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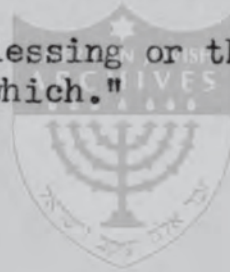
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Five Hundred Years of Printing, 1940.

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FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF PRINTING

"The printing press is either the greatest blessing or the greatest curse of modern times, one sometimes forgets which."



By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, March 10, 1940

Five hundred years ago, the use of movable type printing was introduced in Western Europe. It changed the face of the earth. It is generally accepted today that Johann Gutenberg, of , is to be credited with the first expert use of movable metal type hand press. Though others have claimed that same honor; a gentleman by the name of Coster, also France and Italy have claimed that honor, the controversy as to who was first is of little moment really.

In the history of science, many important inventions are frequently made almost simultaneously by two or more people in different parts of the world. When the time is ripe for the invention, when the precedent steps had been made and when there is an urgent demand for it, that invention will, as a rule, make its appearance in a few places almost simultaneously.

Actually the honor of inventing printing goes not to Western Europe, but to China. Fifteen hundred years before the invention of movable type, the Chines were already printing their classics. The Chines invented not only printing, but paper, also, just as they invented gun-powder, the compass, the telescope and many other important things. It is rather disconcerting to a Nordic to realize that the Orientals and the Asiatics were first to have invented these indispensable things. Genius, of course, knows no national or racial boundaries, and almost any great invention or discovery is a composite international achievement. Passionate exponents of racial superiority don't like to accept that and frequently are driven to consider intellectual dialectics to explain away the simple fact of this international inter-racial characteristic.

Thus, for example Oswald Spengler, one of the great champions of Nordic race superiority in his book, "The Decline of the West", goes to great lengths to point out that the outstanding characteristic of the Nordic is his strength of will, and his direct destiny. "The Nordic possesses a unique gift to discover, probe into the mystery of nature, to wrest secrets in order to master. That is a unique Nordic quality." But Oswald Spengler knows, because he is an educated

man, that some of the greatest scientists are not Germans. He says that scientists do not wrest those things from nature. They wheedle it out.

Two factors were responsible for the invention of printing, if you can call it that, in the Fifteenth Century. One was the availability of paper as printable material. Paper was far less expensive as a medium for printing than was parchment. That made a cheaper book. Second was the revival of learning, beginning at the close of the Thirteenth Century, throughout the Fourteenth Century, reaching its climax in the Fifteenth Century, from Italy to Northwest Europe. Men became interested again in the civilization of classical antiquity in Ancient Greece and Rome and the great things which the minds and the hands of the Greeks and Romans introduced. For a thousand years after the invasion of Greece and Rome by the Teutons, dark night lay over Europe, and the mind of man was cut off from the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the ancient world. A new intellectual ferment set in in the minds of the people of Western Europe, first of all, in Italy, the home of great Roman civilization. They began to turn eagerly to the great texts, the works of great masters, the Classics. They began to seek eagerly for the manuscripts of Plato, Aristotle, etc. etc.

The mind of man was experiencing a new Spring. An interest in books increased amazingly. There was a great demand for more books, cheaper books, so that more people could read. A manuscript was a very expensive business. First of all, the parchment itself was expensive, and the work, of course, was long and tedious.

In the Middle of the Fifteen Century, after the fall of Constantine, a great number of scholars fled in exile to Italy, and carried along with them their Greek culture....Because of the contact of the East and West, that

intellectual ferment increased a hundred fold. This revival of learning, this interest in classic literature, spelled the emancipation of the intellect. That movement gained headway and by the middle of the Fifteenth Century, it spread to the the people of Germany and Northwest Europe, and a great demand arose for books. Thus the availability of paper brought about the invention of the movable type for the printing of books.

The first book was printed around 1453, and by the close of that century, more than ten thousand editions of books had been printed in Western Europe, the greatest number of them, ofcourse, in Italy. In the City of Venice, alone, before 1500, two hundred printing presses, two hundred printing establishments were brought into existence. Such was the great hunger and thirst for books.

It can be readily anticipated that the first book printed was the Bible. The famous Gutenberg Latin Bible was printed in 1453-56. It was famous because it was not only the first book, but because it was in the full sense of the word, a masterpiece of printing. Like so many inventions, it was almost perfect in basic principle. And then some other Bibles appeared in part and in whole. The Book of Psalms was a particularly favorite book. The Bible came to be printed in the vernacular, not only in Latin, the official language of the Catholics, but in German, in French, Italian. The people wanted to read the Bible in the language which they could understand. Up to now, every scholar in Europe wrote not in his native speech, but in Latin. With the translation of the Bible in the language of their native speech, and from this era of printing the way for modern national literature is paved. For not only were Bibles, prayer books, religious texts of all kinds printed, but the Classics, grammars, dictionaries, textbooks of all kinds were printed. And the mind of man received a tremendous stimulation due to this sudden tide of intellectual greatness which poured in upon the mind and heart of Europe.

