The Baskerville Letter
A SPECIMEN
OF
PRINTING LETTER
DESIGNED BY
John Baskerville
ABOUT THE YEAR MDCCLVII
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A NOTE
ON THE BASKERVILLE TYPE

This new "Monotype" face is a faithful reproduction of an historic type designed by John Baskerville, the Birmingham ex-footman and writing master, who was born in 1706. His interest in typography dates from 1750, and during twenty-five years he printed and published a large number of editions of English, Latin and Greek classics in octavo and quarto, and one or two folios which by reason of the fineness of paper (he was one of the first if not the first, to use wove) and type employed exerted a tremendous influence upon English and foreign typography. There can be no question that the Birmingham craftsman successfully interpreted the spirit of his time, in spite of the lukewarm reception which his types received in his own country where typography was much less conscious of its potentiality. Abroad the situation was entirely different, initiative in typographical design having always, from the beginning of the craft, been in the hands of continental craftsmen. Caslon's successful copies of familiar Dutch models aroused no more than local interest. It must not be
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forgotten that the main stream of continental type design since the time of Grandjean flowed in a new channel and that Caslon’s 1720 letter, though excellent in itself, was not related to new taste. Baskerville’s influence, apart from the novel cut of his letter, was greatly increased by the fact that in addition to his designing and founding his own type, he practised an individual style of typography. His example powerfully affected Bodoni, and Baskerville’s notable neatness, refinement and precision were further developed by the Italian. It was Baskerville’s printing methods which revolutionized the typography of Italy, France, and the Low Countries. Jansen’s “Essai sur l’origine de la Gravure,” Paris, 1808, well expresses contemporary French appreciation of Baskerville’s type. After mentioning the Caslon specimen of 1734, Jansen goes on to remark, “Incontestably, it is Baskerville who, not only to England but even to the whole of Europe, has given to the roman letter the most geometric proportions joined to the greatest elegance.” The later influence of Baskerville’s letter was by no means inconsiderable in England. The typesounders Martin, Fry and Wilson manufactured many very similar characters, and one of the Caslons who split away from the parent firm also made a letter of much the same cut as Baskerville’s. The type of
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the present composition is a conscientious reproduction of the authentic Baskerville as used, for example, in his quarto Milton, of 1758, and The Lanston Monotype Corporation now offer it to printers in the usual sizes from 8 to 36 point.
FROM
EDMUND FRY’S
PANTOGRAPHIA
leaded two points

There is not, perhaps, any language in the world which has experienced so many revolutions as this; and, like the political constitution of the country, it seems to have gained both strength and energy by every change.

We may conclude, from Caesar’s account of this island and its inhabitants, that about the beginning of the Christian Era, the language of the ancient Britons was the same, or very similar, to that of Gaul, or France, at that time, and which is now believed to have been the parent of the Celtic, Erse, Gaelic, or Welch; for the intercourse between this island and Gaul, in Caesar’s time, as well as their relative situations, render it more than probable that Britain was peopled from that part of the continent, as both Caesar and Tacitus affirm and prove, by many strong and conclusive arguments.

There are now but few remains of the ancient British tongue, except in Wales, Cornwall, the Isles and Highlands of Scotland, part of Ireland, and some provinces of France; which will not appear strange, when we consider that Julius Cæsar, some time before the birth of our Saviour, made a descent on Britain; and in the time of Claudius, about A.D. 45, Aulus Plautius was sent over with some Roman forces, who overcame the two kings of the Britons, Togodumnus and Caractacus, and reduced the southern parts of the island to the form of a Roman province; after which, Agricola subdued the island, as far as Scotland; whercupon a great number of the Britons retired into Wales, Scotland, and the Isles, carrying their own language with them. The greatest portion of Britain being thus become a Roman province, the Legions who resided in the island above 200 years, undoubtedly diffeminated the Latin tongue; and the people being afterwards governed by laws written in Latin, must necessarily create a mixture of languages.

Thus the British tongue continued, for some time, mixed with the provincial Latin, until the Roman Legions being called home, the Scots and Picts took the opportunity to attack and harass England: upon which...
The Saxons to his assistance, for which he rewarded them with the Isle of Thanet and the whole Country of Kent; but they, growing powerful and discontented, dispossessed the inhabitants of all the country eastward of the Severn; by which means the Saxon language was introduced.

In the beginning of the Ninth Century, the Danes invaded England, and became sole masters of it in about 200 years, whereby the British language obtained a tincture of the Danish; but this did not make so great an alteration in the Anglo-Saxon as did the revolution in 1066 by William the First, who, as a monument of the Norman conquest, and in imitation of some other conquerors, endeavoured to make the language of his own country as generally received as his commands; thus the ancient English became an entire medley of Celtic, Latin, Saxon, Danish, and Norman-French.

