

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
Charles Knight  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION

*Books of enduring scholarly value*

### **Printing and Publishing History**

The interface between authors and their readers is a fascinating subject in its own right, revealing a great deal about social attitudes, technological progress, aesthetic values, fashionable interests, political positions, economic constraints, and individual personalities. This part of the Cambridge Library Collection reissues classic studies in the area of printing and publishing history that shed light on developments in typography and book design, printing and binding, the rise and fall of publishing houses and periodicals, and the roles of authors and illustrators. It documents the ebb and flow of the book trade supplying a wide range of customers with products from almanacs to novels, bibles to erotica, and poetry to statistics.

### **The Old Printer and the Modern Press**

Charles Knight's *The Old Printer* was first published in 1854 and is partly a biography of William Caxton and partly an account of the development of the printing press and its role in English literature from the fifteenth century. William Caxton was not only the first printer in England, but also a prolific translator and importer of books. He established a printing press at Westminster and among the books printed there were Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *The Subtil Histories and Fables of Esop*. Knight describes Elizabethan reading habits and traces the development of the types of books, papers and magazines that were most popular with the reading public in the mid-nineteenth century. The author is particularly interested in the availability of cheap popular literature as he regards this as an indication of the democratisation of society.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
Charles Knight  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection will bring back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
Charles Knight  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

# The Old Printer and the Modern Press

CHARLES KNIGHT



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
Charles Knight  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108009225](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108009225)

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1854  
This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-00922-5 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with, or with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
Charles Knight  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

THE  
OLD PRINTER  
AND THE  
MODERN PRESS.

By CHARLES KNIGHT.

~~~~~  
"Plus on lit, plus on lira ; plus il faut, plus il faudra des livres."  
*Histoire des Français des divers états.*  
~~~~~

LONDON:  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.  
1854.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
Charles Knight  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

TO

CHARLES DICKENS,

ONE OF THE MOST EARNEST LABOURERS IN THAT POPULAR  
LITERATURE WHICH ELEVATES A PEOPLE,

THIS VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

*April 13th, 1854.*

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
Charles Knight  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

---

IN 1844 I wrote, and published in my series of 'The Weekly Volume,' WILLIAM CAXTON, A BIOGRAPHY. That little work sold as largely as any of the collection. It will not be reprinted, as I have cancelled the stereotype plates.

In the present work I have remodelled that biography; rendering it a more compact narrative of the state of knowledge before the invention of printing, of the personal history of the man who brought the invention to England, and of the nature of his efforts to diffuse information amongst his countrymen. This account forms the FIRST PART of this volume.

The SECOND PART embraces a very broad view of the PROGRESS OF THE PRESS to our own day, especially in relation to the important subject of CHEAP POPULAR LITERATURE.

In treating of the remarkable revolution of our times in the prices of books, I cannot avoid incidentally noticing some of my own labours in that direction. I have done so as slightly as possible; and, I trust, in the impartial spirit of an honest chronicler.

---

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
 Charles Knight  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## CONTENTS.

### PART I.

#### CHAPTER I.

The Weald of Kent — Caxton's School-days — French disused — English taught — Variations in English — Books before Printing — Libraries — Transcribers — Books for the Great — Book Trade — No Books for the People — Changes produced by Printing . Page 1

#### CHAPTER II.

The Mercer's Apprentice — His Book-knowledge — Commerce in Books — Schools in London — City Apprentices — City Pageants — Spread of English Language — English Writers — Chaucer — Gower — Lydgate — The Minstrels — National Literature . 19

#### CHAPTER III.

Caxton abroad — Caxton's mercantile pursuits — Restrictions on Trade — Caxton's Commission — Merchants' Marks — Beginnings of Printing — Playing Cards — Wood-engraving — Block-books — Moveable Types — Guttenberg — Guttenberg's Statue — Festival at Mentz . 44

#### CHAPTER IV.

The Court of Burgundy — Caxton a Translator — Literature of Chivalry — Feudal Times — Caxton at the Ducal Court — Did Caxton print at Bruges — Edward the Fugitive — The new Art. . . . 62

#### CHAPTER V.

Rapidity of Printing — Who the first English Printer — Caxton the first English Printer — First English Printed Book — Difficulties of the first Printers — Ancient Bookbinding — The Printer a Publisher — Conditions of Cheapness in Books . . . . 85



Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
 Charles Knight  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

viii

## CONTENTS.

## CHAPTER VI.

The Press at Westminster—Theological Books—Character of Caxton's  
 Press — The Troy Book — The Game of the Chess . . . Page 109

## CHAPTER VII.

Female Manners — Lord Rivers — Popular History — Popular Science  
 — Popular Fables — Popular Translations — The Canterbury Tales  
 — Statutes — Books of Chivalry — Caxton's last days . . . 125

## CHAPTER VIII.

The Chapel — The Companions — Increase of Readers — Books made  
 Readers — Caxton's Types — Wynkyn's Dream — The first Paper-  
 mill . . . . . 153

APPENDIX . . . . . 167

---



---

 PART II.

## CHAPTER I.

Cheap Popular Literature — Conditions of Cheapness — Popular Lite-  
 rature of Elizabeth's reign — Who were the Readers . . . 179

## CHAPTER II.

Imperfect Civilisation — Reading during the Civil Wars — Reading  
 after the Restoration — French Romances — First London Catalogue,  
 1680 — Authors and Booksellers — Subscription Books — Books in  
 Numbers — The Canvassing System . . . . . 197

## CHAPTER III.

Periodical Literature—Prices of Books—18th Century—Two Classes  
 of Buyers — The Magazines — Collections of the Poets — The Cir-  
 culating Library — Cheap Book-Clubs . . . . . 218

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
 Charles Knight  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CONTENTS. ix

CHAPTER IV.

Continued dearness of Books — Useful Knowledge Society — Modern  
 Epoch of Cheapness — Demand and Supply — The Printing-machine  
 — The Paper-machine — Revival of Woodcutting . . . Page 238

CHAPTER V.

London Catalogue, 1816-1851 — Annual Catalogues, 1828, 1853 —  
 Classes of Books, 1816-1851 — Periodicals, 1831, 1853 — Aggre-  
 gate amount of Book-trade — Collections and Libraries — Inter-  
 national Copyright — Readers in the United States — Irish National  
 School-books . . . . . 260

CHAPTER VI.

Cheap Fiction — Penny Periodicals . . . . . 277

CHAPTER VII.

Degrees of Readers — General Improvement — Newspaper Press —  
 Newspaper Press National — Agricultural Readers — General desire  
 for Amusement — Supply of real Knowledge . . . . . 286

CHAPTER VIII.

Free Libraries — In Towns — In Rural Districts — Influences of the  
 best Books . . . . . 303

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-00922-5 - The Old Printer and the Modern Press  
Charles Knight  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

