

ROBERT PROCTOR'S WORK.

IN the short memoir of Robert Proctor which appeared in the last number of 'The Library,' my main object was, with the help of some of his earlier friends, to give to those who knew and honoured him at one period of his life or in connection with some one of his interests, a more complete view of his career and character. The supplementary notes which are now to be put together will be concerned with the typographical studies with which his name will always be connected, with the recognition which his work received, more particularly abroad, with the bibliographical materials which he left behind him, and with the possibility of making any of these materials available for the use of other students.

Allusion has already been made to the international character of Proctor's correspondence after the publication, in 1898, of his 'Index to the Early Printed Books in the British Museum.' The Museum has always cast its nets wide, and though its collection of incunabula is far from being the largest in Europe, it is probably the most representative, just because it has been mainly brought together by purchase instead of having had swept into it large masses of early books in which the issues of native presses (*i.e.*, of French presses in France and Ger-

man in Germany) would naturally predominate. Be this as it may, and with all the gaps in it which have to be deplored, the collection was large enough, more especially when eked out with that at Bodley, to enable Proctor to make it the basis of a detailed typographical history, in which not only every fifteenth-century printing office, but in most cases all the material which it possessed, was minutely set forth. By a happy inspiration, Dr. Burger, a few years earlier, had given a great impetus to typographical study by his Register to Hain's Repertorium, a service since doubled by his contribution to Dr. Copinger's Supplement. But Proctor had the immense advantage of working from the books themselves, not merely from descriptions of them, and he used this advantage with a courageous and unflagging industry to which no words can do justice. Hence, save where the Museum collection failed him, he was able to offer to the students of the national or local history of printing in every country a synopsis, from authentic materials, of the output of each press and of the way in which it was made up. To complete this synopsis, additions had to be made of the books not in the Museum library, the lists of types had to be supplemented by some, but very seldom by many, of which Proctor had come across no trace, and allowance had to be made for the certainty that some errors must have crept into a work involving so enormous a mass of details. But the pioneer work was done, and students in every country in Europe suddenly found themselves presented with a map of the history of their printing-

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presses, in which they had only to fill in additional details to get a complete survey.

Naturally, the foreign students who learnt to use Proctor's 'index' were soon tempted to put themselves into communication with its author, and Proctor, who was willing to help anybody, took a special pleasure in answering these inquiries from abroad, and in giving collations and procuring photographs of the books at the Museum in which they were interested. His knowledge of fifteenth-century books was at once so wide and so detailed that he was able to throw new light on almost any problem which was being investigated; and the specialist in every field found that he had kept abreast with his discoveries. Thus his death was felt as a personal loss in every library in Europe and America in which old books are kept and cared for, and in private letters or printed notices heartfelt tributes to his memory were paid in Germany, France, Austria, Italy, Sweden, and the United States, both east and west. Not only in the 'Centralblatt für Bibliothekswesen' and 'Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel' were appreciative articles written, but in the 'Neue Freie Presse' of Vienna, and also in an Italian daily paper the nature of his work was carefully explained to the outside public who usually hear nothing of these things. More private testimonies, equally eloquent of respect and admiration, were written by M. Delisle, M. Claudin, M. Baudrier, Dr. Burger, Dr. Haebler, Dr. Anderson of Upsala, General Hawkins, and many others. 'Ce n'est pas seulement pour le Musée britannique que la disparition de Proctor

laissera un vide irréparable,' wrote the doyen of European bookmen, M. Léopold Delisle. 'M. Proctorseul pourra me tirer d'embarras,' M. Claudin had said with regard to a puzzling edition of the romance of Jason; and just before the news of his death arrived M. Delisle had caused two pages of the book to be photographed expressly for the sake of getting his opinion on them. Proctor was only thirty when he completed his Index of fifteenth-century books; only thirty-five when he died; but before death took him he was recognized, by the best possible judges, as the foremost student of his subject.

