



ALDUS MANUTIUS  
(From the binding of the Rylands Vergil of 1501)

*[To face page 57.]*

# ALDUS MANUTIUS, THE SCHOLAR-PRINTER, 1450-1515 <sup>1</sup>

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THE year of the birth of Aldus Manutius is not known for certain. The dates ascribed to the event vary from 1447 to 1450. The most probable date, as Firmin-Didot points out, is 1450. But last year the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana of Venice, in which town Aldus learned the art of printing and established himself as printer, held an exhibition of the works printed by him to celebrate the quincentenary of his birth. In so doing those responsible indicated the year 1449 as the date accepted by them.

The birthplace of Aldus is also uncertain. Some have held that it was Rome from the fact that he later entitled himself Romanus. But from the first page of the first volume of his Aristotle, published in 1495, he apparently describes himself as from Bassiano, a small town in close proximity to Velletri and the Pontine Marshes.

His Italian name was Aldo (short for Theobaldo)<sup>2</sup> Manucio (Manuzio), latinized as Aldus Manutius. The Italians of his epoch showed a predilection for the use of Christian names rather than surnames, so he was mostly known as Aldo (or Aldus), less generally as Manutius. It is through this Christian name that he and his printing press have become familiar to us. The full name which he later adopted was Aldus Pius Manutius Romanus. He was authorized to use the name Pius first in 1503. It was the family name of the Prince of Carpi and he it was who gave Aldus permission to adopt it as

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered to the Proprietors of the Athenaeum, Liverpool, on 22nd April, 1950.

<sup>2</sup> A. A. Renouard : *Annales de l'Imprimerie des Aldes*, 3rd ed., Paris, 1834, p. 372, maintains that Aldo was his baptismal name, and that there was a saint of that name.

a high mark of his esteem and friendship. Aldus had tutored Albertus Pius and his younger brother Leonellus, and there was a strong bond of affection between teacher and pupils.

Of the family name of Manucio nothing is known. Aldus' grandson—named Aldus after him—sought to claim connexion with the wealthy Florentine family of Manucci. It is certain, however, that neither Aldus, nor his son Paul who succeeded him as printer, claimed any such relationship. Nor, when Aldus instituted his trade-mark (an anchor with a dolphin entwined), did it bear any resemblance to the coat of arms of the Manucci family.

Of Aldus' early life we know very little definite. It is established that he spent some time in Rome where he studied under two celebrated scholars, Gaspar of Verona and Domizio Calderini. Next we hear of him in Ferrara, which boasted a university (founded some two hundred years earlier) and had become a centre of culture. There he attended the lectures of Battista Guarino, from whom he learned Greek, and to whom he dedicated the volume containing Theocritus and Hesiod which he printed in 1495.<sup>1</sup> We are told also, that Aldus himself taught whilst in Ferrara and that one of his pupils was the young Albertus Pius. But the war in which Venice and Ferrara were engaged at this time interrupted Aldus' studies. Ferrara was attacked and everyone who could flee, fled. Thus in 1482 Aldus sought refuge with the rich and noble Count Johannes Picus of Mirandola who had been a fellow student at Ferrara. The kind-hearted count was both patron and guardian of refugee scholars from Greece, and Aldus had as fellow-guest Emmanuel Adramyttenos from Crete. The latter was one of the band of educated Greeks who at this time sought refuge in Italy, bearing with them their mother tongue as practically their only stock-in-trade. They wandered from Sicily to the Alps earning a scanty living as teachers of Greek, as proof-readers to printers or as copyists of Greek manuscripts. Picus sheltered Adramyttenos partly from natural kindness, but partly also to learn from him

<sup>1</sup> In his dedication he says: "It was under Gaspar of Verona, that excellent grammarian, that in Rome I learned Latin literature, and it was under you, Guarini, that I perfected myself in the Greek and Latin languages at Ferrara".

the Greek language, as was the common practice of the time. Aldus' intimacy with Adramyttenos for two years under the same roof largely accounted for the familiarity with the Greek language both in speaking and writing which he was later to display. In deploring with him the misfortunes of Greece subjugated by the Turks, Aldus was devoured with the same burning passion for that land as Byron later displayed, and took pride in attaching to his name the title *φιλέλληνη* which he first used in the second volume of his Aristotle.

