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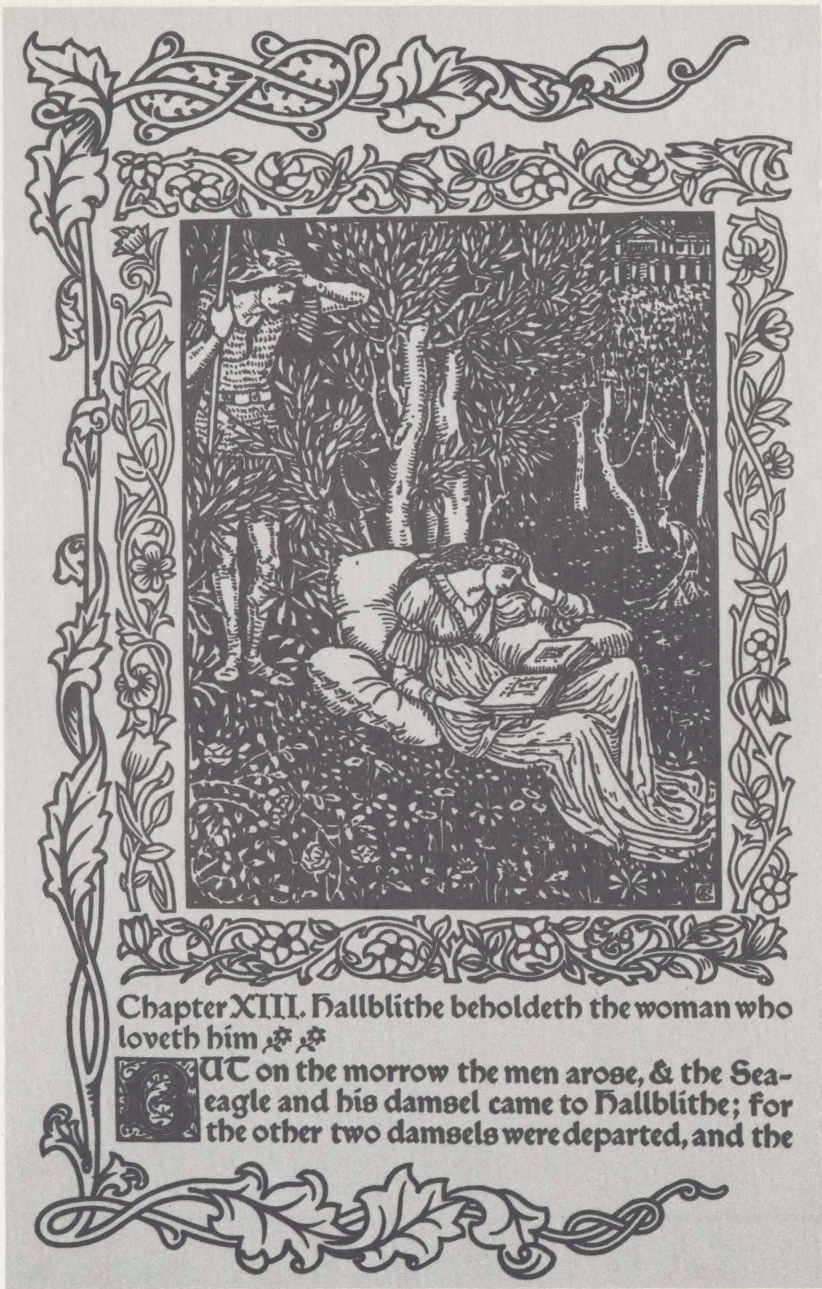


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Chapter XIII. Hallblithe beholdeth the woman who loveth him ❀ ❀

WAT on the morrow the men arose, & the Sea-eagle and his damsel came to Hallblithe; for the other two damsels were departed, and the

William Morris, *The Glittering Plain*, p. 84.

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*Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson:
A Study Based on His Journals*

by Elizabeth Mozley

The revival of fine bookmaking in England during the last decades of the nineteenth century is well represented in the collection at the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University. The excellent work of the private presses became a major expression of the Arts and Crafts movement, led by William Morris and his Kelmscott Press. Morris's work still dominates our impressions of the period. However, the movement's basic purpose, to beautify useful everyday objects, resulted in books from one of the private presses as restrained in design as the others were exuberant.

Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson, following the same artistic tenets as William Morris, created books at the Doves Press that in their unadorned perfection became the concrete expression of their maker's philosophical concept of the universe.

The Doves Press English Bible in five vellum-bound volumes at Syracuse University is the best known and most imposing of Cobden-Sanderson's works; but appreciation for the others in the university collection, the *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Milton's *Areopagitica*, and the *Address* by J. W. Mackail on William Morris is enhanced by a study of the *Journals* which he kept as a record of his search for self-fulfillment and personal harmony with the cosmos. Though he deliberately omitted most of the facts of his daily life and his personal relationships in preparing for publication, his devotion to the beautiful books of the Doves Press cannot be understood apart from his *Journals*.

