

DANIEL BERKELEY UPDIKE

Daniel Berkeley Updike, dean of American printers and historian of the printing art, died at his home in Boston, December 29, 1941. He was born at Providence, Rhode Island, February 24, 1860, the only child of Caesar Augustus and Elizabeth Bigelow (Adams) Updike. His father was a successful lawyer and a graduate of Brown in the class of 1849. Educated in private schools in Providence, the son acquired a knowledge of books through constant reading and visits to the several Rhode Island libraries. At the age of eighteen he became an assistant in the Providence Athenæum and then finding that the family finances did not admit of a college education, he took a position in 1880 with Houghton, Mifflin & Company. Starting in as errand boy, he worked up to a place of responsibility, chiefly because of his ability in planning the typography of his firm's many publications. For twelve years he remained with the Company, making lasting friends, meeting such famous literary people as Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, Aldrich, Howells and Mrs. Stowe, and learning, almost unconsciously, the details of fine printing.

After two years of further typographical experience at the Riverside Press in Cambridge, in 1893 Mr. Updike went into business for himself in rooms at 6 Beacon Street. He used other presses for his press-work, but issued his books with colophons describing them as from his designs or published under his supervision. By 1896 he secured presses and types and began to publish over his own name, calling his establishment the Merrymount Press. In this year appeared *The Altar Book*, one of the finest of his productions. The story of his press, of his fortunate association with John Bianchi, his later partner, and of the various changes in location, is graphically told in his *Notes on the Merrymount Press*, published in 1934.

For nearly fifty years all kinds of printing were turned out in rapid succession—stately folios, histories, memorial tributes, catalogues, programs, and even, as Mr. Updike himself once remarked, a label for a pot of jam. The amount of work, numerically, was astounding. Mr. Julian Smith's Checklist, only up to 1933, numbered 762 volumes, and an equal number of so-called "Minor Printing." Mr. Wroth, in his scholarly tribute to Mr. Updike, published in 1942, said that in the forty-nine years of his connection with printing some 20,000 pieces, embodying books, pamphlets, broadsides, invitations, and announcements, were issued. It is impossible in this short sketch to particularize, or to describe the outstanding productions of his press. One could discuss at length the *Description of the Pastoral Staff*, of 1900, or the *Book of Common Prayer*, of 1930, or the *Catalogues* of the Carter Brown Library, or even the remarkable series of announcements which he printed for the Club of Odd Volumes, but the subject has been covered in many treatises on his work.

Sufficient it is to say that Mr. Updike applied to the common types of printing the same high standards that other printers applied to limited editions, or as he himself expressed it, he sought to "do common work well." He preached the doctrine of suiting typography both to the purpose of the book and to its user. His taste and his imagination, coupled with his experience and his mastery of details, enabled him to reach a more constant degree of perfection than that attained by any other printer of his time. He insisted that printing was a trade and not an art, but he assuredly raised the trade to the level of an art.

With his scholarly background and associations and with his knowledge of typography, it was but natural that Mr. Updike should make notable contributions to the history of the printing art. His *Printing Types, their History, Forms,*

and Use, 1922, with a second edition in 1937, *In the Day's Work*, 1924, and *Notes on the Merrymount Press*, 1934, established his reputation and greatly influenced typographic practice. A checklist of his writings was published by the Grolier Club in 1940 in *Daniel Berkeley Updike and the Merrymount Press*, in connection with an exhibition of his printing.

Mr. Updike was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1904. He sent many gifts of books to the Library and invariably attended the Boston meetings. He was modest, almost retiring, in nature, yet when the occasion called for it, was strong minded and highly expressive in his views. The writer of this sketch has known Mr. Updike for over forty years. He remembers vividly the visits to the old apartments on Beacon Street and stories of early life in Providence. Fastidious in his tastes, unflinchingly upright in character, and scholarly in his attainments, Mr. Updike was a Christian gentleman, whose loss to the world and to his friends is deeply felt.

C. S. B.

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.