd of more curious, more magnificent, or more important manuscripts in the same noble collection. During some joint researches conducted by Mr. Kershaw, the librarian, and Mr. Sims, of the British Museum, the identity of the book with part of the Mazarine Bible in the Museum was established, although it had even deceived so acute an observer as the late Dr. Todd, and was named in his catalogue of the Archiepiscopal manuscripts.

The Mazarine Bible is the first edition of the Vulgate. That, at least, is the technical description, and includes these minor points:—that it is the first Bible printed, the first book printed with metal type, the first work of the first firm of

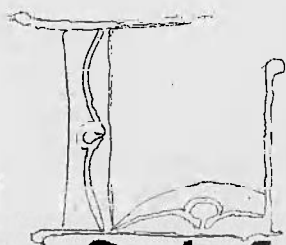
¹ Arch. Journ. vol. xxviii, p. 341.



liber generationis ihesu xpi
filij dauid: filij abraham.

Abraham genuit ysaac:
ysaac autē genuit iacob.

Iacob autē genuit iudā et fratres ei⁹:
iudas autē genuit phares et zara de
thamar. Phares autē genuit esrom:
esrom autē genuit aram. Aram autē



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printers, and therefore the most interesting printed volume, intrinsically, in existence. The name by which it is usually known is derived from a copy having been found and first identified, or recognised, in the library left by Cardinal *Mazarin*, by the celebrated *De Bure*, who died in 1782.

This work is generally believed to have been begun by Gutenberg in or about 1450, and, perhaps, carried to a conclusion by his partners, Fust and Schoiffer, from whom he separated in 1455, or earlier. We are thus able to approximate to the date of the Bible. The Paris National Library has a copy on vellum, in which the rubricator by whom the headings of the chapters and pages were supplied, has put his name in the last page, and the date at which he finished his work: "Henry Cramer, August, 1456." So that it must have been printed, or even finished, in or before 1455. *Trithemius* says in his Chronicle that he was told by Peter Schoiffer that this edition was executed about 1450; and there are one or two other early allusions to it, one of the earliest being by *John Schoiffer*, the son of Peter, in the colophon of his edition of *Trithemius*, 1515. We may, I think, safely conclude that the historians of printing are not wrong in making the assertions about this book with which I commenced; and I have only further to name Mentz as the probable place, perhaps. I may say with certainty, *the* place where it was printed. The cost of printing it must have been very great. According to one of the authorities named already it amounted before twelve sheets were finished to 4000 florins. But, as Fust seems to have foreseen, the cost was nothing in comparison with the price which Bibles fetched in MS. Fust is said to have gone to Paris and actually to have sold his Bibles there as MSS., and to have died in Paris of the plague in 1466. Be this as it may, we cannot but see a curious example of his success in the book before us, for there is every reason to suppose it was thus bought perhaps with a parcel of real MSS., and imported shortly afterwards to remain among MSS., and be itself reckoned as one for perhaps four centuries.

The entire book, of which the volume in the Lambeth Library is a part,² consisted of 641 leaves, according to Horne; but no two copies are quite alike, some having

² The volume was exhibited at the monthly meeting of the Institute, April 5, 1872.

additional matter not in others. Each page is printed in two columns, each column has forty-two lines, except the first nine, which have only thirty-nine, and the tenth which has only forty. There is no title-page, no paging, and there are no initial letters, except by the labour of the illuminator. The volume is unusually rich in this respect.

There are seven examples of the complete Bible on vellum, as well as this New Testament. Of these two are in England, the Grenville copy at the British Museum, and that which belongs to Mr. Henry Perkins. Nineteen copies are on paper. There is one in the Bodleian Library, and one in Lord Spencer's collection. Mr. Kershaw has kindly communicated the following exact description of the volume in his charge :—