In the year 1485 the household separated. Adramyttenos accompanied Picus to Pavia where he died the same year. A letter of Aldus to Politian<sup>1</sup> deplores the death of Adramyttenos whom he describes as 'homo et moribus apprime ornatus et graecis litteris saneque doctus, meique amantissimus'. Aldus meantime had taken up his abode in the house of the sister of Picus, the widowed Princess Catharina of Carpi, to teach her two sons, Albertus and Leonellus Pius, both Latin and Greek. In a letter<sup>2</sup> addressed to their mother written in Latin about the year 1488, he lays down precepts for their education and mentions that he has composed some writings to make things easy for them to learn grammar. Albertus especially was a gifted boy like his uncle Picus, and on him Aldus built his fondest hopes. It was to this Albertus, Prince of Carpi, that he later dedicated so many of his important editions and especially his Aristotle. There was a strong bond of affection between Aldus and his pupils. Thus Albertus could address a letter to Aldus 'excellentissimo praeceptori amantissimo meo domino Aldo Manutio Pio'.

The great handicap for both teacher and pupil alike in those days was the lack of aids to learning. Grammars and lexicons were few and far between and such as existed were not directly helpful, being overloaded with a mass of useless abstract definitions. Indeed, they were more of a hindrance than a help to beginners. As far as the Greek language was concerned Greek grammars were only composed by Greeks and written

<sup>1</sup> Published in Aldus' edition of *Omnia Opera Aug. Politiani*, Venice, 1498.

<sup>2</sup> See *Aldi Pii Manutii scripta longe rarissima a Jac. Morellio denuo edita*. Bassani, 1806.

throughout in that language. The first printed Latin translation of a Greek grammar appeared as late as 1489.

Lexical aids were in worse case than grammatical aids. The older dictionaries were full of errors and omissions. The first Greek-Latin lexicon, that of the monk Craston (or Creston), was printed about 1480 but only gave meagre assistance. The earliest Greek lexicons were in Greek and were only of use to those who already knew that language. The learner, in fact, had to depend almost entirely on his teacher and the language had to be learned directly from the text. As we have already noted, Aldus, as teacher, felt the need of instructional aids and composed a number of short treatises on grammar, accents, metre, etc., some of which he later printed.

We have no certain knowledge of the course of Aldus' life during the intervening years before he made his appearance in Venice in 1494. It would seem, however, that his career was shaped by an incident that happened whilst he was engaged in teaching the young princes. Picus of Mirandola paid a visit on one occasion to his relatives of Carpi, and there was discussion concerning the barbarity of the age and the possible means of overcoming it. The agreement and support of the princes brought the eager and enthusiastic Aldus to the conclusion that a printing press for spreading abroad the wisdom and culture of the ancients, especially the Greeks, would prove all-important for the revival of learning. Greek books were largely unprinted and existed only in manuscripts expensive to purchase and hard to find. And the Greek writing with its breathings and accents presented problems from which printers shrank. From only four towns, Milan, Venice, Vicenza and Florence, had Greek books been produced before Aldus began in 1495. Aldus' enthusiasm stirred the princes to give active support to this idealistic venture, the success of which appeared to them assured when a man like Aldus was willing to take the matter in hand and be both editor and printer. They knew him as a combination of scholar and man of affairs and withal of the highest character.

What was the background against which Aldus made his debut as crusader for culture towards the end of the fifteenth

century? The fall of the Greek empire in 1453 did not mean the obliteration of ancient Greek learning. Educated Greeks fled to Italy bearing manuscripts, and the language and culture of Greece. The Italian admiration for Greek literary treasures which had never been entirely extinguished, was thereby revived and the tragedy of Greece awakened fresh feelings of sympathy for her people. But the Italy of this time was not a land of high culture. The fall of the Roman Empire had dragged down with it scholarship and the arts. Few Latin authors were now read. The texts supplied by the copyists were faulty in the extreme and frequently imperfect. Knowledge of the Greek language had almost disappeared and the works of the famous Greek writers of old were known only through bad Latin translations. The Latin in use was debased and corrupted to serve the purposes and needs of ecclesiastics and scholastics.

