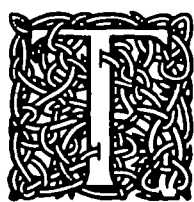




INITIAL-PAGE OF PART II. OF THE MALERMI BIBLE. VENICE,
'ANIMA MIA,' 1493 (REDUCED).

THE LIBRARY.

TWO ILLUSTRATED ITALIAN BIBLES.



WO years ago 'The Library' recorded the almost simultaneous discovery in Italy of two copies of a previously unknown edition of the Italian translation of the Bible by Niccolo Malermi, printed by 'maestro Guiglielmo da trino de Monferato nominato Anima Mia' at Venice in 1493. By the kindness of Mr. Voynich, the discoverer of one of the copies, two woodcuts from the Bible were printed with the note; but one of the books had already passed to the library of the Prince d'Essling and the other to the Berlin Print Room, and it was thus impossible to make any detailed comparison of the illustrations in the new find with those in the already known editions published by Lucantonio Giunta in 1490 and subsequent years. Within the last few weeks a third copy has been acquired by the British Museum, which has also since 1897 possessed the first Giunta edition, and a few notes based on a careful collation of the two may perhaps be found interesting.

The first edition of Malermi's Italian version of the Bible was printed by Jenson, who finished it on August 1st, 1470, apparently the same year in which the translator entered the monastery of S. Michele in Murano, near Venice, at the age of forty-eight. He was then stated to be '*natus quondam spectabilis et generosi viri domini Philippi de Malerbis, de Venetiis*'; but nothing else is known of his family or early life, and the subsequent records only refer to his transfer from one monastery to another. Besides the Bible he also translated into Italian the lives of the saints from the '*Golden Legend*' of Jacobus de Voragine, with additions of his own. This book also was printed for him by Jenson, and published in 1475.

Malermi's translation of the Bible was a great popular success, at least nine, and probably ten editions being printed during the fifteenth century, and the British Museum possessing six others issued in 1517, 1546, 1553, 1558, 1566, and 1567. By a curious chance another translation, by an anonymous author, must have been already in the press while Jenson was printing Malermi's first edition. It appeared exactly two months later, on October 1st, 1471, without the name of its printer, but in the types of Adam of Ammergau. That two rival translations of the Bible were thus among the firstfruits of the Italian press is one of the facts which Protestant controversialists are not apt to emphasize. It is probable, as Dr. Garnett, I think, has suggested, that Venice, which was wont to show great independence in its relations with the Papal Court, was the only city in Italy in which a

vernacular Bible would have found a publisher. The earliest Italian Bible printed in any other Italian town does, indeed, appear to be one with Doré's illustrations, published at Milan at some date between 1866, when the illustrations first appeared in English and French Bibles, and 1880, when it attained a third edition. No doubt the Holy See had little enthusiasm for vernacular Bibles, and the Italian governments, which were more susceptible than Venice to the feeling of Rome, did nothing to encourage them. But discouragement, whether we approve of it or not (and the subsequent religious history of Europe shows that the Roman objection to unannotated vernacular texts was not wholly unfounded), is very different from prohibition, and next to the eighteen prae-Reformation German editions, the ten printed at Venice during the fifteenth century offer the most convincing proof that, except in the actual presence of heresy, vernacular translations enjoyed a practically unimpeded circulation long before the leaders of the Reformation made free access to the Scriptures one of their main demands. It is remarkable, indeed, that during the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Inquisition was tightening its hold on Venice, and the 'Index Librorum Prohibitorum' had come into being, the Italian Bibles printed there increased notably. The British Museum possesses five editions of Malermi's version published in the twenty-two years 1546-1567, six of Brucioli's published in the twenty years 1532-1551, two of Santi Marmochino's, printed respectively in 1538 and 1545, a total of

thirteen editions published within thirty-six years, now on the shelves of a single library. After 1567 there is another tale to tell. Until the Milan edition already mentioned, Geneva, Nuremberg, Leipsic and London are the only imprints to be found on Italian editions of the Scriptures. In the face of what she considered heretical interpretations, the Church of Rome would no longer trust her people with vernacular Bibles; but it is one of the small services which Bibliography can render to History to note that this had not been her policy so long as the Scriptures were desired for edification and not for controversy, and the popularity of the Malermi Bible is so decisive a proof of this that it would be unfair to leave it unmentioned.

