OMNIBUS 92

Compiled by J. P. Burke

NO SWEARING ON THIS BIBLE!

IN 1456 you could swear to Johann Gutenberg's genius on a stack of ibles."

O runs the caption to a two-colour advertisement which appeared in *he Irish Times* on successive Mondays with the following text: "Un- l Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1456, documents nd books were written by hand, slowly and at great expense. A small andwritten bible, for example, cost as much as two complete arches or the old London Bridge. Appropriately, Gutenberg's first press run as bibles! His revolutionary invention greatly reduced the cost of eproducing material, and began a circulation of knowledge that ourishes today."

The advertisement is a promotion for the Rank Xerox company, which aims to be the first to introduce photocopiers to the world's commer- al markets in 1959, and equates their introduction of the first laser rinter in 1984 with "doing for the 20th century what Gutenberg did for ie 15th." For people who project an exact image, so to speak, might suggest that their copy writer has exercised a measure of economy ith the facts and compounds the fiction of the invention of printing y the great German whose name is synonymous with the art. But he d not invent the printing press: what he did invent was movable type, hich is something entirely different. Printing had been in use in China id other Asiatic countries for centuries, and there is evidence that wood and metal was common dur- l also in Korea.

ars before Gutenberg was born of the 14th century — the dates vas he who had the vision to see of producing books other than *nting* issued by Pelican Books, every ten readers the sentence shortened form of 'Gutenberg he inevitable association of tends to strengthen this fallacy. — the mechanical production ion a turning point in the history fore Gutenberg, and there is no engraved metal plates, draw- media should not have gone on as actually done."

loyed by the Chinese scholars y the traders who found a ready it was a receptive era for new ld skills. And that was how nting, for he had served his ap- ve city, where his family were ann Genfleisch zum Gutenberg lispute between the trade guilds im to exile in Strasbourg, where He was not the only seeker after ipt to replace the laborious but s and translators who catered overished students.

THE FIRST LIQUIDATION

l not enjoy all the fruits of his then in his 70s, but left his name olutionary art and craft. Other icular and artists who illustrated similar experiments but only ntion. He then decided to return mmercial advantage, and like ow money. His choice of banker he was a lawyer named Johan- guilders and a similar loan a er in the production of books. profit, it appears, and poor be liquidated by his financial the highly sophisticated print- time, with foreclosure and re- le).

Gutenberg's presses and types, n, who was the inventor's most oyalty to Fust and had the good did he betray his first master n Fust took his foreclosure ac- alvaged little from his ill-starred ement of his work before profit e court action. It is argued that mous 42-line Bible, would have t, but the records of the court t offered for sale at that time. een printed but it is reckoned throughout the world and held Kells.

scribing the process by which imple terms he employed some ulds from which he produced stem, with various refinements