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DORAN BOOKS

Points of View

On Printing

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

A great deal of discussion about printing has been going on lately, not only in printing journals and magazines but also in clubs and at meetings of those interested in the various branches of the graphic arts. The liveliest topic of dispute at present is the comparative merits of modernistic and conservative practice of the art (a question on which I may some day be goaded into airing my own opinions, but not at the present writing).

So far the discussions, though interesting and well-informed, seem to me inconclusive and of little real value, principally because of the loose terminology employed. Such technical terms as *design*, *drawing*, *engraving*, *type*, *line*, *composition*, *character*, *cut*, *etching*, and many others, may all have double meanings and applications; and when used loosely and inaccurately, as they so frequently are, result in confusion and obscurity of meaning. We need a clearer definition of terms and a closer adherence to that definition.

The very word "printing" is itself employed with the most diverse implications, and no profitable discussion can be carried on unless there be some sort of agreement as to its scope and application.

What do we mean by "printing"?

The artist printer finds himself in the complex situation of the architect who must consider the accord between the suitability of his building and its actual external appearance, or of the poet who must combine what he says—the contents of his poem—with his verse forms. In all the arts—and that is why they are arts—there must be this adjustment to make a successful work. The final harmony of these independent properties is never obtained automatically or by rote, but by a miracle, or after vast effort, or rather by inspiration and effort combined.

A perfect book is both easy to read and beautiful to look at. Pleasure in the reading matter itself is enhanced by pleasure in its suitable frame. An excellent balance of black and white lessens the effort of reading and the eye unconsciously approves of both ensemble and details without being distracted by them.

The art of printing abounds in subtle difficulties, in delicate nuances unsuspected by the majority of people. The masters of this art work with enthusiasm and devotion to satisfy a select few. One may reproach an author with a meticulousness that cuts him off from appreciation by the masses, but not a printer. Stendhal quotes an exaggerated case—the great Bodoni, a master printer, who spent six months looking for a single line of capitals to put on a title-page of Boileau-Despreaux!

To sum up, a beautiful book should first be an efficient instrument; it should be legible and easy to read. It may at the same time be a work of art, with a beauty and personality of its own.

Typographical work permits no improvisations. It is the ripe fruit of experiment—the result of an art which preserves only the successful trials and rejects the rough drafts and sketches.

The press holds up a mirror to the author in which he may see himself clearly. If the paper, type, and composition are carefully chosen and harmonious, the author sees his work in a new guise. He may feel keen pride or shame. He hears a firmer, more detached voice than his own—an implacably just voice—articulating his words. Everything weak, trivial, arbitrary, or in bad taste that he has written is pointed up and comes out in clear relief. It is at once a lesson and a splendid thing to be beautifully printed.

Some writers evidently mean strictly the making of books of literature, art, or science; others broaden this use to the inclusion of catalogues, advertisements, or anything else in book form; still others doubtless have in mind all the miscellaneous products of the press—pamphlets, broadsides, posters, advertising pages in periodicals and newspapers—all usually devoted to selling something.

It is obvious that, beyond a few basic ones, the same principles cannot possibly govern all these multifarious uses to which art is put, even though the technical processes be more or less identical; and I would plead, as I said, for a clearer definition of terms and more discriminating and intelligent use of them if we are ultimately to derive any benefit from either side of the argument. Could not a committee com-

posed of printers and designers, and at least one philologist, undertake to draw up and publish a set of definitions applicable to modern methods and processes that would not conflict with the older standard meanings of the terms used?

As a model of conciseness and admirably clear thinking along this very line, I would call your attention to a short paper, "The Dual Virtues of a Book," which Paul Valéry, of the French Academy, has contributed to the first number of the new French journal, *Arts et Métiers Graphiques, Paris*. In it he deals with printing as the interpreter of literature, i.e., bookmaking; but in the same issue there is another paper, "The Catalogue as a Work of Art," in which Jean Luc considers it as applied to advertising, ("publicity" is, I believe, the polite term). The two articles taken together present an admirable exposition of the subject as a whole. They follow this letter.

Though it is perhaps too much to expect that any of our own Academicians will interest themselves in so minor an art, some of our American writers on the subject may well study these papers with profit.

BRUCE ROGERS.

New Fairfield, Conn.

Virtues of a Book

BOOKS may appeal to us in two separate, distinct ways, says M. Paul Valéry, the well-known modern poet.

First, they may be entirely utilitarian, easy to read. If they are clear and legibly printed they facilitate the actual task of reading. Our eyes follow one line and leap to another easily, without interruption, and the thoughts roused by the writer flow in without check. Legibility allows the mind to more readily seize upon and digest the text.

Books may also be beautiful in themselves. A page may exist as an entity, be attractive or ugly, well spaced, or badly spaced, as a separate work of art. Each page presents a system of design in black and white. The impression it gives must be considered as a whole, just as one would consider the unified impression given by an etching.

A book then on the one hand, should be an instrument of clear vision, to facilitate, not interrupt, the flow of ideas; on the other hand, it may in itself be a thing of beauty, endowed with its own particular ability to please or displease our sense of taste.

Text as a succession of words and text as pieces of type are two entirely distinct beings. It is not possible to consider both phases at the same moment; attention to one precludes attention to the other. There are many very handsome books which do not invite reading. They exist as artistic masses of black on a white field, but their decorative letters are difficult to make out. Modern literature is not well suited to this too ornate style, dear to German and English texts, nor does it adapt itself successfully to the more archaic forms which copy the style of the fifteenth and sixteenth century letterpress.

In the combination of these totally independent qualities which a book may possess, lies the art of printing. But when printing wishes to respond to the simple need of easy reading it need not necessarily be done by artists. The printer may follow certain mechanical rules which inevitably produce a clear and legible text. When he wishes to combine readability with beauty, he must experiment, and he becomes at once an artist.

