Supplement to "The British Bookmaker."

ORIGINAL COVER DESIGNS BY GEO. FALKNER & SONS,
DEANSGATE, MANCHESTER.

Printed on Grosvenor, Chater & Co.'s "Acme" Printing Paper.
LIKE many another Binding Establishment, especially those outside of London, that of Messrs. Falkner is only one department of a large house where book-binding is conducted through all its branches, and in briefly sketching out the firm’s history, we must for awhile leave the beaten track of binders’ lives.

GEORGE FALKNER, the well known engraver and lithographer of Manchester, first saw the light in Edinburgh on the 28th October, 1817. His father, Andrew Falkner, was a penman of renown and an able arithmetician, being a master at the High School of Edinburgh, and a member of the Senatus Academicus of the University. The wife of Andrew Falkner was Jean Laing, who came of an old Scotch family connected by close ties with the poet Burns.

Being brought by his father’s friendship into the intimate acquaintance of such men of learning as Adam Black, Dean Ramsay, and their contemporaries, and under the inspiration of the Brothers Chambers, it was but natural that the boyish inclinations of young Falkner should early lean towards pursuits of a literary character. Thus, at the age of fourteen, George Falkner was apprenticed to the “arte and craftes of prynting.” He was not, however, destined to remain long in the city of his birth, for at about seventeen years of age, owing to the dissolution of the firm by whom he was employed, he made up his mind to visit the Metropolis, where he had obtained an appointment as reader for the press in Her Majesty’s printing office. While there, the great strain upon his faculties and the length of hours he was compelled to work induced him to consider the advisability of changing his employment, and he accordingly consulted the members of his family with a view to obtaining an appointment at Somerset House. In due course the young man received an invitation from the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, to meet him and accompany him to the Horse Guards, there to be presented to the Secretary of State for the War Department. “These favours,” he says, “I well knew were due to the influential support tendered by my relatives at home to the Whig party, and I walked down Parliament-street with a hopeful spirit. Lord Macaulay received me with much courtesy, and invited me to state my case, to which he listened with patient attention.” “I should be glad, indeed,” he replied, “if I could serve you, not only for your own sake, but that of your relatives, who have placed me under obligations. My advice to you, however, is to seek no change in your profession, but steadily to pursue it, and I have no doubt that opportunity will arise by which you will be enabled to bring your education and knowledge of your business into successful application.”

The prophecy—unpalatable as it was at the time—was, however, not long in being realised, for shortly afterwards Mr. Falkner’s talents brought him under the notice of “Old George Bradshaw,” of Railway Guide fame. The histories of George Bradshaw, the Quaker, William Blacklock, and George Falkner here become intertwined, and to attempt to unravel them in their ramifications as well as to follow Mr. Falkner in his intimacies with the local literati of the period, would fill many an interesting page. Suffice it to say that, May, 1841, chronicled the issue of a new magazine, entitled “Bradshaw’s Journal,” with George Falkner ensconced in the editorial chair. There is little doubt that had Mr. Falkner remained with his principals, Messrs. Bradshaw and Blacklock, he would in due course have become a member of that firm; but following a not unnatural impulse, and acting with the concurrence of his father, he commenced business in Brown-street and King-street, Manchester, in 1843, taking with him into partnership his brother Alexander, under the style of G. & A. Falkner. This partnership existed until 1848, when Mr. Alexander Falkner retired and removed to Leeds, and Mr. Falkner carried forward the venture alone with marked activity and success. In 1874 the firm became George Falkner & Son, and subsequently, in 1880, George Falkner & Sons.

At the commencement of his career Mr. Falkner determined that his business should, as far as practicable, rise above the ordinary commercial requirements of the great community with which he was surrounded, and so become the reflex of his own mind and powers. Accordingly he laid himself out to cultivate the higher branches of his craft, and the lines so laid down have been pursued up to the present time and enlarged upon. In his early years he was entrusted with the printing of the Parliamentary Plans of gigantic schemes during the railway mania of ’48, and since that period nearly all the Parliamentary Plans of the great civic improvements, which have made the Manchester of to-day, were lithographed under his personal superintendence, as well as large quantities of similar work for other towns.

In 1857, at the great Art Treasures’ Exhibition in Manchester, Mr. Falkner was distinctly a power. He set up a printing press in the building, and upon his shoulders considerable responsibility rested.

The heavy leaden foundation stone plates of the Town Hall and Owens’ College, Manchester, lie for all time as silent and obscure witnesses of his cunning as an engraver.

For the last twenty years the firm have made great strides in the development of old style printing, and their collection of illustrations, head and tail pieces, initial letters and the like, is phenomenal. They have also devoted much attention to the invention of quaint literary conceits of all kinds, as well as to the
illumination of addresses and heraldic emblazoning. In connection with the latter, it should be recorded that some of the most beautifully finished and characteristically wrought presentation addresses to Her Majesty the Queen, presented to Her Majesty on her jubilee, and afterwards exhibited at St. James' Palace, were from the establishment of Messrs. Falkner.