From the first entry in the *Journals*, May 5, 1879, written at age thirty-eight, the reader is struck with Cobden-Sanderson's highly emotional and sensitive nature, varying from debilitating depression over his own shortcomings to rapturous pleasure in the beauty of a sunset. His image is shaped for the reader by the sincerity of his self-reproach and the naiveté of the confirmed bachelor who has fallen in love at about the time the *Journals* begin. "I am," he wrote, "inclined to think I underrate man as man, and put an obstacle in the way of my own development by fixing my attention too constantly on the universe of things, and not on man and his doings in

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relation thereto.”¹ A note in his *Journals*, from a friend in whom he has confided his love for Ann Cobden, is revealing. “What a redemption for you – what an awakening out of dreamy egotism – or dreamy philosophy – out of languid ill-health – out of despondency and loneliness, into the full glory of life.”²

Thomas James Sanderson was born in 1840. Perhaps his temperament was partly a product of that romantic age. Despite his highly emotional nature, and the ornate tastes of nineteenth century England, the books he designed reflect a simplicity and emotional purity that are classic in feeling – a paradox reinforced by the romantic idealism of his goals and his practical application of them. He was an intellectual, an upper class Englishman, who turned to manual labor for the sake of his beliefs. He was a mystic who believed the key to the universe lay in attaining harmony with its beauty and order; yet he ultimately destroyed the tools of his own union with eternity. Despite his reticence, dislike of personal acclaim, and his horror of machine-made things, his influence reaches well into the twentieth century “form follows function” school in the graphic arts and architecture.

Sanderson, enthusiastic, liberal, and sensitive, had been a member of Morris’s circle since their student days at Cambridge. Like his friends, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, he was greatly influenced by John Ruskin, who deplored the ugliness that the machine technology of the Industrial Revolution seemed to foster. The answer, they thought, lay in the return to hand-made things, where the inspiration of the artist-craftsman would beautify and spiritualize ordinary objects. The young men embraced Ruskin’s creed that their work would be dedicated to God, and that “truth in making is making by hand, and making by hand is making with joy.”³

After a period of mental questioning, he left Cambridge in 1863 and began to prepare for the bar, to which he was called in 1871. Until 1879, he did legal work at the Inner Temple, including a monumental digest on the rights and obligations of a large railway company. The serious strain of the work broke his health, and he went to Siena to recuperate. Here he met his future wife, Ann Cobden, daughter of the well-known liberal British statesman, Richard Cobden.⁴

After Cobden-Sanderson and Ann were married (he added her name to his, out of respect for her famous father), he tried to study, much against his

¹Cobden-Sanderson, Thomas James, *Journals of 1879-1922*, New York, Macmillan, 1926, Vol. 1, p. 32, August 30, 1879.

²*Ibid.*, Vol. 1., p. 50, February 11, 1882.

³Lewis, John, *Typography: Basic Principles. Influences and Trends Since the Nineteenth Century*, New York, Reinhold, 1964, p. 10.

⁴Duryea, M.P., “Cobden-Sanderson’s Garden at Hammersmith,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, 74: July 23, 1921, p. 32-33.

nature, for the parliamentary bar. He thought, at that time, that he really would prefer to be able to get out and work among the poor. In the hope of curing his recurring depressions, he began to look for some work to do with his hands.

The gifted and versatile William Morris had by this time founded the Art Worker's Guild, to revive interest in handicraft. (It became the foundation of the Arts and Crafts movement and the starting point for both Art Nouveau and the twentieth-century applied art movement.) Cobden-Sanderson was an active supporter of Morris's ideas and the social consciousness which they fostered. The artists, by becoming craftsmen, hoped to raise the status of the ordinary craft worker and "overcome the ugliness of the time by consciously cultivating a sensitivity to beauty [by interesting] the public especially in the decoration of useful objects with 'genuine artistic finish' in place of a trade finish."⁵

Morris set out to reform the printed book, which by the middle of the nineteenth century had reached a point where lack of taste in style and poor legibility were commonplace. With the help of Sir Emery Walker, a commercial bookman who had inspired Morris with a lecture he gave at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in London in 1888, Morris started the Kelmscott Press for printing books as he thought they should be done; legibly, with beauty of proportion, design and decoration — all conforming to the scheme and content of the book. His lavishly decorated books, printed in a type of his own design, were exceedingly beautiful.

When Cobden-Sanderson mentioned to Mrs. Morris that he needed something to do with his hands, she suggested that he try bookbinding, as this was something Morris had not tried.

Though he had been deeply impressed by the work of Morris and Burne-Jones and had thought of joining them in some practical capacity, Cobden-Sanderson had not felt the urge for artistic endeavor. Nevertheless, without delay, he persuaded Roger de Coverly, a professional binder, to give him lessons. Within two weeks, he wrote in his diary that he loved the "quiet of the handicraft trade" and "the thinking of high thoughts all the while."⁶

It is hard to imagine, today, how his friends tried to dissuade him from becoming a "manual laborer." They thought it a waste of his cultivated intelligence. In the biographical note on this subject, the editor of the *Journals* states "Shortly after marriage, obeying the emotions of the day and hour, in accordance with his wife's wishes, he quitted the Bar and sought to realize his ideals in the work of his hands and to work with the working people."⁷

⁵Members of Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, *Arts and Crafts Essays*, London, Rivington, Percival, 1893, p. 123.

