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A Bibliography of Early English Law Books

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These notices are preliminary; they do not preclude *Reviews* later.

NOTICES

A Bibliography of Early English Law Books (The Ames Foundation) by Joseph Henry Beale, Harvard University Press: Cambridge. 1926. pp. viii, 304.

This is a bibliography of books which are contained for the most part in the George Dunn collection which was acquired for the Harvard Law Library largely through the efforts of Professor Beale who has compiled this bibliography. The books themselves contain writings which were composed before the art of printing was developed and were subsequently printed as some of the earliest instances of printing in England. It is remarkable to know that these law books which were of interest almost exclusively to lawyers were so extensively published by the small printers with their limited equipment during the very first stage of the printing industry in England. The books themselves deal in large measure with records and cases of the courts but to an astonishing degree they consist of treatises on the different branches of the law. One might suppose that books with which we are currently familiar are really the significant ones. We must constantly remind ourselves that a vast store of learning in the common law which once obtained is known today only to those who have studied legal history with some care. For instance, one of the main topics of these books is the law of procedure which was even more formidable and more complicated and more obstructive to the prompt disposal of litigation on the merits than much of our procedure today. For instance, the vast learning connected with the substantive law of real property and the adjective law of real actions has passed away almost in its entirety.

In the preface Professor Beale disclaims any original contribution in his compiling of this bibliography. In this opinion his readers must respectfully disagree with him. The arranging of this book in the orderly manner indicating the names of the authors, where it is known, and the name of the printer and the date of publication, where it is known, call in themselves for a work involving vast effort and are of great service to librarians and legal scholars. Necessarily, a book of this kind has a limited appeal but it is invaluable for those who are working in legal history or who are engaged on particular problems where a bibliography of old English law books is necessary. Professor Beale will be entitled to the gratitude of lawyers, students and librarians who will be indebted to him in saving their time and increasing their efficiency.

The book contains two appendices, one in which a large number of woodcuts for the different printers appear and the other a series of tables which indicate in brief form a number of important characteristics of each book.