Johann Gutenberg.
1397—1468.
Fierce and furious was the controversy that for many years raged round the invention of printing. Now this town, and now that, claimed the distinction of having given birth to the noblest art we possess, and the partisans of Gutenberg, of Coster, of Jenson, and other more mythical inventors, waged deadly contest, and published long and learned treatises in support of the claims of their rival proteges. At last, when the din of battle has subsided, and when we have time to look around us and to examine dispassionately the arguments and the evidence brought together concerning these much debated questions, we find that the claims of Gutenberg far outweigh those of all other competitors, and the more his history becomes clear to us the stronger becomes the conviction that to him alone we owe the art of printing with movable types, even if others had before his time contributed some of the steps which paved the way for and led up to the final consummation which he achieved.

We know but little of the early life of Gutenberg. His father's household, along with other patrician families of Mentz, was banished from his native town in consequence of some democratic outbreak in the year 1420, and young Gutenberg, then about 20 years of age, settled in Strasburg, either going thither direct from home, or coming to reside there somewhat later. We cannot trace his actual presence in Strasburg until 1424, when he dates a letter from thence to his sister Bertha, an inmate of a convent at Mentz, but the authenticity of this document is more than doubtful.
The Gutenberg House, Mayence.
In the year 1430, the Archbishop Conrad III. granted an amnesty in favour of certain of the expatriated families of Mentz, and among these occurs the name of Henne or John Gutenberg, but he does not seem to have availed himself of this privilege, since in 1434 he caused the town clerk of Mentz, while on a visit to Strasburg, to be arrested for the non-payment of certain rents due to him by the authorities of his native city. The official record of the verdict in this case is still preserved.

Two years later, viz. in 1436, one bearing the honoured name of Gutenberg appears in the Strasburg archives, as the defendant in an action for breach of promise of marriage, at the suit of one “Ennel” (Ann) who dwelt near the Iron Gate. It is conjectured that the suit was compromised and that the lady became his wife, for in 1443 a certain “Ennel Gutenbergin” is found on the rolls of the tax-payers, but this is a mere surmise, and we obtain no other glimpse of his married life.

It was about 1436, as would appear from subsequent events, that Gutenberg taught to one named Andreas Dritzehen, the art of cutting and polishing precious stones, so at any rate was alleged during a law suit, the full documentary records of which are still in existence. This art was a secret one, and as we have nothing to show that Gutenberg was a lapidary, and as everything tends to prove that he was about this period busied with an invention of quite another kind, it seems reasonable to infer that the so-called “cutting and polishing of precious stones” was a mere blind; that it was the cutting of wood or metal types upon which he was even then engaged, and that this was the “secret art” he taught to Dritzehen.

Be this as it may, we have the sworn deposition of Hans Dünne, a goldsmith, in 1439, that some three years previously (1436) he had been paid by Gutenberg about 100 guilden for “things required for printing.” In or about the year 1438, Gutenberg entered into another engagement with a certain Hans Riffe, to teach him some secret process, with the results of which it was agreed that they should undertake a journey to Aix-la-Chapelle, on the occasion of the great Pilgrim’s festival or fair, to be held there in 1439. This fair, which took place every seven years, and was one of the chief medieval marts resorted to by merchants from all parts of Europe, was, however, postponed until 1440. In the meanwhile we learn that Dritzehen became aware of the arrangement with Riffe, and begged to be also taken into partnership in this business, as did likewise Anton Heilman, from whom it is conjectured that money had been borrowed by the partners.

Nothing can be more certain with respect to Gutenberg’s circumstances than the fact that he was in constant need of money, and that he was put to great straits in order to procure it for his varied undertakings. The different persons with whom he allied himself from time to time, had all of them to find portions of the requisite capital, and he borrowed from his family and wealthy neighbours large sums to carry on the work.