In this work of printing, our own people, the Jewish people, were not far behind. In fact it was a Jew who made possible the first printing press of Gutenberg in the same way as it was the Jews who made possible the trip of Columbus to discover the world. Within ten years after the art of printing was introduced in Italy, the first Hebrew book was printed in that country. An important Hebrew Press, the Soncino Press, in Venice, in 1488, was the first printing establishment to complete a Bible in Hebrew. That was quickly followed by the printing of numerous tracts from the Talmud, prayer books, Ethical treatises and philosophical works. In fact, we have close on to one hundred seventy Hebrew books printed before the year 1500 - Hebrew Credo books. All books printed before the year 1500 were known as credo books.

Not only were Spain and Portugal interested in the printing of Hebrew books, but Christian printers in other countries as well were interested as there was a great eagerness on the part of Christian scholars to become acquainted with Hebrew. There was a great revival of Hebrew and of the language. And Hebrew scholars and Rabbis were employed to help the Christian scholars read the original because they wanted to master the Bible in its original text.

So we find in Venice early in the Sixteenth Century, the printing establishment of Daniel Bomberg who devoted itself to the printing of Hebrew books. First appeared the Talmud printed by this Christian printer in the years 1519-1523. Printing of the Hebrew books stimulated Jewish learning among the Jews, not to speak of what it did elsewhere.

Many Jews in those days found it difficult to study because of the excessive cost in possessing a manuscript. Many of these manuscripts were as precious as diamonds and pearls. In many classes, the children were taught orally because of the expense of the manuscripts. Now with the printing of cheaper books, Jewish scholarship received a tremendous impetus.

What has the invention of printing done for mankind? Has it all been a blessing? Carlyle said: "He who first shortened the labor of copyists by the device of "movable types" was disbanding hired armies and most Kings and Senates, and creating a whole new democratic world: he had invented the Art of printing." There is a good deal of truth in what Carlyle said, ~~xx~~ although it is not all truth. It did make possible a whole new democratic world. Knowledge had been the privilege of very few and only of a few priests and scholars, because not every priest could read and write. Many of them were shamefully ignorant. Knowledge which had been the privilege of the few for hundreds and hundreds of years now became possession of the many. The monopoly of learning was destroyed. To that extent the printed book introduced democracy of learning which is a tremendously levelling factor in life.

The printed book also placed weapons in the hands of the many. Because knowledge is power. And a man possessed of education, learning, is^a fortified and strengthened individual in defense of rights. Printing made possible public libraries, newspapers. In other words, it contributed much to the stamping out of illiteracy in the world. Many men began to think for themselves.

At first the Church welcomed the printed book because it made available for the masses of the people its sacred text. But after a while, the very reading of the text by themselves and by many people made them individual interpreters of the text and made them challenge the traditional interpretation which the Church had put upon the text. Men began to think for themselves so much so that the Church, after a time, began to clamp down on the reading of books. By 1559, we have the Index librorum prohibitorum, which is a list of books prohibited to read. Even the reading of the Bible was discouraged for a while. The Church wanted its faithful to hear the Bible read by the competent heads of the Church and accepted according to the traditional of the Church.

In fact, the whole struggle of the Protestant Reformation may be summed up as a struggle maintaining that the Bible itself was the living of a living God, and that the faithful should himself read the book, and himself receive enlightenment from the book, and that the book did not need the authoritative interpretation of the priests....Not only did the Church come to be afraid of the Book, but laws were introduced to keep the people from reading it.

But behind every revolution, my friends, behind every struggle of men for greater justice and greater freedom, you will find the issue, if you look closely enough, in the enkindling words of some great book. In fact, the first soldiers in the wars for the liberation of mankind were these twenty-six leaden soldiers of the printed album. "A book," Disraeli said, "may be as great a thing as a Battle." And frequently, far greater. And those who are the friends of human liberation are always eager to make more and more books available to more and more people. And those who are the enemies of human freedom are always eager to destroy books.

The Nazis symbolized their coming into power by an autodafé on books, by burning of books.

But the art of printing, my friends, has not been the Messiah of mankind as some people think, nor has it been a blessing. This statement of Carlyle which I have read, revealed the truth: "He who first shortened the labor of Copyists by device of 'Movable Types' was disbanding hired armies and most Kings and Senates, and creating a whole new Democratic World: he had invented the Art of printing."