Since the restoration of learning, the sciences have been cultivated with such success in this island, that in astronomy, anatomy, natural history, natural philosophy, chemistry, medicine and the fine arts innumerable terms have been borrowed from that inexhaustible source, the Greek. Italy, Spain, Holland and Germany have also contributed something, so that the present English may be considered as a selection from all the languages of Europe.

What we know of those nations who have continued for many centuries unconnected with the rest of the world, militates most strongly against the

hypothesis of the human invention of alphabetical writing. The experiment has been fairly made upon the ingenuity of mankind, both Chinese and savage, for a longer period than that which is supposed to have produced alphabetical writing by regular gradations, which decidedly concludes against this art being of human invention.

The Chinese, a people famous for their discoveries and mechanical genius, have made some advances towards the delineation of their ideas, by arbitrary signs; nevertheless, have been unable to accomplish this exquisite device; and, after so long a trial to no purpose, we may reasonably infer that their mode of writing, which is growing more intricate and voluminous every day, will never terminate in so clear, so comparatively simple, an expedient, as that of alphabetical characters. We shall consider the argument on which the commonly received supposition entirely depends; that is, the natural gradation through the several species of symbols acknowledged to have been in use with various people, terminating, by an easy transition, in the detection of alphabetical characters: we believe the strength of this argument will be fairly appreciated from the following representation.

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Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be. We weep at what thwart or exceeds our desires in serious matters: we laugh at what only disappoints our expectations in trifles. We shed tears from sympathy with real and necessary distress; as we break into laughter from want of sympathy with that which is unreasonable and unnecessary, the absurdity of which provokes our spleen or mirth, rather than any serious reflections on it.

To explain the nature of laughter and tears, is to account for the condition of human life; for it is in a manner compounded of these two! It is a tragedy or a comedy—sad or merry, as it happens. The crimes and misfortunes that are inseparable from it, shock and wound the mind when they once seize upon it, and when the pressure can no longer be borne, seek relief in tears: the follies and absurdities that men commit, or the odd accidents that befall them, afford us amusement from the very rejection of these false claims upon our sympathy, and end in laughter. If everything that went wrong, if every vanity or weakness in another gave us a sensible pang, it would be hard indeed: but as long as the disagreeableness of the consequences of a sudden disaster is kept out of sight by the immediate oddity of the circumstances, and the absurdity or unaccountableness of a foolish action is the most striking thing in it, the ludicrous prevails over the pathetic, and we receive pleasure instead of pain from the farce of life which is played before us, and which decomposes our gravity as often as it fails to move our anger or our pity!

Tears may be considered as the natural and involuntary resource of the mind overcome by some sudden and violent emotion, before it has had time to reconcile its feelings to the change of circumstances: while laughter may be defined to be the same sort of convulsive and involuntary movement, occasioned by mere surprise or contrait (in the absence of any more serious emotion), before it has time to reconcile its belief to contradictory appearances. If we hold a mask before our face, and approach a child with this disguise on, it will at first, from the oddity and incongruity of the appearance, be inclined to laugh; if we go nearer to it, steadily, and without
saying a word, it will begin to be alarmed, and be half-inclined to cry: if we
suddenly take off the mask, it will recover from its fears, and burst out a-
laughing; but if, instead of presenting the old well-known countenance, we
have concealed a satyr's head or some frightful caricature behind the first
mask, the suddenness of the change will not in this case be a source of merri-
ment to it, but will convert its surprise into an agony of conformation, and
will make it scream out for help, even though it may be convinced that the
whole is a trick at bottom.

The alternation of tears and laughter, in this little episode in common life,
depends almost entirely on the greater or less degree of interest attached to the
different changes of appearance.

The mere suddenness of the transition, the mere baffling our expecta-
tions, and turning them abruptly into another channel, seems to give additional live-
liness and gaiety to the animal spirits; but the infant the change is not only
sudden, but threatens serious consequences, or calls up the shape of danger,
terror supersedes our disposition to mirth, and laughter gives place to tears.
It is usual to play with infants, and make them laugh by clapping your hands
suddenly before them; but if you clapped your hands too loud, or too near their
fight, their countenances immediately change, and they hide them in the nurse's
arms. Or suppose the same child, grown up a little older, comes to a place,

