

A Great Italian Printer.

ALDUS PIUS MANUTIUS.



IN Italy the printing press originated with Sweynheim and Pannartz, first at Subiaco and then at Rome, who from 1465 to 1474 issued many editions of the classics. In addition to the famous names already recorded when noticing the introduction of the art into Italy, Ulric Hahn, Philip de Lignamine, Silber, Planck, and Reissinger, noted typographers of the fifteenth century, deserve mention. But the lustre of all fades before the fame of the celebrated Aldus Pius Manutius Romanus. This great printer was born at Bassanio, in the Roman States, in 1449. He studied for many years in Rome, and from that fact assumed the name of Romanus. In 1482 he lived in the same house as Picus Mirandulus, and afterwards abode with Prince Alberto Pio, who allowed him to adopt the name "Pius." Being strongly impressed with the potentialities latent in the printing press, he determined, about 1489, to devote his whole attention to the publication of classical literature. After organising in Venice the most complete printing office hitherto seen, he began his typographical career by the issue of the Greek Grammar of Lascaris. This was in 1494. In the prologue to that book Aldus declares the determination of himself and his co-workers in the following noble words:—"We have determined henceforth to devote all our lives to this good work. I call God to witness that my sincere desire is to do good to mankind, as indeed I hope has already been shown by my past life. I will indeed labour continuously to make constant progress; for although we might have chosen a tranquil country life, we have preferred a life busy and full of hard work. A good and learned man will not give himself up to base pleasures, but to work and to do something worthy. Cato has said truly, 'Man's life may be compared to a sword; use it and it keeps bright; neglect it and rust will soon be its destruction.' Therefore if work seem sometimes irksome to a man, let him be sure of this—that sloth would be much more detrimental to him than the hardest kind of labour."

These were words from the heart of Aldus, and in this conviction he worked until his death. In 1501 he established an academy of learned men and scholars. Constantinople had just fallen into the hands of the Turks, and among the Christian refugees were many scholars of fame and repute. To these Aldus offered a safe and quiet asylum, asking from them in return that a portion of their time should be devoted to the collation of manuscript copies of the classics, which in the course of time had become very erroneous through the carelessness of successive copyists. He also employed them in reading his printed proofs and revising them for the press. In this way many good scholars lived on terms of good friendship with Aldus, and were entirely supported by him. Surely modern lovers of literature owe an incalculable debt of gratitude to Aldus for preserving by these means an accurate text of the great classical writers of antiquity.

The expense of this great undertaking was of course very great; and partly to reduce the cost of production, and partly to place copies of the books he printed within the reach of poor scholars, Aldus employed the artist Giovanni de Bologna to design for him a new and compressed type which would enable him to print nearly two pages in the same space as one. From the country of its birth this letter has ever since been known as *italic*. Its elegant shape has been much, perhaps too much, admired. The appearance is somewhat marred by the invariable use of roman capitals, which, throughout a page of italic, is certainly not agreeable to the eye.

The fame of Aldus's printing office soon spread throughout Europe, and his little pocket editions of the Greek and Latin classics were esteemed as much for the beauty of their dress as for the accuracy of their text. The visits of the curious, as well as of the learned, became at last so troublesome that Aldus placed the following notice over the chief entrance:—"Whoever you are that wish to see Aldus, be brief; and when business is finished go away; unless indeed you are able and willing to assist him as Hercules did Atlas in his need: and even then remember that whoever gains here a footing must work hard and with perseverance."

Aldus himself took no relaxation; scarcely would he afford himself any sleep until fatigue compelled him to rest. He died in 1515, the king of printers, with an immortal halo surrounding him.

Aldus adopted for his device an anchor, with a dolphin twisted round it. This emblem is justly celebrated in the annals of typography under the name of the Aldine anchor, and is very appropriate to the work of a printer. The dolphin is the emblem of swiftness, on account of the rapidity with which it cleaves the waves. The anchor is the emblem of stability and reliance. So the printer should be speedy at his work, but consider his plans carefully and soberly. This was admirably summarised in the motto adopted by Aldus—"Festina lente" (Hasten slowly).—BLADES' *Pentateuch of Printing*.

MISS S. T. PRIDEAUX has just completed a Bibliography of Bookbinding, of which 150 copies have been printed, and 130 are in the hands of James Bain, 1 Haymarket, London, for sale. It is the most complete classified list of books and papers upon the subject yet issued, indeed no other can be compared to it, and it must have cost untold time and labour. Not only have books dealing directly with the subject been alphabetically arranged, but many others have been searched for an odd note or chapter, and all sorts of journals ransacked with the same object, the year and the page of the journal being noted. Acts of Parliament, petitions to Parliament, illustrated catalogues of libraries and book sales, and plates of designs, all are recorded for the benefit of the student, who if he does not thank Miss Prideaux must be a stony-hearted wretch. This bibliography will later on be included in a new work on binding, which is being prepared for publication in the autumn.



A GREAT ITALIAN PRINTER: ALDUS, OF VENICE.



