ENGLAND'S FIRST PRINTER—WILLIAM CAXTON.

The precise date when William Caxton introduced printing into England has not been ascertained, notwithstanding the researches of those who have made the subject their special study, but the appearance in 1477 of "The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers" (being the first book printed with a date in England) is accepted as indicating the period of the commencement of Caxton's labours "in the Abbey of Westminster."

with the life of William Caxton could be found in the archives of Bruges.

At the age of fifteen we know that Caxton was apprenticed to a mercer in London, Robert Large, who "dwelled in Lothbury," and "whose house standeth in two parishes, St. Margaret's and St. Olave's."

Sir Robert Large became Lord Mayor in 1439, and at his death in 1441 he bequeathed to his apprentice a legacy of thirty-four marks. A year after his master's death, Caxton went abroad; it has been considered as agent for the Mercers' Company, but this can be hardly correct, for, says Knight's "Life of Caxton," "during twenty of those years in which Caxton describes himself as residing in the countries of

The incomparable work of Mr. William Blades has rendered the subject capable of being satisfactorily studied.

The date of Caxton's birth can only approximately be set down as taking place in 1412. We have Caxton's own word that he was born in "Kent in the Weald." Who taught him the art of printing has never yet been discovered. Mr. Blades almost conclusively proves that to Colard Mansion he was indebted for his instruction, and no doubt many new facts connected

Brabant and Zealand, there was an absolute prohibition on both sides of all commercial intercourse between England and the Duchy of Burgundy, to which these countries were subject, and for nearly the whole period no English goods were suffered to pass to the Continent except through the town of Calais, and "in France," says Caxton, "I was never."

In 1484, Edward the IV. appointed Richard Whitehill and William Caxton, still abroad, to be his ambassadors and deputies to the Duke of Burgundy "for the purpose
in England) is accepted the commencement of
of confirming an existing treaty of commerce, or if necessary, for making a new one." In 1466 a treaty was concluded, by which the commercial relations between the two countries, which had been interrupted for twenty years, were restored. Margaret, sister to our Edward IV., was married to Charles, Duke of Burgundy, in 1468, at Bruges, and Caxton, who was of his adoption, and, after a residence of about thirty-five years, to have returned to England, laden with a freight more precious than the most opulent merchant adventurer ever dreamed of, to endow his country with that inestimable blessing, the printing press—the instrument designed to relieve mankind from the thraldom of ignorance, superstition, and vice.

Of the first English Book printed with a Title-page, published about 1493 by Wynken de Worde.

residing in that city, received an appointment—it is not known in what capacity—in the Court of the Duchess. He became a great favourite with the noble lady, and in conversation she elicited from Caxton an acknowledgment that "having no great charge or occupation," he had, before her Grace's arrival, com-

menced the translation from French into English of the "Recuyell of the Historyes of Troy" (by Raoul le Fèvre). Discouraged, he had abandoned the task; but his noble mistress made him fetch his "five or six quires" and submit them to her inspection, and then "commanded me straightly to continue, and make an

In 1476, then, we find Caxton established at Westminster. Many think that his press was actually set up in some part of the church, some "chapel" of Westminster Abbey. The facts are not difficult to arrive at. It may be considered as beyond all doubt that Caxton's press was erected in the Almonry, which was a building established by a most admirable and excellent personage, whom the printers of England might well regard as their patroness, Margaret of Richmond, mother of King Henry VII., who was the great patroness of learning, and, as we know, the friend of Erasmus. As far as can be made out,
Man they of Crete had herdesk the resolution of Saturne they were greatly abashed. for they knew well that Saturne toke this mater great to his heart: and they knew that he was a terrible man to offend. And so they knew that wrongfully he was by the death of his son Jupiter that bad restored hym to his lordship by his prowess and vaillance. Many there were that went into an other kynge dom because they would not be with the fader against the son at this time. But the other was noman that durste be so hardy to reply again Saturne son said that he did err so for they dreaded more his prer than to offend Jupiter. What shall I say of the comandement of Saturne: one man withdrew hym unto his house full of greke and bitter sorrow to his heart. And there was not oon man but he had his face charged with greke grece and pesant anoyent 200:

he day than drew we ouer. And on the morne Saturne armed hym self and sowned Trompettis unto armes. They of crete aroos this mornynge and many ther were of them that knew the heavenly of Saturne. And all so ther were many that instead of that that the kynge Woldy do 200 could sconde no reson wherefore he made this armee. for all Crete was my peers and all the tynannys were discharged and put into destruction perdurable. Amongst all other Cynge Wist not what to thynke seyng that Saturne went not after Jupiter. She demanded hym oftestymes wherther he Woldy goo and for what reson that he toke not Jupiter with hym in his compaigne. Jupiter was at that spire my parthenympe with his Wys Juno. Wlan
Pole; but the greater likelihood is that the sign had a heraldic significance, and was a shield of one of the heraldic metals, a pale gules.

A curious advertisement or handbill, printed and circulated by Caxton ante 1440, furnishes us with these particulars. Of this interesting relic we append a facsimile from the original in the Bodleian Library. Only one other copy is extant, and that is in the Earl Spencer collection. It may be considered the earliest broadside known.

It may be remarked that Caxton frequently used the word “reed” for red. The advertisement refers to an Ordinale of the Church of Salisbury, printed in the same type. The word “pye” is supposed to have given the name to the type called pica.

