

classical or Mediæval times, they strike us with astonishment, and we feel that if this prop were removed our modern civilization must necessarily fall to pieces. Nor can we fairly allege that printing has done evil as well as good. In itself it is a harmless and rational industry, giving profitable employment to many hands and heads. In its productions, though it may sometimes minister to bad causes, or to false taste, or even to immoral enterprises, yet not only does the good vastly outweigh the evil, but it affords the means of correcting its own evils. Like the light of heaven, it may shine sometimes on what is obscene and disgusting, but even then it only reveals what would otherwise fester in darkness and do its mischievous work without any chance of detection. The free and full discussion of an unfettered press, whatever may be its occasional inconveniences, has been proved by all experience to be the best of all guarantees for the safety and progress of society. I would, therefore, emphatically assert that when Caxton introduced printing into England, and when, after his time, the British Constitution guaranteed the most full liberty to discussion in the press, and to the publication of all things not absolutely immoral or seditious, they did what was of the nature of unalloyed good, as much as anything of human invention may claim that title, and for this reason such a commemoration as this is a merited and proper tribute to a great and pregnant fact in the history of our country. The manner in which Caxton introduced printing is also noteworthy. He was not a mere accident of his time; not merely a man who procured some cases of types and a press and set up a business in a new place. He was a man of some education and literary taste. His enterprise began by translating a French work into English, and then he fell upon the art of printing, and learned it at a somewhat advanced time of life, that he might print his book. He was on the borders of sixty years when his first book appeared, and he says himself with respect to it