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expecting to meet a person it is particularly fond of, and does not find that
person there, its countenance suddenly falls, its lips begin to quiver, its cheek
turns pale, its eye glistens, and it vents its little sorrow (grown too big to be
concealed) in a flood of tears. Again, if the child meets the same person un-
expectedly after a long absence, the same effect will be produced by an excess of joy,
with different accompaniments; that is, the surprise and the emotion
excited will make the blood come into his face, his eyes sparkle, his tongue
faller or be mute, but in either case the tears will gush to his relief, and
lighten the pressure about his heart. On the other hand, if a child is playing at
hide-and-seek, or blind-man's-buff, with persons it is ever so fond of, and
either miffes them where it had made sure of finding them, or suddenly runs
up against them where it had least expected it, the shock or additional impetus
given to the imagination by the disappointment or the discovery, in a matter
of this indifference, will only vent itself in a fit of laughter. The transition
here is not from one thing of importance to another, or from a state of in-
difference to a state of strong excitement; but merely from one impression to
another that we did not at all expect, and when we had expected just the
contrary. The mind having been led to form a certain conclusion, and the result producing an immediate solution of continuity in the chain of our ideas, this alternate excitement and relaxation of the imagination, the object also striking upon the mind more vividly in its loose unsettled state, and before it has had time to recover and collect itself, causes that alternate excitement and relaxation, or irregular convulsive movement of the muscular and nervous system which constitutes phycical laughter. The discontinuous in our sensations produces a correspondent jar and discord in the frame. The steadiness of our faith and of our features begins to give way at the same time. We turn with an incredulous smile from a story that staggers our belief: and we are ready to split our sides with laughing at an extravagance that sets all common sense and serious concern at defiance.

To understand or define the ludicrous, we must first know what the serious is. Now the serious is the habitual stress which the mind lays upon the expectation of a given order

of events, following one another with a certain regularity and weight of interest attached to them. When this stress is increased beyond its usual pitch of intensity, so as to overstrain the feelings by the violent opposition of good to bad, or of objects to our desires, it becomes the pathetic or tragical. The ludicrous, or comic, is the unexpected loosening or relaxing this stress below its usual pitch of intensity, by such an abrupt transposition of the order of our ideas, as taking the mind unawares, throws it off its guard, startles it into a lively sense of pleasure, and leaves no time for painful reflections.

The essence of the laughable then is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another. The first and most obvious cause of laughter is to be found in the simple succession of events, as in the sudden shifting of a disguise, or some unlooked-for accident, without any absurdity of character or situation. The
accidental contradiction between our expectations and the event can hardly be said, however, to amount to the ludicrous; it is merely laughable. The ludicrous is where there is the same contradiction between the object and our expectations, heightened by some deformity or inconvenience, that is, by its being contrary to what is customary or desirable; as the ridiculous, which is the highest degree of the laughable, is that which is contrary not only to custom but to sense and reason, or is a voluntary departure from what we have a right to expect from those who are conscious of absurdity and propriety in words, looks, and actions.

Of these different kinds or degrees of the laughable, the first is the most shallow and short-lived; for the instant the immediate surprise of a thing’s merely happening one way or another is over, there is nothing to throw us back upon our former expectation, and renew our wonder at the event a second time. The second sort, that is, the ludicrous arising out of the improbable or distressing, is more deep and lasting, either because the painful catastrophe excites a greater curiosity, or because the old impression, from its habitual hold on the imagination,

still recurs mechanically, so that it is longer before we can seriously make up our minds to the unaccountable deviation from it. The third sort, or the ridiculous arising out of absurdity as well as improbability, that is, where the defect or weakness is of a man’s own seeking, is the most refined of all, but not always so pleasant as the last, because the same contempt and disapprobation which sharpens and subtilizes our sense of the impropriety, adds a severity to it inconsistent with perfect ease and enjoyment. This last species is properly the province of satire. The principle of contrast is, however, the same in all the stages, in the simply laughable, the ludicrous, the ridiculous; and the effect is only the more complete, the more durably and pointedly this principle operates.

To give some examples in these different kinds. We laugh, when children, at the sudden removing of a paste-board mask: we laugh, when grown up, more gravely at the tearing off the mask of deceit. We laugh at absurdity; we laugh at deformity. We laugh at a bottle-nose
in a caricature; at a stuffed figure of an alderman in a pantomime, and at the tale of Slaukenbergius. A dwarf standing by a giant makes a contemptible figure enough. Rosinante and Dapple are laughable from contrast, as their masters from the same principle make two for a pair. We laugh at the dress of foreigners, and they at ours. Three chimney-sweepers meeting three Chinese in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, they laughed at one another till they were ready to drop down. Country people laugh at a person because they never saw him before. Any one dressed in the height of the fashion, or quite out of it, is equally an object of ridicule. One rich source of the ludicrous is distress with which we cannot sympathize from its absurdity or insignificance. Women laugh at their lovers. We laugh at a damned author, in spite of our teeth, and though he may be our friend. “There is some-