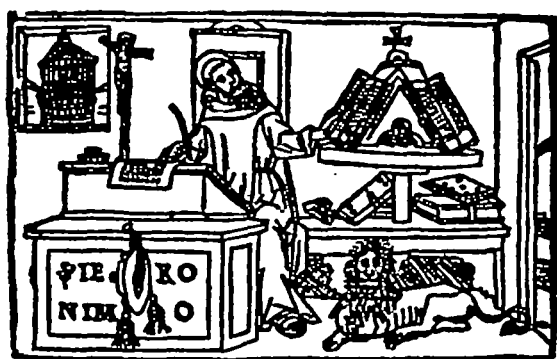
The main object of this article is far removed from the weighty question of religious policy on which we have incidentally touched. The first edition of the Malermi Bible is a very rare book, and the British Museum, sad to say, possesses no copy of it. The only copy in England of which I know is in the John Rylands Library at Manchester, and this possesses six coloured illustrations representing the six days of Creation, the colouring being so heavy as nearly, though not quite, to obscure the fact that it is imposed upon woodcuts.

In the years 1470-1472 there are fairly numerous examples of woodcut borders and initials being used in books printed at Venice, not as substantive decorations in themselves, but as outlines for the guidance of illuminators. We may probably take it that the six designs in the first Malermi Bible, which do not seem to occur in all copies, were of

this character, and were not intended to stand by themselves. The first Venetian woodcuts not intended to be coloured are found in books printed by Erhard Ratdolt, and their use spread very slowly until nearly 1490. Thus the Malermi Bibles of 1477, 1481, 1484 and 1487 are all innocent of woodcuts, though there are blank leaves and spaces left in some of them, which may have been intended for illumination.

There seems to have been a project of making the 'Biblia cum postillis Nicolai de Lyra,' published by Octavianus Scotus in 1489, into a handsome illustrated book; but if this was so the project was soon abandoned, as the illustrations come in little patches at different points at which the book may have been put in hand on different presses, and between these points there are long stretches without any pictures at all. Thus not only the first Italian Bible, but the first Bible printed in Italy in which illustrations form an important feature, is the edition of Malermi's version printed in October, 1490, by Giovanni Ragazzo for Lucantonio Giunta. If long delayed, this was a fine enough book to be worth waiting for. It is in double columns, measuring 250 × 76 mm. apiece, and each containing sixty-one lines of a respectably round type about the size of pica. For convenience of printing rather than of binding it is divided into two parts (the second beginning with the Book of Proverbs), which are always, as far as I know, found united in a single volume. Part I. contains: (i.) a frontispiece made up (within a border) of six cuts measuring 56 × 57 mm. each,

representing the six days of Creation, obviously influenced by the illuminations with underlying woodcuts of the 1471 edition; (ii.) a pictorial initial N for the 'Nel principio' of Genesis; (iii.) 208 small woodcuts or vignettes, measuring about 45×75 mm., of which 199 are different and 9 are repetitions. Part II. contains a large picture and border for the opening chapter of Proverbs, and 175 small cuts, of which 166 are

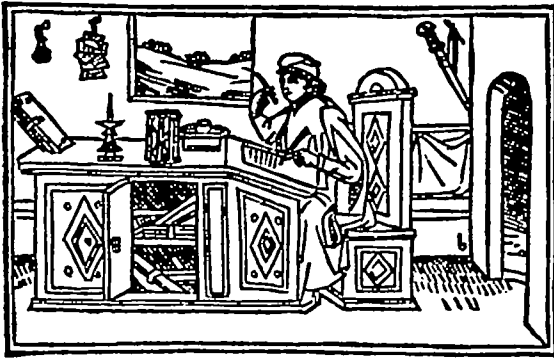


8. JEROME. FROM THE MALERMI BIBLE.
VENICE, GIUNTA, 1490.

different and 9 are repetitions. Deducting the repeats, but counting the initial and each of the Creation woodcuts separately, we have thus a grand total of 373 different designs, almost all of them well drawn, though many have been sadly mangled by the wood-cutter.

It is to the credit of the Venetian public that Giunta's edition of this big book sold quickly. For reasons hereafter to be given I think it possible that a reprint with some additional cuts was published as early as 1491. We know for certain

that a new edition (printed again by Giovanni Ragazzo) was ready for sale in July, 1492. Like most reprints of illustrated books this aimed at an appearance of greater liberality at a comparatively small expense. Thus in the book Genesis there are 27 woodcuts in 1492 against 16 in 1490, a too realistic picture of Potiphar's wife tempting Joseph being judiciously omitted, while twelve new subjects are added. In Exodus we have 29 cuts against 25,



AN AUTHOR AT WORK. FROM THE MALERMI BIBLE.
VENICE, GIUNTA, 1490.