Whilst developing this fascinating branch of their craft they still, however, maintain that excellence in the draughtsman's work and general commercial printing for which they have earned so enviable a notoriety. They possess the largest lithographic and letterpress printing machines which have probably ever been erected. The former prints a sheet 62 x 42, and the latter a posting bill 64 x 80 at one operation.

From the foregoing remarks it might perhaps be judged that the resources for the production of printed matter overshadowed the Binding Department of the Deansgate Press. Such, however, is not the case. The Messrs. Falkner give the greatest personal attention to this department, and it is one which has during recent years made rapid strides, so much so, that their workshops cover the upper stories of their entire premises in Deansgate and Cumberland-street.

The firm are believers in the old handicraft system of binding for which has to carry with it any stamp of individuality. Thus, Messrs. Falkner design their own tools for finishing, and have many of the skins and cloths used in their bindery dyed to their own special shades, and spare no pains to make their work unique in every way, watching it carefully through all its processes. The special adjuncts thus acquired are of the greatest service in the realisation of the original fancies in Christmas cards; or, rather, booklets, for which the house has gained a reputation both here and in America.

We have chosen two of peculiar style which serve to illustrate the firm's productions. Both are close imitations of very antique work, and the coarse canvas in which they are bound is stained to represent the discoloration of ages; through the sides of one leathern thongs are laced, which are intended for tying the book together at the foreedge, and on the side is an imitation antique seal. In these books the paper is also specially stained as if with age, so that the whole work presents a very unique appearance. The other two are specimens of hand-tooled work on illuminated addresses, the centre panels being left open for whatever inscription is required.

A few years back Messrs. Falkner opened offices in Queen Victoria-street, London, which, under competent management have served as an important auxiliary to their Press in Manchester. Of works produced in their London house which are of more than ordinary moment may be mentioned the "Shakespeare Show Book" and the "Old English Fayre Volume," both of which are unique.

The late Mr. George Falkner, in his capacity of Governor and subsequently as Hon. Sec. of the Royal Manchester Institution, was largely instrumental in endowing that building as an Art Gallery for the City of Manchester. He was for many years vice-president of Henshaw's Blind Asylum. He was president of and inaugurated the Manchester Association of Master Printers, and was largely instrumental in the creation of the Manchester Advertising Company.

Mr. Robert Falkner has succeeded his father in connection with the two former Institutions, and is Hon. Sec. of the Master Printers' Association and Chairman of the Manchester Advertising Company. Mr. Frank Falkner and Mr. Fitzgerald Falkner are his able coadjutors, each of these three gentlemen having a thoroughly practical knowledge of, and deep personal interest in, the art which has been so long associated with their name.

A carefully bound book can be recognised when in the hands of a collector, who knows by experience that the two essential qualities of the binding are, opening with facility and an absolute regularity of margin. The first of these is often obtained at the expense of style, but without the second a bound book loses its value. Then it is a mistake to purchase a palpably chipped or pruned book—and we never know the faults which the cutting often exaggerates, for the book was cut to sell, being pruned to improve the appearance, and without such appearance all the faults of the folding and collating are seen.

A really well-bound book should be simple in its ordering and bear evidence of slow and careful workmanship.

The commencement of the eighteenth century saw the really marvellous specimens of bookmaking—the highest grade of paper and the illustrations by the great masters. This opinion is shared by the majority of French bond-collectors. When one of our great writers publishes a book, in a short time it is at a premium. All books printed at the expense of the "Society of Collectors of Good Books" are valued at four or five times their first value, and yet their typographical execution varies singularly; all are not master-pieces of taste, but they bear a general sign which is their passport.

While reviewing the new, we must not forget the old records of bibliography, and the literary interest to be derived from old books, though when we cannot delight ourselves with the valuable eighteenth-century editions, we shall be easily consoled with those of the nineteenth.

Without doubt, the latter have a great advantage in the illustrations, for the methods employed are much more expeditious than formerly, but if we rejoice in books from the collection of Grolier, or in those whose pages are enhanced by the double crossings of Henry II. and of Diana of Poictiers, by the salamander of Henry III., or the double escutcheon of Henry IV., and if we do homage before the three bees of the President of Thou, and the three towers of the Marquis of Pompadour, we are far from disdaining a pretty book of last year bound by a modern artist.

In our last issue several short paragraphs with the initials "S. T. P." were "lifted" from the catalogue of the recent Exhibition at Nottingham Castle. They should have been credited to Miss S. T. Prideaux, who contributed them to the catalogue of the Burlington Club Exhibition.