It was the revival of interest in the classical authors which revitalized everything—arts, science, law, etc. The famous Italian writers of the preceding century, Petrarch and Boccaccio, had rendered good service by appealing to and quoting the works of the great classical authors, and thus played a pioneering part in rescuing Italy from its widespread ignorance and barbarity. The enthusiasm they kindled burned brightly and Italy became the Mecca for European scholars. Knowledge of Greek did not keep pace with Latin. Petrarch knew little or no Greek and a very slight acquaintance with Greek was sufficient to win fame for Boccaccio. But the infiltration of Greek scholars which began about this time encouraged the study of the Greek language and the spread of the virtues and excellences of that glory which was Greece. Universities were being founded in Italy; libraries, such as the Vatican, were being instituted. When printing and printers came to Italy from Germany in the latter half of the fifteenth century, many of the works of the Latin writers were quickly printed. Manuscripts to serve the printing presses were eagerly sought. Monasteries up and down the land were ransacked and many precious manuscripts were recovered from holes and dark corners where they had lain, worm-eaten and neglected, covered with the dust of centuries. Every discovery of a new work, miraculously preserved, was

hailed with enthusiasm. Many of the works thus recovered were those of authors known hitherto by name only.

In or about the year 1490 Aldus left Carpi and settled in Venice in order to equip himself for the great task that lay ahead of him by learning the trade of printer. Why did he choose Venice? Well, Venice was the wealthy and mighty seaport which as early as 1420 had a population of 190,000. When Aldus elected to make it his headquarters it was the centre of the printing industry in Italy. In the year 1500, indeed, it had within its bounds no fewer than two hundred printing houses, a sure indication that conditions there were favourable for their operation. It was a city of wealthy merchant-princes and the tentacles of its trade spread far and wide. Because of its geographical situation and its enlightened government it was the safest and most desirable place in the peninsula in which to dwell. To Aldus it made a special appeal, for it was the magnet to which the refugee Greek scholars were irresistibly drawn. In addition it had established a fine library from the books and manuscripts bequeathed to it by Cardinal Bessarion and Petrarch. The Cardinal's library alone possessed some six hundred Greek manuscripts, of several of which Aldus made use later in the preparation of his editions.

We are told that Aldus delivered lectures on the classical authors with great acceptance when he first took up residence in Venice. This he did presumably as a means of earning a living. But principally he devoted himself to learning the art and craft of printing. We do not know for certain with whom he learned the trade, but it is suggested that it was with Andreas Torresanus of Asola, who in 1479 had acquired the printing press of the famous French printer and engraver Nicolas Jenson, before whom it had belonged to John of Speyer. This seems probable for it would account for the close association of Aldus and Torresanus, and for the fact, too, that Aldus later married Torresanus' daughter. Aldus apparently was older than his father-in-law, who survived Aldus by fourteen years, so his wife must have been much younger than Aldus, who married her in 1500 at the age of fifty. There was always the happiest of relations between the two men.

Having learned the trade Aldus set up his own printing press in the early nineties. Its site is not accurately known but it must have been in the neighbourhood of the church of San Augustino. The first dated book to issue from his press was a Greek grammar, the *Erotemata* of Lascaris with Latin translation, in the year 1494. Two undated works (the poem of Musaeus and the *Galeomyomachia*) are held by some to have been printed by him prior to this date. Soon a steady flow of editions of the classics issued from his press, as well as the works of Italian authors such as Dante and Petrarch and contemporary writers such as Erasmus and Pietro Bembo (later Cardinal).