“The Lambeth volume contains the New Testament only ; it consists of 128 leaves of pure white vellum, measuring 16 in. in length by 12 in. in breadth ; the margins being from $2\frac{3}{4}$ in. to 3 in. in width. The writing ‘*Novi testamenti versio vulgata Latina*’ on the fly-leaf is probably that of Bishop Gibson, who was chaplain and librarian to Archbishop Tenison. To Gibson, the Lambeth Library is indebted for the acquisition of the ‘*Codices Gibsoniani*,’ fourteen volumes in folio, and also for the compilation of the catalogue of printed books in that library. The special features of the Lambeth Mazarine Testament are as follows :—The text commences with the prologue of St. Jerome to the Gospel of St. Matthew, and ends upon the verso of fol. 128, with the rubricated words ‘*Expl’ Apocalypse.*’ The *incipits* and *explicits* are rubricated and written in by hand, as are likewise the names of the several books in the upper margins. The volume is richly ornamented with illuminated initial letters, both large and small, the latter in great profusion. The larger letters are usually upon a back ground of burnished gold, the body of the letter is composed of intertwining leaves, somewhat of an angular or Gothic character, and terminating in fruit or flowers. The outer margin of nearly every pattern is relieved with white, thus giving to the ornamental features of the volume a very brilliant and glittering appearance.

“At the period (1450) of the supposed printing of the Mazarine Bible, it is somewhat difficult to decide on the *style* of embellishment of the Lambeth volume. Foreign influ-

ences were then so greatly affecting the English school of illumination as to obscure established characteristics. But the bold floreated ornament with bracket borders, known as English 15th century art, together with the foliage interweaving with the gold bars, which separate the columns of text, tend with other features, to a decided opinion in favour of English workmanship. One point of a different character which gives much curious interest to the Lambeth volume, maintaining, at first sight, the illusion as to its being written by hand, is the fact that each page of the vellum had been prepared as though for the office of the scribe. Horizontal and perpendicular lines are ruled to guide the hand of the copyist, as was customary with mediæval MSS. From this circumstance it might be inferred that the present copy was among the earliest printed."

I have not been able to come to the same conclusion as Mr. Kershaw regarding the style of illumination. To my eyes it looks foreign—I should say Flemish. But I give this opinion with the utmost deference to superior authority.

Mr. Tupper, who has prepared the fac-simile which illustrates this article, has sent some very careful notes respecting the two copies of the Mazarine Bible in the British Museum, and this Lambeth Testament. From them I gladly extract the following :—

"In respect of the printing, there can be no doubt that the two Bibles in the British museum (the King's copy on paper, and the Grenville copy on vellum) and the Lambeth Testament were produced from the same types, and, so far as I have examined, the three *Testaments* are from the same setting of those types: my examination, however, has necessarily been very partial, and a side-by-side comparison might possibly show some exception in respect of the identity of setting. The propriety of this reservation will be evident when I mention that a portion of the 1st book of Kings in the King's copy, is not of the same edition (*i.e.* is not from the same setting of types) as the corresponding portion in the Grenville copy. This, I believe, has not before been noticed, despite the conspicuous fact of two rubrics in that portion of the King's copy being the only printed rubrics in the book. That the portion in question belongs to a *later* edition, seems a fair conclusion, but demands further investigation."

(Then follow remarks on the difference in size between

the printed matter of the paper and vellum copies, such difference being due to contraction of the latter substance, but identity of print not rendered questionable thereby : and facts warranting the conclusion that at least a considerable portion of the three copies belong to same edition.)

“Whilst the three copies of the Testament may be considered identical so far as the black or printed portion is concerned, the illuminations and rubrications (which are hand work) differ widely. The King’s copy has the name of each book rubricated at the head of the pages, the numerous unprinted capitals are inserted in red, and the printed capitals have the usual red vertical dash put on them. The “Incipit” and “Explicit” sentences to all the prologues and books are likewise rubricated. In the Old Testament portion, the headings are omitted from the Psalms, the large initials are ornamented, and three pages are boldly and not very elaborately illuminated with floreated scrolls, birds, &c., (the human form being in two instances introduced), the work, probably of a more religious than accomplished illuminator, judging from the fact of the illuminations to S. Jerome’s prologues being far less imposing than those to the Sacred Books themselves.

“The Grenville copy has the same portions rubricated as the King’s, save that there are no head-lines, neither are there any illuminations throughout the book, further than the substitution of blue for red in some of the capitals, and the large initials being put in in very simple devices of blue and red.

