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978-1-108-02143-2 - A History of Booksellers: The Old and the New

Henry Curwen

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A History of Booksellers

Henry Curwen (1845–92) was a journalist and author who became editor of the *Times of India*. First published in 1874, *A History of Booksellers* aimed at providing an informative but entertaining picture of British bookselling and publishing, by means of ‘biographies’ of the major publishing houses and their output. He begins with a general survey of publishing and bookselling from Roman times to the nineteenth century, including a discussion of copyright legislation. It is clear that by 1800 the demand for books was considerable and growing: Alexander Donaldson, who specialised in cheap reprints of popular works, though repeatedly sued over copyright by other publishers, died in 1794 a very rich man. Many of the firms Curwen discusses are still well-known names, such as Longmans, Chambers, Butterworths and W.H. Smith. He concludes with anecdotes on some of the better known representatives of the provincial book trade.

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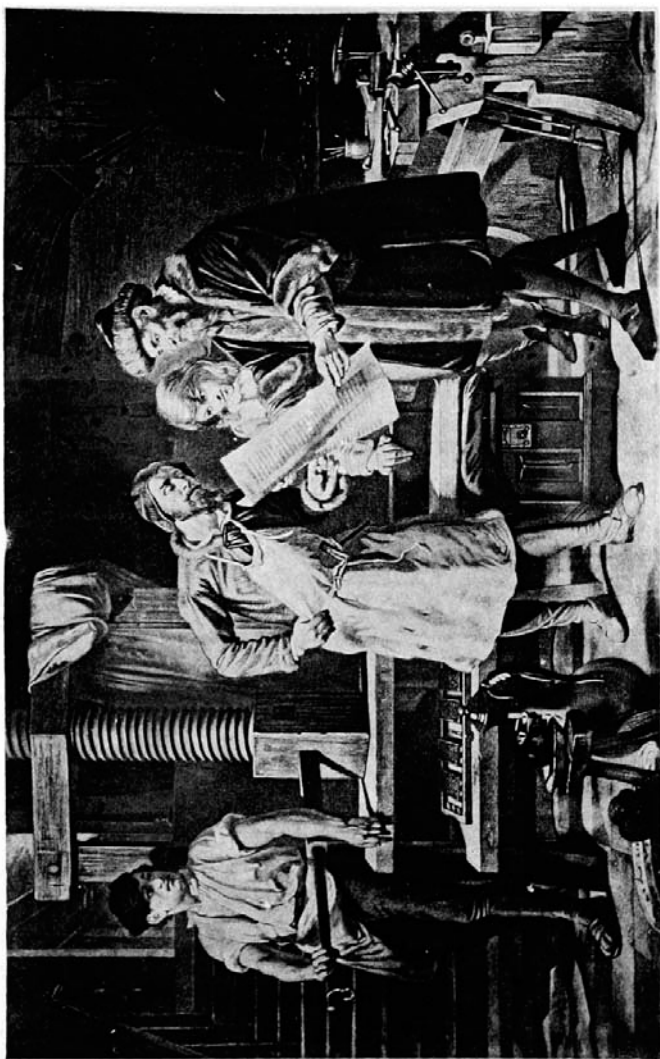
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A

HISTORY OF BOOKSELLERS,

THE OLD AND THE NEW.

By HENRY CURWEN.



“In these days, ten ordinary histories of kings and courtiers were well exchanged against the tenth part of one good History of Booksellers.”—THOMAS CARLYLE.

WITH PORTRAITS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

London:

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P R E F A C E .

HISTORY" has been aptly termed the "essence of innumerable biographies;" and this surely justifies us in the selection of our title; but in inditing a volume to be issued in a cheap and popular form, it was manifestly impossible to trace the careers of all the eminent members, ancient and modern, of a Trade so widely extended; had we, indeed, possessed all possible leisure for research, every available material, and a space thoroughly unlimited, it is most probable that the result would have been distinguished chiefly for its bulk, tediousness, and monotony. It was resolved, therefore, in the first planning of the volume, to primarily trace the origin and growth of the Book-selling and Publishing Trades up to a comparatively modern period; and then to select, for fuller treatment, the most typical English representatives of each one of the various branches into which a natural division of labour had subdivided the whole. And, by this plan, it is believed that, while some firms at present growing into eminence may have been omitted, or have received but scant acknowledgment,

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PREFACE.

no one Publisher or Bookseller, whose spirit and labours have as yet had time to justify a claim to a niche in the "HISTORY OF BOOKSELLERS," has been altogether passed over. In the course of our "HISTORY," too, we have been necessarily concerned with the manner of the "equipping and furnishing" of nearly every great work in our literature. So that, while on the one hand we have related the lives of a body of men singularly thrifty, able, industrious, and persevering—in some few cases singularly venturesome, liberal, and kindly-hearted—we have on the other, by our comparative view, tried to throw a fresh, at all events a concentrated, light upon the interesting story of literary struggle.

No work of the kind has ever previously been attempted, and this fact must be an apology for some, at least, of our shortcomings.

H. C.

November, 1873.

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