Teobaldo Manuzio, known as Aldus:
THE FIRST PRINTER AND BINDER OF VENICE.

Italians of the fifteenth century could not take up a handicraft without making it into an art, and German printing became refined the moment it touched Italian ground. For this refinement we are indebted to Teobaldo, or Aldo Manuzio (born 1447 at Sermoneta, near Velletri), whose printed works are so beautiful that to this day Aldine editions are prized as precious works of art by collectors.

Aldo was a man of education; Gasparino da Verona was his Latin master, and Guarino taught him Greek. Lorenzo de' Medici's friend, Pico da Mirandola, in 1482, made Aldo tutor to his nephews, Alberto and Leonardo Pio, Lords of Capri. Alberto Pio, under his training, became a great lover of literature, and when Aldo conceived the idea of starting a printing press, Alberto Pio advanced the necessary funds and gave him a house in Venice, near the church of Sant'Agostino. Here Aldo found his mission, and became the benefactor of a world greedy for classics, by supplying large numbers of beautifully printed books at prices within the reach of even students. His pocket series of classic authors, of which *Virgil* was published in 1501, sold for about two shillings each of our money. These, we suppose, were issued in parchment covers.
Aldo’s house was a regular colony. He had his Readers’ Rooms and Studios, where a
number of learned men were employed in collating MSS., settling points of spelling and inter-
pretation; his Correcting Room, in which Musurus of Crete ruled as chief reader, besides
the Printers’ Rooms. Over the door of the principal room was this inscription: “Whoever
thou art, I, Aldo, request thee if thou wantest anything, ask it in a few words and go thy way.”

Between the years 1494 and 1515, Aldus had printed thirty-three first editions of Greek
authors. So fond was he of the language that nearly all his workmen were Greeks, and the
general orders of the establishment were given in Greek.* He employed an ink he himself
had made, and obtained his paper from Fabriano. The Greek type was copied from the
writing of his reader, Musurus; the Italian type, known as Aldine, was from the model of
Petrarch’s handwriting, and was cut by Francia of Bologna.

Aldo, philanthropist though he was, had no easy career: his workmen struck for higher
wages; the printers, Giunti of Rome, and the publishers of Lyons, pirated his copyrights;
the League of Blois and frequent wars interrupted the course of business; the League of
Cambray caused him to close from 1506 to 1510; selfish bibliophiles, prizing their unique
MSS., declined to lend them as copy; finally, his prices were too low to be remunerative, and
Aldo, having spent his all, died poor; and his press passed into the hands of a Company.

All Aldo’s first publications were Greek. The printing of Aristotle occupied three
years, from 1495 to 1498, being brought out in an edition of four volumes, one at a time; these
were edited by Scipione Forteguerra; Aldo himself, and his reader Musurus, edited
Aristophanes, Thucydides, Herodotus and Xenophon in 1503, and Demosthenes in 1504. The
Aldine Plato, Pindar, and Æschylus are dated 1513. Between the publications of these
Greek classics, Aldo brought out such a varied list of Latin and Italian authors that it
became within the power of any scholar of moderate wealth to amass a library as complete
as that which Vespuccio had, with such pains and cost, supplied to the Duke of Urbino.
This list included not only Dante and Petrarch, but the modern authors of the day, such as
Cardinal Bembo and Poliziano. Nor were contemporary foreigners left out: Erasmus here
found a publisher for his Adagia; he himself visited Venice to bring his Proverbs through the
press, and he worked together with Aldo and his readers in revising his MS. and correcting
his proofs. Aldo also published the English Linacre’s Proclus in 1499.

Although the Roman press, started first at Subiaco by two of Faust’s fugitive workmen
in 1462, was prior to that of Aldo, as was the Milanese press in 1476, Bernardo Cennini did
not begin to print in Florence till 1471. When the new art, however, reached that congenial
soil, and Vespuccio’s customers and allies had relinquished their prejudices and recognised
the value of the invention which could, like the miracle of the loaves and fishes, feed the
minds of thousands with the food hitherto only enough for the units, the Florentines took it
up with great avidity. Before the end of the century several printers were established there,
and the occupation of Vespuccio was gone.

There can be no doubt that the books printed by Aldus were also frequently bound in
his workshop, for his well-known distinguishing mark—an Anchor with a Dolphin twined
round it—has been found on the decoration of the covers of several of his books, and we
know that in the sixteenth century most of the Printers were also Binders.

* Among his attendants was a Nubian boy who carried messages to the workmen; he was the first
“Printers’ Devil.”