CAMBRIDGE PRINTING¹

JAN VAN SIBERCH, or Siborch, began issuing books from the first press set up at Cambridge in 1521, and the four-hundredth anniversary of his start is here celebrated by Mr. G. J. Gray in a pamphlet on Siberch himself and by Mr. S. C. Roberts by a general survey of the work done not only by Siberch but by the later printers, who were really printers to the University. To settle the order in which the few books which proceeded from Siberch's press in 1521 and 1522 were produced was the piece of work on which Henry Bradshaw was engaged at the time of his death, and his paper on the subject, as completed by Mr. Jenkinson, was prefixed to a facsimile of the first of them (Henry Bullock's Latin speech when Cardinal Wolsey visited Cambridge), still purchasable from Messrs. Bowes & Bowes at the modest price of five shillings. Mr. Gray, who has already written twice on Siberch in supplement of Bradshaw, here records once more the discovery by Mr. Duff at the Chapter-house Library at Westminster Abbey of two leaves of an edition of Lily's Grammar in Siberch's types and a letter to Siberch from Peter Kaetz, Mr. Bowes's discovery at Dublin of a variant state of the Galen, and the acquisition by Dr. J. F. Payne of copies of both states bound in a single volume which he gave to the College of Physicians, with other minor

¹ *John Siberch, the first Cambridge Printer, 1521-1522.* By GEORGE J. GRAY. In *Commemoration of the Four-hundredth Anniversary of Printing in Cambridge.* Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1921, pp. 25. Price 2s. 6d. net.

A History of the Cambridge University Press, 1521-1921. By S. C. ROBERTS. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1921, pp. xv, 190. Price 17s. 6d. net.

points. His pamphlet thus has not very much that is new in it, but it brings together what is known of Siberch in a convenient form and is a highly suitable commemoration of the fourth centenary of his press.

Mr. Roberts also begins with an account of Siberch and his activities which owes something to Mr. Gray, but also contains some features of its own, such as the notes on the extant copies of the books Siberch printed; but the bulk of his book is concerned with the later history of printing at Cambridge. In 1534 the University obtained a charter empowering it to appoint three stationers and printers with powers to sell and print such books as the University approved. Five years earlier the University had petitioned for the right to appoint three booksellers, and Mr. Roberts is no doubt right in connecting this petition with the charter of 1534. It may be suggested, however, that the charter should also be connected with the Act subsequently passed in that year which withdrew the special privileges granted in the reign of Richard III for the importation of books, the reason alleged being that English printers were now sufficiently expert to print all the books needed. It might almost be guessed, indeed, that the addition of printing rights to the bookselling rights asked for by the University came from the royal initiative to help pave the way for the contemplated Act. If the University had really desired printing rights it would hardly have refrained from using them, as it did for forty-nine years, an attempt to set John Kingston printing at Cambridge in 1576 being abandoned at Burghley's request, and the first printer to the University only at last appointed by grace of 3 May 1583.

Thomas Thomas, Fellow of King's College, though the Bishop of London was probably justified in calling him 'a man utterlie ignoraunte in printinge', brought to the Press his own Latin dictionary and thus did much to justify

its existence, and with better health and longer life might have made it a credit to the University. His death in 1588 was a real misfortune, as the University replaced him by a London printer, John Legate, and thus inaugurated a system of which Mr. Roberts (who curiously dates it from the Charter of 1534) writes, in connexion with the reforms instituted in 1696 :

Under that system the university simply licensed tradesmen (who might or might not be members of the university) to print and sell books ; and the proper working of the Press was dependent on the capabilities of the individual printer. He might be bullied by the London Stationers, as were Thomas Thomas and John Legate (the elder), and involve the university in a long series of petitions and counter petitions ; on the other hand he might make commercially profitable arrangements with the Stationers' Company, as did Thomas Buck, and disregard the interests of the university ; he might accept the office with no intention of printing, but simply in the interests of a family monopoly, as did Francis Buck ; or he might neglect his duties altogether, as did John Legate, the younger. Consequently, the standard of typography, the expansion of the Press buildings, and the purchase of new type were at the mercy of the commercial fortunes of the holders of the patents.

The indictment is a severe one, and Mr. Roberts himself supplies plenty of material which could be used in extenuation, but substantially it is true, and with some such thoughts in his mind the Duke of Somerset as Chancellor, presumably at the instigation of Richard Bentley, in 1696, urged the University to do better. By grace of 21 January 1697 the first Press syndicate was formed, and the management of the Press was confided to the Vice-Chancellor, the Heads of Houses, the Professors, and twelve other members of the University, with a committee, which seems to have changed every month, to look after details !

By 1725, we are told, 'the driving power of Bentley's energy and enthusiasm was flagging,' and for the next thirteen years 'there are no entries in the Curators' minute book'. The chief cause 'of the failure of the Press to fulfil

'the high hopes of 1696' appears, in the words of Bentley's biographer (J. H. Monk),

to have been the want of a permanent committee of management, a measure which, however obvious, was not adopted till many years afterwards. In the meantime the disbursement of large sums of money, as well as the necessary negotiations with persons of business, were entrusted to the individuals holding the annual office of Vice-Chancellor, who in many cases possessed no previous acquaintance with the concern; a system which inevitably led to injurious and almost ruinous consequences.

Mr. Roberts is not very communicative as to the means by which this second unhappy 'system' was reformed. On the last page of his narrative he tells us that 'the government of the Press by a body of Syndics appointed by the Senate of the university has, with certain important modifications, persisted since 1698,' but it is not clear what these 'important modifications' were, though we are told that 'the constitution of the Syndicate has been more than once revised—notably in 1782 and 1855—and the length of a Syndic's tenure of office varied from time to time'. There are now, in addition to the Vice-Chancellor, fourteen Syndics, holding office for seven years, and a permanent Secretary, first appointed in 1892. The importance of the permanent Secretary can hardly be over-estimated, and the better fortunes of the Press since 1737 are no doubt largely due to the better type of men appointed to the office of University printer. But the management of the press of a great university is a matter of no small interest, and more details as to its history during the last two centuries would have been welcome.

If Mr. Roberts's book is slightly disappointing in respect of the history of the management of the Press, it has plenty of interesting information. The story of the struggle of the University against the Stationers' Company is considerably augmented, and though Mr. Roberts is inclined to apologize

for giving so much space to it the details are really important. Personally, I am especially grateful for it as the evident reluctance of the University to set cumbrous machinery in motion to right its wrongs makes it easy to understand why such a much less influential class as actors might be willing to suffer small wrongs rather than worry their patron to right them. Other important episodes are those of the Bible-printing done at the Press (or leased out to Londoners), Baskerville's tenure of office, and the experiments in stereo-typing. Great gratitude is due for the short-title list of books printed at Cambridge up to the close of 1750. It will be very useful, and every additional year for which it can be given will be a gain. In fact, the only fault I am inclined to find with Mr. Roberts's book is that there is not more of it.

It only remains to say that it is very well printed, in a style which shows the influence of Mr. Bruce Rogers's engagement as typographical adviser to the Press during his too brief stay in England, and to wish the Press every success.

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