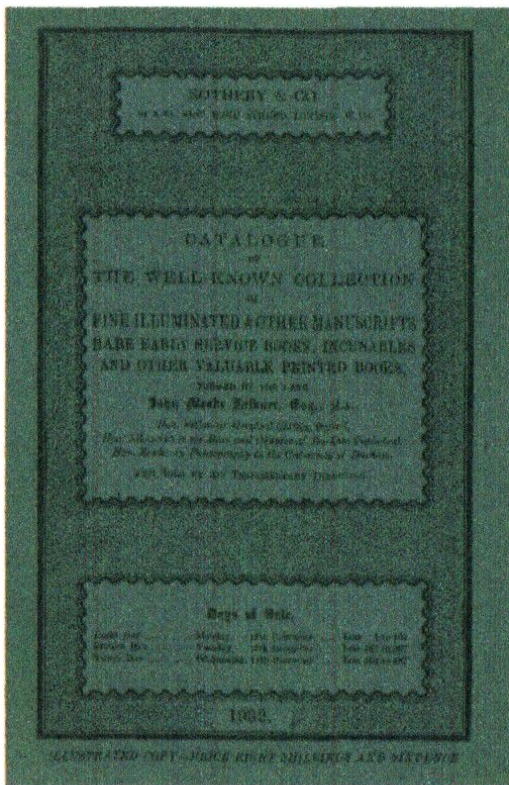


John Meade Falkner as a Book Collector

John Coulter

The harmless vice of book collecting covers a wide spectrum of motive and ambition. At one extreme is the library acquired strictly for practical use, and treated with little respect or ceremony. Most writers have inclined to this party. Wordsworth would impatiently open the pages of new books at the breakfast table, using the butter knife alternately on book and toast. At the greatest distance from this is the collector who regards the making of books as one of the fine arts, and puts his library together as though he were assembling a gallery of great paintings. One notable bibliophile compromised by having three copies of each book, one for show, one for use, and one for lending, but most collectors have had to choose.



The surviving evidence places Falkner firmly in the fine art camp, but it does not necessarily give a perfectly balanced picture of his tastes. The only detailed account of his library now known is the catalogue compiled by Sotheby & Co. for their sale on the 12th, 13th, and 14th of December 1932, five months after Falkner's death. It lists some 600 works, many of them multi-volumed sets, in 487 lots, perhaps a thousand books in all. This is a small number for a rich man to acquire in fifty years, and we can be certain that it was not the full total of Falkner's books. It represents only the parts

of his library that were not given away or sold privately, and that appealed to the sordid taste of an auctioneer. Books then of small value may well have been disposed of through the trade after the Sotheby cataloguer had made his selection. The pernicious lotting system meant that not all the books that were included in the auction are recorded, as many entries end with the depressing formula "and two others", "and five others", etc. In the following analysis of the contents of the library, as revealed by the catalogue, this fact should always be borne in mind.

There can be no doubt that during the later part of Falkner's collecting career, when wealth and learning made him a respected figure in the great bookshops and auction houses, it was on liturgical books that he increasingly focused his attention. In 1930 he quoted approvingly the advice "Never turn your back on a Sarum book, however battered and imperfect", and the catalogue shows how diligently he pursued his missals and breviaries. This major element in Falkner's library is discussed below by Godfrey Smith, another collector in that specialised field. Here I will attempt to discover something about Falkner's other tastes and interests by examining the 55% of his auctioned books that were not liturgical.

It would be a peculiar author - even more peculiar than Falkner - who possessed no copies of his own works, yet there is no *Nebuly Coat*, no *Moonfleet*, no *History of Oxfordshire*, nor any of the others in the sale catalogue. Were they kept by Evelyn Falkner? Were they given to John Noble and other friends, or bought by Noble in accordance with the right given to him in Falkner's will? Were they sold to a local bookseller as items of little value?

