



BOUND BY R. A. BOWKER, LONDON.

DE MONTFORT PRESS

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Our Portrait Gallery.

R. A. BOWKER, LONDON.

JUST on the site of what was once the great ditch or trench on the northern outskirts of the old Alders-gate, in which the dead were flung at the time of the great plague in 1666—now a thickly populated and busy district—stands the building occupied by Mr. R. A. Bowker, one of the cloth or publishers' binders of the metropolis, and thither we made our way for the purpose of looking over the works, and picking up such items of information as might prove interesting to others in the trade.

The business was originally founded a good many years ago by Miss Colwell, in Windmill-street, Finsbury, but was afterwards taken over by Mr. David Bowker, the father of the present proprietor, who, on his decease, bequeathed it to his two sons, David Alexander and Robert Alfred. They succeeded in extending their connexions until they had to remove to larger and more commodious premises in Middle-row, Goswell-road, where the business is at present conducted. On the death of Mr. D. A. Bowker, the entire control centred in Mr. Robert's hands, and when we are informed that during the last few years the business has grown to nearly three times its former size, we must conclude that he possesses the energy and enterprise which are the first essentials for success.

Mr. R. A. Bowker was born in London, on December 30th, 1857, and was brought up to the trade in his father's workshop, but he has never been content to sit down quietly and wait for orders to be sent in. While personally supervising much of the work entrusted to him, he is always pushing out into fresh fields, and taking up any novelty that may present itself for the purpose of trade. His establishment

is fully equipped for an extensive trade, and his machinery is up to date for the work he undertakes.

The building occupied consists of four floors and a basement, in which, besides a Crossley gas engine from whence power for some of the machinery is drawn, the case makers, board cutters, &c., are located and the heavier materials are stored. The ground floor is occupied by the forwarders and their machinery. The first and second floors contain the

females, working mostly by hand, although we noticed some Brehmer threadsewing machines; and on the top floor there is a staff of blockers. Passing through the shops we were shewn specimens of the work, which compare favourably with that of other houses, both in the character of the forwarding and the external decoration, several of the cover designs being rather striking, but the firm has latterly turned its attention largely towards a new class of work that has only sprung into existence within the last few years: gold and silver blocked text and showcards, and more particularly embossed cards. The number and variety of these upon the market is already very great, but the demand is by no means exhausted, the only difficulty being to produce new and attractive devices for the purpose of advertisement, and so long as advertisement is required



R. A. BOWKER.

the firm intends to leave no ground unturned for the development of that branch of its business. Already Mr. Bowker has produced a great many novelties in various forms, from the simple price ticket up to the more elaborate framed and glazed showcards with bevelled, or frosted, or corrugated letters on delicately tinted German boards with gilt bevelled edges.

Besides these, the embossed cards, though not so expensive, are perhaps newer and more varied. Some

1860 the old house in School-lane—where Mr. John Fazakerley was first initiated into the mysteries of the craft—had to be demolished, when the father removed to Hanover-street. Here the business was carried on under more advantageous conditions, and after a good training the son became of great assistance.