⁶Cobden-Sanderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 96, July 14, 1883.

⁷*Ibid.*, Biographical note, (Follows title page)

Ann had already persuaded him that, together, they had enough income to live, if they were not extravagant, without his having to work at the Bar. He later taught Ann to help with the bookbinding, and they worked together in their home-workshop with their infant son nearby.

While working with de Coverly, Cobden-Sanderson bound fifty-three books of exquisite design, some of which are now in museums, but he soon left de Coverly in order to carry on alone and to develop some of his own ideas. One of his friends quoted him as saying, shortly after he began bookbinding, "It was gradually revealed to me that the arts and crafts of life might be employed to make society itself a work of art, sound and beautiful as a whole, and in all its parts."⁸

During this time, Cobden-Sanderson was active in the socialist movement and even thought of dropping his aristocratic friends in order to organize teaching groups so socialists might learn how to reform the populace. Typically, at the same time he was reminding himself that he must read and think, and not let handicraft turn him into a plodding artisan.

The artistic and financial success of his bindery surprised him. And though he could, to himself, describe a woman as "a vulgar beggar type,"⁹ he wrote that his "higher aim [was] to dignify labor in all the lower crafts . . . to consecrate the arts and crafts to the well-being of society as a whole . . . to dedicate oneself to it".¹⁰ And he did devote himself to his work. His perfectionism drove him to rage and exhaustion. He severely strained his shoulder and arm from the work of tooling. His depressions and sleepless nights returned. Soon he began to need a fortnight's rest holiday, several times a year. Finally, the tools became too heavy for his weak hand and arm. He feared his sight was failing. One of his books had won a first prize at the Society of Art Exhibition in 1887, and by 1891, another was in the Ruskin Museum.

In the Spring of 1893, he established the Doves Bindery (so named because of a nearby inn of that name), with a competent staff of workers to carry out his designs under his supervision, since he could no longer do the work himself. The Doves Bindery was located opposite Morris's now famous Kelmscott Press, and there was some thought of his binding Morris's books.

Strangely, Morris and Cobden-Sanderson did not agree on the style of the latter's bindings. Morris thought that his friend's work was too costly and that the binding should be rough finished. Notwithstanding his own exquisite and expensive books, he felt some machinery should be invented to bind

⁸Orcutt, William Dana, *In Quest of the Perfect Book, Reminiscences of a Bookman*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1920, p. 97.

⁹Cobden-Sanderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 198, August 21, 1884.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 268, July 5, 1888.

books, since people will go to a cheaper market. Further, he told Cobden-Sanderson that “he did not wish to multiply the minor arts!”¹¹

The Doves Bindery did some mending, re-covering and rebinding for the Kelmscott Press. Cobden-Sanderson designed the silver gilt clasps with vellum cover for Morris’s *The Glittering Plain*.

The Doves Bindery paid its way within the first eighteen months. Cobden-Sanderson wished to establish himself and his own clientele and so fought shy of Morris and his ideas. The Doves Bindery quickly became known in America and on the Continent. Booklovers and dealers sought his books. Cobden-Sanderson continued to make patterns and insist on perfection in finish. In a rare interview for *The Studio* magazine, he pointed out that the proper binding of a book should come before decoration in importance. He criticized the commercial publishers for poor quality paper and presswork, mechanical sewing, and books which would not lie flat to be read. He admitted that his books were very expensive, but one or two, he felt, sufficed for enjoyment, decoration not being a necessity of life.¹²

In an essay for the Art and Crafts Exhibition Society, he wrote that, ideally, one person should do all the work on a book so that it may be conceived as a whole. “A well-bound, beautiful book is neither of one type, nor finished so that its highest praise is that ‘had it been made by machine it could not have been made better.’ It is individual; it is instinct with the hand of him who made it, it is pleasant to feel, to handle, and to see; it is the original work of an original mind working in freedom simultaneously with hand and heart and brain to produce a thing of use, which all time shall agree ever more and more to call ‘a thing of beauty.’”¹³ He applied these ideals in his own work.

In some of his thinking, he had begun to express his independence of William Morris’s taste in decoration. His ideas on design, as frequently expressed in the *Journals*, reflect his philosophy and his craftsmanship: “A work of art has the peculiar quality that it is capable of standing momentarily for the whole universe . . . In making patterns I must try to exhibit serene arrangements, beautiful organization, and so in matter exhibit lucidity of thought.”¹⁴

It should be noted that the above was written in 1897, when Art Nouveau was swirling all over England and the Continent. Art Nouveau, as a decorative craze, lost sight of the original concept of beautifying useful

¹¹*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 211, 212, March 21, 1885.

¹²“An Interview With T. J. Cobden-Sanderson,” *The Studio*, 2: September, October, 1892, p. 54.