If it pleseth any man spirituell or temporall to hye any pyes of two and thre commemo-racions of salisbury ye enprynptid after the forme of this present lettre which he ben wel and truly correct, late hym come to westmin-ster in to the almonerbye at the reed pale and he shal have them good chepe.

Supplício vestredula
Caxton’s Advertisement.

“The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers,” the book which has very properly been adopted as marking the introduction of bookmaking into England, is a volume of seventy-five leaves, seventy-two of which are occupied by the translation, which is made by Anthony Wydeville, Earl Rivers, brother of the Queen of Edward IV. This work is especially interesting from the fact that the last three leaves afford us a specimen of Caxton’s own style of composition. His patron the Earl, with whom he seems to have been on the most affectionate terms, having omitted to translate certain conclusions of Socrates “towchyng women,” Caxton supplies the omission—but we will leave him to tell the occasion of it in his own words. Our facsimile of the commencement of the epilogue which follows is from the first edition of the “Dictes and Sayings,” 1477, in the British Museum; and what follows the woodcut is the remainder of the epilogue.

Whiche book is late translated out of Frenshe into englyssh, by the Noble and puissant lord Lord Antone Erle of Ruyers lord of Scales & of the Ille of Wyght. At suche tyme as he had accomplished this sayd Werke, it liked him to sende it to me in certayne quyers to oversee, whiche withthowth I saw & fonde therin many grete, notable, and wyse sayengys of the philosophes. And thus obeying hys request and comandemente I have put me in devoyer to oversee this hys sayd book and beholden as nygehe as I coude

hoe It accordeth wyth thoriginal beying in French, And I fynde nothyng dyscordaunt therin. Stuf only in the dyctes and sayengys of Socrates. Wherin I fynde that my saide lord hath left out certayn and dyverse conclusions towchynge women. But I suppose that som sayr lady hath desired hym to leve it out of his booke. Or ellys he was amorous on some noble lady, for whos love he wold not sette yt in his booke. . . . I can not thinke that so trewe a man & so noble a Phyllosophie as Socrates was shold wyte other wyse than trouthe. . . . Therefore . . . I purpose to wryte the same sayenges of that Greke Socrates, whiche wrote of the women of grece and nothyng of them of this Royame, whom I suppose he never knewe. For if he had I dar plainly saye that

he wold have reserved them in especiall in his sayd dictes. Alway not presumyng to put & sette them in my sayd lorde book, but in thende aparte in the rehersayl of the werkes, humbly requiring al them that shal rede this lystyl rehersayl that yt they fynde ony faulte tarette (i.e., to ascribe) it to Socrates and not to me whiche wrythe as here after foloweth."

Taking the “Dictes and Sayings” as the first work issued from the English press, about ninety-six separate works have come down to us, of which number no less than thirty-three are known by single copies or fragments only. If so great a proportion of the work is unique how much is lost altogether? We are possessed in the various public and private collections, all told, of about 550 volumes from Caxton’s press. He remained at Westminster till his death, which, as nearly as can be ascertained, took place at the close of the year 1491.

Had Caxton’s opportunities allowed, he would probably have used wood-engraving to a much greater extent—the chief difficulty was no doubt experienced in obtaining the services of an engraver—many of the blocks being badly cut into, and the draughtsman’s work thereby destroyed. Caxton’s best specimen of the wood-engraver’s art, and one which has been much praised for its composition and feeling, is the well-known “Crucifixion” frequently seen in the books of Wynkyn de Worde, who received great
credit for it until its earlier use was discovered as a frontispiece to Caxton’s “Fifteen Oes.” We take pleasure in presenting this wood-engraving to our readers.

Mr. Blades considers the large pressmark used by Caxton to be the most interesting of all his woodcuts, and is of opinion that he used but one. To differ from Mr. Blades requires boldness and some attention to the subject. Still we must venture to come to another conclusion on this slight point. The smaller device, here represented, is of a similar design to the larger one, and appeared first in “The Chastising of master’s death. Caxton only began to use the device about two years before, and what more likely than that, finding the larger device sometimes inconvenient, he had designed the smaller?

The interpretation of the device offers a question by no means of easy solution. The common-sense

God’s Children” (1491?), Caxton’s death occurring at the close of that year. He would certainly not have permitted the use of such a device by another printer in his lifetime, nor would Wynkyn de Worde exhibit such a want of shrewdness as to put forth a new design professing to be Caxton’s directly upon his
Cheap Books.

A New York publisher when questioned upon the new system of cheaply reprinting cyclopaedias, dictionaries, and other standard works, said: “It is a very odd fact, indeed, that these new processes have done no harm whatever to the legitimate publishing business. Shortly after they were first put into practical use, many large book houses were greatly apprehensive that their trade would be seriously injured. The actual result, however, has been the exact opposite. The new process in the main consists of photographing pages, pictures, and maps upon a gelatine compound and using the latter to print from directly, or as a matrix from which an electrotype is easily taken. Its chief beauty is, that any error or defect can be remedied without trouble, so that, to use a paradox, the copy is often better than the original. The cost of the plates is a trifle compared with setting up the type and stereotyping. The cheapest paper, ink, presswork, and binding are used, and the result is a neat and useful work, which can be sold profitably at low figures. Bibliophiles seldom or never buy these books. They are purchased usually by young men and women whose means are too limited to indulge in the expensive originals.”

When illustrations are printed lengthways of the book always place them with the title running from bottom to top of page.
Lord Rivers presenting Carton and his Book to Edward the Fourth.
One of the woodcuts printed by Caxton,
from the prayer book called "The Fifteen Oes."