

The Father of the English Press.

THE Father of the English Press, four hundred and twenty years ago, or thereabouts,—exact figures are not attainable,—John Gutenberg, of German descent, now known as William Caxton, was born in the Weald of Kent. Of the locality we are ignorant, for Kent was then a rude and almost barbarous country. Its language was so broad as to be hardly recognizable as English. A topographical writer described it, a century and a half after the birth of our benefactor, as being: "A desert and waste wilderness, stored and stuffed with herds of deer and droves of hogs only."

Naturally little would be known of the parents, or of the early history of a youth brought up in such environments.

The first authentic account we have of Caxton is that he was apprenticed, while still a lad in his teens, to Robert Large, a member of the Mercer's Company, who was, as documentary evidence proves, a man of great wealth and influence. He was a merchant as well as a mercer, and it is presumably certain that among his merchandise there were books. The boy was therefore placed in favorable circumstances to cultivate a taste for reading, which otherwise would have been impossible, on account of the great cost of books, (such as there were at that time), which would have been far beyond his means.

Robert Large was Lord Mayor of London in 1439-40: the following year he succumbed to a serious illness, leaving Caxton twenty marks, a bequest of some consideration in those days.

Shortly after his master's death, Caxton went abroad. His legacy enabled him to study in Flanders and Holland. It was here that he made himself master of the art of mechanically reproducing on paper, by use of movable types, words and pages, thereby doing away in England with the volumes engraved on blocks of wood, wax or on parchment, such as were used until very recently in China, and upon which many a great and noble thought was engraved by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Paper had been common enough for a century or so, yet no one had discovered typography.

William Caxton, the man who brought us this gift, was not a craftsman or a professional printer, nor did he ever become what one would call to-day a competent printer. Early English