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Henry Benjamin Wheatley

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Literary Blunders

Delight in other people's errors never dates, and this little book, first published in 1893, is a fount of human folly and a joy to read. Its compiler, Henry Benjamin Wheatley (1838–1917), was a distinguished librarian, bibliographer and scholar, and a prolific author on London history and the history of books. This publication displays his great sense of humour, and his effortless command of far-flung sources in the search for a good joke. Citing examples from historians to misguided schoolboys, as well as from everyday conversation, Wheatley looks at comic misprints, misunderstandings, and garbled English in foreign parts. However, the book also has a more serious contribution to make: the chapter on printed errata makes use of the earliest evidence of proof correction by authors, and the analysis of misprints in early printing shows how many variant readings in the works of Shakespeare came about.

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HENRY BENJAMIN WHEATLEY



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The Book-Lover's Library

Edited by

Henry B. Wheatley, F.S.A.

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LITERARY BLUNDERS

A CHAPTER IN THE

"HISTORY OF HUMAN ERROR"

BY

HENRY B. WHEATLEY, F.S.A.



LONDON

ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW

1893

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P R E F A C E .

VERY reader of The Caxtons will remember the description, in that charming novel, of the gradual growth of Augustine Caxton's great work "The History of Human Error," and how, in fact, the existence of that work forms the pivot round which the incidents turn. It was modestly expected to extend to five quarto volumes, but only the first seven sheets were printed by Uncle Jack's Anti-Publishers' Society, "with sundry unfinished plates depicting the various developments of the human skull (that temple of Human Error),"

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and the remainder has not been heard of since.

In introducing to the reader a small branch of this inexhaustible subject, I have ventured to make use of Augustine Caxton's title; but I trust that no one will allow himself to imagine that I intend, in the future, to produce the thousand or so volumes which will be required to complete the work.

A satirical friend who has seen the proofs of this little volume says it should be entitled "Jokes Old and New"; but I find that he seldom acknowledges that a joke is new, and I hope, therefore, my readers will transpose the adjectives, and accept the old jokes for the sake of the new ones. I may claim, at least, that the series of answers to examination questions, which Prof. Oliver Lodge has so kindly supplied me with, comes within the latter class.

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I trust that if some parts of the book are thought to be frivolous, the chapters on lists of errata and misprints may be found to contain some useful literary information.

I have availed myself of the published communications of my friends Professors Hales and Skeat and Dr. Murray on Literary Blunders, and my best thanks are also due to several friends who have helped me with some curious instances, and I would specially mention Sir George Birdwood, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., Mr. Edward Clodd, Mr. R. B. Prosser, and Sir Henry Trueman Wood.

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