Imaginative literature is very poorly represented in the catalogue. Shakespeare does not appear at all, nor Sheridan, who is recommended as a good historical source in Falkner's 'Bath'. In fact, the only plays are found in an 1805 Paris edition of Molière (lot 361). There is little guidance for those seeking models for Falkner's poetry. Latin poets, classical and Renaissance, account for most of the small total. Another notable item is a 1486 Venetian folio of Petrarch's *Sonetti e Canzone* (lot 377). Milton and Walter Scott (lot 290), some early editions of Byron (131), 'The Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin' (part of 436), *Barham's Ingoldsby Legends* (19), and Pope's Homer (62), are the only examples of English poetry. *The Ingoldsby Legends* were well-known to Falkner as a child, when he used to recite them, but the set auctioned cannot have been a family heirloom, as the pages were uncut. *The Odyssey* was such a favourite of Falkner's (as of all good men) that he chose it for light reading when confined to a nursing home during his declining years. But he usually read the original (though there is no Greek text in the catalogue) and in any case love of Homer does not necessarily imply love of Pope. A taste for Walter Scott may have been acquired from Sir Andrew Noble, though, like that for Byron, it was natural enough for a romantic Victorian youth, but it is hard to imagine any poet less likely than Milton to appeal to a High Church Conservative like Falkner. *The Anti-Jacobin* must have been far more to his taste, politically.

Of the contemporary poets Kenneth Warren suggests as influences upon Falkner - Belloc, Chesterton, Hardy, Kipling, Newbolt - there is not a sign, although one or two were friends who might have been expected to give presentation copies. An equally striking absentee from the list is A.E.Housman, Falkner's close contemporary and a man with some similar characteristics and tastes. Housman's poems often confidently hold the note that Falkner strives for but only occasionally hits.

Fiction is even more scantily represented, and again foreign works predominate, with the Burton translation of *The Arabian Nights* (lot 13), an 1820s Paris edition of Rabelais (428), a French translation of *Sir Charles Grandison* (69), and the French and English first editions of *Vathek* (25-26). Sir Walter Scott is the only English classic represented, with a collection of the first editions. There is no trace of such old favourites as *John Inglesant*, nor of contemporaries who can be seen as influences, like Stevenson, or who might have been expected to appeal to the author of 'The Lost Stradivarius', like M.R.James. Falkner was an admirer of Hardy's novels from early youth, and he gradually came to love his poetry at least as much. He collected Hardy's books and gave them as presents, yet no Hardy title features in the sale catalogue. (We know that Hardy collected Falkner too, for he read *The Nebuly Coat* in November 1903, and there is a copy with his bookplate on the shelves of some lucky bibliophile.)

The fine arts are also poorly represented, with only the expanded second edition of Vasari's *Lives of the Painters* (Florence, 1568, lot 480), *The Golden Age of Classic Christian Art* by Richter and Taylor, 1904 (part of lot 437), and perhaps the first edition of Bewick's *Aesop* (lot 27a). On printing and bookbinding, which Falkner surely classed as fine arts, the catalogue includes accounts of the Aldine and Elzevier presses (lot 176), and monographs on various binders and collections of bindings by Cyril Davenport, Strickland Gibson, Sir Richard Holmes, and W.H.J.Weale. Far more notable were the examples of the work of the early printers, with the first edition of *The Golden Legend* ("the largest Caxton known") leading the way. An American collector, S.W. Rosenbach, gave £11,000 for it at the sale, very much the highest price realised, and more than twenty-two times what Falkner had paid.

Music features more strongly, though mostly in the specialised field of sacred choral works of the English school. These are the scores Falkner used to carry from the Divinity House to the

Cathedral for use during the services. He possessed the three volume sets of *Cathedral Music* by both William Boyce and Samuel Arnold (1760-72 and 1790, lots 88 and 14), Ouseley's edition of the *Sacred Compositions* of Orlando Gibbons (187), Purcell's *Orpheus Britannicus* (1698-1702, lot 427), and two undated scores of *Messiah* (200-201). There is nothing to guide the student of *The Lost Stradivarius*. Foreign music is represented only by the *Directorium Chori Ad usum omnium Ecclesiarum Cathedralium & Collegiatarum*, Rome 1737 (164), and by a French manuscript collection, *Receuil d'Airs Serieux et à boire* (Besançon 1734, lot 432).