Now, what was this secret art he agreed to teach Riffe and the others? That of “looking-glass making” we find from the documentary evidence unearthed about a hundred years ago from the dusty records of Strasburg. Again a blind! though nobody seems to have doubted that this was the business they projected, until M. Paul Lacroix suggested that they used the German form of the Latin “Speculum,” the well-known block-book, to throw people off the scent. This surmise has everything in its favour, but it has not hitherto attracted the notice it deserves, owing to the fact that no block-books of that date can, with any degree of certainty, be pronounced to have been produced at Strasburg. We feel, however, more than doubtful whether Gutenberg, whose whole energies at that period, and for many years before that, had been bound up in his grand invention, would turn aside to strive after doubtful gains to be derived from the making of “Spiegeln,” even if this was, as it is alleged to be, a secret art, and one bearing abundant profits; for we know from contemporary evidence that wealth in profusion was to be obtained from this enterprise. No! The whole of the facts, when studied in the light of recent research, tend to convince us that all these secret undertakings were in the nature of printing and nothing else.

Space does not permit us to follow out all the details of the partnership and of the lawsuit arising from the death of Andreas Dritzehen, but it is clear from the documents that can be followed in English in the work of Mr. W. Skeen, that Gutenberg was indeed at that time engaged in preparing to print some book or books with separable types. The lawsuit extended over nearly a twelvemonth, and the verdict was in favour of Gutenberg; the papers were first published by Schöpf in his Vindicia Typographica, but they have since appeared in many translations.

One of the consequences of these legal proceedings was a stoppage in the work of Gutenberg, and we hear nothing more of his invention for some years, during the course of which he returned to Mentz. The date of his arrival in his native city is unknown, probably it was about 1444, as we then find him again figuring in certain borrowing transactions. He seems first to have applied for funds to Faust, a banker and money lender of Mentz, in 1448. In the course of 1450 an agreement was entered into between them with respect to a joint undertaking in which they were to engage, and from henceforth their names are inseparable in the history of typography. With the money, 800 guilden, advanced by Faust, Gutenberg, who was bound down under very strict conditions, proceeded with his great designs, and doubtless produced the types from which his magnum opus, the 42-line Bible was printed. This must have been a work of enormous labour, when we consider that most of the type had to be cut by hand, and year after year went by, and more and more money was sunk, until, as we learn from the Abbot Trithemius, no less a sum than 4000 guilden had been expended, and only the first twelve sheets had been completed. This Bible, begun in 1450, according to the testimony of Ulrich Zell, must have been finished towards the close of 1455, but some time before this Faust and Gutenberg quarrelled about money matters, and Faust enforced his application, for the return of his money or the forfeiture of the book, by an appeal to law.
Filius epistolae sanctorum Theronimi ad Paulinum presbyterum de omnibus divinae historie libros capitulo primo.

Kare ambrosius, ea nuncius munifcens, duxit et sua insulas tras su a principio amicius, hic plato iam idci x vertis amicitiae nova pserbant. Hic erat illa necessitudo, quia si gluvulo populata cii non velit, tres si familiius no prida tangunt, corporis no sioda x palmis adularis sed dei amor et divina scripturar is audia conosiam. Legim in veritatis historis, quosdam lustrasse punica, nonos adisse pros maria taisisse utros quos x libris nostranc. coss a nisi videas. Hicur pitagoras memphi nicos rates hic Plato egipci x architecta tarunui, sanctam ovam vateaque quondam magna grecia dioba, lati rio sive ne peraguit ut qui athenes mge rat x potens nihilis doctrinas.

Fig. 1.—Facsimile of a part of a column of the 42-line or Mazarin Bible.
THE BRITISH BOOKMAKER.

The verdict in this action, concerning the justice of which many different opinions have been expressed, was given in favour of Faust, who had claimed 2000 gulden for principal and interest. Gutenberg being unable to meet these demands, Faust became sole possessor of type and presses in his own right, and these, with the partially printed Bible, were removed by him to his house in the Schuster-gasse, from henceforth to be known as "The Printing Office." On the eve of its completion, the Bible to which he had devoted so many years of anxious toil, passed out of his possession, and Gutenberg found himself despoiled and robbed of his reward. Nor was this the only mortification he had to undergo, for Petrus Schaeffer, an illuminator, who had been engaged to rubricate copies of the Bible, discovered a far simpler and readier mode of producing type than that of Gutenberg, namely, the process of stamping matrices with letter-punches, the very plan in use at the present time, by which means the complete type could be cast in a mould, and no hand-cutting such as Gutenberg practised was needed.