four new ones being added, while on the other hand the representations of the Burning Bush (in which a dog is shown barking at the Almighty) and of the slaying of the firstborn are withdrawn and replaced without appropriateness by cuts taken from Deuteronomy ix. and Leviticus x. In Leviticus one cut (that to chap. vii.) is changed and a new one added to chap. xviii. In Numbers an illustration of the zeal of Phineas in chap. xxv. is omitted, and two new cuts added to chaps. xxix. and xxxiii.; in Deuteronomy we have six new cuts

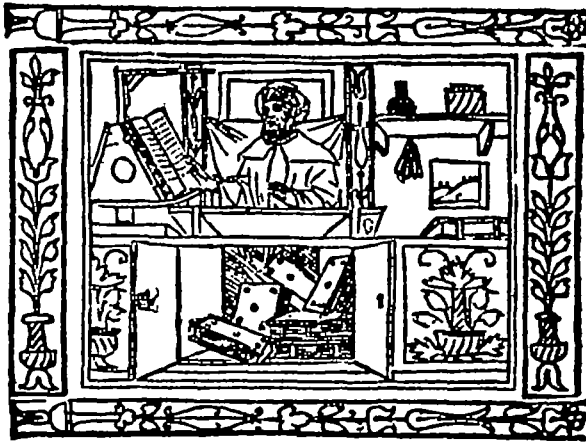
and a repeat. To these 26 additions (against two omissions) in the Pentateuch, we have to add 14 more (against one repeat omitted) from Joshua to Kings. From Chronicles to Acts the woodcuts in the two editions are substantially the same, six cuts being changed, while one is omitted. In the Epistles, besides two changes, there are 12 additions, but these are mostly either repeats or taken



S. JEROME. FROM THE MALERMI BIBLE.
VENICE, 'ANIMA MIA,' 1493.

from other books. In the Apocalypse and the Life of St. Joseph, with which the book ends, the illustrations in the two editions agree. The number of different cuts (deducting 12 and 9 respectively for repetitions) is 240 in Part I. and 178 in Part II., or a total of 418 different cuts against 373 in the 1490 edition, the increase being practically confined to the books Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy and the Epistles.

Turning now to the 'Anima Mia' edition of 1493, three copies of which have recently come to light after its existence had remained unsuspected for generations, we have only to place it side by side with one of the Giunta texts to find that it is a not too scrupulous attempt to cut into the profits of the firm which was first in the field. The worst evil of the publishing trade at the present day is that if



AN AUTHOR AT WORK. FROM THE MALERMI BIBLE.
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one publisher strikes out a new line, whether in the form of his books, or the prices at which they are issued, or by bringing into notice some hitherto neglected author or subject, one or more of his competitors immediately try to put similar editions on the market, and to offer purchasers a little more for their money. The result is that the first publisher finds his profits sensibly diminished, while the second very probably burns

his fingers. Few modern publishers, however, would plagiarize quite as freely as did 'Anima Mia' in his new Bible. Not only did he copy Giunta closely in the form and size of his book, the arrangement of the page and the size of the illustrations; but in a great number of cases he allowed his artists to take precisely the same subjects for illustration, and even to copy the designs themselves quite closely, sometimes by the lazy method which by imitating the model on the block of wood, without first reversing it, caused the printed picture itself to appear in reverse.

A curious question now arises as to which of the Giunta editions 'Anima Mia' elected to copy from. That of 1490 was clearly not the one chosen, since among 'Anima Mia's' pictures we find illustrations to Genesis xiii., xv., xvii., xx., xxiv., and xxvi., none of which were illustrated in the 1490 edition, while pictures on the same subjects are found in that of 1492. Again, in the four books of Kings the 1493 edition agrees with the 1492 in having forty-nine cuts as against forty-three in the original edition of 1490. More conclusive still is the evidence of a mistake in Joshua ix., where it is impossible that the artist can have had before him the pretty little cut of the Gibeonites as hewers of wood and drawers of water, which is one of our illustrations. By 1492 the block for this had apparently been damaged and is replaced by a larger cut (56 mm. in height), representing a king and two councillors, apparently taken from some other book. The 1493 illustrator was, no doubt, puzzled by this, and for lack of anything better

repeated a cut of Moses and Miriam from Exodus. Clearly he had not in this case the 1490 edition before him. But neither am I at all sure that he had that of 1492. While he copies six of the new pictures in Genesis he omits six others; in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy he agrees with the 1490 edition against that of 1492; in Judges, Ruth and Kings with 1492 as against 1490; in Genesis, Leviticus and Joshua, partly with one, partly with the other. In two other cases he steers



