

**HOW TO TELL A CAXTON:  
WITH SOME HINTS WHERE  
AND HOW THE SAME  
MIGHT BE FOUND, PP. 2-55**

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How to Tell a Caxton: With Some Hints where and how the Same Might be Found, pp. 2-55 by  
William Blades

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**WILLIAM BLADES**

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# How to tell a Capton,

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BE FOUND.



BY

WILLIAM BLADES,

*Author of "The Life and Typography of William Caxton"*

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## PREFACE.

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No apology is needed for any effort which tends, however remotely, to rescue from oblivion a single leaf printed by England's great Prototypographer, William Caxton. The Press is, for good or evil, the greatest power in the civilized world; and it is not too much to assert that progress of any kind would have been slow and almost impossible without its aid. Of all countries there is probably not one more indebted to the Printing-press, for all it holds dear, than England. No wonder then that where the English tongue is spoken and English literature prized, the first books printed in that language are surrounded with a halo

that brightens, and an interest that deepens, year by year. That this interest is real, and not due to an intermittent fever of fashion is proved by the gradual and steady rise in value of all early printed books, which at the present time are worth more than in the mania which raged in 1812 and the following years\*; nor is this rise difficult to explain. The labours of our literary clubs and societies, and the numerous reprints of old authors issued during the past few years, have created an intelligent appreciation of our early bibliographical treasures which has never before been so generally diffused.

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\* The following are some of the prices of "Caxtons" within the last four years.

Confessio Amantis .....	£477	15s
Knight of the Tower .....	616	0
Fayts of Arms .....	300	0



Nor must the influence of America be overlooked. Our most successful "black-letter" opponents in the Sale-rooms and Book-marts of Europe, were for many years Americans or their Agents; and, although the War for a time diverted the flow of capital in that direction, the old feeling is resuming its sway, and the relics of early English Literature are again being sought for by an ever increasing body of intelligent Book-lovers.

The design of this little volume is not to instruct the professed Bibliographer, though even he may find a book of reference occasionally useful; but to draw attention to the existence of many collections of old books hitherto unexplored; to induce owners of ancestral libraries, as well as all persons having

access to old libraries, to commence and carry through an earnest and systematic search for the precious relics of our earliest printed literature ; and lastly to show that the search is not difficult, that it is full of interest, and that very important discoveries *must be* its reward, if carried on energetically.

The owners and guardians of old libraries may be divided into two classes :

There are those who take a real and intellectual interest in their books, as a most instructive portion of our national life and history ; but who have never troubled themselves about the difference of types, and are consequently unable to distinguish the work of one Printer from another. Ask such an one about his library, and, bibliographically, he is entirely ignorant. As an example, take

this amongst several letters which I have received:—

“Dear Sir,

\* \* “You have asked me whether my library contains a specimen of Caxton’s press, and I should be delighted to answer in the affirmative; but, as I am not sure, my reply must be ‘I really do not know.’ You are quite correct in your supposition, that the library has been for many generations in the family, and it certainly contains a goodly number of books printed in the old English character. Should this account excite in your mind a wish to examine for yourself, pray send me a line, and I shall be happy to assist your research to the best of my ability.

“I remain, \* \* \*”

In a library, such as the above, place an intelligent man; if acquainted with old books, so much the better; if entirely ignorant of them, no matter; put in his hands this little volume, and time and patience alone will be required to enable him to state with certainty whether there is a “Caxton” on the shelves or not.