If anyone were to ask me how Proctor won this position so quickly, I think I should be inclined to answer that his courage was so determined, his industry so persevering, his general ability so great, that he was bound to come to the front in any subject he took up, and that chance and his bookish tastes decreed that his subject should be bibliography. Long before he was thirty he had indeed possessed himself of a special gift to a degree which seemed almost miraculous, for he had visualized his memory to such an extent that he seemed able to carry in his head the peculiarities of many hundreds of different founts of type. But although this development would have been impossible without some natural endowment, the evidence points to its being the result of strenuous cultivation rather than any abnormal original instinct. He was indeed an absolute glutton for work, so much so that I remember having more than once upbraided him, half in jest, half in earnest, with pursuing his

foxes with such determination that there would soon be no more foxes to hunt. To mention anything that wanted doing in his hearing fired his imagination at once, and it was an even chance that the thing would be begun within twenty-four hours and carried to a conclusion incredibly quickly. I remember once telling him how I had found that the contemporary demand for the French Books of Hours printed by Philippe Pigouchet was so great, that as each batch of new illustrations arrived from the cutters it was used at once for the edition then in the press, without waiting for the set to be completed. The fifteenth-century editions, which are mostly dated, placed this fact beyond a doubt, and I was sure that it could be applied to get the sixteenth-century editions, most of which are undated, into their true order. Proctor said it was interesting, and I thought of it lazily as a thing to be done when I 'had time.' Within a week, if I remember rightly, he produced a table showing all the cuts in all the sixteenth-century editions at the British Museum, in which book each cut appeared, and the resulting sequence of the editions. He would not have the table printed at the time,¹ on the ground that it was my subject and that I could use his results later on, for he was so scrupulous about poaching, that though he knew far more about many sections of early book-illustrations than I did he could seldom be persuaded to make any use of his knowledge.

¹ I have not seen this table since Proctor's death, but hope that it may be found and printed. He afterwards supplied Mr. Macfarlane with a similar one for the 'Horae' published by Antoine Vérard.

While I have been throwing together these supplementary notes about Proctor, I have had, for another purpose, to read once more Mr. Prothero's 'Memoir of Henry Bradshaw,' and the contrast between the two men, both of whom rendered such admirable service, is very striking. Perhaps, however, contrast is hardly the right word to use; it would be truer to say that Proctor, alike in his capacities and his work, was Bradshaw's complement. It was Bradshaw's great achievement that he invented a new bibliographical method, a method so simply and convincingly right that we may now easily be tempted to take it as a matter of course, though it revolutionized the whole study of the history of printing and the description of old books. Bradshaw himself did little more than show how his method should be worked. Partly from the incessant calls made on him by his official duties, still more perhaps from his natural temperament, detailed work on any large scale was impossible for him. He was essentially, not only in bibliography, but in Chaucer-studies and in every subject he took up, an originator, a master of method, a sketcher of outlines which he left other men to fill in. Proctor, on the other hand, had one of the brains which require some outside influence to kindle them into activity, and his enthusiastic nature caused him to receive these impulses mainly through the hero-worship of which he made first Bradshaw, afterwards Bradshaw and Morris conjointly, the object. Whatever they did he must do too, and the unfaltering, imperturbed industry, to which I have already alluded as his greatest natural

gift, made him attempt the largest tasks with a joyous zest. If he had been born twenty years earlier and gone to Cambridge instead of Oxford, and had thus come directly under Bradshaw's personal influence, I doubt if he would have carried out the latter's wishes and ideals more punctiliously than he did. As early as April, 1870, Bradshaw had tried to stir first the Bodleian and then the British Museum to take more interest in their incunabula. He had sent Dr. Coxe a classified list of the English ones at Bodley in the hope that he would print it, and had been told that it was superfluous. He had pleaded with his friend and early correspondent, Mr. Winter Jones, for 'encouragement to hope that some steps will be taken towards a systematic method of dealing with the vast treasures which the Museum contains in the way of fifteenth-century books,' that some one of the staff should be 'told off to this branch of work, some one whose *business* it should be to deal with this class of books'—to all which Mr. Jones seems to have replied that the Treasury was not likely to make any grant for the payment of such a specialist. In fulfilling Bradshaw's missionary aspirations at Oxford Proctor had a considerable share; at the Museum he did the work alone, and in both cases he left his records behind him in all the permanence of print. To the day of his death Proctor's attitude to Bradshaw was that of a pupil to his master, but he was one of those rare pupils from whom their masters receive back as much as they give. The real greatness of Bradshaw's method is nowhere else written so large as in Proctor's Index.