Here we are, in 1940, without printing presses turning out books, myriads of books and yet armies have not been disbanded, but multiplied, and much worse than kings, we have dictators. The menace today, my friends, is that printing is being used to re-enslave men. Dictators are no longer interested in keeping their people ignorant, illiterate. They don't shut down the schools. They don't stop the printing presses. Quite the contrary. They establish many more printing presses, but to print the kind of books which will befuddle the human mind, which will undermine the intellect of the human being. They are now keeping the lot of the masses no longer in the iron ring of ignorance, but in the iron ring of propaganda. The masses are taught to read, but only that which is allowed them to read by the bureaucracy. They are taught to read only the more readily to be controlled and maneuvered. In other words, education has become propaganda and books are used to undermine the purposes and objectives of Humanism and Humanity and Education, instead of being dedicated to the free unshackled questing mind of man. That is the menace today. The exploitation of the book to undermine the purposes and objectives of humanism. And if man is not to succumb, not to ignorance, but to that which is worse - lies, misinformation, falsehoods, if the mind of man is not to fall prey to this concerted attack which is being made upon him from so many quarters today, the mind of man will have to be toughened to resist that kind of attack. In other words, one of the supreme tasks of this generation is to discover ways of keeping books from destroying themselves.

Another throwback in the art of printing, in the popularization of books is the fact that ^{ti}quantity rather than quality has become the measure in many fields of education. I read you that very challenging phrase: "Of making many books there is no end." There are many books today which are read whose intellectual and moral value are below their printing value, and men and women, many of them, have come to grade themselves by the number of books

which they read rather than by the quality of their reading. In fact, the eagerness to read more and more books have been responsible for so many pre-digested books of all kinds, of book reviews whose chief purpose seems to be to tell stories of the book without taking the trouble to read it. It is a substitute for reading.

I think it was St. Thomas Aquinas who was called "Homo Unius libris" the man of one book, who devoted his entire lifetime to the complete reading of one book - the Bible. That is an extreme, of course - the man who knows only one book. But it is true that most people today read too much, and study too little. , you remember called it "a donkey that carries a lot of books on his shoulders."

"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested" said Bacon, "that is, some are to be read only in parts, others to be read but curiously, and some few to be read with diligence and attention."

One of the great tasks of education today, I believe is the rediscovery of our reverence for a few great books whom we want to make our life-long companions, books which we read, digest and make part of the experience pattern and thought pattern of our lives.

The early printers used to call their work, holy work. The Hebrew scribe before setting about writing one of the scrolls would first pray. Something of that restricted reverence for a great book is lost to us. that reverence Each of us ought to rediscover/whether that book, be ~~it~~ the Bible or ~~some~~ an ancient classic. There are not many classics in the world. To read and digest a few books in life is to make ourselves more firm. We will have firmer roots in life and will have finer sensitiveness for intellectual

and spiritual values.

There is a beautiful saying of the Rabbis: "The book and the sword came down to them from Heaven." And that is the eternal conflict, my friends, whether life shall be controlled by the wisdom and the knowledge which comes from books, or whether it be controlled by force and might which comes from the sword, whether our lives shall be terrorized by might, or directed by learning, whether we shall be driven or guided.

There are some people who hold a book fundamentally in contempt. They use books merely as a vehicle to achieve certain advantages for themselves. The Fascists, the Nazis, employed books, the printed word, in the same way as we would employ poison - to make and spread confusion, to spread terror. On the other hand, there are men who love liberty and freedom, men who want to establish the principle of dignity and who hold books in reverence. Therefore, we, who believe in freedom, liberty, the rights of man, ought to be very zealous in our defense of the book, in our free thought, free press, free good speech, in our reverence for the good book, the noble book. We ought not to encourage the cheap book, the vulgar book. There are all too many of them in the world today. We ought not to encourage them by buying them. We ought to encourage the great and noble, elevating emancipating books of the world by reading them ourselves, by studying them ourselves and by enabling our children to read and to study them.

1/ 500 yrs ago - Use of movable type was introduced in W. Europe and changed face, the earth.

Generally accepted to day - Johann Gutenberg of Mayence - is to be credited with first expert use of movable metal type. ^(type setting & others) Others have claimed it for Coster, Haerlem - also France and Italy have claimed honor - honor of first printing of little moment. many great inventions were made simultaneously by two or more people. - The time was ripe for it - The precedent steps had been made - The demand urgent.

Actually - China was first here - 1500 yrs. before - (classics so much else - Compass - telescope - gun powder - Paper and porcelain -

Wonders - Asiatics -

From Chinese then Arabs, Knowledge of Paper working printing came to West Europe. ^{Did not West - wheelbarrow - hand hauled - spread it & print it} Its Religion -

And then Arabs & Jews rediscovered Philos.

