

EARLY PRINTING AT LYONS.¹

THE early-printed books of Lyons have hitherto been imperfectly studied, and many passed unidentified; although it was at Lyons that the first printed book in the French language, 'Les Merveilles du monde,'² appeared, and also the first illustrated book printed in France, 'Le Mirouer de la Rédemption de l'umain lignage,' which is dated Aug. 26, 1478. Many of these Lyons incunabula are, moreover, of such extreme rarity that they are little known, and not to be seen without a special pilgrimage to some distant land; so that the third volume of M. Claudin's monumental work on French printing, which deals with them, has been eagerly awaited. It proves even more interesting, more rich, and more magnificent than was expected even by those who had seen the proof-sheets, which, with ungrudging and chivalrous generosity, M. Claudin had placed at the service of workers in the same field, long before the publication of the book. Large as it is, however, this volume includes, it is

¹ 'Histoire de L'Imprimerie en France' . . . par A. Claudin. Tom. III. (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale.)

² This book is without date; but on typographical grounds is considered earlier than 'La legende doree,' printed in the same type, which is dated 18th April, 1476, *i.e.*, nine months earlier than the 'Grandes Chroniques de France,' printed at Paris 16th January, 1477 (1476 old style).

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understood, not more than half M. Claudin's materials on the subject of the early Lyons presses. This part of the work, planned originally for a single volume of the great History, grew so much as it advanced, that the author found himself obliged to allot two to it, of which the second is still to come. As the present instalment contains the account of only sixteen presses, connected with twenty-one printers' names, while Mr. Proctor's list of Lyons presses, before 1500, runs to thirty-nine, and M. Rondot's list of Lyons printers to two hundred and thirty-six, it is evident that much compression and omission will still be required to keep even to two volumes.

The first thing that strikes the eye in the book is its wealth of illustration; it is magnificent even as a picture-book. There are twelve full-page reproductions in gold and colours, mostly of pages of printed books, illuminated by hand after the fashion of manuscripts. One of them, however, is a very interesting reproduction from a manuscript of the early sixteenth century, in the Bibliothèque nationale. It represents the interior of a printing establishment, and shows five men engaged in five various employments, setting the type, inking the pads, working the press, folding the sheets, and reading the proofs. Beside these coloured pages, there is an infinite number of facsimiles, occurring on almost every page, of founts of type, pages of letterpress, and woodcuts or other illustrations. As many of these are drawn from books of the utmost rarity, it is evident that they have an unusual interest and a great working value. The volume is indeed a mine

of wealth to future workers, besides its own value as a history.

Among other things its publication should certainly rouse some one to supplement the extremely valuable work of M. Rondot by studying thoroughly and in detail the subject of the earliest Lyons woodcuts, a subject of much interest as showing the development of a native French style out of purely German origins. The first illustrations in Lyons books were either copied from German woodcuts or printed from the actual blocks which had been cut and already used in Germany.¹ Both are found in the 'Mirouer de la Rédemption.' Mathieu Husz, himself a German, not only employed woodblocks brought from Augsburg, but also got woodcutters from there to work for him at Lyons. And in some of the earliest cuts designed specially to illustrate French works printed there, as the series of eighty-six small cuts to the first edition of the 'Roman de la Rose,' it seems possible to see a French artist combined with a German woodcutter. The cuts to Julien Macho's 'Exposition de la Bible' (some of which are reproduced by M. Claudin), appear to be by the same artist or woodcutter, or perhaps both. The first woodcut supposed to have been designed and cut at Lyons is, however, finer than these, and shows a different style. This is the admired 'Virgin and Child' from the 'Histoire du Chevalier Oben,' of which the only known copy is in the British Museum, its importance and interest having been first perceived by Mr.

¹ Including the north of Switzerland, which, as M. Rondot remarks, *était alors pour nous l'Allemagne.*

Proctor. M. Claudin gives a beautiful reproduction of it.

There is an important series of woodcuts which M. Claudin appears to claim for Lyons, which are, however, undoubtedly of German origin. These are the large cuts, originally sixty-five in number, to illustrate the story of Melusine. The German 'Melusina,' in which they first appeared (Hain, 11063), is a rare book, and has no date, place, or printer's name. It has been attributed to various printers and places, among others to Bernhard Richel of Basle, others of whose blocks certainly came to Lyons. The type appears in many of the letters to be identical with his, but some of the capitals show differences. Muther ('Die Deutsche Bücher-Illustration') gives specimens in facsimile of both the type and the cuts, and attributes the book to Basle or Ulm, dating it conjecturally 'about 1485.' This is assuredly too late. M. Claudin gives reproductions of three of the illustrations from three separate Lyons editions in which they appeared, the supposed earliest of which, bearing the names of Ortuin and Schenck, he dates conjecturally about 1483.¹ There is an edition of the French 'Melusine,' published by Adam Steinschaber at Geneva in 1478, with woodcuts, which M. Claudin says he has compared carefully with those in the Lyons editions, and he asserts positively that the latter are reversed copies of the Genevan cuts. But as he was, apparently, unaware of the German book, he may possibly not have been on the look-out for indications as to which way the

