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A PRINTED SPECIMEN OF

Caslon

OLD STYLE TYPE

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A PRINTED SPECIMEN

OF THE

CASLON OLD STYLE TYPE

WILLIAM CASLON.

A PRINTED SPECIMEN

OF

Caslon Old Style

TYPE

WITH APPROPRIATE ORNAMENTS

Being the first of a series
of books showing the many beautiful types
in the composing-room of

REDFIELD-KENDRICK-ODELL CO.
Printers and Map Makers

311 WEST FORTY-THIRD STREET
NEW YORK

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New York

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THE STORY OF

CASLON OLD STYLE

ITS ORIGIN & REVIVAL

ASLON has perhaps the most interesting biography of all type faces in general use. From first to last, the narrative of its birth, of its rise and fall and rediscovery, and of its present-day superabundant vitality is touched at every point with real human interest. Its history makes a fascinating page in the Romance of Typography.

Though William Caslon, the man who gave the world this beautiful Roman letter, did not actually "beat his sword into a ploughshare," he did something very like it. Starting in life as an engraver of gun-locks and barrels and making a conspicuous success at that difficult and semi-martial trade, he was fortunately induced to turn his talents to the cutting of English type faces instead, and proved so great a genius at his new profession that his charming old style types set the styles in English and American typography until nearly the close of the Eighteenth century. Thereafter for nearly fifty years his faces suffered an almost total eclipse by the modern Roman letter. Happily resurrected in 1843, they have since steadily grown in favor until today no printer would seriously attempt to do business without being plentifully supplied with the classic Caslon letter.

Two hundred years ago printing was in a bad way in England. Whether due to the repressive and illiberal laws

which had prevailed under the Stuarts, or to the lack of ideas and ideals of the type-makers themselves, type-founding was especially in a state of degeneracy. Such type as possessed any merit at all was imported from Holland, and even these Dutch faces had fallen away from the beauty of the Elzevirs.

In this crisis a small group of famous London printers, among whom were William Bowyer and John Watts, casting about for some one capable of raising the printing art out of the slough of despond in which it seemed hopelessly mired, hit upon William Caslon as the one likely to succeed. Then in the full flush of ambitious young manhood, the latter, who was born in the west of England in 1692, had added the making of bookbinders' tools and stamps to his regular work of engraving gun-locks and barrels, and it was the fine workmanship of his bookbinders' letters that convinced his printer friends of his ability to cut the type faces of which they were so desperately in need.

Like many another who has achieved distinction in the world, Caslon began in a garret in Helmet Row, Old Street, London. There, with £500 which Bowyer, Watts and a third printer advanced him to make a start with, he set up in the business of type-founder in 1720. Success smiled upon him from the beginning. The exact sequence of events in his little establishment is somewhat befogged, but he seems to have cut in that first year a pica Roman and Italic and also to have made at the order of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge a fount of Arabic on English body for use in a Psalter and New Testament, which were published several years later. In 1722, it is related, he cut

"the beautiful fount of English," which four years afterwards was used in the famous three-volume edition of the works of John Selden, the celebrated lawyer and antiquary. This "noble" fount, says Talbot Baines Reed, historian of English type-founding, "marked a distinct turning-point in the career of English typography, which, from that time forward, entered on a course of brilliant regeneration."

By 1730 Caslon had so far justified the early hopes and expectations of the friends who had financially backed their faith in him that he had distanced all competitors, both in the excellence of his type faces and in the scope of their sales. The earliest of his broadside specimens which has come down to us, printed in 1734, displays thirty-eight founts, all except three of which were cut either by the master himself or under his close personal supervision.

With popularity and success came the need for larger quarters and Caslon graduated from his garret first to Ironmonger Row, also in Old Street, and then to 22 and 23 Chiswell Street, where the business he founded was conducted in the original building up to nine years ago, when it was torn down. By 1742, the year in which he took his oldest son, William II, into partnership with him, he had accumulated an independent fortune and his type faces were almost without opposition in Great Britain and America.