JOSHUA AND THE GIBEONITES. FROM THE MALERMI BIBLE. VENICE, GIUNTA, 1490.

a middle course. The 1490 artist had illustrated far too realistically both the temptation of Joseph and the sin which called forth the zeal of Phineas. In the 1492 edition these subjects are very wisely omitted. In that of 1493 they appear, but in a modified form. My own theory to account for these discrepancies is that between 1490 and 1492—presumably in 1491—Giunta published yet another issue of the Bible, adding a few illustrations, but not so many as in 1492, and substituting
 16. two new cuts of the subjects unpleasantly illustrated

in 1490, which he subsequently thought well to pass over altogether. Such an intermediate edition would supply a model which would explain all the early illustrations in the edition of 1493, and would also allow a more reasonable time to 'Anima Mia' to get them made, and his book printed, than the nine months which separate the editions of July, 1492, and April, 1493. 'Anima Mia,' however, was by no means wholly a plagiarist, as is proved by



'EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE.' FROM THE
MALERMI BIBLE. VENICE, 'ANIMA MIA,' 1493.

the fact that while in his first volume the 236 illustrations stand midway numerically between the 215 and the 252 of the two Giunta editions of 1490 and 1492; for his second volume he provided no fewer than 208 against the 176 and 187 of his predecessors, the new cuts being fairly evenly distributed through the different books, while their artistic merit is of average quality.

It is by this touchstone of artistic merit, and not by considerations of quantity that the comparative claims of the two rival editions must be decided;

and on the whole there can be no doubt that both for originality of design and for the highest merit in execution the palm must be given to the artists and craftsmen employed by Giunta. Unfortunately in both editions large numbers of the woodcuts were intrusted to cutters quite incompetent to deal with such delicate work. Giunta's illustrations to the Gospels are quite painfully bad, while those of 'Anima Mia' are here only mediocre, his worst



'THE FOOL HATH SAID IN HIS HEART.' FROM THE
MALERMI BIBLE. VENICE, GIUNTA, 1490.

craftsman having been employed on some of the middle books of the Old Testament. His worst work is almost as bad as the worst of Giunta's, though less painful, as not introducing the figure of Christ. The proportion of mediocre cuts is far greater, and of these we give a 'generously chosen example in that prefixed to Psalm lii. It should really be an illustration, it may be imagined, to the text, 'Except the Lord build the house their labour is but vain that build it,' but in any case it is strikingly inferior to the brilliant cut in the 1490

edition, which illustrates the heading 'Dixit insipiens' with all possible cogency.

Lastly, his best work, though really good, is not so good as that of his predecessor. One reason for this is, no doubt, that part of the space available in the column was occupied by the little border-pieces which, though offering a pleasing setting to the pictures, diminish the space available for illus-



THE ENTRY INTO THE ARK. FROM THE MALERMI BIBLE. VENICE, 'ANIMA MIA,' 1493.

tration by nearly a quarter. The effect of this is especially noticeable when the 1493 artist is copying his predecessor, the necessity for 'selection' sometimes leading to the omission of important parts of the composition. But at the outset of both volumes, before the work began to be hurried, there is plenty of originality, and excellent use is made of the space at the designer's disposal. The cut of the animals entering the ark here shown is

delightful, and in that of Jacob deceiving Isaac we seem to feel instinctively the blindness of the old man, who stretches out his hand to feel for the dish his false son is bringing him. As the 1493 edition is so little known compared with that of 1490, both our remaining illustrations are taken from it. The first, the frontispiece to the second volume, shown at the beginning of this article,



JACOB DECEIVING ISAAC. FROM THE MALERMI BIBLE. VENICE, 'ANIMA MIA,' 1493.

compares very favourably with the similar design in the earlier edition. The second, the picture of S. Jerome in the Desert, is one of the best things in the book, both in design and cutting; but it differs from everything else in it, and may possibly belong to some other set.

It may have been noted that in writing of the edition of 1490 I have not thought it necessary to write of the various theories which have been built

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on the little letter 'b' with which many of the cuts are signed, *e.g.*, that of 'an author at work' reproduced on p. 233. It is now generally acknow-



3. JEROME IN THE DESERT. FROM THE MALERMI BIBLE. VENICE, 'ANIMA MIA,' 1493.

ledged that it is the mark, not of any designer, nor even perhaps of any individual woodcutter, but merely of the workshop in which the little blocks were cut.

ALFRED W. POLLARD