

ART. L.—*Relics of the First New Zealand Press.*

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Plate XXV.

It is well known that the late Rev. W. Colenso was the pioneer of the printing art in this colony. In his little book, "Fifty Years Ago in New Zealand" (1888), he has described the institution of the missionary press, the plant having arrived at the Paibia Mission Station on the 30th December, 1834, and having been landed in the early days of the New Year. He gives a vivid account of the difficulties he underwent through the want of technical knowledge on the part of the under-secretaries of the Mission-house in London, who were above taking counsel with their printer-elect, or, indeed, any other practical man. The result was that many essential articles, including even printing-paper and printers' cases, were omitted, and makeshifts had to be resorted to in the colony, at great expense to the mission. There was not even a composing-stick, "save," he says, "a private one of my own that I had bought two years before in London—a most fortunate circumstance. . . . Fortunately, I found a handy joiner in the Bay, who soon made me two or three pairs of type-cases for the printing-office, after a plan of my own; for, as the Maori language contained only thirteen letters (half the number in the English alphabet), I contrived my cases so as to have both roman and italic characters in the one pair of cases, not distributing the remaining thirteen letters (consonants) used in the compositing of English, such not being wanted." On page 30 he says, "On my coming to reside in Hawke's Bay in 1844 I brought hither with me a small Albion press and types, which I again found to be of great service; though, having a people scattered over a very large district to attend to, with its consequent heavy travelling on foot, there being then no roads, I could not use my little press so much as I wished."

In Mr. Colenso's will he bequeathed to me his little press and all the printing material in his possession, including "type, old and new," and, specially, "my sole composing-stick, with which I did so much work both in England and New Zealand." This material is still stored in Napier. On my visit there this New Year I went over it, and found that certain portions had formed part of the first printing plant, set up in 1835.

For a long time the composing-stick could not be found by the executors. It was at last discovered—alas!—partly embedded in the earthen floor of a damp shed, where it had lain neglected for probably thirty years, and was so corroded by rust as to be almost unrecognisable. Most of the wooden articles had been so ravaged by the boring-beetle that they had to be burnt. An exception, however, was a large and peculiar pair of type-cases, containing the types just as they had been last composed from. These cases were of kauri, and were in good condition. They contained part of a font of small pica, which it was necessary to remove. From their unusual size and depth I took them for “font-cases”—that is, cases specially used for reserve supplies, and too heavy when full to be handled in the ordinary manner; but I had no sooner begun to remove the type than I found them to be a pair of the original cases, made in 1836, from Mr. Colenso’s design and to his order, specially for Maori work, and therefore a quite unique relic of the first printing-office. I made a diagram of the cases, showing the “lay,” which I afterwards drew to scale, and a copy of which appears on Plate XXV. The cases are $36\frac{1}{2}$ in. long by $16\frac{3}{8}$ in. wide; the depth is $1\frac{1}{2}$ in., the front ledge 2 in.; the bottom $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick. The upper case weighs (empty) 10 lb. 6 oz.; the lower 9 lb. 12 oz. The cases differ in size, capacity, and slightly in proportion from standard English cases, which are $32\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $14\frac{1}{2}$ in., 1 in. deep, and weigh about 5 lb. each. Both in weight and in capacity they are more than double the English standard. English cases, when well filled, are quite heavy enough for handling, and the Paihia cases would be cumbrous and inconvenient unless always on the frame or stand, as probably they were. The scheme could, however, be reduced to the familiar standard without difficulty.

The problem being given: To design a pattern of case for the alphabetic characters and signs of any given language—no two people would solve it in the same way. And, the plan being fixed, no two people would independently arrange the characters in the same order. It is interesting to see in what a systematic and orderly style our first printer adapted his case to his alphabet. Beginning with the upper case, he adopted the plan in vogue in his youth of placing the capitals to the left. In most modern offices they are now placed, more conveniently, on the right hand. Formerly they were absurdly arranged at the top of the case; he has brought them down, starting with “A” where the modern printer starts, fourth row from the bottom. The Maori alphabetic order is followed: First the vowels; then the consonants, as in English. “G” is at the end, as “G” is properly no part of the alphabet, used only in the digraph “ng,” which, in all

phonetic systems, is indicated by a single character. In the lower case the italic letters are arranged in a border to the left and along the top, leaving the handier and larger boxes for the roman. All the cells for italic are uniform in size except for "p" and "w," which are half as large as the rest. A compositor will recognise that the roman letters, spaces, &c., follow the familiar arrangement of the English case as far as the variation in the alphabet will allow. One or two divisions unmarked in the drawing may have been occupied by minor sorts—there must, for instance, have been a place allotted for the ¶ sign, used freely in the Maori New Testament. Such omissions, however, do not affect the general scheme.