The younger Caslon proved to be nearly as able a designer and founder of type as his father. Under his direction the business grew and prospered and added to its prestige. William Caslon, the elder, retired soon after 1750 to his country house near London, where he devoted his remain-

ing years to music and books and to the hospitable entertainment of his friends. He died in 1766, at the age of 74, leaving the world of English typography vastly in his debt. His famous type foundry was conducted by his descendants until 1873, when on the retirement of the last of the line, Henry W., due to ill-health which ended his life the next year, the business was continued for a purchaser by Thomas W. Smith, who later became its owner and took the name of Caslon-Smith. The ancient foundry, which in 1920 celebrated its two hundredth anniversary, is now owned by three of his sons, who have assumed the name of Caslon.

The strangest part of the story of Caslon type remains to be told. Despite its unbounded popularity for nearly the whole of the Eighteenth century Caslon old style Roman letter began to be superseded in the century's closing years by the modern style Roman face introduced by Bodoni and modified by the Scotch type founders, and it rapidly fell into a state of total neglect. For nearly fifty years it was absolutely forgotten. That few expected that it would ever come back into use is proved by the fact that type founders almost universally destroyed their old style punches and matrices. Caslon's descendants, however, moved by a spirit of reverence for the work of their founder, carefully preserved the historic punches and matrices which had so lately revolutionized the typographic art, and the time arrived when they were rewarded for their sentiment and providential foresight.

In 1843 Charles Whittingham, the younger, of the famous Chiswick Press, wanting a type face which in its style should harmonize with the text of a Seventeenth century

novel—"The Diary of Lady Willoughby"—which he was about to print, sought out the Caslons and got them to cast for the book founts from the old style matrices. After this the use of the Caslon face slowly revived—so slowly, however, that it was not until 1860 that the Caslon foundry restored any of the old style types to their specimen book.

Whittingham's good taste, nevertheless, had started the revival and the genius of William Caslon I was now destined for the second time to work a revolution in the printing of the English language. Gradually the foremost type founders of Great Britain joined the Caslons in casting the classic old style Roman letter and long before the end of the last century it had returned to a well-deserved popularity there.

Yet it is in America rather than in England that Caslon has achieved its greatest success and it is in this country that this graceful and pleasing face is most appreciated and most used. A large group of the best American printers are agreed that it is one of the most admirable of all type faces and they delight to interpret their art through its instrumentality.

Still further identifying American typography with the classic type face which William Caslon has bestowed upon countless millions of English readers—past, present and future—there is the interesting fact that the type which has given him lasting fame was first named Caslon in this country in the year 1895. The American Type Founders Company so designated the historic face in its specimen book of that year. The Caslon type foundry itself adopted the name eighteen years later.

SPECIMENS

OF THE VARIOUS SIZES

OF THE

Caslon Old Style Type

SHOWING BOTH THE

ROMAN

&

ITALIC FACES

Tonson, a king amongst the English printers, is said on one occasion to have lodged in Amsterdam while a founder there was casting him £300 worth of type; and James, the only English founder whose business showed any vitality, owed his success chiefly, if not entirely, to the fact that all his letter was the product of Dutch matrices; and even these, in his hands, were so indifferently cast as to be often as bad as English type.

What was the reason for this lamentable decline—how far it was chargeable on the printer, how far on the founder, or how far both were the victims of that system of Star Chamber decrees, monopolies, patents, restraints and privileges which had characterised the illiberal days of the Stuarts—this is not the place to inquire. Nor, happily, are we called upon to speculate as to what would have been the consequence to English Typography of an uninterrupted prolongation of the malady under which it laboured. But it is necessary to remind ourselves of the critical nature of that malady in order to appreciate properly the providential circumstance which turned the attention of William Caslon to type-founding, and thus served to avert from England the disgrace which threatened her.

William Caslon was born at Halesowen in Shropshire in the year 1692. He served his apprenticeship to an engraver of gun-locks and barrels in London, and at the expiration of his term followed his trade in Vine Street, near the Minories.

The ability he displayed in his art was conspicuous, and by no means confined to the mere ornamentation of gun-barrels—the chasing of silver and the designing of tools for bookbinders frequently occupying his attention. While thus engaged some of his bookbinding punches were noticed for their neatness and accuracy by Mr. Watts, the eminent printer, who, fully alive to the present degenerate state of the typographical art in this country, was quick to recognise the possibility of raising it once more to its proper position. He accordingly encouraged Mr. Caslon to persevere in letter-cutting, promising him his personal support, and favouring him meanwhile with introductions to some of the leading printers of the day.

