

THE JOHN M. WING FOUNDATION OF THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY.

BY E. E. SHELDON.



WITH the city ideally located and fast becoming the printing center of this country, it was no mere coincidence that led a Chicago publisher to establish in Chicago a foundation for a great library on printing. It was the vision of John M. Wing that led him to leave his fortune to establish a library as an inspiration and a joy to the workers in the industry greatest in the world in its far reaching influences and effects upon civilization. Equally happy was his choice of the Newberry Library to be the home of the Foundation. The library was already rich in material of interest to lovers of the art of printing.

John Mansir Wing was born April 17, 1845, at Ferndale, Oswego County, New York, and died at the Auditorium Hotel, Chicago, March 14, 1917. After a few terms at Pulaski Academy in New York, he became a printer's devil and later a compositor, serving on newspapers in Rome and Utica, New York. Finally he became a proofreader and an editorial writer. In August of 1865 he came to Chicago. After he had worked nine years for the *Chicago Times*, arrangements were made for him to take the son of the editor of the *Boston Herald* around the world. After returning from this trip, Mr. Wing founded the *Land Owner*, which he was running at the time of the Chicago fire. After the fire he went to New York, and in some trunks brought back enough material to keep his paper running. He had eight very successful years with this journal. Later he started another paper called the *Western Brewer*. He retired

at the age of forty-three, and for the last twenty-nine years of his life he was a traveler as well as a collector of books.

Through the interest of Horace H. Martin, a book lover and lawyer in Chicago, Mr. Wing was persuaded several years before his death to enter into an arrangement with the trustees of the Newberry Library, whereby he was to leave his property to the Newberry Library for the establishment of a memorial collection to be known as the John M. Wing Foundation, and the trustees were to provide him with a private room in the library building where he could keep and use his private collection. Here Mr. Wing took up extra illustration, and, following this hobby, passed his later years in bookish seclusion. As he was a bachelor without near relatives, no family ties were ignored when he left by will practically all of his estate to the Newberry Library, with the direction that "the income from this bequest be used for the purchase of books which treat of the history and development of the arts of printing, engraving and book illustration from the date of the introduction into Europe of the art of printing with type. . . ."

He left the library approximately \$250,000, the income of which will be available for the purchase of books. He also left his own private collection of books to be preserved as a personal memorial of the founder. These books are mostly of antiquarian interest only. Not many of them are connected directly with typographical matter, either in their text or physical make up. The income has been available for over a year. Last year nothing was done in connection with the Foundation except to purchase a certain number of books. On the first of January, 1920, a custodian was appointed, Pierce Butler, who has devoted his life to a study of books. Plans are rapidly being matured for the rearrangement of the matter in a special exhibition room, which will be a mecca for students of printing. So far as the material goes there is already available a group of

