



## THE RICCARDI PRESS BOOKS

**T**HE most difficult as well as the most desirable thing in the art of book-making is to design volumes which shall have both beauty and distinctive individuality. This was the aim of William Morris, and it has been the aim of all the more capable men who have given time and thought to the improvement of the physical appearance of books. Few, however, have attained the goal. Most of those who try to reach it find that it seems to recede as they advance, and not infrequently they discover quagmires and yawning chasms where they think to find solid ground. In truth the way is not easy to be perceived, for it lies very close beside, and is in places identical with, the beaten path that leads to Characterless Convention. To depart from the beaten path is imperative, yet to wander far from it is fatal. On either hand lie the cleverly masked pitfalls of eccentricity and caprice that engulf many and to avoid which the wayfarer needs the guidance that rigorously exacting taste alone can supply.

In its application to the problems that confront the designer of the book beautiful and useful, taste must rest firmly on the basic principles that govern harmonic relation and underlie all art. While this is a truism that no one disputes, it is not always kept in mind as steadily as it should be. We are apt to like familiar things. With all that concerns typography our eyes have become so accustomed to certain forms that any variation seems more or less uncouth. Moreover the familiar forms are very practical. They are the resultant of a gradual sifting process from critical examination and the application of utilitarian tests during several centuries. Any novelty placed before us if not fitted to endure a similar ordeal must be condemned as a freakish performance of no real worth. It must be remembered that the primary function of the printed page is to be read. Necessarily, therefore, utilitarian considerations must always take precedence of, though they need not exclude, the æsthetic.

William Morris endeavored to solve the problem of the book beautiful by reproducing with little variation effects found in books printed in the early days when papers were hard and rough in texture and the difficulties in the manufacture of type had not been overcome. In this way he avoided the rigid mechanical precision of the modern page, but this was accomplished through sacrifice of the great desideratum of easy legibility. Incidentally he gave the Kelmscott Press books a certain affectation of antique flavor which even their most ardent admirers cannot wholly approve. Notwithstanding these shortcomings the publication of the initial volume of this series was a notable event; in more than one respect it marked the beginning of a new epoch in the making of books.

Nearly twenty-two years have elapsed since the first Kelmscott book, "The Story of the Glittering Plain," was issued from the press at Hammersmith. In the interval many attempts have been made to produce books that should have equal or greater beauty and distinction, and yet be as easy to read as though set in Caslon old-faced type. The books issued by the Vale Press, the Essex House Press, the Doves Press, the Ashendene Press, and scattered volumes brought out by various publishers, all represent different efforts in this direction. One of the most ambitious of these attempts, and one of the most interesting to the bibliophile, is afforded by the Riccardi Press Books, published in London by the Medici Society. These are not only the most recent to claim our consideration, they are also the most unusual in conception, and they have a charm that is all their own.

The Riccardi Press Books take their name from the Riccardi type in which they are printed. There does not appear to be a Riccardi Press as such, the printing being done at the famous Chiswick Press, London, under the personal supervision of Mr. Charles T. Jacobi, who has maintained an extremely high standard throughout all the volumes that have as yet been issued. Every page of every book appears to have exactly the same quantity

## MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS

41. Epicurus says, In my sickness my conversation was not about my bodily sufferings, nor, says he, did I talk on such subjects to those who visited me; but I continued to discourse on the nature of things as before, keeping to this main point, how the mind, while participating in such movements as go on in the poor flesh, shall be free from perturbations and maintain its proper good. Nor did I, he says, give the physicians an opportunity of putting on solemn looks, as if they were doing something great, but my life went on well and happily. Do then the same that he did both in sickness, if thou art sick, and in any other circumstances; for never to desert philosophy in any events that may befall us, nor to hold trifling talk either with an ignorant man or with one unacquainted with nature, is a principle of all schools of philosophy; but to be intent only on that which thou art now doing and on the instrument by which thou doest it.

42. When thou art offended with any man's shameless conduct, immediately ask thyself, Is it possible then that shameless men should not be in the world? It is not possible. Do not then require what is impossible. For this man also is one of those shameless men who must of necessity be in the world. Let the same considerations be present to thy mind in the case of the knave, and the faithless man, and of every man who does wrong in any way. For at the same time that thou dost remind thyself that it is impossible that such kind of men should not exist, thou wilt become more kindly disposed towards every one individually. It is useful to perceive this too, immediately when the occasion arises, what virtue nature has given to man to oppose to every wrongful act. For she has given to man, as an antidote against the stupid man, mildness, and against another kind of man some other power. And in all cases it is possible for thee to correct by teaching the man who is gone astray; for every man who errs misses his object and is gone astray. Besides wherein hast thou been injured? For thou wilt find that no one among those against whom thou art irritated has done anything by which thy mind could be made worse; but that which is evil to thee and harmful has its foundation only in the mind. And what harm is done or what is there strange, if the man who has not been instructed does the acts of an uninstructed man? Consider whether thou shouldst not rather blame thyself, because thou didst not expect such a man to err in such a way. For thou hadst means given thee by thy reason to suppose that it was likely that he would commit this error.

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of ink and exactly the same strength of impression. Finer presswork is, indeed, scarcely possible.