Aldus was not merely printer. He did his best to make his editions scholarly productions. He corrected as best he could the faulty manuscripts from which he had to work and brought their texts into order before publishing them. As far as text is concerned Aldus' Latin editions are generally better than his Greek. There were more Latin manuscripts and most of the works of the Latin writers had been printed before he came on the scene. In the case of the Greek writers Aldus was often the first to produce them. Aldus recognized the tentative nature of his editing and often expressed the wish that later editors might find a greater wealth of material with which to work and so enable them to establish more correct texts.

With the arrival of printing the copyists of manuscripts, in Italy as elsewhere, perceived that their occupation was in jeopardy, and in some places, Genoa for instance, there were demonstrations by the copyists against the printers. In 1474 the copyists petitioned the Senate of Genoa to expel the printers. Printing, however, did not have things all its own way. When the novelty of this 'new writing' had begun to wear off, the uniformity and sameness of the isolated letters of the printed text tended to jar on those accustomed to the fluidity and individuality of the copyists' work. In the writing of Greek particularly the expert scribes had scope for their art, and they adorned their writing with a wealth of ligatures and artistic flourishes and fluidities. Aldus was led away by the desire to compete in printing with the running pen and to base the design and form of his types on the cursive writing of his own day. Thus



for his Greek type he took as his model the handwriting of his friend Marcus Musurus which he greatly admired. The result was that he overloaded his fount with a mass of over a thousand 'sorts', making type-setting a slow and burdensome process. But seemingly he gave his customers what they wanted. He set the fashion for Greek type which persisted for centuries after him and saddled the printing of Greek text with a host of involved ligatures whose intricacy has proved a handicap to readers unfamiliar with them. Aldus designed but did not cut his own type. He employed the expert cutters, Francesco Bononi and Julio Campasnola. The famous French printer Jenson was better placed. He could both design and cut his own type since he was originally an engraver.

Aldus was more successful in his roman than his greek. He invented a distinctive sloping roman tending towards the cursive based on the handwriting of Petrarch. And this form has continued down to the present day. It was first known as Venetian or Aldino in Italy. By the French it was called italique. We know it to-day as italics. Aldus first made use of it in his edition of Vergil which he published in 1501. In 1502 the Venetian Senate assigned to the Aldine Press the exclusive use of the new type for the next ten years and Pope Leo X and two of his successors in the papacy granted him letters of privilege entitling him to the sole rights of his typographic invention.

The invention of new forms of type was not the only enterprise of Aldus. He it was who popularized the small format in books, especially the octavo. Hitherto the classics had been published in large folio editions with broad margins for the use of scholars for note taking. These great, heavy tomes required a reading desk for their use. For a scholar to take them on his travels meant a heavy addition to the baggage. Aldus reduced the size of his types and brought out pocket editions of the classics. The small octavo format was just what scholars wanted, and it made for cheapness as well as convenience. Its popularity was instantaneous.

Aldus was a man of many parts. He not only printed and published, he was also a bookseller, selling not only his own publications but those of rival printers. Bookbinding,

P.O.N. IN PRIMVM GEORGICORVM;  
ARGVMENTVM.

Quid faciat letas segetes, quae sidera feruct  
Agricola, ne facilem terram proscindat aratris,  
Semina quo iacienda modo, cultusq; locorum  
E docuit, messis magno olim sanore reddi.

P.V.M. GEORGICORVM LIBER PRI  
MVS AD MOECENATEM.

Vid faciat letas segetes, quo sidere  
terram,  
Vertere Maecenas, ulmsq; adiun  
gere uis,  
Conueniat, quae cura boum, quix  
cultus habendo

Sit pecori, atq; apibus quanta experientia parvis,  
Hinc canere incipiam. Vos o clarissima mundi  
Lumina, labentem caelo quae ducitis annum  
Liber, et alma Ceres, uestro si munere tellus  
Chaoniam pingui glandem mutauit arista,  
Poculaq; inuentis Acheloi a uisfauit unis,  
Et nos agrestium praesentia numina Fauni,  
Ferte simul, Fauniasq; pedem, Dryadesq; puella,  
Munera uestra ceno, uisq; o cui prima frementum  
Fudit equum magna tellus percussa tridentis  
Nepaene, et cultor nemorum, cui pinguis Cae  
Teraeum nitentem dumetis iuuenca,  
Ipsae uenae liquent pappum, salusq; Licet.