thing in the misfortunes of our best friends that pleases us.” We laugh at people on the top of a stage-coach, or in it, if they seem in great extremity. It is hard to hinder children from laughing at a flammerer, at a negro, at a drunken man, or even at a madman. We laugh at mischief. We laugh at what we do not believe. We say that an argument or an assertion that is very absurd is quite ludicrous. We laugh to show our satisfaction with ourselves, or our contempt for those about us, or to conceal our envy or our ignorance. We laugh at fools, and at those who pretend to be wise—at extreme simplicity, awkwardness, hypocrisy, and affectation. “They were talking of me,” says Scrub, “for they laughed consumedly.” Lord Foppington’s insensibility to ridicule
and airs of ineffable self-conceit, are no less admirable; and Joseph Surface's cant maxims of morality, when once disarmed of their power to do hurt, become sufficiently ludicrous. We laugh at that in others which is a serious matter to ourselves; because our self-love is stronger than our sympathy, sooner takes the alarm, and infantly turns our heedless mirth into gravity, which only enhances the jest to others. Some one is generally sure to be the sufferer by a joke. What is sport to one is death to another. It is only very sensible or very honest people who laugh as freely at their own absurdities as at those of their neighbours. In general the contrary rule holds, and we only laugh at those misfortunes in which we are spectators, not sharers. The injury, the disappointment, shame, and vexation that we feel put a stop to our mirth; while the disasters that come home to us, and excite our repugnance and dismay, are an amusing spectacle to others. The greater reftistance we make, and the greater the perplexity

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into which we are thrown, the more livelly and piquant is the intellectual display of cross-purposes to the bystanders. Our humiliation is their triumph. We are occupied with the disagreeableness of the result instead of its oddity or unexpectedness. Others see only the conflict of motives and the sudden alternation of events—we feel the pain as well, which more than counterbalances the speculative entertainment we might receive from the contemplation of our abstract situation.

You cannot force people to laugh, you cannot give a reason why they should laugh;—they must laugh of themselves, or not at all. As we laugh from a spontaneous impulse, we laugh the more at any restraint upon this impulse. We laugh at a thing merely because we ought not. If we think we must not laugh, this perverse impediment makes our temptation to laugh the greater;
for by endeavouring to keep the obnoxious image out of sight, it comes upon us more irresistibly and repeatedly, and the inclination to indulge our mirth, the longer it is held back, collects its force, and breaks out the more violently in peals of laughter. In like manner anything we must not think of makes us laugh, by its coming upon us by stealth and unawares, and from the very efforts we make to exclude it. A secret, a loose word, a wanton jest, makes people laugh. Aretine laughed himself to death at hearing a lascivious story. Wickedness is often made a substitute for wit; and in most of our good old comedies the intrigue of the plot and the double meaning of the dialogue go hand-in-hand, and keep up the ball with wonderful spirit between them. The consciousness, however it may arise, that there is something that we ought to look grave at, is usually always a signal for laughter outright: we can hardly keep our countenance at a sermon, a funeral, or a wedding. What an excellent old custom was that of throwing the stocking! What a deal of innocent mirth has been spoiled by the disuse of it! It is not an easy matter to preserve decorum in courts of justice; the smallest circumstance that interferes with the solemnity of the proceedings throws the whole place into an uproar of laughter. People at the point of death often say smart things. Sir Thomas
More jested with his executioner: Rabelais and Wycherley both died with a bon-mot in their mouths.

Misunderstandings ("malentendus"), where one person means one thing, and another is aiming at something else, are another great source of comic humour, on the same principle of ambiguity and contrast.

There is a high-wrought instance of this in the dialogue between Aimwell and Gibbet, in the "Beaux' Stratagem," where Aimwell mistakes his companion for an officer in a marching regiment, and Gibbet takes it for granted that the gentleman is a highwayman. The alarm and consternation occasioned by some one saying to him in the course of common conversation, "I apprehend you," is the most ludicrous thing in that admirably natural and powerful performance, Mr. Emery's "Robert Tyke".

