

OVER-FIGURING OR THE HAND OF THE 'PRENTICE COMP?

BY DEFINITION, press figures are to be found only once per forme. Occasionally, even where cancellation is manifestly not involved, two figures are found in one forme; in such instances it is usual to assume that the over-figuring is accidental. But there is also the extremely rare instance where the over-figuring is gross. An example is afforded by the Oxford duodecimo Bible of 1739 printed by 'Jonh' Baskett (Darlow and Moule, rev. Herbert, no.1045), which collates A-2P¹² 2Q⁶. Of this edition I have seen six exemplars: Edinburgh Public Library (lacking all after 2G6 - i.e. N.T.), Rylands (R77175), Bodleian (Bib. Eng. 1739.f.1), Cambridge University Library (1.35.85), British Library (3049.a.16(1)) and British and Foreign Bible Society (H1045). The figure in 2A appears to have been pulled in the Edinburgh, Rylands and BFBS exemplars; otherwise all 39 gatherings are figured, but only once, implying that the practice was being followed of not figuring the reiteration forme when it was worked off at the same press which had been responsible for the white-paper forme. Invariably the figure is in the outer forme, appearing in \$1^r or \$12^v except for F and 2I, where it is in \$11^r. The press figures are predominantly '3' and '4', though '1' and '6' also appear.

To this point there is nothing exceptional about the volume. However, on nineteen pages there is an asterisk beneath the first column. Asterisks themselves present no problems. They are perfectly admissible as press figures in books from presses which — for reasons I have not been able to determine — continue the numerical sequence '1' - '9' by typographic symbols or letters of the alphabet. And at the Oxford Bible Press asterisks could be used as paper-quality marks. But it is the distribution of the asterisks which is puzzling. They are not confined to \$1^r, thus ruling out paper-quality marks as the explanation. Nor are they confined to formes otherwise unfigured. Their incidence is: F11^v 12^r 12^v, I5^r 5^v 6^r 6^v 7^r 7^v 8^r 8^v 9^v 10^r 10^v 11^r 11^v 12^r, and M6^v 11^v. M might pass muster as containing only one superfluous figure; F is more problematic, with two figures in each forme; but I, on the face of it, is quite inexplicable — how can you explain away fifteen press figures in one sheet, seven in one forme, eight in the other?

If the asterisks are not reconcilable with the normal disposition of press figures, what then do they represent? A parallel instance is afforded by gathering A of the second(?) edition of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees. Part II* (1730, 12mo), where a double dagger appears at the foot of ten consecutive pages, A7^r-11^v. W.B. Todd cites this instance in his 'Observations on the incidence and interpretation of press figures', *Studies in Bibliography* 3(1950-1951), 171-205, and in footnote 19 (pp.179-80) comments:

Professor James L. Clifford has offered what seems to be the only reasonable explanation for this phenomenon. An apprentice has composed these ten pages and is held responsible for whatever correction is necessary and for the eventual distribution of the type.

This 'explanation' is attractive, though it awaits the confirmatory evidence of the printer's records. If compositors *were* identified in this way gathering M illustrates the possible ambiguity: what is to link two pages, widely separated and in different formes, with a compositor, and what if our hypothetical apprentice (did he forget to mark I9^r?) had marked only 11^v in sheet M, or if M1^r had not been figured? Are other apprentices lurking in other books behind the isolated marks which pass for spasmodic press figures?

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PAPER DATED TO THE MONTH

IN BRITISH-MADE PAPER from 1794 to 1811 a date is commonly found either as the sole watermark or in conjunction with another mark. The presence of the date is due to a requirement of the 'Act for repealing the duties on paper, pasteboard, millboard, scaleboard, and glazed paper; and for granting other duties in lieu thereof' (34 George III (1794), c.20). Oldman summarizes the relevant sections (XXVIII, XXX and XXXI) thus: 'The first states that paper made in Great Britain may be exported, and a drawback (a refund of part of the duty already paid) allowed on certain conditions; the second allows printers and booksellers to export books and consequently to claim the drawback; and the third stipulates that they cannot claim the latter unless the paper on which the books are printed bears a watermark date.'¹ Hence the frequent placing of the date at one or more corners of the mould so that the date in the paper could be seen in a lower margin when the sheet had been printed on. Though the regulation was abrogated in 1811 (51 George III, c.95, sect.III) dates continued to appear in paper made in Britain well into the twentieth century,² even if in general use the practice of dating paper had died out by about 1830.

A dated watermark can be of value to the modern bibliographer when the date of printing is not stated or is thought to be wrong, since it must be presumed that the date of printing cannot be earlier than the date in the paper, even though the date in the paper cannot be proved to be the date that a sheet containing it was actually made. For example, paper dated '1873' provides one terminus (Forman's sale in November 1884 provides the other) for the printing of R.H. Horne's *Galatea Secunda*, Harry Buxton Forman's 'first slip down the path that was to lead to the wholesale production of forgeries well before he met [T.J.] Wise.'³

The problem of dating the printing by reference to the paper is compounded by the fact that some dates — as with personal names in watermarks — became conventional, being used in moulds made long after the particular year: thus '1742' was a conventional watermark in French paper — paper made much later in the century. Similarly, as Balston points out,⁴ the date in the mould might be

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