

Concerning Book Printing in Edinburgh, 1507=1600.



THE art of printing has long been one of the largest industries in the city of Edinburgh. Its first introduction into the Modern Athens was in the year 1507, when Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar, both burgesses of the city, obtained from King James IV. a royal privilege to establish a press there. The original patent, dated 15th September, 1507, was discovered about one hundred years ago in the archives of the Register House. Chepman and Myllar established their printing press in what was then called the Southgait, but which is now and has been for many generations known as the Cowgate, at the foot of Blackfriars-wynd, which is now designated Blackfriars-street, the wynd having disappeared, and a fairly broad street having taken its place. The first publications that issued from their press consisted of a collection of pamphlets, chiefly metrical romances and ballads, in the year 1508, of which an imperfect copy is to be found in the Advocates' Library. This historical treasure is said to have been discovered in Ayrshire in 1785, and was presented in 1788 by its owner, the late Mr. Alston, of Glasgow, to the library. The late Mr. David Laing, LL.D., reprinted these pamphlets in a handsome quarto volume, which was published in 1827. The work had been begun thirteen years before, but various difficulties intervened before it was properly accomplished.

In 1509-10 the same firm also produced the "Scottish Service Book, including the Legends of the Scottish Saints," commonly called "The Breviary of Aberdeen" (*Breviarum Aberdonense*). A beautiful copy of this scarce book in two volumes, 8vo, printed in red and black, is to be seen in the Edinburgh University Library. This work was intended to take the place in Scotland of the Sarum Breviary—or "Usum Sarum" in England—as the book of service for the Church. In King James IV.'s patent to Chepman & Myllar it is specifically mentioned as a work to be done by them. Only four copies are now known to exist.

Walter Chepman was a man of substance in England. He was a favourite of King James IV., was frequently engaged by His Majesty to conduct his correspondence, and was entrusted with the king's signet. He was a shrewd man of business, and possessed considerable wealth. He held the office of Dean of Guild in 1514-15, and he received special marks of favour from King James V.

During the last year of King James IV.'s reign, Chepman erected an aisle on the south side of St. Giles' Church, when Gawin Douglas was provost of the same. He endowed an altar, so that prayers might be regularly said for the salvation of the king, queen, himself, and his first and second wives. He also endowed a mortuary chapel of the Holy Cross in memory of King James IV., for the purpose of prayers being said, not only on behalf of those already mentioned, but for the souls of the nobles and the king's faithful subjects who fell at Flodden fifteen

years before. Shortly thereafter (in 1532 or 1533) Chepman died, and was buried in his own aisle. The late Lord Provost William Chambers, LL.D., succeeded in discovering the tomb of Scotland's first printer, and dedicated one of the aisles to the memory of Chepman.

Regarding Myllar, his partner in business, comparatively little is known. It has been ascertained that works printed by him, or bearing his imprint, are to be found several years before King James IV.'s patent to the Edinburgh firm of which he was a member. Though a Scotsman, his books were chiefly published in France. There is no evidence to shew that he was himself a practical printer, although he might have had a certain amount of technical knowledge, acquired abroad at Rouen and other places made famous at the time by their typographical achievements.

Although for many years after the introduction of printing into Scotland, the works issued from the Edinburgh press were necessarily few and restricted, the samples of early printing that have come down to us are most excellent specimens of typography, no less in the preserved brilliancy of the colours (usually black and red) than in the extreme accuracy of the text. The next printer of any note who appeared on the scene was Thomas Davidson, born in Aberdeenshire, "upon the waterside of Dee." In 1541 he was appointed, along with James Bannatyne, official searcher of all merchandise coming into the country by sea. During the same year he was selected by the lord clerk-registrar of the day, Sir James Foulis, of Collington, to print several Acts of King James V. These were issued very early in the following year. He began business after Chepman's death. His printing-house is described as being "above the Nether Bow, on the north syde of the gait." Among other works which issued from his press may be mentioned "The History and Croniklis of Scotland. compilit and newly correckit be the Reuerend and Noble Clerke, Maister Hector Böece. Translated laily be Maister Johne Bellenden. Imprintit in Edinburgh, be Thomas Davidson (1536), dwelling fornent the Frere Wynd." He also produced "The Nevv Actis And Constitvtionis Of Parliament Maid Be The Rycht Excellent Prince Iames the Fift King Of Scottis (1540)" folio. Only two copies of these are known to exist. One of them is in the Advocates' Library, and the other is to be found in the Wodhull Library. Davidson also printed during the same year another edition of his History and Chronicles of Scotland, as well as the "Whole Works of Sir David Lindsay." He received a patent as king's printer in the same year, and during the following (1541) he got a licence to print the Acts of Parliament (*Impressor Regii*).

Robert Lekpreuik may be mentioned as the next famous Edinburgh printer. By stress of circumstances he was obliged, in 1571, to leave Edinburgh and settle for a time in Stirling. He took his printing plant with him, but little work was done. He afterwards took up his abode in St. Andrews, where for several years he conducted a printing press in that ancient city. Here he remained until 1573, when he returned to Edinburgh, where, during January, he issued a poetical tract, without first having received a licence from the Town

