

# The Printer's Miscellany.

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[Selected from our Scrap Book.]

## The Art of Displaying Type.

NUMBER I.

The art of displaying type is often erroneously considered as the exclusive function of the job printer. The book or news compositor is apt to think that a knowledge of this branch of the art is not a necessary part of his education. It is a mistake. He cannot be considered a good compositor who is incompetent to set up a good book title or a neatly displayed advertisement, for these are duties strictly within his province.

We have no reason now to complain of the poverty of our materials. It would be almost impossible to number or to strictly classify the distinct faces, sizes, and styles of modern types. Where the type-founders have done so well, it is not unreasonable in the public to look for a corresponding advance on the part of the compositor. It is much more difficult to be a good compositor now than it was one hundred years ago. The good presswork of the last century would pass muster with honor; but the good composition of that period would not now be tolerated.

The utility and importance of a knowledge of the best methods of display will not need any elaboration. However utilitarian any man may be in his tendencies, he cannot fail to note the superior merit of a properly displayed piece of composition. The subject-matter, the thought itself, of any form of printing, should be its chief attraction; but there is no written matter so wise or so witty that the method of arranging the types, by which

the wise or witty idea is conveyed to the reader, can be passed by as of trivial importance. A badly-arranged title page, a profuse peppering of italics or capitals, or a neglect to proportion blanks, spaces and margins, will repel an ordinary reader quite as effectually as dullness in the subject itself. How many persons would read accepted poems if they were run in solid? How many would read standard histories if they were set up in solid minion double columns? We have but to look at some of our old books again to perceive the necessity of a proper arrangement of type. Irrespective of subject-matter, the reading of one book is a pleasure, the reading of another a drudgery.

The superior attraction of a good modern book is due to its arrangement. In the old book there are no chapter-heads, no blanks, no paragraphs, no relief whatever to the eye. In the modern we have systematic divisions, displayed headings, paragraphs, capitals, italics, and suitable captions. This is one of the many forms of displaying types, the utility of which cannot be questioned. The first inference to be drawn is, that to make books look inviting and subject-matter attractive, there must be leads between the lines, frequent use of paragraphs, a systematic division of the subject in chapters and captions, and good broad margins. To sum all up briefly, there must be much more white than black on the page. This rule should be remembered, for it will apply almost as well to posters as to book pages.

Before the novice can reasonably hope to become expert in displaying type, it is important that he should have a clear idea of the effect he wishes to produce. He must first know what a good piece of display is, and what are the points that make it good. If he undertakes to study the matter, he will first perceive that in most pieces of display there are various sizes and styles of type. He will rightly infer that contrast is one of the methods by which the desired effect is produced—he will notice contrasts in the sizes, shapes and shades of the type. He will see that a line of capitals is often followed by a line of lower-case—that a long line is preceded by a short line—that the prominent lines are black, while the catch-lines are small and light—that antique type appears all the blacker and bolder by reason of its juxtaposition with light-faced Roman—that prominent lines are most prominent when they are not followed or preceded by lines of the same length. The inference would be, that bold and effective display can be secured only by using the best methods of making contrast—that display itself is nothing but contrast.

To a great extent this is true; but it is not always correct. There are other kinds of display work than posters—work in which violent contrasts are useless as well as in bad taste. Book titles would be disguised by strict imitation of the method by which a poster is improved. The reason is obvious: the book is held in the hand, the poster is to be read, if need be, across the street; the book title needs no violent contrast to arrest attention, while the poster is ineffective without this violent contrast; the poster is an isolated piece of work, and need