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Editorial Review

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Ninety-one complete alphabets — medieval to modern — include 3,924 decorative initials, including Victorian novelty and Art Nouveau. These alphabets were obtained from rare, out-of-print books, generally available only in libraries or in the rare-book market. They were reproduced directly from the pages of a large and expensive collection that was made specifically for the production of this volume. Since they are direct reproductions, they will all reproduce again excellently.

The book has been carefully arranged and annotated so that the students of letters and types may have a complete understanding of decorative alphabets and initials. The work is divided into three parts. Part One deals entirely with manuscript initials as they were used from the 8th to the 15th century. It includes Celtic initials, rare designs from the Bible of Charles the Bald, and incised letters from the monument of Richard II in Westminster Abbey. Part Two contains initials from printed books, starting with the 15th century and running through the 18th. Here are the fanciful creations of the 16th-century woodcutters: initials illustrated with children, cherubs, birds, beasts, flowers, legends, and grotesque heads. The works of the later engravers, writing, masters, and baroque and rococo designers follows in order. Part Three attempts to arrange the "great weeds jungle" of Victorian letters and types and concludes with the 20th-century alphabets such as the distinctive wood engravings of Edward Wadsworth. Each section has an historical introduction and each plate has a descriptive caption.

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