

# THE EARLY PRINTED EDITIONS OF THE GREEK TESTAMENT

NEXT to the conjunction of the birth of Christianity with the foundation of the Roman Empire, the most pregnant coincidence in the history of civilization was perhaps the coincidence of the fall of Constantinople in A.D. 1453 with the invention of printing.

The earliest printed books were the great Latin Bibles of Germany: the first at Mainz, by Gutenberg or by Fust and Schoeffer, known as the Mazarin or 42-line Bible, for which the *terminus ad quem* is supplied by a rubricator's note in a copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale dated August 24, 1456; the second at Bamberg, by Albrecht Pfister, the 36-line Bible, which a similar note, also in a Paris copy, fixes as not later than 1461; the third at Strassburg, by Mentelin, again similarly dated by notes in a copy at Freiburg in Breisgau showing that the rubrication of vol. i was completed in 1460 and that of vol. ii in 1461; the fourth—the first with date and printer's name—at Mainz, by Fust and Schoeffer, in 1462.

Outside Germany the first Latin Bible was issued by the great Roman printers Sweynheym and Pannartz, and in 'Roman' type, in 1471. What we thus call justly Roman type was copied from the script which the scholars of the Italian Renaissance, to the incalculable advantage of posterity, introduced in the fifteenth century in direct imitation of the Carolingian handwriting of the ninth, as that in turn was derived, by the conscious effort of Carolingian scholars, from the Italian minuscule hand, miscalled semi-uncial, of the fifth and sixth centuries. In the one case the degraded and illegible hand

of Merovingian scribes, in the other the late mediaeval hands, almost equally unintelligible from the number of contractions employed, were superseded by the re-introduction of older forms as beautiful as they were simple. It is not easy to estimate how much we have lost by the fact that the only attempt to effect a parallel revival in Greek failed of success.

Among the books conventionally known as *Incunabula*, books that is to say published before the end of the fifteenth century, there are not less than about 100 Latin Bibles. Besides these there were not only Hebrew Old Testaments or parts of the Old Testament (all of them printed in Italy or in the Spanish peninsula), but Bibles in the principal vernacular languages of Western Europe—Italian, Spanish, German, French, and Dutch—with the one exception of our own. There was, speaking generally, no apparent reluctance, outside England at any rate, to circulate the Holy Scriptures among the reading public: England depended, for her printed Bibles and her printed liturgical books, upon the Continent.

But there was as yet no Greek Bible and no Greek Testament. Why?

In the first place there was of course the difficulty of type. For Latin Bibles and vernacular Bibles the type was the type of any other books that issued from fifteenth-century presses. But though there were plenty of Greek scholars and Greek MSS., at least in Italy, the founts of Greek type necessary for a book of any size were not easy to produce, and the expense must have been serious. Outside Italy no Greek books were produced before 1500; in Italy itself the first great effort was the Florentine Homer of 1488, though before the end of the century there followed such a huge prose book as the Milan Suidas of 1499—lexicons and grammars commanding obviously a relatively large sale.

But the principal cause which retarded the appearance