too, was done on the premises. He maintained a not inconsiderable retinue of correctors, proof-readers, interpreters, type-setters, bookbinders, etc. Every day, it is said, over thirty persons sat down to meals in his house. He was scholar, text critic, philologist, grammarian, historian of literature, moralist. In the beginning of the year 1498 Aldus was stricken with the plague and in danger of death. He vowed that if he recovered he would enter the priesthood. He did recover, but he was absolved from his vow by Pope Alexander VI in August of the same year. It is said of him that he was one of the finest and noblest personalities of his age.

At the time when Aldus began to print, only four Greek classics had been published in Italy with Greek text, Aesop (Milan, 1480), Homer (Venice, 1486), Theocritus, Isocrates (Milan, 1493).<sup>1</sup> But Aldus quickly changed the situation. From 1494 to his death in 1515, with slight interruptions due to war conditions, a steady stream of Greek texts issued from his press, and thereafter the tradition was carried on by his son Paul and his grandson Aldus the Younger. Aldus in all his work set and maintained a high standard of excellence. His books were distinguished for their great artistry, good printing and fine paper. The paper used by Aldus was manufactured at Fabriano, a small town renowned for the excellent quality of its paper, which combined all the qualities most desired, fineness, whiteness, strength, and glossy surface. Scholars could thus make notes in ink on the margins. The quick succession of his editions caused astonishment and bred the suspicion that he drove his workers too hard. He had trouble with them according to himself, on four occasions, but was able to overcome their conspiracy "prompted by avarice, the mother of all evils".<sup>2</sup>

Aldus was scholar first and printer afterwards. In his day there were no learned periodicals in which scholars could express their views and record their researches. In consequence

<sup>1</sup> Greek type was first used in Germany in 1501 and in France in 1507.

<sup>2</sup> "Quater jam in aedibus nostris ab operis et stipendiariis in me conspiratum est, duce malorum omnium matre: Avaritia. Quos, Deo adjuvante, sic fregi, ut valde omnes poeniteat suae perfidiae." See his *Monitum in Lugdunenses Typographos*, 1503.

they were impelled to form themselves into societies for interchange of information on the subjects in which they were interested. Aldus gathered around him an Academy of about thirty members which included professors, priests, physicians, lawyers, writers, proof-readers, etc. The Academy, instituted in 1500, held regular meetings at his house. Conditions of membership were knowledge and love of the Greek language and ability to speak it. Visiting scholars who fulfilled the conditions were admitted to the circle. Thus Erasmus when in Venice was a member, as was also Thomas Linacre, the first English Hellenist of note.

The unbreakable rule of the Academy was that Greek and Greek only must be spoken. "If anyone amongst us expresses himself otherwise, whether on purpose or inadvertently, through forgetfulness of the law, or through any fortuitous circumstance, he shall pay as fine a small piece of money." There was no fine for solecisms unless committed of set purpose. The fine had to be paid forthwith. "If he (the culprit) does not pay immediately the fine will be doubled, then quadrupled, and so on proportionately to the delay." Refusal to pay involved expulsion. The money was placed in a purse or box designed for the purpose and put under the charge of a member elected for this office. At intervals, on resolution of the Academy, the box was opened and if enough money was found inside, it was given over to Aldus to provide a feast for the members, "not a mere printers' feast, but one worthy of men who have realized the grand dream of a new Academy and have instituted it". The rules were written in Greek.

It speaks volumes for Aldus' character and influence that he was and remained the focal point of the group. He enjoyed a great reputation amongst his contemporaries as a scholar, based partly on his lectures and his writings, partly on the impression left by personal contact. His wide knowledge of the classics made a profound and lasting impression upon them. The desire to claim friendship with him was widespread and embraced many lands. He dedicated the books which issued from his press to friends of all nationalities and the dedications, of high literary merit, are one of their important features.