¹³Members of Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, *op. cit.*, p. 147, 8.

¹⁴Cobden-Sanderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 342, 43, August 20, 1897.

objects through craft. Morris had tried to “recreate nature, staying close to the model as long as it was true to the surface it ornamented, within the bounds of simplicity and freshness.”¹⁵

Cobden-Sanderson’s designs for bindings are examples of this dictum, but unlike some of his contemporaries, his use of floral designs was strictly controlled and never became so unrestrained as in the Art Nouveau style. His bindings were models of fine craftsmanship and beauty. He brought back the Golden Age of bookbinding, giving it a new richness and individuality which made his work conspicuous.

Douglas Cockerell, his first apprentice, who became a well-known binder in his own right, wrote of his teacher, “Before his time there had been few attempts to combine tools to form organic patterns. Mr. Cobden-Sanderson’s tools were very elementary in character, each flower, leaf or bird were combined in such a way as to give a sense of growth, and, yet, in no way overlapped the traditional limitations and conventions of the craft. Mr. Cobden-Sanderson got his results by sheer genius in the right use of simple elements.”¹⁶

In his *Journals*, Cobden-Sanderson repeatedly reminded himself to trust the mind to invent, not to copy consciously, to make the design and color suit the style of the contents and avoid allegories, symbols, and emblems.

After William Morris’s death in 1896, and the closing of the Kelmscott Press, Cobden-Sanderson wrote in December, 1898, “I must, before I die, create the type for today of ‘the book beautiful,’ and actualize it – paper, ink, writing, printing, ornament, and binding.”¹⁷ Later, he published his treatise, *The Ideal Book or Book Beautiful*, in which he explained his conception of the book, consisting of many parts, each independently beautiful, yet contributing to the beauty of the whole, none dominating. Handwriting, he said, is the base of typography, especially in the adjustment of letter to letter and word to word and word to picture. As in handwriting, the type must be fluid. Further, the proper placing of the words on the page is a continuation of order and beauty found in all the arts, but one must be careful that the beauty of the type is not so dominant that it cannot be read. The whole duty of typography is to communicate to the reader without loss by the way – to give access by charm and beauty, and where a pause occurs in the text “interpose restful beauty of its own art.”¹⁸ Illustration, he said,

¹⁵Amaya, Mario, *Art Nouveau*, London, Studio Vista, 1966, p. 12.

¹⁶MacMurtrie, Douglas C., *The Book: The Story of Printing and Bookmaking*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 547.

¹⁷Cobden-Sanderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 384, December 11, 1898.

¹⁸Nash, John Henry, ed., *Cobden-Sanderson and the Doves Press: The History of the Press and the Story of its Types, told by Alfred W. Pollard; The Character of the Man Set Forth by His Faithful Scribe, Edward Johnston; with, The Ideal Book or, Book Beautiful, by Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson, and a list of the Doves Press Printing*, San Francisco, John Henry Nash, 1929, p. XVI.

should be related to the text and the typographical environment. To make it fit with the type, it should be of the same style and texture as the letter press.

In his characteristically thorough fashion, he had enrolled in a class in Writing, Illustrating, and Lettering, probably the first of its kind, given by the fine calligrapher Edward Johnston at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. His teacher, who became a major influence in the graphic arts of this century, wrote that Cobden-Sanderson could get little from the class in practice, but was very interested in the characteristics of letters formed by means of the pen.¹⁹ In January, 1900, Cobden-Sanderson wrote in his *Journals*, "Book-binding must be pursued . . . Printing must be added, and, by and by, writing, and illumination. And all must tend to an ideal."²⁰

Since Cobden-Sanderson knew nothing about printing, he asked Sir Emery Walker to help him and to become his partner in starting the Doves Press. Walker had helped Morris in an unofficial capacity at the Kelmscott Press, and had been a willing source of aid and inspiration to other private presses which had come about because of Morris's work. Walker was a skilled etcher and engraver, with a profound knowledge of the history, aesthetics, and practice of printing. Of his influence at that time, Will Ransom wrote that he was "an inexhaustible source of experience, taste, and enthusiasm from which they all derived instruction and encouragement."²¹ His experience with Morris had richly repaid him, "even technically, by the insight he gained into the successive inspirations with which Morris confronted the difficulties of fine printing and book decoration."²²

Walker had shown Morris how to enlarge good examples of old fonts through photographic process, redraw them, and then reduce them through photography to the size required for the punch cutter to engrave. Emery Walker became a partner in the new Doves Press, and through the photographic process he "translated Jenson's famous letter into what will perhaps stand as the finest formal book type of all time."²³ He used Landino's Italian translation of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, printed in Venice by Nicolas Jenson in 1476, reproduced, as Morris's type had been, though the redrawing was much less ambitious than Morris's redesigning.

¹⁹Nash, *op. cit.*, "The Character of the Man Set Forth by His Faithful Scribe, Edward Johnston," p. 24.

²⁰Cobden-Sanderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 1, January 12, 1900.

²¹Ransom, Will, *Private Presses and Their Books*, New York, Bowker, 1929, p. 36.