The Catalogue As Art

A catalogue that is well got up and that answers its purpose exactly deserves to be called a work of art just as a book. What is the aim of a catalogue? To induce sales. To do so it must first of all find favor, it has to be a well-introduced ambassador, it must have a magnificent appearance, have breeding. It will be read with all the more faith as it displays visual eloquence, that is to say, as it makes use of typographical surprise.

The catalogue has more liberties than the book. The latter is bound by tradition, and sobriety is often its distinction. As for the catalogue, its liberties are unlimited; for graphic arts in general it opens up a new field to all darings. It can be considered, from a certain standpoint, as the music-hall of typography.

There is a general tendency to consider

(Continued on page 271)

The AMEN CORNER

THE WHIRLPOOLS and eddies of the summer stream have at last gently dropped the Oxonian again on the strand of the publishing world. All the other recalcitrants of Indian summer holidays are there before him:—the Publisher's Young Man, tragically noble after a bad heart attack on the Maine Coast; Young Harvard, with features still ruddy from hatless days at Forest Hills and fiesta nights on West Twelfth Street; and above all Pamela, nicely tanned and six pounds the worse after untold but suspected adventures up-country.

About the Publishers' Building at 35 West 32nd Street is an aura of renewed endeavor. Mixed bags of new publications are daily emptied upon our library table, the advance agents of a Christmas company. The Oxonian, impresario of books, cannot do better than introduce these handsome heralds of whatever new the realms of thought may hold.

Enter first an impressive newcomer whose arrival has long been trumpeted, *The Oxford Book of American Verse*. Bliss Carman is the anthologist, and few modern collections will wear so well. The form and price will be similar to the other Oxford Books of Verse; publication is promised before Christmas.⁽¹⁾

Within the next few weeks the Oxford University Press will publish *American Mystery Stories*, selected with an introduction by Carolyn Wells. Even the unemotional flesh of the Inner Sanctum Potentate crept visibly when its august owner read proof of these stories. An ideal book for the train or the rainy Sunday, (the price but One Fifty!). American Detective Stories will follow!⁽²⁾

Not all phases of the popular interest in crime should be encouraged, but when a scholar like Boris Brasol, former Prosecuting Attorney in St. Petersburg, (we nearly said Petrograd!) writes a book on *The Elements of Crime*, authorities take notice, and the common reader wisely purchases and is edified.⁽³⁾

The Legacy of Israel (which is one of the most handsome books for the money the Oxonian has seen) wins high praise in exalted places. No similar study of the effect of Jewish culture on civilization exists, and none is likely to rival it for years to come.⁽⁴⁾

In the field of religious study there are few names more universally honored than that of Friedrich Heiler. The Oxford Press is about to publish an English translation of Heiler's book on *Sadhu Sindar Singh*, the Modern Indian mystic. A translation of Heiler's *Das Gebet*, that unequalled study of prayer, will appear later.⁽⁵⁾

Miss Ryllis Alexander, the editor of the new *Garrick Diary*, which will soon emerge handsomely in a limited edition, uncovered this interesting document while working for her Doctorate at Yale. She offers a brief account of this Diary (hitherto unpublished) in the last number of the Yale Review.⁽⁶⁾

Two new volumes have been added to the Oxford Reading Courses, now in preparation. These are *The Essay*, by M. Edmund Spenser, and *Biography*, by A. C. Valentine. They may be bought separately for One Dollar each, or secured in connection with the accompanying volumes. The Oxford Press will give full information.⁽⁷⁾

The Oxford Best Seller for 1927 will probably be *Modern English Usage*,⁽⁸⁾ but the American *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*⁽⁹⁾ and Rostovtzeff's *History of the Ancient World*⁽¹⁰⁾ will be close seconds. And there are still various pre-Christmas tricks hidden up our scholarly sleeves!

The recent interest in Colonel Isham's purchase of Boswell material has made us turn again to *Boswell's Note-book*,⁽¹¹⁾ that convenient and too little known volume edited by R. W. Chapman.

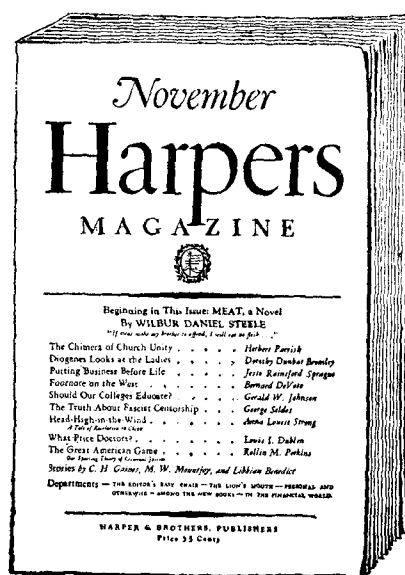
Perhaps the most attractive gift book for the Fall is *Architectural Design in Concrete*,⁽¹²⁾ A hundred full page plates depict new designs in concrete the world over, and the text by T. P. Bennett is not only authoritative but interesting.

Corrado Ricci, the famous Italian art critic, has written a book on the Lombard country-side and its artists. The English translation, with handsome off-set illustrations, has just emerged from its publisher at 35 West 32nd Street. The title is *Umbria Santa*,⁽¹³⁾—but be not discouraged by that, for it is a charming and delightful book even for you and me. The publisher's Young Man is going to give one to Pamela, who has been very high-hat of late!

"High-hat" is a bad word. Once used, it owns a man forever, and he can think of no other!

—THE OXONIAN.

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MEAT

By **WILBUR DANIEL STEELE**

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