

Errata

BESIDES the ordinary *errata*, which happen in printing a work, others have been purposely committed that the *errata* may contain what is not permitted to appear in the body of the work. Wherever the Inquisition had any power, particularly at Rome, it was not allowed to employ the word *fatum*, or *fata*, in any book. An author, desirous of using the latter word, adroitly invented this scheme: he had printed in his book *facta*, and, in the *errata*, he put, for *facta*, read *fata*.

Scarron has done the same thing on another occasion. He had composed some verses, at the head of which he placed this dedication—*A Guillemette, Chienne de Ma Sœur*; but having a quarrel with his sister, he maliciously put into the *errata*, instead of *Chienne de ma Sœur*, read *ma Chienne de Sœur*.

Lully at the close of a bad prologue said, the word *fin du prologue* was an erratum, it should have been *fi du prologue*.

In a book, there was printed *le docte Morel*. A wag put into the *errata*, for *le docte Morel*, read *le docteur Morel*. This Morel was not the first *docteur* not *docte*.

When a fanatic published a mystical work full of unintelligible raptures, and which he entitled *Les Délices*

de l'Esprit, it was proposed to print in his *errata*, for *Délices*, read *Délires*.

The author of an idle and imperfect book ended with the usual phrase of *cetera desiderantur*, one altered it *non desiderantur sed desunt*; the rest is *wanting*, but not *wanted*.

At the close of a silly book, the author as usual printed the word FINIS—a wit put this among the *errata*, with this pointed couplet:

FINIS! an error, or a lie, my friend!
In writing foolish books—there is no End!

In the year 1561 was printed a work, entitled the Anatomy of the Mass. It is a thin octavo, of 172 pages, and it is accompanied by an *Errata* of 15 pages! The editor, a pious Monk, informs us that a very serious reason induced him to undertake this task: for it is, says he, to forestall the artifices of Satan. He supposes that the Devil, to ruin the fruit of this work, employed two very malicious frauds: the first before it was printed, by drenching the ms. in a kennel, and having reduced it to a most pitiable state, rendered several parts illegible: the second, in obliging the printers to commit such

numerous blunders, never yet equalled in so small a work. To combat this double machination of Satan he was obliged carefully to re-peruse the work, and to form this singular list of the blunders of printers, under the influence of the Devil. All this he relates in an advertisement prefixed to the *Errata*.

A furious controversy raged between two famous scholars from a very laughable but accidental *Erratum*; and threatened serious consequences to one of the parties. Flavigny wrote two letters, criticising rather freely a polyglot Bible edited by Abraham Ecchellensis. As this learned editor had sometimes censured the labours of a friend of Flavigny, this latter applied to him the third and fifth verses of the seventh chapter of St. Matthew, which he printed in Latin. Ver. 3. *Quid vides festucam in OCULO fratris tui, et trabem in OCULO tuo non vides?* Ver. 5. *Ejice primùm trabem de OCULO tuo, et tunc videbis ejicere festucam de OCULO fratris tui.* Ecchellensis opens his reply by accusing Flavigny of an *enormous crime* committed in this passage; attempting to correct the sacred text of the Evangelist, and daring to reject a word, while he supplied its place by another as *impious* as *obscene*. This crime, exaggerated with all the virulence of an angry declaimer, closes with a dreadful accusation. Flavigny's morals are attacked, and his reputation

overturned by a horrid imputation. Yet all this terrible reproach is only founded on an *Erratum*! The whole arose from the printer having negligently suffered the first letter of the word *Oculo* to have dropped from the form, when he happened to touch a line with his finger, which did not stand straight! He published another letter to do away the imputation of Ecchellensis but thirty years afterwards his rage against the negligent printer was not extinguished; certain wits were always reminding him of it.