Again, unconsciousness in the person himself of what he is about, or of what others think of him, is also a great heightener of the sense of absurdity. It makes it come the fuller home upon us from his insensibility to it. His simplicity sets off the satire, and gives it a finer edge. It is a more extreme case still where the person is aware of being the object of ridicule, and yet seems perfectly reconciled to it as a matter of course. So wit is often the more forcible and pointed for being dry and serious, for it then seems as if the speaker himself had no intention in it, and we were the first to find it out. Irony, as a species of wit, owes its force to the same principle. In such cases it is the contrast between the appearance and the reality, the suspense of
belief, and the seeming incongruity, that gives point to the ridicule, and makes it enter the deeper when the first impression is overcome. Excessive impudence, as in the “Liar”; or excessive modesty, as in the hero of “She Stoops to Conquer”; or a mixture of the two, as in the “Busy Body”, are equally amusing. Lying is a species of wit and humour. To lay anything to a person’s charge from which he is perfectly free, shows spirit and invention; and the more incredible the effrontery, the greater is the joke.

There is nothing more powerfully humorous than what is called keeping in comic character, as we see it very finely exemplified in Sancho Panza and in Don Quixote. The proverbial phlegm and the romantic gravity of these two celebrated persons might be regarded as the height of this kind of excellence. The deep feeling of character strengthens the sense of the ludicrous. Keeping in comic character is consistency in absurdity; a determined and laudable attachment to the incongruous and singular. The regularity completes the contradiction; for the number of instances of deviation
from the right line, branching out in all directions, shows the inveteracy of the original bias to any extravagance or folly, the natural improbability, as it were, increasing each and every time with the multiplication of chances for a return to common sense, and in the end mounting up to an incredible and unaccountably ridiculous height, when we find our expectations as invariably baffled. The most curious problem of all is this truth of absurdity to itself. That reason and good sense should be consistent, is not wonderful, but that caprice, and whim, and fantastical prejudice, should be uniform and infallible in their results, is the surprising thing. But while this characteristic clue to absurdity helps on the ridicule, it also softens and harmonizes its excesses, and the ludicrous is here blended with a certain beauty and decorum, from this very truth of habit and sentiment, or from the principle of similitude and dissimilitude. The devotion to nonsense and enthusiasm about trifles is highly affecting as a moral lesson, it is one of the striking weaknesses and greatest happinesses of our nature. That which excites so lively and lasting an interest in itself, even though it should not be wisdom, is not despicable in the sight of reason and humanity. We cannot suppress the smile
on the lip; but the tear should also stand ready to start from the eye. The history of hobby-horses is equally instructive and delightful; and after the pair I have just alluded to, My Uncle Toby's is the best and gentlest that "ever lifted leg!" The inconveniences, quaint accidents, falls and bruises to which they expose their horsemen contribute their share to the amusement of the spectators; and the heavy blows and wounds that the Knight of Sorrowful Countenance received in his many perilous adventures have applied a healing influence to many a sorely hurt mind.—In what relates to the laughable, as it arises from unforeseen accidents or self-willed scrapes, the abject pain, the shame, the mortification, and utter helplessness of
situation, add to the joke, provided they are momentary, or overwhelming only to the imagination of the sufferer. Malvolio's punishment and apprehensions are as comical, from our knowing that they are not real, as Christopher Sly's drunken transformation and short-lived dream of happiness are for the like reason. Then Parson Adams's fall into the tub at the Squire's, or his being discovered in bed with Mrs. Slipsop, though pitiable, are laughable accidents; nor do we read with much gravity of the loss of his Æschylus, serious as it was to him at the time. A Scotch clergyman, as he was going to church, seeing a spruce, conceited mechanic, who was walking before him, suddenly covered all over with dirt, either by falling into the kennel, or by some other calamity befalling him, smiled and passed along; but afterwards seeing the same person, who had
stopped to refit, seated almost directly opposite him in the gallery, with a look of perfect satisfaction and composure, as if nothing of the sort had happened to him, the idea of his late disaster and present self-complacency struck him so powerfully, that, unable to resist the impulse, he flung himself back in the pulpit, and laughed until he could laugh no longer. I remember once reading a tale in an odd
number of the "European Magazine," of an old gentleman who used to walk out every afternoon with a gold-headed cane, in the fields opposite Baltimore House, which were then open, only with foot-paths crossing them. He was frequently accosted by a beggar with a wooden leg, to whom he gave money, which only made him more importunate. One day, when he was more troublesome than usual, a well-dressed individual happening to pass, and observing
how saucy the fellow was, said to the gentleman, “Sir, if you will lend me your cane for a moment, I’ll give him a

threshing for his impertinence.” The old gentleman, smiling at the proposal, promptly handed the other his cane, which he no sooner was going to apply to the shoulders of the lame culprit
than immediately he whipped off his wooden leg, and scampered off with

great alacrity, and his chastizer after him as hard as he could. The faster the one ran the faster the other followed him, brandishing the
This specimen book of the Baskerville type, the
ornaments and the rules, have been composed
and cast on the "Monotype"

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