They were written in polished Latin or Greek as the case might be. In the dedication of his Aristotle to his former pupil, the Prince of Carpi, Aldus insists on the value of the study of Greek. "If formerly it was said that Cato, when old, was seen studying Greek in Rome, so now in our day with us old men do the same. And amongst the youth Greek is studied equally with Latin. Greek manuscripts, also, are avidly sought, but they are so rare that it is only with the help of God that I hope to remedy this defect by consecrating all my strength and all my resources to aid the friends of letters. And in what an age! When arms are much more handled than books! I shall not rest until I have reaped a rich harvest."

The wars which threw Italy into disorder at this time had their effect on Aldus. One day in the year 1506 when he was returning from Lombardy, whither he had gone in search of manuscripts, he was arrested as a spy by the soldiery of the Prince of Mantua. He was held prisoner for three or four days before he was identified and released with an apology and the return of his possessions. Because of war he had twice in his short career as a printer to close his printing house and leave Venice for a period. The first departure was in 1506-1507 and the second in 1509-1511. Of his fortunes and activities during his absence from Venice we know little. On the first occasion he visited Milan where he was received with honour by the scholars there. In 1507 he entered into partnership with his father-in-law and the business became active again. Between the years 1509 and 1511 it was again at a standstill. Aldus had almost decided to give up printing altogether and abandon his great project when a wealthy friend came to his rescue with fresh capital.<sup>1</sup> So the year 1512 and particularly the years 1513 and 1514 show Aldus' press in full and expanding activity.

His labours were such that he had hardly time to eat or sleep. In his dedication to all scholars which prefaces his *Thesaurus Cornucopiae et Horti Adonidis* (1496) he wrote: "Since I have imposed on myself this duty (i.e. printing editions of the classics) I can affirm on oath that I have never enjoyed

<sup>1</sup>Said to have been Petrus Franciscus, son of the Doge Barbarigo, who subsidized Aldus with several thousand ducats.

during all these years one hour of peaceful repose. Everyone praises my work, its usefulness, its beauty, its honourableness, that is true ; but to give you good books means a life dedicated to toil." As the years passed the pressure increased. In the year 1514 he wrote in the dedication of his edition of Cicero's rhetorical writings to the Venetian Senator Naugero : " Two things especially from a hundred others are a perpetual annoyance to me. First, the numerous letters of learned men which reach me from all quarters. Were I to answer all these I should require to spend day and night doing nothing save writing letters. The second is the great number of visitors. They come sometimes to see how I am, sometimes to ask what new work is in hand, sometimes from want of anything else to do. In which case they say to themselves : ' Let's go to Aldus ! '. Then they sit there dully like the leech which never leaves your skin until it has sucked its fill. And as for those who bring me their creations in verse and prose desirous of having them printed, I cannot trust myself to speak of them ! At long last I have set out to free myself from these interruptions. Unimportant letters I answer not at all, important ones only laconically. No one should take this amiss for such time as is left me I shall expend on the production of good books. As for visitors, I have had the following notice put over the door of my room : ' Whoever you are Aldus begs you urgently to finish your business with him in few words and then take yourself off, otherwise you must be come to offer your shoulders like Hercules when Atlas was tired. Here there is work for you and for all who come here ! ' "

The fever of his desire to fulfil his self-imposed task so consumed him that it brought on an illness from which in the year 1515 he died. A few months before his death he made his will, and as one of his executors he named the Duchess of Ferrara, the celebrated Lucretia Borgia, that enlightened patron of art and letters with whom tradition has dealt so unkindly and so unjustly. The last rites were paid to the deceased in the church of St. Patrinian in the immediate neighbourhood of which he apparently lived. Round the coffin in the church as he lay in state were piled the books which he had printed and for which he had given his life.