²²Nash, *op. cit.*, "The History of the Press and the Story of its Types, told by Alfred W. Pollard," p. 2.

²³Ransom, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

Perhaps because Walker was unable at the time to contribute to the partnership financially (Ann Cobden-Sanderson supplied the money), he remained in the background, and the work of the Doves Press stood for the personal expression of Cobden-Sanderson.

Walker was helped with his designs by a draughtsman, and the punches and matrices were cut by E. P. Prince, who had cut Morris's type. Walker supplied harmonious punctuation marks and a fine set of numerals based on a later model. The result was a new Jenson font closer to the original than Morris's, "trimmed to a slim grace which suggests a race horse at the top of its training, with no ounce of superfluous flesh, but full of spring and life."²⁴ The type seemed cool and formal, "not friendly, but instinct with restrained yet magnificent beauty."²⁵ It was a great type and a great feat of reproduction from fifteenth century impressions coarsened by the spread of ink. W. D. Orcutt says that the Doves Type is, "to me, the most beautiful type face in existence."²⁶

Even before the Doves Press was officially established in 1901, plans had been made to produce a small edition of Scrivener's text of the Bible. The highly skilled J. H. Mason had been employed to do the presswork, and Cobden-Sanderson set about to design the text, adjust spacing, design and title page, and so on. Thus, his taste set the style of the Doves Press. He designed the watermark of the "two Doves breasting a perch."²⁷ Because Cobden-Sanderson's health was bad at this time, it was Walker who made daily visits to the press to see that the work was progressing properly. The Doves Press made a brilliant start, helped by the list of customers from the Kelmscott Press, which Walker had brought. The workshop became a model of the socialist ideal, all the workers being on an equal basis, unsupervised, "honor being the only guardian of the owner's rights."²⁸ Everyone believed in Cobden-Sanderson's ideas, everyone was a "radical," and the talk was of books and the *Daily Chronicle*, a socialist newspaper. A student wrote that the work proceeded cheerfully, with singing, everyone taking pleasure in what he was doing. Cobden-Sanderson himself dressed in a workman's blue blouse and beret. His son and daughter played in the workshop in order that they

²⁴Nash, *op. cit.*, p. 7, 8.

²⁵ *Loc. cit.*

²⁶Orcutt, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

²⁷Cobden-Sanderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2., p. 4, April 29, 1900.

²⁸Preston, Emily, "Cobden-Sanderson and the Doves Bindery," *Craftsman*, 2:1, April, September, 1902, p. 26.

IN THE BEGINNING

GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH. ¶ AND THE EARTH WAS WITHOUT FORM, AND VOID; AND DARKNESS WAS UPON THE FACE OF THE DEEP, & THE SPIRIT OF GOD MOVED UPON THE FACE OF THE WATERS.

¶ And God said, Let there be light: & there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: & God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

¶ And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, & let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: & it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening & the morning were the second day.

¶ And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: & it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, & herb yielding seed after his kind, & the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening & the morning were the third day.

¶ And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, & years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: & it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, & to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

¶ And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, & every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, & every winged fowl after his kind: & God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, & multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening & the morning were the fifth day. ¶ And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the

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The Doves Bible, Genesis, p. 27.
Reduced to about 1/4 original size. The initial is in red.

might imbibe the new mode of living and become small apostles of the Gospel of Labor as soon as possible.²⁹

In his *Journals*, Cobden-Sanderson wrote in detail of his plans for the Press. Though pleased at the success of the Press, he was anxious not to let it become a means of personal acclaim, and even refused an official award offered in recognition of his work in 1901. His great dream, an edition of the Bible, had been subscribed to and paid for in advance, and as it was begun, he wrote a sincere, if lofty, prayer, "Let me desire for it the most beautiful frame possible, for the Bible as a whole – a composite whole . . . and now set forth, not ornamentally, for a collector's toy, but severely, plainly, monumentally, for a nation's masterpiece, for a nation's guidance, consolation and hope."³⁰

For one not familiar with the niceties of fine bookmaking, it is difficult to imagine the care spent in designing each page, or, indeed, of the knowledge and sense of design needed to set the title page alone. Cobden-Sanderson gave many hours to the Bible, his life's work. Edward Johnston designed the capitals which were printed in red – simple, absolutely correct for this otherwise undecorated Bible. After more than two years of work, the Bible, in five large vellum-bound quarto volumes, was finished in 1905. Five hundred copies were printed on paper and two on vellum.

The Doves Bible has been praised in extravagant terms, even by critics not given to unrestrained enthusiasms. Stanley Morrison remarked of Johnston's initials that they were of special form and color and that the Doves Bible, a superb effort, "represents the finest achievement of modern English printing" – then added, rather deprecatingly, "and a standard to which subsequent Doves books never attained."³¹ Will Ransom remarked that the Bible was outstanding among approximately fifty books published between 1901 and 1916. He placed it side by side with William Morris's Kelmscott *Chaucer*, an elaborately decorated book in the medieval style, "upon the peak of typographical accomplishment."³² The two books are utterly dissimilar, but both have the quality of "greatness incontestable." Ransom found the Doves Bible more beautiful than the Gutenberg.³³ MacMurtrie calls it a "monument of restraint and dignity."³⁴

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁰Cobden-Sanderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 16, January 14, 1902.