¹ The others bear the names of G. Le Roy and Mathieu Husz respectively. All three are of the utmost rarity.

copying had been. Unfortunately the Genevan edition is also exceedingly rare, only one perfect copy being known, that in the library at Wolfenbüttel. But were it practicable to bring this and the German edition together it might be possible to decide the priority. A minute study of the details depicted might reveal which set of illustrations was designed to fit the story, and which merely followed the former designs,—the first and second series of the ‘*Roman de la Rose*’ illustrations are clearly distinguishable by this means. The number of illustrations in the German book is sixty-five, in the Genevan only sixty-three, and the latter appears to be also the number of those in the *Le Roy* edition of Lyons.¹ In any case it is certain that the German edition is earlier than the Lyons editions with the same cuts. For in the Bodleian copy there are, besides small cracks, three or four cases of conspicuous damage in the wood block, where the German cuts are intact. It would be interesting to compare the state of these cuts in the Ortuin and Schenck edition which M. Claudin considers earlier than the *Le Roy*. But even if they were undamaged in that, it is evident that the German edition must have been printed before the blocks came to Lyons at all. These two Lyons editions appear to correspond page for page, and must have been printed very shortly one after the other. For a full study of the question no doubt the *Bämter* (German) edition, Augsburg, 1480, with seventy-four cuts, would have to be consulted also.

¹ Four of the cuts in the Bodleian copy appear to be supplied in facsimile from a different series of *Melusine* illustrations, so that an exact collation by its means is impossible.

It will be seen, then, that M. Claudin has rather opened out than exhausted the field with regard to the woodcuts and illustrated books of Lyons. On the other hand he has left little, if anything, for a supplementary worker to add to his analysis and determination of the various founts of type. This is, of course, the province which M. Claudin has made specially his own, and for which he has that aptitude of eye, a combination of instinct and training, which was also the pre-eminent endowment of the late Mr. Proctor. It is pleasant to note the *entente cordiale* that existed between these two labourers in the same field, and it cannot but be gratifying to Mr. Proctor's fellow-countrymen to observe how often his name is quoted, and what weight is attached to his authority in this volume. There are many books without place, date, or printer's name, which M. Claudin, with his intimate knowledge of types and wide acquaintance with incunabula, has been able to identify as the work of this or that Lyons printer. There are few more interesting—or even fascinating—pages in this volume than those in which M. Claudin shows the probability that a particular type, found in a small number of works in Latin and French, all without date or printer's name, is that of Gaspard Ortuin; and the collection of the constructive evidence of the date and place of these books must have been as exciting work as it is interesting reading. Thus in a copy of one work, the 'Boece de Consolation,' at Dresden, the rubricator has himself added the date 1481; in a copy of another, the 'Liber de Casu Trojae,' in M. Claudin's own possession, there is a

manuscript note dated 3rd May, 1486, showing that the book is certainly anterior to that;¹ while as to the place, there is a third book in this type, the first edition of the 'Roman de la Rose,' of which the Bibliothèque Nationale possesses a copy bearing a manuscript note in a fifteenth-century hand, to show that it then belonged to a lady at Lyons.

The labour of accumulating such a mass of material as is found in this volume, and from such widely scattered quarters, must have been very great, and it could have been carried out by no one in whom the aptitude for distinguishing type just mentioned was not united with an infinite capacity for taking pains. M. Claudin has spared no trouble to run a book to earth, on the slightest hint of its existence, and though he modestly attributes one of his most fortunate finds to 'la hasard, cette providence des bibliophiles,' it may safely be said that neither chance nor providence would have thus befriended any searcher less keen and experienced.

If it be necessary to add a word of criticism, or rather of suggestion, it might be complained that the material in this volume—as indeed in the two former—is hardly sufficiently digested; the same book will be found mentioned, with important details, in several different parts, often without reference back or forward; and fact follows fact, and detail detail, often without any particular method or order. Hence, in using the book as a work of

¹ On the (modern) binding of a copy from the Heber collection is the date 1487. There is nothing in the book itself to suggest this date. It seems probable that before the book was rebound the date was present somewhere in the old binding or flyleaves.

reference, it is sometimes extremely difficult to light upon what is wanted. No doubt when the great work is finally completed there will be a copious index. But as that time must be still some years distant, it would be an immense advantage if, at the end of the next volume, an index could be added, either to the Lyons part only, or to the whole four volumes of Lyons and Paris together. Were this done in detail—say, as minutely as the wonderful indices to ‘Dom Bouquet’—the usefulness of this invaluable work would be immensely increased. Were it further possible to arrange on a few pages together all the alphabets of various types which are scattered in such profusion through the volumes, so that type could be compared with type, and a comprehensive view of all obtained at one glance, the added debt of a bibliophile’s gratitude would indeed be impossible to pay.

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