In the preface to his *Adagia*, printed by Aldus, Erasmus compared the glory of Aldus to that which Ptolemy gained in creating the great library at Alexandria. That, however, was confined within the walls, whilst the creation of Aldus had no bounds save those of the universe. And Theodore Beza later praised Aldus in Latin verse in which he claimed that Aldus might justly and fairly be accounted a god since he had been able to restore so many dead poets to life.<sup>1</sup>

After Aldus' death his friend Egnatius, a member of his Academy and the tutor of Aldus' son Paul, in a preface to the edition of Lactantius printed by the house of Aldus, wrote of his friend that he associated with all scholars, never doing aught to detract from their fame or to impede its spread, but surrounding them with almost unbelievable affection. He went on: "There is no land, no people within the bounds of Europe where the name of Aldus is not known and revered. Many famous men have visited Venice solely on his account to greet him and even to bring him presents. Not the great and wonderful city drew them to her by her beauty, but the magnetism of a single man. Vehemently they urged upon him to persevere to the utmost in his resolve to restore to their former glory the Latin and Greek languages. As he applied himself to the task day and night he was stricken down with a long and lasting illness from which he died. Even if it was at his set time, it was to our deep grief."

Aldus was survived by his wife Maria, three sons and a daughter. The eldest son became a priest; his third son Paul, after certain business difficulties were surmounted, succeeded his father in the printing press. He, too, was a fine scholar and was so steeped in Cicero that the Latin he wrote was markedly Ciceronian in style. His son Aldus, known as Aldus the Younger, carried on the family tradition. As a scholar he was not in the same class as his father and grandfather, but lived on their reputation. When he died in 1597 the famous printing house of Aldus came to an end.

<sup>1</sup> Quanto est justius aequiusque, quaeso,  
Aldum Manutium deum vocare,  
Ipsis qui potuit suo labore,  
Vitam reddere mortuis poetis.



Erasmus, who had had an edition of his *Adagia* printed in Paris in the year 1500, came to Venice in 1508 in order to have an enlarged and improved edition printed by Aldus. The story goes that when Erasmus visited the printing house to discuss the matter with Aldus he was kept waiting long outside since Aldus was busy within, and had not been told the name of his visitor. Aldus was vexed when he discovered what had happened, welcomed the already famous man warmly, and arranged for him to be lodged in the house of his father-in-law, Andreas Torresanus. Erasmus not only busied himself with the preparation of his own work for the press, but assisted Aldus by preparing the text of a projected edition of Plautus for which work Aldus paid him twenty golden crowns. The elder Scaliger seized on this to describe Erasmus with measured contempt as a mere proof-reader in the pay of Aldus. Because of clerical influence the *Adagia* had no sale in Italy outside of Venice, but it was a great success in Germany and went through several editions. Paul Manutius was compelled to conceal the name of Erasmus in his catalogues under the vague designation 'Batavus quidam.' It has been argued that an estrangement developed between Erasmus and Aldus and that in his *Opulentia sordida* Erasmus lampooned Aldus, his family, friends and assistants under fictitious names because of their parsimoniousness and frugal living. But there seems to be no real ground for such a supposition. The fact that Aldus had to refer to him as 'Transalpinus quidam homo' was not due to private enmity but to a shrewd business instinct because of Erasmus being in such bad odour with the Church. Whilst we have no direct knowledge of further intercourse between the two, it is certain that Erasmus remained on the friendliest terms with Andreas Torresanus and his family as well as with Egnatius, and left a good name behind him in Venice. Erasmus, it must be said, was on one occasion rebuked by Egnatius. Wishing to pay the latter a great compliment Erasmus rated him above Aldus whilst recognizing the high merit of the famous scholar printer. Egnatius replied, "I, dearest Erasmus, cannot accept that praise bestowed on me at the expense of another. I can never even pride myself on being equal to Aldus, so much my superior do I regard him."

In the year 1502 Aldus adopted as emblem or trade mark an anchor with a dolphin entwined. It first appeared in his edition of Dante printed in that year, and was symbolic of the Latin adage 'festina lente' corresponding to our 'more haste, less speed'. How he lighted upon the device is uncertain. Some say he got it from a woodcut of that character in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* printed by him in 1499. If Erasmus is to be believed he adopted it from a denarius of Titus Vespasian gifted to him by Pietro Bembo which bore the device with the inscription *σπεῦδε βραδέως*. Erasmus commented that the motto had evidently pleased Titus as much as, according to Suetonius, it had pleased Augustus.