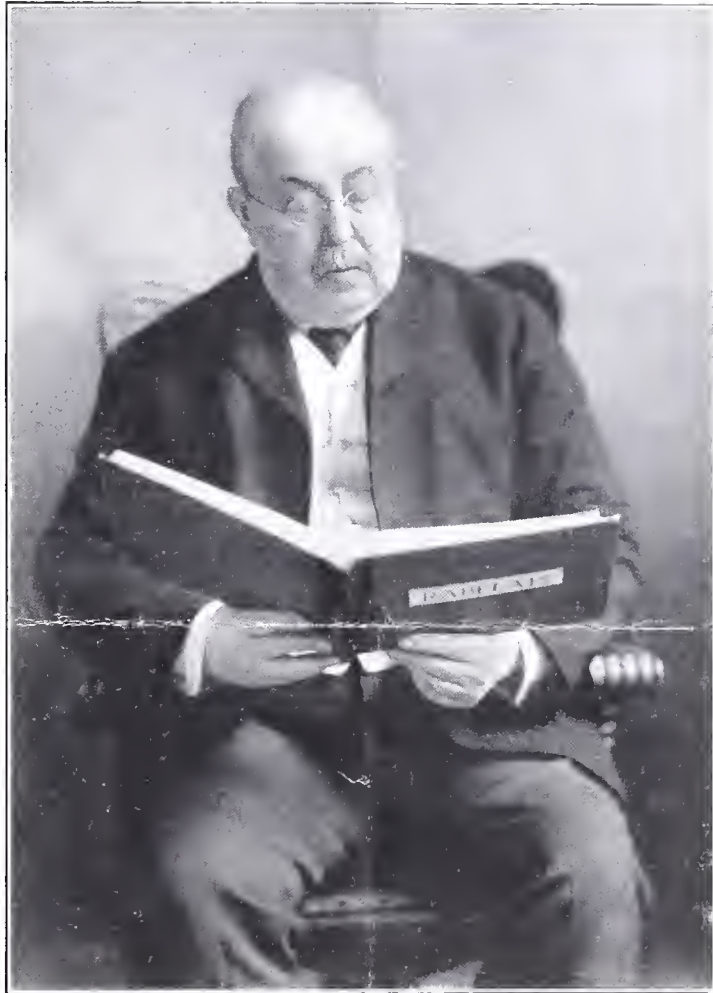
examples of fine printing more representative than is available anywhere else in Chicago. The library has 306 books printed before 1500 A. D., including the work of such famous masters as Peter Schoeffer, Nicholas Jenson, the Aldines, Elzevirs and Plantins, Stephanus, Froeben and others. The Wing Foundation has bought most heavily of the work of William Morris' Kelmscott Press and that of his followers, the Doves, Ashendene, Vale and Riccardi Presses. But most notable of all its acquisitions, perhaps, are nearly three hundred volumes purchased from the private library of Theodore L. De Vinne, which was recently sold at auction in New York. Many of these books contain marginal notes and other marks of De Vinne's patient study.

The following paragraphs taken from a memorandum prepared by Mr. Butler will show the lines on which the collections will probably be developed:

"In its particular field of the typographic arts, the John M. Wing Foundation should be what the Newberry Library is in the broader realm of general

culture. Concerning itself with the humanities of typography, this Foundation will avoid on the one hand the empirical limitation of the artizan and on the other the finical niceties of the dilettante, to devote itself whole heartedly to the accumulation of such things as will instruct, correct and inspire the makers and users of books in the higher aspects of typographic art. Loyalty to this ideal will require no austere refusal to receive into the collections treatises on mechanical processes or curiosities of printing. These will have their place, but they must be acquired and used with a frank recognition of their subordination to other and higher matters.

"There is need of such an institution in Chicago. In connection with the trade schools, and elsewhere, there are adequate collections of the literature covering modern printing practice. The Caxton Club and other agencies offer ample guidance for the collector of rarities and curiosities. But nowhere, in this city or in its surrounding territory, is there a typographical library built on a solid foundation of critical scholarship, where



John M. Wing.



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an advanced student may find adequate resources for his studies. If the Wing Foundation is to supply the needs of such students, its collections must be developed along three distinct lines. On the historical side it must accumulate all the 'sources' and the more important secondary works relating to the invention, spread and development of printing during its earlier years. It must also acquire collections illustrative of the work of every printer or press down to the present day whose work is of real significance for the subsequent course of the art. On the theoretical side the Foundation must cover, both by examples and criticisms, the problems of artistic composition involved in such matters as letter construction, page proportions and arrangement, ornament, illustrations and the like. And finally, it must offer, as a source of inspiration to typographical workers, a collection of fine examples of the best work that has been accomplished in every important branch of printing. . . .