The designer of the Riccardi type, Mr. Herbert P. Horne, first became known to the bookloving world about 1884. He was then a member of the firm of Macmurdo and Horne, architects, and was one of the organizers and active spirits in the Century Guild of artists. In the year named the first number of "The Century Guild Hobby Horse" was issued under his direction, but he was not satisfied with it, and withdrew it from sale. Two years later the publication was resumed as a quarterly and was continued for seven years, during which the constant endeavor of the editor was not only to promulgate sound doctrine upon questions connected with the fine arts, but in the make-up of the periodical to set a new standard of excellence. In recent years Mr. Horne has given especial attention to the designing of type. With his "Merry-mount" and "Florence" types, the readers of THE PRINTING ART are no doubt familiar. The "Riccardi," he tells us, is based on the model of the Miscomino "Horace" of 1492, which in its general appearance closely resembles the Jenson that Morris followed when designing his Golden type. As has been well said by a writer in *The Athenaeum*, it is, however, "obvious that each separate letter has been fashioned in accordance with a pre-arranged scheme, not copied from any model however good." There is not a trace of eccentricity in any one of them. Mr. Horne has wisely relied upon the proportions of the letters to give the type its legibility and unusually beautiful expression; but he has also given careful attention to their set, and to the relation between the thick and thin lines, which do not vary greatly in width of face. The treatment of the capitals is especially happy; only slightly heavier in face than the lower-case letters, they are strong without being insistent. To the skill with which they have been managed the delightfully even color of the letterpress of the Riccardi books is in large measure attributable, though the exceptional quality of the presswork has something to do with the result.

The opinion of the Riccardi type expressed by the writer in *The Athenaeum* already quoted, that "there is no doubt that this fount

of type is one of the best ever cut," may be accepted with the reservation that it belongs to a style of type more desirable for what may be called special as distinguished from general use. Its defects are so slight as to be negligible. Set solid there is a suggestion of squareness to the letters which is perhaps intentional, and regarding which opinions may well differ. To the writer of this article it seems that this effect would disappear, and the expression would be even finer than it is, were the type just a shade less "extended." The cutting of the Riccardi is remarkably good. It was done under Mr. Horne's direction by Mr. E. P. Prince, who cut the Kelmscott Press type. So far only 14-point has been used. Mr. Prince has recently recut the Riccardi in 11-point, but the writer has not seen an impression from this smaller size and cannot, therefore, say anything about its relative merit. Presumably, however, the necessary modifications have been made. It is announced that the 11-point type will be used for a new series of smaller format than the books of the present series, which are quarto volumes, the page measuring 10½ by 7½ inches.

Although the beauty of the typography and the presswork are large factors in the charm of the Riccardi Press Books, they do not constitute their only claim to distinction. None of the niceties of fine book-making have been overlooked. They are printed on an English hand-made paper of soft, creamy tone and agreeable texture, neither rough nor smooth, and pleasant alike to the eye and touch. The typographical arrangement is excellent; the relation between the type-page and the leaf, and the arrangement of the margins, conform to the most exacting requirements. The binding in blue Michelet boards with canvas back is simple and dignified, though here, perhaps, a grayer blue would harmonize better with the color of the canvas.

Each of these things is important, but the feature that emphasizes the individuality of these books and gives them a broad popular claim to consideration is the illustrations. These are in full color, and have been reproduced by the so-called Medici process of color collotype. Except that the printing is from gelatine plates made from photographic negatives, and that sometimes as many as seven

## THE PRINTING ART

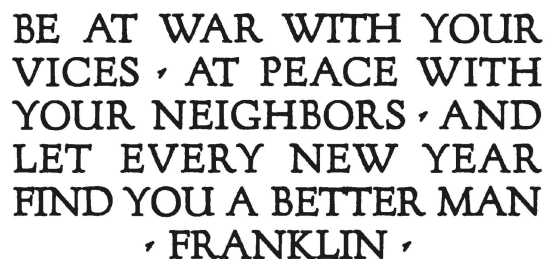
or eight color-plates are employed, no details of this process are forthcoming. It is the same process as that employed in making the Medici reproductions of paintings by the Old Masters, which have attracted much attention from the fidelity with which they give the texture as well as the color of the original works. In appearance the plates in the Riccardi Press Books closely resemble the artists' water-color drawings. There is, of course, some loss in vitality; that is inevitable in any reproduction. In many of the plates the loss is very little. The drawings in which the color scheme is light come out rather better than the dark ones, as in the latter the deeper shadows incline to be a little black and heavy, though this may be the fault of the drawings rather than of the reproductive process.

The illustrations for "Everyman" were designed by J. H. Amschewitz; those for the other books by W. Russell Flint. To consider these illustrations singly and comment upon their artistic qualities would transcend the scope of this article. It will be sufficient to say of them that they are of very distinct merit. By the possessors of the books they will be valued for their clever handling, decorative quality, and unusual variety in treatment, and most of all for their beauty, which has been well brought out in the reproductions. All in all, the Riccardi Press Books

are exceptionally choice specimens of the art of book-making. As examples of typography and presswork they are worthy to rank with the best work in that field. And they have, in no uncertain measure, that rarest of qualities, beauty combined with individuality.

The five books already published in this series, and the sixth, which is announced for early issue, are all well-known classics. The earliest to appear was "The Thoughts of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius." This was followed by "The Song of Songs which is Solomon's"; Malory's "Le Morte d'Arthur," in four volumes, with the text of William Caxton in modernized spelling; "Everyman: A Morality Play"; and Charles Kingsley's "The Heroes." A three-volume edition of Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales," in Professor Skeat's authoritative text, will appear this year. Though prophecy is proverbially dangerous, it would seem that collectors of the finest products of modern book-making would be well-advised to add the Riccardi Press Books to their collections while they are still to be had at the published prices. Being issued in editions strictly limited to five hundred copies, it can be a matter of only a short time before they will be as difficult to procure as are the finest of the Kelmescott, the Vale, and the Doves Press books.

*Frederick W. Gookin.*



BE AT WAR WITH YOUR  
VICES · AT PEACE WITH  
YOUR NEIGHBORS · AND  
LET EVERY NEW YEAR  
FIND YOU A BETTER MAN  
· FRANKLIN ·