The box above the "H" was marked "Bad letters," and still contained a few damaged types. A French case always has such a box, which is known as the *diabte*. In English it is the "hell-box," but is always a separate receptacle. The box over the italic "A" was marked "h, old," and contained two italic "b's" with the bottom curve cut off—a makeshift when the supply of "h" ran out. These cut "b's" used as a substitute for "h" may be seen in some of the early mission printing.

It is not likely that it would be found worth while to bring Mr. Colenso's pattern of Maori cases into use, so the originals, which I intend to place, with other relics, in the Colonial Museum, are likely to remain unique. In modern Maori printing little use is made of italic; in the work on which Mr. Colenso was engaged, though the quantity of italic used was not great, words in that character occurred (as in the English Bible) in every few lines. Printers, however, who do much work in the native language would find it advantageous to have a special lower case. The standard upper case, seven boxes by seven each side, would be more convenient than one of six-by-six, as the whole alphabet would come in two rows. To compose any foreign language, and Maori especially, from an English case is inconvenient. The English proportion of "a" is far too small; so with "k," the most frequently occurring consonant, which in English is allotted to one of the smallest boxes. Then, the compositor is cumbered by large quantities of useless sorts, such as "d" and "s," the boxes devoted to which are full and possibly overflowing when the rest of the case is worked out.

Mr. Colenso had sometimes to do English work, and, having no English cases, was put to no little inconvenience. "I may observe," he says, "that such an arrangement proved to be a very good one while my compositing was confined to the Maori language only; but when I had any English copy to compose it was altogether the reverse—then I had to pick out

the discarded English consonants as required from their lots put up in paper parcels. Fortunately this occurred but rarely; except at the time of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), when I had necessarily much printing-work to do for the Government of the colony, and, having no extra cases, was obliged to place the letters required in little lots on tables and on the floor."

At the auction of Mr. Colenso's sundries large quantities of his old memoranda passed into private hands. Mr. H. Hill, one of our members, is in possession of a mass of these papers, and from him I have a copy of two interesting entries from the old office diary, bearing upon the subject of this paper. They are as follow :—

1836. July 19.—Gave R. Brown, carpenter, Kororareka, an order for six pair cases, one imposing-frame and drawers.

1837. March 8.—Brown's bill for cases, imposing frame, &c., £8 16s.

So far as I can judge, Mr. Brown's charge was reasonable.

Though it does not bear directly upon the first printing-office, I may mention that Mr. Colenso did a great deal of work on his little foolscap-folio Albion press at Waitangi, Hawke's Bay. One book, in Maori, unfinished, was on the lives and deaths of witnesses for the truth in the early Church, written by himself. It was never completed; but he had done about two hundred pages, printed two pages at a time. The amount of labour this represents, in the intervals of an exceptionally busy life, can only be realised by a practical printer. I have the form of the last two completed pages, just as it stood when he left it—either ready for press or printed off. This, I think, is a relic that will be of interest to visitors to the Museum in years to come, as it is set in the old small pica of the first mission press.

The type is of the early "modern" face, probably by Caslon, and is, of course, hand-cast. It must have been cut in the very early years of the century, soon after the abandonment of the "old-face," and before the beauties of the modern style had been developed. It is a heavy, legible, and inelegant style, deficient in "character," and now quite out of vogue. A box of types, small pica and minion, ordered for the office at Waitangi, had never been opened since leaving the foundry until I opened it at Napier, some fifty years after it had been packed. There were indications that Mr. Colenso intended it for an edition of the "Pilgrim's Progress" in Maori—the minion for the notes. He had a manuscript translation which he highly valued. I do not know by whom it was made, and I fear it has been lost. He had also provided himself with stereotype copies of engravings of the fight with Apollyon, &c., to illustrate the book.

I have made repeated inquiries about the final destination of the original missionary plant. The first press is hopelessly lost. One early Columbian press answering to the description was ultimately sold to a foundry in Auckland and melted down; another was shipped to an Australian port, and thence to the Pacific coast of North America—either of these may or may not have been the historic press on which the first Maori New Testament was printed, a relic which would have been highly valued in years to come. I know of yet another old press, which once belonged to the Church Mission, but as it bears date 1841 it is certainly not the first. The large font of small pica, or the bulk of it, after passing through several hands, found its way to Palmerston North, and was used for some years by Mr. Alexander McMinn in printing the *Manawatu Standard*.