The device was originally inserted between the AL and DUS of Aldus. It underwent changes in the course of time and when Paul Manutius was raised to the nobility in 1571 it became his crest, but surmounted by the imperial eagle.

The editions which issued from printing presses in the time of Aldus were not large. An edition of more than 275 copies was rare until the appearance of the smaller format, when the numbers increased to round about a thousand. The first edition of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* printed by John of Speyer in Venice in 1469 consisted of only 100 copies.<sup>1</sup> But even so some printers found difficulty in getting rid of their stock. Thus the famous German printers Sweynheim and Pannartz, who came to Italy and set up in partnership at Subiaco near Rome in 1464, complained in a letter to Pope Sixtus IV of their lack of sale and consequent poverty. Their house, they plead, is empty of necessities but full of unsold quires.

One of the greatest tributes paid to Aldus and one of his greatest worries was the counterfeiting of his octavo editions by printers elsewhere, notably in France at Lyons. So extensive was this practice that Aldus issued a pamphlet drawing the attention of the public to the defects in the counterfeit editions and the means by which the genuine could be distinguished from the counterfeit.<sup>2</sup> The Lyons editions are without notes ;

<sup>1</sup> Only six copies of this edition appear to have survived, one of which our Library possesses.

<sup>2</sup> The Lyons printers who produced Aldine counterfeits were Huyton, Balthasar, Myt, Marescall and Gryphe. Out of Lyons the most notable was Giunti of Florence.

they have not the dolphin and anchor ; the type has a certain Gallicity about it ; the capitals are ugly ; there are no ligatures, and so on. He applied to the government for protection and this was granted him by a decree of 14th November, 1502.

So much value was attached to the books of Aldus that soon collectors were busy. In Germany the earliest collectors of Aldines were Pirkheimer and Reuchlin and Jean Grolier in France. In Italy his octavos were much sought after. This is made clear by a letter of Henrich Loriti (Gloceanus) of Basle who wrote to Zwingli : “ Wolfgang Lachner has sent people to Venice to bring the best authors in the Aldine editions. If you would have them, write to Lachner and send me the money ; for there are always thirty there who want books without asking the price. Several don't understand them at all, but still want them.”

The John Rylands Library is fortunate enough to possess a unique collection of Aldines. Of the 127 authenticated editions which issued from the press of Aldus Manutius up to and including the year of his death in 1515 the Library has copies of 120. The seven it does not possess consist of minor publications of few leaves, mainly pamphlets or catalogues. And of the 800 or so works which were produced by the Aldine Press in the hundred years of its existence it possesses a copy of almost every work of importance. As an interesting supplement it has very many examples of the counterfeit editions.

Aldus was, indeed, one of Italy's great sons, yet neither in Venice nor at Carpi was a monument erected in his honour. Thus Firmin-Didot the famous French bibliophile and a fervent admirer of Aldus could write in 1875 : “ His country, indeed, appears to have forgotten to-day one of its most illustrious sons. Of all the former glory of Aldus Manutius there remains only his books, relegated to the depths of libraries and known only to scholars. No one knows where lie his ashes, and the house which saw so many remarkable books issue from its walls is not even known with certainty. . . . One sees on the verge of one of the less frequented canals near San Augustino a house of sorry appearance. There it is thought with a great deal of probability was the famous printing press of Aldus. On a

marble plaque can be read this inscription, placed there in 1828 by the Abbé Vinc. Zenier :—

MANUCIA . GENS . ERUDITOR . NEM . IGNOTA  
HOC . LOCI . ARTE . TYPOGRAPHICA . EXCELLUIT.”

And here we must end this brief sketch of Aldus. What words can be more fitting with which to close than those of Ovid—words which Aldus himself printed? “Factum abiit : monumenta manent”—“The deed is past and gone : the memorials thereof remain.”