³¹Morrison, Stanley, *Four Centuries of Fine Printing*, London, Ernest Benn, 1960, p. 44.

³²Ransom, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

³³*Loc. cit.*

³⁴MacMurtrie, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

Though John Nash thought the Doves Press edition of *Paradise Lost*, (1902) the most perfect book in Roman type, he adds, “the Bible is an equally magnificent book, only more formidable,” because of the size of the page, the content itself, and in the prose form, “the type shows to less advantage and the long lines are less easy to read.”³⁵ (In the Doves Bible the verses are not separated in the conventional way.)

The *Times Literary Supplement* said that with the Doves English Bible criticism stops short, so perfect is it “in the proportion of its page,” the “sparkling and judicious use of red,” and the “admirable arrangement of the poetical portion. A noble book which will bear comparison with the great examples of typography of all time.”³⁶

In 1906, the Doves Press began to have some financial difficulties, and the partners were prepared to close the press after it had printed the remaining books on their program. Cobden-Sanderson was again depressed and ill. He gave a series of lectures in late 1907 in the United States at Boston and Cambridge. The enthusiasm he found there for his work encouraged him to keep the press open. He gladly accepted his wife’s inspired suggestion that he print a Shakespeare series, beginning with *Hamlet*.

So, in the face of ailing health and recurrent depressions, Cobden-Sanderson continued in his painstaking way for six more years to design beautiful books “characterized by a majestic simplicity of design, meticulous typesetting, flawless press-work on the finest papers, and workmanlike bindings, [not the early hand-tooled leather bindings] free from all ornament; save for an occasional colored initial.”³⁷ The last book of the Doves Press, was typical of his stubborn courage in that, despite strong anti-German feeling in England, he printed – in 1916 – the long projected volume of Goethe’s *Lieder*, which was immediately bought up by his subscribers. With the publication of a *Catalogue Raisonné* in 1916, the final list of Doves Press books, he closed the press.

Mr. Walker, for personal financial reasons, had had to withdraw from the partnership. Because he loved the type he had created, he wanted it to be a part of the press, still. A legal agreement was drawn up in which Cobden-Sanderson was allowed the uncontrolled use of the Doves font as long as he lived, at which time it would revert to Emery Walker, if he did not die first.

On April 12, 1917, a review of the *Catalogue Raisonné* had appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*. It described, at length, the work of the Doves

³⁵Nash, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁶A Review of “*Catalogue Raisonné* of Books Printed at the Doves Press, (1900-1916)” *Times Literary Supplement*, 795: April 12, 1917, p. 179.

³⁷MacMurtrie, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

Press and lamented its closing. In the next issue, a letter was published from Emery Walker's solicitors, noting that the "Consecratio," a statement at the end of the *Catalogue*, was misleading. The type punches and matrices, said the solicitors, were not, as it seemed from the "Consecratio," the absolute property of Cobden-Sanderson, but, according to agreement the ultimate ownership of the font depended on the survivor.

This "Consecratio," published in 1917, as part of the *Catalogue Raisonné*, had first appeared in slightly different form, in the *Journals*, on June 9, 1911. Headed, "My Last Will and Testament" and underscored, it read: "To the Bed of the River Thames on whose banks I have printed all my books, I bequeath the Doves Press Fount of Type – the punches, the matrices, and the type in use at the time of my death, and may the river in its tides and flow pass over them to and from the great sea for ever and for ever, or until its tides and flow for ever cease; then may they share the fate of all the world, and pass from change to change for ever upon the Tides of Time, untouched of other use, and all else."³⁸

Mr. Walker was not the only one disturbed by this strange paragraph. A debate by letter began among the readers of the *Times*. The public seemed to think the type should be used commercially for the pleasure of all. Some resented the exclusive and expensive products of the private presses. Some of the private printers defended their position. The controversy suddenly ceased, when, on July 5, 1917, another letter from Walker's solicitors appeared with two letters sent to them by Cobden-Sanderson, which, they explained, "serve to illustrate Mr. Cobden-Sanderson's own view as to the sanctity of this agreement [as to the disposition of the Doves Fount of Type] – a somewhat peculiar one to be held by a barrister at law."³⁹

In his letters to Emery Walker's lawyers, Cobden-Sanderson blandly noted that it seemed there was doubt as to the meaning of the "Consecratio." "The type punches and matrices I have irretrievably committed, as described in the 'Consecratio' to 'the bed of the River Thames.'" ⁴⁰

Sir Emery Walker must have been astonished to learn that the font had been "dedicated" to the river. Cobden-Sanderson assured him that he had intended to abide by the agreement, but had "irresistably returned" to his intention to consecrate the type to the Doves Press. Incredibly, Cobden-Sanderson expressed his wish to regain Walker's friendship and heal the breach his action had caused.