"Another matter which may be worth considering at the present time is the question of incunabula. Dealers' catalogues, as well as many collectors, seem to find in that word alone ample proof of the entire desirability of any particular example of the class. Yet the mere fact that a volume is an incunabulum, which may mean no more than that it was printed in December, 1500, and not in January, 1501, is by no means a sufficient hall-mark of its bibliographical or typographical worth. The Wing Collection can not hope ever to have a copy of every 'cradle book' extant. The number of them, to say nothing of their prices, prevents such an inclusion. . . . An incunabulum may have a value for its historical features. We have a list, practically complete, of all the early books which are original documents in the history of printing. The Newberry Library already possesses the greater number of those whose market values are within our reach. There are, of course, a number of others which we can never hope to obtain, but the historical value of reliable facsimiles of these will be almost as great as that of the originals. The acquisition of such facsimiles should be made a part of the Wing program.

"Or again, an incunabulum may have what for the lack of a better term I have called a critical value. By this I mean the evidence of *why* the problems of design have been more successfully worked out by one line of development than another. Now the problems of design in typography relate to the forms of letter and page, ornament, and illustration. The Wing Foundation should include for each of these a select and comprehensive series of examples which will enable a student of these matters to attain a clear understanding of their origins, development and variations. Of these problems, that of letter form is undoubtedly the most complicated. The work of the earliest printers has a two fold value for the student; each craftsman designed his own letters with very little regard for what other men were doing and, moreover, these independent designs arose in an age when letter forms were still in a flexible state. If any particular designer had not himself been a manuscript scribe he was accustomed to handling the work of scribes. Indeed, he had probably learned to read from a written volume. Now, in pen work no two examples of the same letter were exactly alike; a skilled writer unconsciously

modified the letter slightly into conformity with the rest of the word in which it appeared. But the printer has recourse to no such process. His types for any letter are identical in form, so in designing them he has to make them in such way that a printed page will be smooth in tone and in texture. His m's must not be so fat and his l's so thin that from a little distance the one would show on the page as black specks and the other as white holes. The tails of his y's must not be so conspicuous as to disfigure the page with a series of diagonal dashes. And so on through a thousand details. The early printers faced these problems no less than do modern type designers, but because the former lived in an age when letters

were still plastic, they were, in the main, more successful than are their present day successors. Thus, their work represents a wealth of material that can nowhere else be found for a study of what is a good type face and what is not. Even their errors are significant. I believe that the Wing Foundation should ultimately include, in facsimile where necessary but in originals where possible, examples of every important type used during the first three generations of printers.

"Finally, an incunabulum may have an esthetic value. The early printers were craftsmen in every sense of the word. Their work was produced from beginning to end by processes which were under the direct personal supervision of the master, if they were not actually performed by his hands. If he was an artist and had mastered his technique, the books he produced were works of art. As such they possess an inspirational value for all who can use them. In the history of fine printing it is a noteworthy fact that nearly every worker who has produced beautiful results has been a careful student of



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the work of these early printers. The Wing Foundation should have examples of the works of all the greater printers, and it should have examples of each printer in sufficient numbers so that the student shall be enabled not only to study his mannerisms in one piece of work but the spirit of his productions.

"Indeed, the same principle should hold in the selection of illustrative examples from any press. Our collection of Kelmscott books is a case in point. One often hears it said of the Morris books that 'when one has seen three of the books he has seen all.' I do not believe this. As an artist William Morris was not only a great man but a peculiar and a restless one. His printed books record ever new experiments, and, it must be confessed, a series of overemphases on each method as it was introduced. A serious student of the work of the Kelmscott Press must know something of the whole series if he is to understand the significance of any particular example."

Mr. Butler during the past three years had charge of the Book Selection Department at the Newberry Library. His experience thus fits him for the work of the new Foundation, since the present task of its keeper will be to purchase widely in the whole field of typographical literature. Familiarity with the old and rare book trade is thus, for the present at least, more important than a practical knowledge of modern shop practice. Mr. Butler, so far from being a printer, is purely a scholar; he was graduated from a Massachusetts high school, Dickinson College, Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University and Hartford Seminary.