10 POINT CASLON OLD STYLE

Caslon Old Style—Roman

SIX TO FOURTEEN POINT

6 point Caslon Old Style

ABOUT THE CASLON TYPE

Tbis article is reprinted from the specimen book issued by the Caslon Letter Foundry in England. Printing had reacbed a low ebb in England in tbe early years of the eighteentb century. A glance tbrougb any of tbe common public prints of the day, sucb, for instance, as official broadsides, political pamphlets, works of literature, or even Bibles, points to a depression AND DEGENERATION

8 point Caslon Old Style

SO MARKED THAT ONE IS

tempted to believe that the art of Caxton and Pynson and Day was rapidly becoming lost in a wilderness of what a contemporary satirist terms "brown sheets and sorry letter." With the exception of Oxford University, no foundry of the day was contributing anything towards the revival of good printing of the sixteenth century, OR EVEN TOWARDS THE

10 point Caslon Old Style

MAINTENANCE OF SUCH A

standard as did exist. And Oxford, as we have said, owed its best founts to gifts procured, almost entirely, from abroad. Grover and Andrews, the heritors of the old founders, originated little or nothing; AND WHERE THEIR

12 point Caslon Old Style

EFFORTS WERE PUT

into requisition (as in the case of Andrews' attempt to cut the Anglo-Saxon for Miss Elstob's Grammar) they failed. Scarcely a work with any pretension to fine PRINTING WAS

14 point Caslon Old Style

THE IMPRESSION OF

honest English type. Watson, the Scotch historian of printing, openly rebuked his brethren of the craft for not stocking their cases with DUTCH TYPE.

MR. CASLON established himself in a garret in Helmet Row, Old Street, and devoted himself with ardour to his new profession. An opportunity for distinguishing himself presented itself shortly afterwards.

In the year 1720 the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge acting on a suggestion made by Mr. Salomon Negri, a native of Damascus, and a distinguished Oriental scholar, "deemed it expedient to print for the Eastern Churches the New Testament and Psalter in the Arabic language for the benefit of the poor Christians in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia and Egypt, the constitution of which countries allowed of no printing." A new Arabic fount being required for the purpose, Mr. Caslon, whose reputation as a letter cutter appears already to have been known, was selected to cut it. This he did to the full satisfaction of his patrons, producing the elegant English Arabic which figures in his early specimens. The Society was, according to Rowe Mores, already possessed of a fount of Arabic cast from the Polyglot matrices in Grover's foundry. But Caslon's fount was preferred for the text, and in it appeared, in due time, first the Psalter in 1725, and afterwards the New Testament in 1727.

"Mr. Caslon, after he had finished his Arabic fount, cut the letters of his own name at the bottom of a specimen of the Arabic; and Mr. Palmer (the reputed author of Psalmanazar's History of Printing), seeing this name, advised Mr. Caslon to complete the fount of Pica. Mr. Caslon did so; and as the performance exceeded the letter of the other founders of the time, Mr. Palmer—whose circumstances required credit with those who, by his advice, were now obstructed (i.e. whose business was likely to suffer from this new rival)—repented having given the advice, discouraged Mr. Caslon from further progress.

12 POINT CASLON OLD STYLE

Caslon Old Style—Roman

EIGHTEEN TO TWENTY-FOUR POINT

18 point Caslon Old Style

TONSON, A KING

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22 point Caslon Old Style

THREE HUNDRED

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24 point Caslon Old Style

OWED HIS

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MR. CASLON, disgusted, applied to Mr. Bowyer, under whose inspection he cut, in 1722, the beautiful fount of English (Roman) which was used in printing the edition of Selden's Works in 1726."

Caslon's excellent performance of this task may best be judged of by an inspection of this noble work, which remains conspicuous not only as the impression of the first letter cast at the Caslon foundry, but as marking a distinct turning-point in the career of English typography, which from that time forward entered on a course of brilliant regeneration. The Hebrew letter used in the Selden was also of Caslon's cutting, and must therefore share with the English Roman the honour of a first place in the productions of his foundry.

