ANTHONY BIRDSALL.
THE PORTRAITS we give this month are those of Messrs. Anthony and Richard Birdsall, of Northampton, the proprietors of one of the oldest bookbinding businesses in this country.

From some of the engraved tools in the possession of the firm, and other circumstances, it is clear that the business was being worked very early in the last century, but its known continuity dates from 1757, when John Lacy, who had recently acquired it, carried it on in The Drapery, Northampton, in connexion with his bookselling trade, having also a banking business in Mercer's-row. John Lacy took his son into partnership, and after many years' successful trading they sold the business in 1792 to a member of an old Yorkshire family.

Anthony Birdsall, a great-nephew of William, and the senior member of the present firm. Up to this period the binding trade had been chiefly local, but many excellent examples are in existence showing a high degree of skill and finish.

From 1844 to 1865 the business steadily developed, the increase and progression arising almost entirely from the recommendation of one customer to another. The manufacturing stationery department was added in 1831, and various considerable additions to the premises were made from time to time as they became necessary.

In 1865, Anthony Birdsall took his son Richard, who had been trained up in the business, into partnership with him. From that time to the present the trade has been extended till its productions are known throughout the country and have earned a high reputation for their excellence and value. The premises, which are shewn on page 29, are central, and a considerable block of valuable property having been acquired, numerous additions have been made to provide for growing requirements, amongst others, in 1870 a large three-storied block was built. After

WILLIAM BIRD SALL.

William Birdsall, who had settled in Northampton, and whose portrait we reproduce. He was an able man and was twice mayor of the borough. He continued the business in the same premises, eventually taking his son James into partnership and trading as William Birdsall & Son until 1826. Upon his decease, James succeeded to the business and worked it in his own name. From want of space in The Drapery, the bookbinding was in 1836 removed to larger buildings in Wood-street.

In 1849 James Birdsall died, and the business was carried on by his widow, who sold it in 1844 to

RICHARD BIRD SALL.
long experience in the requirements of the trade
the works were greatly enlarged and remodelled in 1882, the entire work of binding a book being brought on to one large floor. Thus the numerous processes are effected without change of level, and in an intricate business requiring constant inter-communication between the departments, much time is economised, and the management facilitated. Again in 1888 a handsome block of offices, showrooms and factory buildings was erected at the corner of Wood-street and Union-street, all of which are now occupied to their fullest capacity.

The trade done is of a very miscellaneous character necessitating the most systematic management down to the smallest details, and a correspondingly large managing staff. Everything in bookbinding from the goodly relieure de luxe down to the cheap cloth-cased primer is executed on the premises. The high-class leather binding has been the special care of Mr. R. Birdell, who has devoted to it many years of artistic study and practical experience, and has brought it to a well recognised first-rank of excellence. Very much of this class of work is of a confidential nature, both as regards the special bindings and the books themselves. A more extensive trade is done in commercial bindings, including those by the patented split-case process, invented—together with the machinery—by Mr. R. Birdell, and which, under the registered title of "Stronghold," have become a large trade in themselves. With their artistic and well finished leather backs they offered a most serviceable binding for serials and publishers' work. In them are combined the strength of a regular hand-forwarded binding with the decorative facility of an ordinary case, and being offered at a very favourable price they came at once to the front. Recently a special binding with the registered name of "Bibliofoxia" has been patented by him for books subject to heavy and continuous wear, also for Free Library use. For best work every section is sewn—and sometimes twice sewn—through a fold of fine linen, and the maximum of strength and durability is attained. Other departments include a large one for the manufacturing stationery trade, wherein are produced all kinds of account books, including ponderous bank ledgers containing nearly a ream of paper and humble school exercise books made of half-a-dozen sheets. In another department is carried on the manufacture of fancy boxes, for which there is a considerable local demand. Others are used for the wholesale paper trade, etc., and in a separate building are drying rooms heated by hot water, whereby the risk attached to overhead lines is avoided, and large quantities of paper in various processes of manufacture are expeditiously dried.

The works contain a full plant of the best machinery, and at the time of our writing new shafting was being erected for more additions.
For the most part the workpeople have been trained in the place, a bonus is annually distributed amongst the older and more skilled workmen, and as an evidence of mutual good feeling, 20, 30 and even 40 years of continuous service are not unknown amongst them.

The constant aim of the proprietors has been honest value, and general and reliable excellence; this has secured many valuable customers whose names have been on the books for periods equal to those named for employees' services. Neither expense nor pains are spared to maintain the efficiency of the works, and in these days of close competition a steadily increasing trade makes constant demands for fresh facilities of production.

The partners have not taken any active part in public life, though Mr. R. Birdsal is well-known locally in connexion with church work. He was for over 30 years a worker in St. Giles' Sunday Schools, resigning the superintendence about two years ago in consequence of the increasing pressure of other duties.

The cover designs of Messrs. Birdsal's work accompanying this notice are simply taken from their ordinary run of high-class work and are not chef d'oeuvres or special bindings: in fact much of their very finest work is done for private clients who object to have it published broadcast.

To restore faded ink on parchment, etc., the Bodleian Library, at Oxford, has long employed hydrosulphide of ammonia, a solution of which is spread in a thin layer over the writing, by means of a camel's-hair pencil.