If Proctor seldom or never originated he could, and often did, better his instruction; and, as everyone knows, the scheme of his Index from the first included not merely incunabula but books printed in the first twenty years of the sixteenth century. One section of the continuation, embracing some 2,200 books in the British Museum printed in Germany during the later period, was issued shortly after his death. His slips for the books printed in other countries are stored in a number of little tin boxes into which they have been sorted. What remains to be done is to get out these books at the British Museum, to describe them briefly, noting the types, borders, devices and initials used in each; and from the occurrence of types, borders, woodcuts or initials in books in which the printer has given his name to identify the printers of those which are anonymous. Before he started for his holiday Proctor had got out all the books printed at Rome, and had made notes on slips as to most of those with full imprints; the anonymous books he had hardly touched. It seemed disloyal to his memory to send the books back to the shelves with the riddles unsolved, and at such odd times as I could spare and latterly with the help of my brother-in-law, Mr. George England, I have wrestled with them with some success. The proportion of anonymous books is unusually large, there being over 200 of these as against about ninety with imprints; but some of the types used are very distinctive, and though complications are introduced by borders changing hands and the use of the same type in different states, I think the number of un-

identified books will finally be small. Possibly these Roman books have been exceptionally easy; but as my own powers of distinguishing types are very limited, and Mr. England is new to the work, it is encouraging to find that so much can be done. Such success as has been achieved is due indeed solely to the persistent use of the millimetre-rule. Type, borders, initials and cuts have all been invariably measured, and the temporary notation adopted is based on these measurements. Thus G. 72, R. 55, R. 44 in the collation denotes that the title is printed in gothic type of which ten lines would measure 72 millimetres, the body of the text in roman letters, measuring 55 millimetres to ten lines, and subsidiary matter in a smaller roman measuring 44 millimetres to ten lines. I cannot visualize these types as Proctor did, but I can carry the figures in my head, and when another type is found with the same measurements it can be placed in juxtaposition with Silber's, and eventually with any others of the same size. When the same plan is applied to every kind of ornament the means of identification are proportionately increased, and the constant measuring is itself a great help to the eye. Of course it is slow work, but it is very interesting and seems reasonably sure; and I believe that no better training could possibly be devised for an apprentice in such matters, than to be set down before two or three hundred old books, presumably printed in the same town, and to have to sort them out by the aid of his measure. I believe that any man of good eyesight and intelligence could finish the Italian section in about a year, not with the

finish and perfection which Proctor gave to his list of German books,¹ but with substantial accuracy and completeness. To do this, however, I think he would need a very much larger number of facsimiles than Proctor provided in his German section, and these facsimiles would have to be available for reference while the book is in progress.

As regards other work on early specimens of printing, the only unprinted materials which Proctor left behind him are his catalogues of the incunabula in the libraries of Corpus Christi, New College, and Brasenose College, Oxford. To these in my first article I inadvertently added a similar catalogue of the incunabula at All Souls, which though in his handwriting is, I am informed, only a transcript from an original by Mr. Gordon Duff, who placed it at Proctor's disposal when the latter was hoping to be able to catalogue the incunabula in all the College Libraries, a work which I trust may some day be undertaken. A general catalogue, specifying all the books and naming the library or libraries in which each may be seen would, of course, be much more useful and much more economical than a number of separate lists; but if it be desired to separate off Proctor's own work from that of any successor, his three lists are in readiness, and could be sent off to the printer without delay. The same remarks apply to his lists of the English books printed before the close

¹ Mr. Proctor took five years over the German section and estimated that Italy would take him fully as long, but he was only able to work at the index (literally) in his odds and ends of time, and was at a great disadvantage compared to a continuous worker.

of the sixteenth century. The lists are excellent, and ready for the printer; but the collections are not individually of sufficient importance to allow a catalogue of them, arranged under printers with an author-index, to be at all exciting. Of two other English tasks at which Proctor toiled the case is exactly different, since, if carried to a completion, they would be of the utmost importance and value; but unfortunately the hardest part of the work remains to be done. The publication of a catalogue of the English books in the Bodleian printed to the close of 1640 is the most crying of all our bibliographical needs at the present time, and the raw materials for such a catalogue exist at Bodley, half of them (the last ten thousand titles), in Proctor's handwriting. Unfortunately this 'rough list of British prae-1641 items,' as Mr. Nicholson calls it, was compiled from the general catalogue of the Bodleian, and it would be grossly unfair to Proctor's memory (even if official consent could be obtained) to print it without revising and expanding the titles from the books themselves, and adding the names of their printers to those published from 1600 to 1640, from which at present they are omitted. This would be a very long business, and is one, I gather, for which no member of the Bodleian staff can at present be spared. That when completed there would be any difficulty in finding paper and print for it is not at all likely.