His next performance was a fount of Pica Coptic for Dr. Wilkins's edition of the Pentateuch, a letter which Rowe Mores commends as superior to the Oxford Coptic in which Dr. Wilkins's New Testament had been printed in 1716. This fount Caslon also cut under the direction of Mr. Bowyer, his generous patron, whom he always acknowledged as his master from whom he had learned his art. Caslon's business, thus established, rapidly advanced in fame and excellence. Although at the outset it depended mainly on the support of his three chief patrons, it was soon able to stand alone and compete with the best houses in the trade. "It is difficult," observes

Caslon Old Style—Roman

THIRTY TO FORTY-TWO POINT

30 point Caslon Old Style

MATRICES
even these, in his hands,
were so indifferently cast

36 point Caslon Old Style

TO OFTEN
be as bad as English
type. What was the

42 point Caslon Old Style

REASON
for this decline

Caslon Old Style—Italic

SIX TO FOURTEEN POINT

6 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

HOW FAR IT WAS CHARGEABLE ON THE

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8 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

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10 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

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12 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

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14 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

FOR THEIR NEATNESS

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Caslon Old Style—Italic

EIGHTEEN TO TWENTY-FOUR POINT

18 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

POSSIBILITY OF

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22 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

PERSONAL

support, and favouring him meanwhile with introductions to some of the leading printers of the day. About the

24 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

SAME TIME

it is recorded that another great printer, the elder Bowyer, "accidentally saw in the shop of Mr.

Caslon Old Style—Italic

THIRTY TO FORTY-TWO POINT

30 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

DANIEL
Browne, a bookseller, near
Temple Bar, the lettering

36 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

OF A BOOK
uncommonly neat and
enquiring who the 12

42 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

ARTIST
was by whom the
letters were made,

THE FOLLOWING SECTION

SHOWS A PAGE OF 18 POINT ROMAN AND TWO PAGES

OF ITALIC TYPES IN SIZES 8 TO 30 POINT

IMPORTED DIRECT

FROM THE CASLON LETTER FOUNDRY

IN ENGLAND

T PRESENT the theory and practice of letter-founding are not, as in his time, an 'art and mystery,' and efficient workmen in every branch are easily procured. He had not only to excel his competitors in his own particular branch of engraving the punches, which to him was probably the easiest part of his task, but to raise an establishment and cause his plans to be executed by ignorant and unpractised workmen. He had also to acquire for himself a knowledge of the practical and mechanical branches of the art, which require, indeed, little genius, but the most minute and painful attention to conduct successfully. The wishes and expectations of his patrons were fulfilled and exceeded by his decided superiority over his domestic rivals and Batavian competitors. The importation of foreign types ceased; his founts were, in fact, in such estimation as to be frequently, in their turn, exported to the Continent.

In 1728 Mr. Caslon narrowly escaped committing an error which might seriously have

Caslon Old Style—Italic

EIGHT TO FOURTEEN POINT

8 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

AS IT WAS HE HAD THE ADVANTAGE

of completing his specimens after his own plan, and impressing with the mark of his own genius every fount which bore his name. His fame in 1730 was such, that (as Ged, in his narrative of the invention of Block-Printing, states) he had already eclipsed most of his competitors, and had introduced his founts into some of the chief printing houses of the metropolis

10 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

AND EVEN SECURED THE

custom of the King's printers to the exclusion of all others. Although Ged's narrative goes to show that Caslon shared the skepticism of his contemporaries with regard to the utility of stereotyping, and was even ready to back his opinion with his money, it is satisfactory to observe that he was no party to the discreditable

12 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

PERSECUTION TO WHICH

that unfortunate inventor was subjected by other members of the craft. Indeed, the only successful experiment made by Ged appears to have been cast from Caslon's type. That the success of the new foundry was not achieved wholly without opposition

14 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

IS APPARENT FROM

the following anecdote preserved by Mr. Nichols, and told in connection with the account of Bishop Hare's Hebrew Psalter, published by Bowyer in 1733. This work, it appears, had been originally intended to be

Caslon Old Style—Italic

EIGHTEEN TO THIRTY POINT

18 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

PRINTED AT THE

press of Palmer, with whom Caslon, as we have seen, had already had dealings of a not altogether satisfactory character. The Bishop likewise insisted upon having some Roman