“The Lambeth copy, likewise, has the same portions rubricated as the King’s ; the head-lines have blue initials, and the illuminations, which are very numerous, are executed with great care and taste. There is no attempt at the human form, but the scroll-work, flowers, birds, &c., are well drawn, the gilding is brilliant and judiciously introduced, and the minute details are elaborately manipulated. Moreover, there are perpendicular and horizontal lines bounding the text or printed matter, and fine lines between the lines of print, *just as in old MSS.* And here is the gist of a comparison of the hand-work in the three copies. In the other two Testaments there has been no artistic effect attempted, whilst in this, I venture to think, every leaf shows the artist’s work. These ruled lines have not unreasonably been supposed to indicate that the vellum having been prepared for the scribe, was afterwards used for the new art of printing, and upon this hypothesis it would follow

that in all likelihood this copy was one of the, if not *the*, earliest printed. Now, if we have rightly concluded, that, at all events, some of the pages of the three copies belong to one series of impressions, the priority of printing cannot amount to much, and a side-by-side comparison might, if necessary, settle the matter; but assuming that the vellum had been ruled for the scribe and afterwards printed on, how does it happen that the page following the end of the Ep. to Coloss. which (doubtless in behoof of printing arrangements) is *un-printed* (in all the copies) is likewise *un-ruled*? Also, that a similar un-printed page at the end of Ep. of Jude (in all the copies), has merely the vertical margin lines ruled? Furthermore, the horizontal or writing lines (between the printed lines) in very many places, especially towards the end of the vol., are in parts of the pages omitted, a thing very unlikely to occur had the ruling been done on blank vellum: but what I conceive to be quite conclusive, is the fact that the lines are traceable in several instances *overlying* the print.

“Were these lines, then, ruled for the purpose of deception, for the purpose of passing a printed book as a MS.? I think not. Specimens of the new art would have been deemed much greater curiosities than MSS., and hence more valuable. However anxious the inventors and earliest practitioners of the art may have been to keep their *modus operandi* secret, they did not fail to draw attention to the wonder and beauty of their productions: Thus in 1457, (about the time perhaps when this book was being illuminated) Fust and Schoeffer, in the colophon to the well known Mentz Psalter, extol their work which was “*ad inventionem artificiosam imprimendi ac caracterizandi absque calami ulla exaratione sic affigiatus:*” and our own Caxton, in the first book printed in the English tongue, says: “Therfore I haue practysed and lerned at my grete charge and dispense to ordeyne this said book in prynte after the maner and forme as ye may here see, and is not wreton with penne and ynke as other bokes ben, to thende that euery man may haue them attones, ffor all the bookes of this storye named the recule of the historyes of troyes thus enpryntid as ye here see were begonne in oon day, and also fynysshid in oon day.” Having been his own scribe, that which naturally struck him as of peculiar value in “*prynte*,” was the fact that as many copies as he wanted were taken from each

successive portion of his book almost simultaneously : all the copies of the beginning were made in one day, and all the copies of the ending were made in one day.

“ If we would solve the mystery of these ruled lines, I think we must bear in mind that disguise—the *suppressio veri*—was not in the 15th century considered so necessary to the beautiful as it came to be afterwards : that *expression* and *meaning* were then, in fact, essentials of all works of art : that these lines (the very skeleton, so to speak, of MSS.) which were never attempted to be erased nor disguised, and which might, as it were, be *felt* guiding the hand of the scribe, would have been sorely missed by the æsthetic illuminator, and (why not ?) introduced by him for effect simply, though now functionless.

“ Touching the fac-simile ; the King’s (paper) copy has been chosen for comparison as the nearest presentment of the types ; accurate measurement shows a slight difference in size between it and the vellum copies. More printing-ink is taken up by paper than by vellum, and hence looks blacker. The type alone being the subject of comparison, a mere outline of the illumination is given. The character, as will be seen, is that of the German scribe of the period, but necessarily more uniform in appearance. The fact of our now using a character of print different from that of MS. may have given rise to a conclusion as to an attempt at fraudulent imitation not founded upon then existing conditions.”

As an additional fact, Mr. Tupper points out that the text is a close imitation of the finished hand of the German scribe of the time, but of course has a more uniform and heavier appearance, and that Caxton used a type extremely like it, both in form and size, for head lines and for a Book of Psalms.

It is certainly most curious to find that the deceptive efforts of the first printers have been successful for 400 years at least, and the congratulations of all antiquaries are to be offered to Mr. Kershaw on the very interesting discovery which has been made during his tenure of office at the Archiepiscopal Library.

I may take this opportunity of saying that the Lambeth Library is open to the public on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and that by the courtesy of the Librarian and the honorary officials, there is not the slightest difficulty about seeing this remarkable volume.