The second unfinished English venture belongs to the last days of Proctor's life, indeed, he only carried it to its present stage just before starting for Tyrol. This is a detailed Printer-Index to the

British Museum Catalogue of English Books to 1640, which we light-heartedly began to do together, some years ago, I contributing the slips for the accessions since 1883, and he cutting up and pasting on similar slips the entries in two copies of the printed catalogue itself. This cutting up process he had finished, and had begun roughly sorting the cards. What remains to be done is to complete the sorting, make very numerous cross-references for publishers and second members of printing firms, and then reduce the printed titles to the fewest possible words, as in the index to the John Rylands Catalogue of the same period. No doubt when the British Museum produces a second edition of Mr. Bullen's Catalogue, such an index of printers will form an essential feature in it; but Proctor's death has sadly weakened the bibliographical forces of the Museum, and there is so much other work in hand that a new edition of the '1640' English Catalogue is not likely to come about just yet, while a temporary index of printers would greatly facilitate it. Both at the Bodleian and at the British Museum what is needed is sure, of course, to be done eventually; but it would be pleasant if some enthusiast would make Proctor's materials immediately available.

Besides this venture still in manuscript and his larger books mentioned in my last article, Proctor wrote twelve papers and pamphlets, which, if it is desired, could be brought together into a satisfactory volume. They are as follows:

The Accipies Woodcut.

'Bibliographica,' vol. i., pp. 52-68. 1894.

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List of the founts of type and woodcut devices used by the printers of the Southern Netherlands in the fifteenth century.

'Tracts on Early Printing,' I., pp. 48. 1895.

A note on Eberhard Frommolt of Basel, printer.

'Tracts on Early Printing,' II., pp. 23. 1895.

On Two Plates in Sotheby's 'Principia Typographica.'

'Bibliographica,' vol. iii., pp. 192-196. 1896.

Additions to Campbell's 'Annales de la typographie néerlandaise au 15^e siècle.'

'Tracts on Early Printing,' III., p. 79. 1897.

Marcus Reinhard and Johann Grüninger.

'Transactions of the Bibliographical Society,' vol. v., pt. i., pp. 143-160. 1899.

Incunabula at Grenoble.

'The Library' (New Series), vol. i., pp. 215-220. 1900.

The Gutenberg Bible.

'The Library' (New Series), vol. ii., pp. 60-66. 1901.

A Short View of Berthelet's editions of the Statutes of Henry VIII.

'Transactions of the Bibliographical Society,' vol. v., pt. ii., pp. 255-262. 1901.

On Two Lyonnese editions of the *Ars Moriendi*.

'The Library' (New Series), vol. iii., pp. 339-348. 1902.

Ulrich von Ellenbog and the Press of S. Ulrich at Augsburg.

'The Library' (New Series), vol. iv., pp. 163-179. 1903.

The Early Printers at Köln.

'The Library' (New Series), vol. iv., pp. 392-402. 1903.

It will be noted that Proctor's twelve papers would have to be sought in only four sources: two in 'Bibliographica,' three in his 'Tracts on Early Printing,' two in the Transactions of the Bibliographical Society, and five in this magazine. A thirteenth paper, on the 'French Royal Greek Type and the Eton Chrysostom,' has been already set up for the Bibliographical Society's Transactions, but I do not think there is anything else to be hoped for, since Proctor had no love for writing miscellaneous papers, and seldom began one of his own accord. It may thus be surmized that nearly all of the contents of a volume of reprints would already be in the possession of most of those who would naturally subscribe for it, though it would be a convenience and a pleasure to have the papers brought together in a handy form. Lastly, the prospectus of the three books it is desired to print in the Otter Greek type can be obtained from the Chiswick Press, and there is thus no need for anything to be added on this subject to what was said in my former article. It will be seen, however, that there is plenty of bibliographical work in his materials to enable a whole school of 'Proctor students' to gain their training, and I think that no greater pleasure could have been given to him than by an assurance that others, after his death, would try, however haltingly and under whatever disadvantages, to carry on the work which was his own delight. I hope very much, therefore, that at least some of his unfinished tasks may be completed.

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