24 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

AND ITALIC

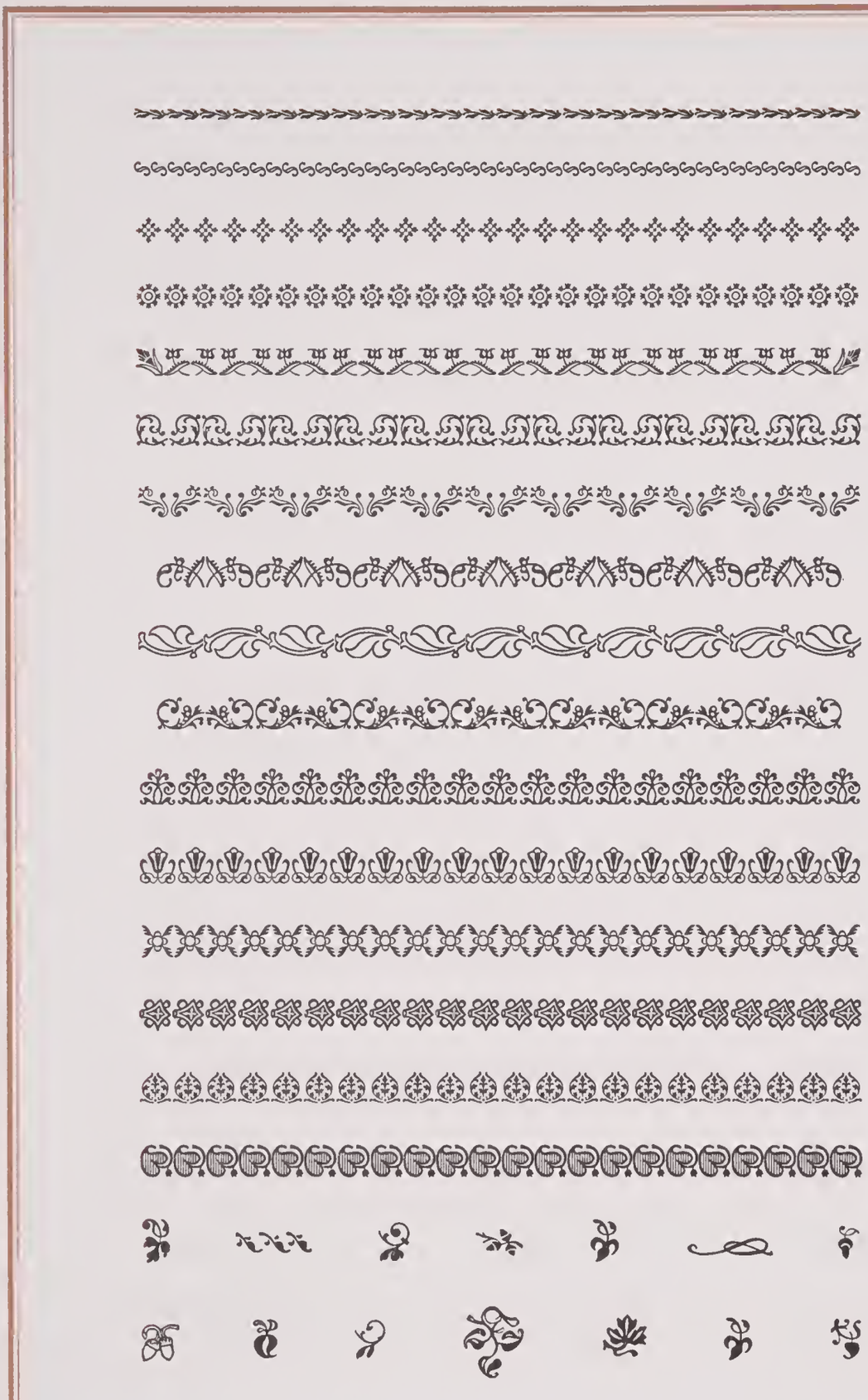
types cast with some distinguishing mark, to direct his readers to the Hebrew letters they were designed to

30 *point Caslon Old Style Italic*

ANSWER

and these required a new set of punches and matrices before they could be cast

THE
FOLLOWING
PAGES SHOW SOME
APPROPRIATE
ORNAMENTS AND BORDERS FOR
THE
CASLON
OLD STYLE
TYPE



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