Faust, as soon as he had ousted Gutenberg, took Schaeffer into partnership, and gave him his granddaughter in marriage, as a reward, say some, for his brilliant discovery. We have no means of estimating the full extent of the disaster which thus overtook the inventor of printing; the loss of a great part of his plant was doubtless a severe blow to him, and for a time his energies were paralysed. Faust did not seize the whole of his types, for we distinctly read that a division was made of the property. Gutenberg set up for himself at his dwelling house, Zum Gutenberg, and found another capitalist to aid him; this time, Dr. Conrad Homery, the syndic of the town, a man of position and influence, who may have espoused his cause, feeling that he had been treated unjustly by Faust.

As Gutenberg never attached his name to his works we have no exact means of ascertaining what he really produced, but bibliographers have recognised in the "Tractatus de Celebratione Missarum," the "Speculum Sacerdotum," and other works very probable products of his press. The absence of his name has been thought by some to be owing to his family pride, for he was, as we have seen, of patrician origin.

There can be no doubt that Gutenberg sooner or later found out and took advantage of the improvements effected by Schaeffer, and it is also certain that within a few years of this date he supplied several other printers in the surrounding country with sets of type identical with those used in his own office. The history of his subsequent labours is hard to trace. We learn from an inscription in a book in the public library of Mentz that he was still printing there in 1463.

In 1465, Gutenberg was appointed by the elector Adolphus of Mentz, a gentleman of his court, an honour he did not long enjoy, as he died in the year 1468. We have no record of the exact date, and infer the year of his death from the receipt of Gutenberg's effects by Dr. Homery, who testifies that the printing materials left by the deceased were his property, and binds himself to allow of their use in Mentz alone. This document is dated Feb. 26, 1468.

Gutenberg's career was one of constant struggles with adversity; he had to withstand a succession of lawsuits and losses, but in the end he triumphed over them all, and saw his beloved art firmly established.

We gave in our October issue a fac-simile of a page of the Mazarin Bible, for so the first Bible is termed by book lovers. This illustration was necessarily on a reduced scale, but we now append a portion of a column of the actual size to show the formation of the type used in the 42-line Bible. We also give a reduced fac-simile of a "Letter of Indulgence," dated 1454, undoubtedly printed by Gutenberg, and the first specimen of an entirely typographic work ever published. It will be seen that two kinds of type are employed, the larger being that used for the 42-line Bible, the smaller a font of type which must have been in existence prior to the issue of that work. Dr. De Villiers has moreover pointed out that the flourish in ink, which Laborde had found on the back of every specimen of these indulgences examined by him, is nothing else than the cryptogram of Gutenberg von Sulgeloch, the inventor of printing. We must refer those who wish to study this curious signature and the mode of deciphering it to the doctor's monograph, for space warns us to conclude. We reproduce the Indulgence of 1454 from the Marquis de Laborde's Essay; the original is preserved in the collection of M. Westeeneen. Our remaining illustration is a fac-simile of the colophon of the famous "Catholicon," dated 1460, a work which is produced from a font of type ascribed to Gutenberg, and which may have been one of his publications after his rupture with Faust, at any rate it was in this kind of type that the latest book thought to be by him is printed. This colophon, which definitely asserts the production of the work to be due to the intervention of the Most High, contains also a singular statement that it was not written with the pen, but impressed with characters made in moulds.

GILBERT R. REDGRAVE.
Forma plenissime abolutionis et remissionis in vita

Miscreatur tui fit. Dn. noster ut supra ego te absuluo ab omni peccato et absolutionem te oblatum dabo. In nomine patris et spiritus sancti amen.

Forma plenarie remissions in morbis articulo

Miscreatur tui fit. Dn. noster ut supra ego te absuluo ab omni peccato et absolutionem te oblatum dabo. In nomine patris et spiritus sancti amen.