

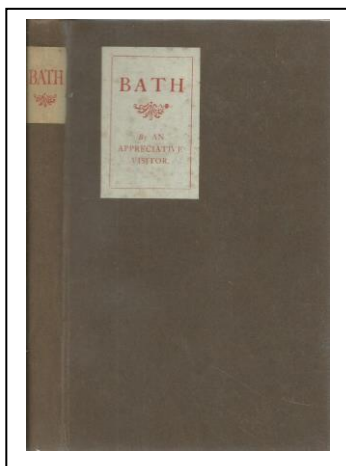
Bath – in History and Social Tradition

Some Reviews of *Bath – In History and Social Tradition*

This little book – by “An Appreciative Visitor” was published in January 1918 and was reprinted in June of the same year. Meade Falkner made only a passing reference to the Great War, well into its fourth year of conflict, and then only on the very last page: *“If even in Bath faint ripples of a far-off war are felt to-day, the City still preserves its dignity sober and serene, still offers a warm cradle for old age and infirmity to rock themselves to sleep.”*

Although he was only in his sixtieth year, Falkner had had his full share of ailments, real or imagined, and was to stay in the city on several occasions seeking medical treatment. He spent a month there in the winter of 1918/1919 enduring an electric ‘arm bath’ for his neuritis [*“It was not only unsuccessful... but had a very nasty effect upon my heart which causes me great discomfort.”*]. He stayed some weeks in early 1920 and again in February 1930, where he wrote several letters from the Grand Pump Room Hotel. Then, in the last year of his life, feeling physically *“old, and very weak”* and bothered by boils, he spent the early autumn there.

The book itself has been regarded as *“slight”* by both **Graham Pollard** [1960] and **Kenneth Warren** [1995]. Falkner himself admitted as much on the dust wrapper: *“This book is an attempt to recall, in a very compressed form, something of the history and traditions which have made Bath famous.”* However, **Sir William Haley**, in his 1957 lecture to the Royal Society of Literature, was more positive: *“Should you ever come across it I recommend it heartily. For it is by Meade Falkner and is a most lively and readable essay. It ranges from Nash to Beckford and its core is a paean of praise for Wood. But it is the opening that is most memorable, when Falkner is dealing with Roman Britain. Contrary to what one might expect he is by no means a romantic in these matters. Despite his enthusiasms, he was always sceptical of conjecture* and especially in archaeology. And when he writes on the Roman bath in Bath it is with a passionate abhorrence for the abiding gloom of Roman remains in general, compared with ‘the sunshine of Theocritus or the tamarisk beach where Nausicaa tossed her ball’.”*



Falkner ended his little book with these words: *“So let us again praise God for good hot water and for all good things, and for those famous men – Nash, who brought the company; Allen, who brought Wood; Wood, who staged the colonnaded terraces upon the sunny slopes”.*

[* Falkner wrote: *“In turning to Roman days we still move within the mist. Except the evidence of the soil, there are indeed few guides to Roman England. Amiable local antiquaries, fad-riders, or pot-boiling compilers of manuals, will tell us this or that for very truth; but the wise man goes warily... After all, does it much matter? Let us throw the antiquaries overboard, let us label buildings with our own tickets and weave our own romance about them.”*]