

## Some British Bookmakers.

No. I.—Messrs. BLACKIE & SON, Limited.



AMONGST our many British bookmakers few have so large and complete an establishment for the production of books under their own direct supervision as Messrs. Blackie. Through the courtesy of Mr. George Ritchie, manager of the binding department, I was permitted to inspect the works at Glasgow, which is not their only factory, a considerable quantity of work being executed in Dublin. The Glasgow house is, however, the most important, and there the enterprise of the firm has concentrated all the various branches of bookmaking, engraving, composing, stereotyping, electrotyping; letterpress, lithographic, steelplate, and chromo printing; and bookbinding; thus securing a unity of purpose throughout all the stages of the work not otherwise to be obtained.

The business was commenced by Mr. John Blackie, senr., in 1809, and for many years it was almost exclusively a subscription one. In 1831 Mr. John Blackie, junr., was constituted a partner in the firm. In June, 1874, the founder of the business died at the age of 92. The principals of the firm now are the brothers, W. G. Blackie, Ph.D., and Robert Blackie, with J. Alex. Blackie and Walter W. Blackie, sons of the former, and J. Robertson Blackie, the son of the latter. In February of this year the business was formed into a limited liability company, but these gentlemen remained as before the moving and directing spirits of the whole business, and under their control it has been widely extended. The business carried on is of the most extensive nature, and includes publications in educational and scientific books, as well as books of general literature. Amongst those most largely circulated are the comprehensive, graded, and century readers; science text books; advanced educational works for the higher grade schools; Vere Foster's writing, drawing, and water colour books; the imperial, comprehensive, concise, and students' dictionaries; the popular and modern cyclopædias; Henry Irving's Shakespeare, Bibles, etc., etc., and it can be readily understood that a large establishment is required for the production in one place of such works as we have named.

The main part of the workshops lie in three large blocks of buildings running parallel with St. James' road. The front buildings facing Stanhope-street, consist mainly of the counting house, offices, and the publishing department. The three top floors of two buildings situated at right angles to one another, form the BINDING DEPARTMENT. These communicate with each other, the printing office below, and the publishing department in Stanhope-street, by two hydraulic hoists which run from the street level up to any of the five flats above. Sheets and materials of all kinds are thus brought to the level required, dealt with and passed on until finally complete and delivered to the publishing department in Stanhope-street.

Female labour has entered very largely into the modern bookbinder's business, and here the two upper floors are devoted almost exclusively to the folding,

plating, and sewing of books. I was glad to see evident attention given to the welfare and comfort of the operatives, the floors are light, roofs lofty and well ventilated: a most important matter in workshops where females are engaged, the nature of their work allowing of a great number being employed in comparatively small floor space. About 250 women and girls were at work here and, while we saw folding and sewing machines (Brehmer's and Smyth's), the great bulk of the work is done by hand, Messrs. Blackie's first concern evidently being that their work should be well done, and in no case do these machines touch a book going into leather binding or indeed even the more valuable of their cloth work.

Having finished our survey of the upper floor we descend one flat lower and find here a distinct department devoted entirely to leather work. Here we see forwarders on the one side and finishers on the other, proceeding in the recognised course, and with hand tools only, for the production of the best class of inboard, calf, and morocco work, many of the firm's bibles, dictionaries, cyclopædias, etc., being issued in full and half-bound morocco. In but few binderies will you *now* meet with some fifty hands entirely employed on this class of work. It is said the time is long past for proceeding in the old orthodox style, and many places have discarded this for a class of work with perhaps more show but with also much less service and which can be turned out with more expedition. On this level we find a department set apart to casemaking, the work being all done by females, acting under charge of a foreman.

Proceeding to a third level we find this entirely occupied with cloth work. In the blocking department we find six hand and six steam blocking presses, three of the latter being of Richmond's make, Messrs. Richmond having modified their newest machines to suit the requirements of the inking work. Some very fine colour printing was in hand as the writer passed through, the colours being finely graded from dark to lighter tints, the high-class designs on their cases being a special feature in Messrs. Blackie's cloth covers. Quite a dozen girls were seen at work here laying on gold. Fitting the books into the cases of course proceeded in the usual way.

Altogether the firm employ between 300 and 400 persons in their bindery.

The cloth work generally is of a superior class to that ordinarily met with, having a good finish and a remarkably solid feel, partly caused by the quality of the paper, and partly, I believe, owing to the special process through which many of their books are put while being treated for the "*olivine edges*" introduced by this firm on their reward and other books. The character of Messrs. Blackie's books, however, needs no passing tribute from me, they having gained and sustain a reputation for a nice adjustment of quality and cheapness all the world over, and for literary merit they stand in the first rank.

My visit was rendered particularly agreeable by the kindness of the manager, and his evident desire to assist me to a proper appreciation of the establishment, a most difficult thing to do in a cursory visit like mine.—F.