Schook’s typographic manual (1854–60)

The second Dutch printers’ manual in its time*

INTRODUCTION

Unlike England, Germany and France, where a number of printers’ manuals were published during the 17th and 18th centuries, the earliest fully-fledged printers’ manual in the Netherlands was not issued until towards the middle of the 19th century. This was the Handboek ter beoefening der boekdrukkunst in Nederland [Manual to the practice of the art of printing in the Netherlands] (’s-Gravenhage, P. M. van Cleef, 1844).1 It was only in the reissue of this work (Hilversum, P. M. van Cleef, n.d. [c. 1856]) that the author mentioned his name on the title-page: he turned out to be the printer/publisher himself, Pieter Marius van Cleef Jzn.

This first printers’ manual in the Netherlands was followed not long after by a second, in two volumes, the first part being published anonymously under the title Handboekje voor letterzetters en correctors [Concise manual for compositors and proofreaders] (Rotterdam, Van Meurs en Stufkens, 1854; illus. 1), the second part appearing six years later under the title Handboekje voor letterzetters, boekdrukkers en correctors [Concise manual for compositors, pressmen and proofreaders] (Gorinchem, J. van Hoeve Jr., n.d. [1860]) with the author’s name, Cornelis Schook, appearing on the title-page but no year of publication (illus. 2, cf. pp. 5–8, iv).

In the present article, after briefly considering certain biographical and bibliographical matters, I shall discuss the contents of this printers’ manual, paying special attention to those passages in the Handboekje which are important for assigning it a place in 19th-century printing.

A photo-reprint of the book is to be published in 1979 by G. Th. van Heusden at Amsterdam; this will include an introduction and registers of names and printers’ terms appearing in the Handboekje, on the same lines as those adopted for the re-edition of Van Cleef’s manual in 1974 (cited in n. 38).

* I am extremely grateful to Professor G. W. Ovink for the care with which he read the typescript of this article; his comments greatly influenced the final form of my text.

1 For bibliographical surveys dealing with printing techniques see note 89.
Schook's Life and Work

In 1854, when the compositor Cornelis Schook, living in Gorinchem, a small town in the central area of the Netherlands, published a Handboekje voor letterzetters en correctors, he was 39 years of age. He was born on 24 March 1815 at Tiel, the son of a courier Aalbert Schook. In 1837 or 1838 Cornelis moved to Gorinchem; and in 1838 he was admitted to the membership of the Reformed Church. One assumes that he was already working as a compositor: in 1840, on his marriage to Maaijke van Steenbergen, this was given as his profession, and it continued so in the birth-registrations of his eight children (between 1843 and 1855). These regular trips to the town clerk are all we know of his doings between 1840 and 1854. As it happens, only two of his eight children, two daughters, survived to adulthood — not at all an unusual pattern of events in the 19th century.

In 1854 Schook published, anonymously and at his own expense, the first volume of his Handboekje: ‘by a compositor’ as the title-page tells us (see illus. 1). His name does, however, appear at the front of the book as one of the subscribers (p. vi): and because he included himself there among the staff of the firm of J. Noorduijn & Zn at Gorinchem, we know who his employers were in 1854. This publication must have been preceded by a prospectus (mentioned on pp. 64, 78, 94), but I have not been able to find a copy. The little book met with a fair measure of criticism from the trade press at the time: the author was taken to task, not only for publishing a number of inaccurate statements, but especially for having paid much more attention to linguistic than to typographical matters.

In his 'Nawoord' [Postscript] Schook expresses the hope of being able to