In 1877 Mr. T. Fazakerley retired, and Mr. John Fazakerley has since conducted the business on his own account. The present premises, No. 40 Paradise-street, were taken in the year 1888, and from the front windows we were pointed out the upper floor on the opposite side of the street where Mr. Fazakerley, sen., first made the acquaintance of the paste brush. The shop we had entered is a long, well lighted floor, divided into several departments, well arranged for the work, which consists of every variety and style, from the cheapest memorandum book up to the finest ledger with russia bands, or the half-cloth book up to the finest crushed levant *reliure de luxe*. A very wide, all-round experience is necessary for the conduct of such a business, but it does not take long to see how thoroughly Mr. Fazakerley has organised his resources to secure a profitable return on such widely different operations, all carried on under one roof. A large share of the work is done in a peculiarly appropriate style for the Liverpool, Birkenhead, and other libraries: this has to be turned out at once both strongly and cheaply, and the end papers are specially prepared, with a view to the prevention of that breaking away so common to the usually pasted-on end papers. Then we get the presentation address books and albums, which form a large and important item in the work of a provincial binder. For these and the best letterpress bindings, special designs are prepared and worked, and some of the rubbings and specimens shewn were of a high-class and artistic order, Mr. Fazakerley having a staff of highly skilled workmen, who are continually engaged on this best class of work. It is this branch of the trade that Mr. Fazakerley delights in developing. "Some years ago," he said, "I found the competition for the ordinary run of half-bound and cheaper kinds of work so intense, that there was little or no profit after all one's labour and anxiety, and I determined to strike out for the better work. I had thought that fine bindings were going down, but in reality I find that the taste for them is growing, and I have succeeded wonderfully well. Of course, it takes some time to get workmen capable of doing this best work; then the work takes a very long time, and the temptation is always to do cheaper work, which, though it yields less profit, allows of a quicker turn over of your capital, but, after all, I am well satisfied with the step I took, for I have since doubled my business, while I still retain customers who have been on our books for over forty and fifty years."

Mr. Fazakerley is no bigot as to style; he finds, however, that there is an inclination towards old models, and he gratifies the taste of those of his customers who admire the work of any of the past masters by following upon their general plan while eschewing their faults. Some of his designs, however, have a freshness which we do not often find. One of his corner pieces, repeated in various combinations, was especially pleasant and tasteful, but having only

the rubbings, we could not reproduce it. The works we have selected are from a few which happened to be on the premises, and are in no way specially prepared, but they show a fine degree of finish in execution, though based upon old styles of the art, while the forwarding is throughout highly commendable, the books opening with unusual freedom without in any way marring the beauty of the backs. We were delighted to find several specimens of painted edges amongst his work, two different pictures of "The Last Supper" being particularly fine in execution.

Mr. Fazakerley has a very large clientèle among the embossed leather workers in different parts of the country, and we have selected an illustration of the work. "Flora's Feast" was designed by Miss M. S. Smith, of the Kirby Lonsdale Home Arts Classes, and it is a beautifully worked specimen of a style that is evidently growing in favour.

Our visit to Mr. Fazakerley was made particularly pleasant by the knowledge that he is much interested in the general welfare of his fifty or more employées, and we were glad to hear his pronounced views upon the reduction of the hours of labour, with which he is in sympathy, believing that it would be a beneficial movement for all concerned, provided that sufficient time was given for a fair revision of prices. He holds the wise view that there is much that is artificial in the outcry for cheapness, and that it is exaggerated, and is inclined to the belief that we are on the point of returning to better methods of production, which will not sweat and grind the bones and marrow of the workers, regardless of anything more than the putting of some article upon the market at a penny cheaper than any one else can do it at. It is no wonder, therefore, that from all sides we hear how much Mr. Fazakerley has won the respect of those who know him, and we heartily wish him the best reward which can accrue to his enterprise, and a long life to enjoy it.

A Famous Family of Binders.

THE Boyer or Boyet family of binders flourished in Paris from 1670 to 1730. As compared with what had gone before, the style of binding adopted by them is distinctively their own. Many of the ornamental details were simply selected from the work of their predecessors; some were quite new, and the mode in which they were applied to the red or blue morocco coverings, manipulated with great skill, was fresh and elegant. It has been followed by the binders of all countries ever since, in spite of a few weak occasional attempts to substitute new methods. In the Boyer books, the backs of the volumes are more elaborately gilt than the sides; the surface of these being left to a large extent blank, without other decoration than the gold fillets and the corner-pieces of *dentelle* work. An elegant ornament is the figure of a vase, sometimes placed at the angles on the sides and in the panels on the back; but this had been used by contemporaries and followers of La Gascon before the first Boyer's time. The usual ornament was a flower on a bit of lace-work which, in combination with the corner-pieces in the panels on the back, left the morocco blank in lozenge shapes.