Great achievements are international - all races

2/ 2 factors - (1) Available supply of Paper - Printable material - in place of expensive parchment - (2) Revival of Learning - First in Italy - 14c.

a revived interest in civil. & classical antiquity - destroyed by Tentative invasions - Contact with heritage of Greece -

Ferment - Study of Classics - Mind, Man -

interest in books - more books - 17th - century - 2
cheaper method of copying books - gradually

- 1453 - Fall of Const. Exiles - still greater interest

- First Book - 1454. By 1500 - 10,000 editions of books

pamphlets printed in W. Europe.

~~Spread in~~ ^{Spread in} Italy - Home, Pinares - 2,835

- Venice alone - 200 printing presses

3) First Book - Bible in Latin - 1453-56 - Favorites

- masterpiece of printing -

Other Bibles ^{Pauls Bible Psalms} - Vernacular - world languages & nations

helped them to become "literary" & paved way
for modern ^{world} literatures

Classics - Grammar - Dictionaries - arts to
scholarship

4) Jews not far behind.

Within 10 yrs - Italy - First Heb. Book

Soncino Press - 1488 - Complete Heb. Bible

Talm. Tracts - 1517 - Ethical Treatises -

Phil. works - Grammar - Codes

Christian - Daniel Bomberg - (non-Jew. interest in
Heb. Pre-Reformation)

Rab. Bible - Talmud - 1519-1523

170 Known Heb. in canabiles - crack books

Portugal - 1/2, books printed before close of C -

Studied without books - Ms - Pearls - Inheritance

5/

5/ What has it done? - (Carlyle)

"What new democ. world"

① Knowledge was to be privilege, a farmed monopoly

Prints (few, then) scholars.

- Destroyed monopoly, barriers.

- "Books are true travellers" (Inch) 2.

- Proved weapons in hands, many -

- Paved way for Popular Education & Public libraries

- Emanipated man from ^{Neurotrophs} ignorance

② Men men began to read. Men men began to think -
for themselves. Free Thought!

- Endangered Tradition - Authority

The church - at first warmly welcomed - afraid

Bible - Heresy - Other Books

By 1559 - "Index librorum prohibitorum"

Book vs Tradition - Prots. Reformation - 1579

Other Ruling Power - Censorship - Repressing knowledge

③ Behind every Revolution - Struggle - to this day - some¹⁴
great enlightening Book -

- First step in War for Human Liberation (26)
- "A Book may be as great a thing as a Battle" - Disraeli
- Nazis - Brown books! Friends - build libraries
- Bill of Rights - freedom of press -

6) But ^{art, printing,} it has not been the sanction, Mankind - was an un-
alloyed blessing.

(Carlyle)

"The not distanced land armies" - carried most
things.

- We now have much larger armies - democratic armies
and much worse > Kings - Dictators.
- Printing used to day to re-enslave Man this indeed
- Keeps that masses in iron ring not shaking
but propaganda.
- Threat to read - only what they will be allowed to read -
only the men ready to be controlled + maneuvered
- Use books to undermine purposes + objectives of
Humanism + Humanity Educators
- 7) Concerted attack via printed word - upon Integrity
of Human intellect - in all lands -
- Toughness or subtlety human mind

"He who first shrouded the labor of Copyists by device of
'Movable Types' was disbanding hired Armies and obliterating
most Kings and Senates, and creating a whole new democratic
world: he had invented the art of printing"
Carlyle

~~"I am a man of the book" (homo unius libri) St. Thomas Aquinas~~

~~"Of making many books there is no end" Eccl. 12.12~~

~~"A book may be as great a thing as a battle" - Derrail.~~

~~"Oh that my words were now written!~~

~~Oh that they were printed in a book!~~

~~That with an iron pen and lead~~

~~They were framed in the rock for ever" Job. 19~~

~~"If books did good, the world would have been converted
long ago" - Geo. Moore~~

~~"It is with books as with man - a very small number play
a great part" - Voltaire~~

"Books are the true builders. They give to all, who will faithfully
use them, the solidity, the spiritual presence, of the best and greatest
of our race". Wm. Channing - ⁽²⁾

"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few
to be chewed and digested: that is some are to be read only in parts, others to be read
but curiously, and some few to be read with diligence and attention - Bacon - ⁽³⁾

8/ Quantity.

- "Of making many books there is no end"
- Below their purifying value.
- Men & Women grade Es by numbers, books they read. Pre-disposed story - Book has ans. - Sulchik for
- St. Thomas ^{Aquinas} Aquinas - "Homo Unius libri" -
- Read too much - + Study too little - 2000 lib 1/2 1/2 1/2
- Bacon (Just) (3) + Holy Writ 20/0
- Redeemer renewer for Great Books - 1/2 1/2
- More than - less shall - better grounded
- finer roots

9/ Good 2000 Ultimate struggle

- { Control , life by wisdom Knowledge
- { A Force + Might. Terror or Conviction
- Defend Free Press - Drive - Guidance
- Make Friends with Great Books - and Others