

Reduced photo-print of a page of Wynkyn de Worde's
Speculum Vite Christi (1494).



The original page *i.e.*, the type excluding the head line and side-notes measures $7\frac{1}{4}$ by $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

A Librarian's Treasure-Trove. A New Copy of the
Speculum Vite Christi by Wynkyn de Worde.

THE librarian of a public library is so frequently called upon to inspect so-called "rare and valuable early printed" books, which are only so in the eyes of their over-sanguine owners, that in many cases he has been converted into an almost callous—certainly apathetic—examiner of these oft-recurring "treasures." The disappointing search for anything out-of-the-way resulting only in the discovery of books valued at their waste paper weight is a poor inducement to study the masterpieces of early printers, and if not loved for their own sakes, their beauties would appeal in vain to the "practical librarian." The recent discovery in this most modern of our great towns of a very rare Wynkyn de Worde, is one of those singular pieces of good fortune that occur now and again, and stimulate all book lovers to hope that their own day may come soon.

It was early in this year that Mr. Robert D. Francis, a prominent solicitor in Birkenhead, and a member of the Public Library Committee, informed me that he was clearing out some old and useless papers, among which were some old books which he had placed aside until I could call at his office and examine them, and decide if they were of any value. I lost no time in paying my visit of inspection, with a conviction that the usual useless lot of rubbish awaited my sentence of destruction. However, on turning over the leaves of one insignificant and fusty-looking tome, judge of my astonishment and excitement when the veritable type of Caxton revealed itself, and with a cry of glad surprise, I announced what I had found. I carried it off to my room, where a careful examination enabled me to establish the identity of my find as a copy of the supposititious work of St. Bonaventure, the *Speculum Vita Christi*. Closer examination and comparison with facsimiles and collations, particularly those in Blades's *William Caxton*, further showed that it was neither of the editions issued by Caxton. I then recollected that Mr.

Gordon Duff, in his *Early Printed Books*, had something to say about a *Speculum*, and at page 134, the following interesting clue was afforded:—

"In 1489, Caxton printed two editions of an indulgence of great typographical interest. This indulgence was first noticed by Dr. Cotton, who mentions it in his *Typographical Gazetteer*, under Oxford, supposing it to have been printed at that place. Bradshaw, on seeing a photograph of it, at once conjectured, from the form and appearance of the type, that it was printed by Caxton, though Blades refused to accept it as a product of his press without further proof, and it was never admitted into any of his books on Caxton. The same type was afterwards found by Bradshaw used for sidenotes in the 1494 edition of the *Speculum Vite Christi*, printed by W. de Worde, and the type being in his possession at that date, could have belonged to no one but Caxton. In a list of Caxton's types, this type would be known as type 7."

At this I strongly suspected that my copy was of the edition of 1494, and then Mr. Duff's very excellent work-specimens of *Early English Printing* came to my aid. These are probably the most beautiful reproductions yet accomplished of early typography, and I hope that a copy of them has been secured for most of our public libraries. The specimen page from the *Speculum* given in plate ix. proved my suspicions to be correct, and Mr. Duff's words are worth quotation:—

"In 1494, De Worde returned to Caxton's types, and printed two large books, the first in which he puts his name, Hylton's *Scala Perfectionis*, and Bonaventure's *Speculum Vite Christi*, both printed in Caxton's type 8, now used for the first time to print a complete book. The former book, of which a good many copies are known, calls for no special comment, but the latter is of peculiar interest, being the only one in which Caxton's type 7 was used. Of this book only one copy is known, now in a private library, though four leaves are also in the Lambeth Library, having been used to perfect a copy of Caxton's edition."

Mr. Duff has taken his facsimile from one of the leaves in the Lambeth Palace Library, and, unfortunately, it does not contain one of the woodcuts so prominent in the work. The known copy is in the library of the Earl of Leicester, at Holkham, and I know of no collation of that copy. It appears in the catalogue of the Caxton Exhibition of 1877 (see No. 231), but

as there is mentioned no exhibitor's name it is probable that it was not lent for exhibition, and that the entry was only made to render the catalogue more complete as a record of early printed works.

For the purpose of arriving at what a complete copy would represent, and in the absence of any known collation we may reasonably assume that one of the editions of the *Speculum* printed by Caxton was used as "copy" by W. de Worde for the production of the edition of 1494.

Which edition, that of 1487 or 1488, scarcely enters into consideration, as they were very similar, and Blades gives the collation as identical, "printed with the same types, page for page (with few exceptions) and nearly letter for letter," whilst the variations by which the two editions may be traced are in the headline, and the use of the full word *Capitulum* in one edition, and the abbreviation of the same word into *Ca* in the other. The collation of these editions is A to s in eights and t4 = 148 leaves, the first and last leaf being blank, leaving 146 printed leaves. The 1494 edition seems to run almost on the same lines, losing a word or two here and there, and just missing assimilation of the pages (probably by the introduction of the larger woodcuts), but recovering itself again as it gets further. We may judge, therefore, that the complete edition would consist of 146 leaves, these running (judging from the copy under notice)

A—Q in 8's, R—T in 6's,

or, as the late Mr. Blades would have recorded it,

a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, are 4ns, r, s, t, are 3ns.

Allowing this to be correct, then the copy in my possession is deficient of the following:—

a, 8ll; b, 8ll; c, parts of 1, 2 and 4 and whole of 3; h, 1 and 8; i, 3; part of o 8; r, 4ll, and whole of s and t.

The book is printed without catchwords, and the headline varies occasionally as in the *Speculum* of Caxton. A curious discovery is that the sidenotes in Caxton's type 7 terminate in that type with sig. h; and with sig. i, the sidenotes are in the same type as the body of the book, Caxton's type 8. This has hitherto remained unnoted.

The measurement of the printed page, excluding headline, signatures, and sidenotes, is $7\frac{1}{4}$ in. by $4\frac{7}{8}$ in. There are thirty-

¹ Blades's *Caxton*, second edition, p. 318.

three lines to the page, and to each chapter is prefixed a woodcut, as is shown in the illustration on p. 193. The earlier of these are large and beautiful cuts, $3\frac{1}{4}$ in. by $2\frac{3}{4}$ in., previously used by Caxton, and the later ones smaller and coarser cuts, measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $2\frac{1}{4}$ in.

The copy has suffered considerably, as the collation above will show, yet there are 103 leaves, comparatively perfect, and the remains of eight additional leaves, from several of which the woodcuts have been torn out, and the binder has played sad havoc in cutting the book down to the same size as another it is bound with, the leaves only measuring $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 6 in.—the side-notes having suffered greatly.

So ends my story of the discovery of a most interesting and valuable bibliographical treasure, a record likely to be no less fruitful in encouraging confidence in others that they too may make some similar find, than in imbuing the spirit of careful research where discoveries are possible.

The existence in most of our cities and towns of the librarian of the public library—a public official who should know a rare book when he meets it—ought surely to do something towards preventing the careless destruction of early literary monuments, and we may yet hear of one of the craft discovering a copy of Caxton's *Horæ*, or, may be, even the manuscript of one of Shakespeare's plays!

WM. MAY.

Public Library,
Birkenhead.