A lawsuit was begun after this dramatic news, and a public quarrel was in the making. Just in time, a cash settlement was made out of court.

³⁸Cobden-Sanderson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 181, June 11, 1911.

³⁹Letters to the Editor, *Times Literary Supplement*, 807: July 5, 1917, p. 321.

⁴⁰*Loc. cit.*

We do not know how Emery Walker felt about the destruction of his type. He kept no known diary, and he remained silent on the subject until his death in 1933. For his part, Cobden-Sanderson erased all mention of Emery Walker in his *Journals* and destroyed all the records of the Doves Press.

The apparently wanton destruction of the Doves font was worsened by the fact that it was premeditated. Cobden-Sanderson had begun in 1913, night after night, to drop the matrices, punches and type into the river. No one, not even his wife, knew. He had become, it seemed, entirely oblivious of the fact that after his death, the font of type should become the absolute property of Emery Walker. He realized it would cost his estate money, but missed the point that money could never atone for the loss and the broken agreement.

How could Cobden-Sanderson have destroyed the type in which he had such an emotional stake? The font of type seemed to him to have a sacred mission to print only the great thoughts of all time. He wrote in 1909, "It is my wish that the Doves Press type shall never be subjected to the use of a Machine other than the human hand, in composition, or to a press pulled otherwise than by hand and arm of man and woman; and this I will see to in my will, though, if I forget, I desire that this which I have written shall operate in its place."⁴¹

By 1910 he was depressed and worried. It seemed to him as if the past life of the press had vanished and the customers gone. He had begun to overhaul, destroy, and arrange papers relating to the Press. After another long illness, on the first day of Spring, 1912, he composed his epitaph: Implicit 1840 Explicit – ?, and confided to his journal that in the last three days he had stood on the bridge at Hammersmith and "looking toward the Press and the sun-setting threw into the Thames below me the matrices, from which had been cast the Doves Press Fount of Type, itself to be cast by me, I hope, into the same great river, from the same place, on the final closure of the Press, in – ?"⁴²

By June, 1915, he had printed all the books the Doves had contracted for. He gave no consideration to offers to buy the press. After the publication of the Goethe and the *Catalogue*, he began systematically to throw the type into the river. It was not easy, as type is heavy and hard to conceal. Several times the package did not land in the river, but on a pier of the bridge in plain sight, but out of reach. He was amused at the irony of the situation. "My idea was magnificent, the act ridiculous."⁴³ He worried lest he be caught, though he felt that this would have given him a chance to explain his acts. He

⁴¹Cobden-Sanderson, *op cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 138, February 9, 1909.

⁴²*Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 214, March 21, 1913.

⁴³*Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 301, October 28, 1916.

apparently knew exactly what he was doing. “My folly is of a light kind, and inexplicable by common sense, and my soul, soaring with my object, is at peace and calm, though in the actual achievement I may be thwarted.”⁴⁴

On July 25, 1917, by which time his deed was known to all, he wrote of walking on the bridge at Hammersmith and enjoying the glory of the sunset on the river, and the city “full of an awful beauty, God’s Universe and Man’s – joint creators. How wonderful! And my Type, the Doves Type was part of it.”⁴⁵

As the year 1917 ended he continued to destroy all the records of the press and bindery. The books, alone, were to speak as the expression of his whole life and its contribution to the order and beauty of the whole. The destruction of the type seemed to him to be part of the universal scheme of creation and destruction. He never doubted his right to destroy the type. It had become a part of him, and like himself, would live on only in the books.

In September, 1921, he stopped working at the bindery forever. In January, he finished his *Cosmic Visions*, his book on his beliefs about self and the universe. He died in September, 1922, almost eighty-two years old, having had the time, after all, to complete his plans and to see his life’s work a success.

Edward Johnston, who had worked so closely with Cobden-Sanderson, wrote, “I suppose no one has ever written with such insight, or so eloquently of The Book Beautiful, and this brief, comprehensive vision might well be taken to heart by all honest printers.”⁴⁶ Of those books for which he was also partly responsible, Johnston said, “I believe that these books were at once the plainest and most idealistic ever produced by any of the ‘Private Presses.’ . . . They depend, not upon ornament . . . but upon their utter legibility and high quality.”⁴⁷

In his description of the Doves books, Ransom writes, “When it is said that they approach dangerously near to absolute perfection in composition, presswork, and page placement, everything has been said. Their peculiarly individual quality is entire absence of decoration. Not a single floret appears; beside the characters of a simple Roman alphabet there is only a paragraph mark. True, there are drawn initials occasionally and a marvelously accurate use of red – and such a red – but that is all. And that all is magnificent. The great red initial that dominates and fits exactly the opening page of Genesis in

⁴⁴*Loc. cit.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 325, July 28, 1917.