One of the most egregious of all literary blunders is that of the edition of the Vulgate, by Sixtus V. His Holiness carefully superintended every sheet as it passed through the press; and, to the amazement of the world, the work remained without a rival—it swarmed with *errata*! A multitude of scraps were printed to paste over the erroneous passages, in order to give the true text. The book makes a whimsical appearance with these patches; and the heretics exulted in this demonstration of papal infallibility! The copies were called in, and violent attempts made to suppress it; a few still remain for the raptures of the biblical collectors; at a late sale the Bible of Sixtus V. fetched above sixty guineas—not too much for a mere book of blunders! The world was highly amused at the bull of the editorial Pope prefixed

to the first volume, which excommunicates all printers who in reprinting the work should make any *alteration* in the text!

In the version of the Epistles of St. Paul into the Ethiopic language, which proved to be full of errors, the editors allege a very good-humoured reason—"They who printed the work could not read, and we could not print; they helped us, and we helped them, as the blind helps the blind."

A printer's widow in Germany, while a new edition of the Bible was printing at her house, one night took an opportunity of going into the office, to alter that sentence of subjection to her husband, pronounced upon Eve in Genesis, Chap. 3, v. 16. She took out the two first letters of the word HERR, and substituted NA in their place, thus altering the sentence from "and he shall be thy LORD," (*Herr*) to "and he shall be thy FOOL." (*Narr*). It is said her life paid for this intentional erratum; and that some secreted copies of this edition have been bought up at enormous prices.

We have an edition of the Bible, known by the name of *ffe Vinegar Bible*; from the erratum in the title to the 20th Chap. of St. Luke, in which "Parable of the *Vineyard*," is printed "Parable of the *Vinegar*." It was printed in 1717, at the Clarendon press.

We have had another, where "Thou shalt commit adultery" was printed, omitting the negation; which occasioned the archbishop to lay one of the heaviest penalties on the Company of Stationers that was ever recorded in the annals of literary history.

Herbert Croft used to complain of the incorrectness of our English classics, as reprinted by the booksellers. It is evident some stupid printer often changes a whole text intentionally. The fine description by Akenside of the Pantheon, "SEVERELY great," not being understood by the blockhead, was printed *serenely* great. Swift's own edition of "the City Shower," has "old ACHES throb." Aches is two syllables, but modern printers, who had lost the right pronunciation, have aches as one syllable; and then to complete the metre, have foisted in "aches *will* throb." Thus what the poet and the linguist wish to preserve is altered, and finally lost.

It appears by a calculation made by the printer of Steevens's edition of Shakspeare, that every octavo page of that work, text and notes, contains 2680 distinct pieces of metal; which in a sheet amount to 42,880—the misplacing of any one of which would inevitably cause a blunder! With this curious fact before us, the accurate state of our printing, in general, is to be admired, and errata ought more freely to be pardoned than the

fastidious minuteness of the insect eye of certain critics has allowed.

Whether such a miracle as an immaculate edition of a classical author does exist, I have never learnt; but an attempt has been made to obtain this glorious singularity—and was as nearly realized as is perhaps possible in the magnificent edition of *As Lusíadas* of Camoens, by Dom Joze Souza, in 1817. This amateur spared no prodigality of cost and labour, and flattered himself that by the assistance of Didot, not a single typographical error should be found in that splendid volume. But an error was afterwards discovered in some of the copies, occasioned by one of the letters in the word *Lusitano* having got misplaced during the working of one of the sheets. It must be confessed that this was an *accident* or *misfortune*—rather than an *Erratum!*

One of the most remarkable complaints on ERRATA is that of Edw. Leigh, appended to his curious treatise “on Religion and Learning.” It consists of two folio pages, in a very minute character, and exhibits an incalculable number of printer’s blunders. “We have not,” he says, “Plantin nor Stephens amongst us; and it is no easy task to specify the chiefest errata; false interpunctions there are too many; here a letter wanting, there a letter too much; a syllable too much, one letter for another;

words parted where they should be joined; words joined which should be severed; words misplaced; chronological mistakes, &c.” This unfortunate folio was printed in 1656. Are we to infer by such frequent complaints of the authors of that day, that either they did not receive proofs from the printers, or that the printers never attended to the corrected proofs? Each single erratum seems to have been felt as a stab to the literary feelings of the poor author!