⁴⁶Nash, *op cit.*, Johnston, p. 25.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 26.

the Doves Bible is a pattern for all time of complexity reduced to a minimum of simplicity.”⁴⁸

The *Times* describes the quality of the Doves books as possessing “a peculiar charm of their own [due to] a kind of architectural balance and just sense of proportion, both in the type itself, closely modelled upon that of Jenson, and in the arrangement of the page.” The books do not owe their beauty to “meretricious ornament,” but are like a maiden “unbedecked and unbedjeweled.”⁴⁹ But a note of criticism enters this extravagant review. The Doves books are almost too perfect in technical execution! “The keenest professional eye cannot detect a flaw in the press-work or the slightest deviation from perfection in ‘color’ or ‘register.’”⁵⁰

Beauty is, after all, a matter of taste. In *Printing Types*, D.B. Updike notes that the Doves type is based on a Jenson type “freed from accidental irregularities due to imperfect cutting and casting and the serifs altered in some cases” and wonders if these improvements are “perhaps a fault, rather than a virtue.” Though Updike agrees that the type is very beautiful, “its regularity and the rigidity of the descender in the *Y* makes it thin and spiky in appearance, and thus a little difficult to read; nor has it the agreeable ‘opulence’ of the best Italian fonts.”⁵¹

L.E. Wroth’s view, from the perspective of twenty or so years later, is that Cobden-Sanderson had learned nothing between 1900, when he published *The Ideal Book*, and 1916, when he published the *Catalogue Raisonné*: “He had produced more than fifty impeccably perfect books, which prove that nothing can be more tiresome than the repetition of perfection.”⁵²

William Morris and Cobden-Sanderson’s followers among the private presses did influence printing for the good. Their lead was followed into the twentieth century, which saw a great revival of fine printing.

In England, an article in *Craftsman* magazine in 1902, when Cobden-Sanderson had published only four books, remarked that the books printed by Morris and Cobden-Sanderson had “worked against the dead level of bad printing, resulting in the best books in the world for artistic excellence.”⁵³

⁴⁸Ransom, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁴⁹A Review of “Catalogue Raisonne of Books Printed at the Doves Press, (1900-1916)” *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁵⁰*Loc. cit.*

⁵¹Updike, Daniel Berkeley, *Printing Types*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1951, p. 212.

⁵²Wroth, Lawrence C. ed., *A History of the Printed Book*, New York, Limited Editions Club, 1938, p. 489.

⁵³Footo, Florence, “The Binding of Books,” *Craftsman*, 2:1, April, September, 1902, p. 35.

John Lewis, in his *Typography; Basic Principles*, says that it was the Doves Press, not Morris's Kelmscott Press, which all subsequent private presses followed in their admiration for fifteenth century Roman type-faces.⁵⁴ Niklaus Pevsner says that the Doves Press stands at the beginning of German twentieth century printing. "Honesty and saneness became the ideals that replaced the sultry dreams of Art Nouveau aesthetics."⁵⁵

Pevsner's words might have been spoken by Cobden-Sanderson, "carried over into the artist's personal outlook, this [feeling about art] means seriousness, religious conscience, fervent passion, and no longer spirited play, or skillful craftsmanship. It meant, instead of art for art's sake, art serving something higher than art itself can be."⁵⁶ These ideas are basic to an understanding of what Cobden-Sanderson's work meant. Beyond the immediate purpose of the press – to print beautiful books, he wished his books to express "the workmanship of life and its embodiment in form beautiful."⁵⁷

Emery Walker's unique type was essential to the beauty of the Doves Press books, but their overall design was the work of a man for whom the books were truly a visible expression of the universe, a part of a comprehensive and beautiful order. Cobden-Sanderson was a serene "philosopher and mystic with a cosmic vision comprehensive enough to resolve illimitable complexity into utter simplicity."⁵⁸

As his *Journals* testify, Cobden-Sanderson consciously made his work the meaning of his life. Can one understand his deliberate refusal to allow profane fingers to touch the very tools of his communion with the universe?

⁵⁴Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵⁵Pevsner, Niklaus, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, Middlesex, Penguin, 1966, p. 202.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵⁷Duryea, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁵⁸Ransom, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

SONNET 151

LOVE IS TOO YOVNG TO KNOW WHAT
CONSCIENCE IS,
YET WHO KNOWES NOT CONSCIENCE IS
BORNE OF LOVE?
THEN GENTLE CHEATER VRGE NOT
MY AMISSE,
LEAST GVILTY OF MY FAVLTS THY SWEET
SELFE PROVE.
FOR THOV BETRAYING ME, I DOE
BETRAY
MY NOBLER PART TO MY GROSE BODIES
TREASON;
MY SOVLE DOTHT TELL MY BODY THAT HE
MAY,
TRIVMPH IN LOVE; FLESH STAIES NO
FARTHER REASON,
BVT RYSING AT THY NAME DOTHT
POINT OVT THEE,
AS HIS TRIVMPHANT PRIZE. PROVD OF
THIS PRIDE,
HE IS CONTENTED THY POORE DRVDGE
TO BE,
TO STAND IN THY AFFAIRES, FALL
BY THY SIDE.
NO WANT OF CONSCIENCE HOLD IT
THAT I CALL,
HER LOVE, FOR WHOSE DEARE LOVE I
RISE AND FALL.

Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 88. The Doves Press.