Apart from Dugdale's *Monasticon* (lot 166), Hugo's *Medieval Nunneries of the County of Somerset* (part of lot 441), and Davies's *Ancient Rites and Monuments of the Cathedral of Durham* (162) there are no works of local history, although we know Falkner subscribed to Monk's history of Burford, and can assume that he collected many similar volumes while writing his Murray hand-books and his histories of Oxfordshire and Bath, and also during his long residence in Durham. None of the works in the brief list of "books which may interest casual visitors" that Falkner included in *Bath in History and Social Tradition* appears in the sale catalogue, not even the one he singled out for special praise, Barbeau's *Une Ville d'Eaux Anglaise au XVIIIe Siècle* (1904). The hand-books and Oxfordshire history have no bibliographies, but even sources so extensively quoted as Robert Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire* cannot be proved to have been in Falkner's library.

General history was not much more generously represented. There were a few French and Italian works, perhaps collected as bindings, but the only standard English historians are Gibbon and Carlyle (lots 186 and 141). The *Decline and Fall* Falkner possessed in an unidentified Edwardian set, not the great edition by Bury. Of Carlyle he had the thirty volumes of the 1896-9 Centenary Edition. The interest in heraldry so obviously felt by the author of 'The Nebuly Coat' is indicated by John Ferne's *The Blazon of Gentry*, 1586 (lot 175), John Guillim's *A Display of Heraldrie*, third edition 1638, and Charles Segoing's *Mercure Armorial*, Paris 1652 (together as lot 461), but not by any of the standard modern works that he might have been expected to own.

It has been suggested that Falkner's interest in religion was concentrated mainly on its externals. The catalogue, though, gives even less evidence of concern for church history, furnishings, and architecture than for the spiritual teaching of Christianity. Among the few works in this field are Boutell's *Monumental Brasses of*

England, 1849 (lot 87), and Pugin's *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costume*, 1844 (426), both possibly relics of his father's professional library, and the sixteen volumes of Sabine Baring-Gould's *Lives of the Saints*, 1914 (lot 20). Daniel Rock's *The Church of Our Fathers* (440) was a part of Falkner's liturgical rather than architectural collection. One work of church history that we know he read with great pleasure, as a soporific when seriously ill, was Battista Platina's *Delle Vite de Pontefici*, published in Venice in 1643 (lot 381).

Does the catalogue hold any clues to Falkner's religious beliefs? Most of his copies of the Bible were Latin manuscripts or incunabula, clearly not intended for daily use in the twentieth century. His English bibles were treated in the catalogue, and probably bought by Falkner, as fine bindings, except for the first Roman Catholic translation of the Old Testament into English, published in 1609-10 (lot 33), which was perhaps acquired because of Falkner's interest in recusancy. Most of the devotional works are also fine bindings. They include such Anglican classics as the sermons and manuals of George Bull, Simon Patrick, William Sherlock, Robert South, and Jeremy Taylor (lots 55, 65, 71, 73, and 74).

The catalogue contains nothing connected even remotely with Falkner's working life in armaments and shipbuilding. The only naval work is an Admiralty signalling book of 1799 (part of lot 72). Falkner was a great traveller, and a writer of guide books, yet the only work on the subject in the catalogue (lot 179) is Lt.-Col. William Francklin's *Observations made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia* (1790), treating of regions Falkner did not visit. He no doubt acquired the book because it was Beckford's copy, with his marginal notes. Falkner was clearly fond of *Vathek*, he owned John Rutter's *Fonthill and Its Abbey*, 1823 (part of lot 441) and a life of Beckford is included in the *Bath* bibliography. Van Millingen's *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople*, 1912 (part of lot 440) may be a souvenir of a sales trip.

Falkner's purchase of *The Divinity House* in 1899 can be regarded as a symptom of his growing collecting habit, and as a powerful stimulus to it. Of the books of practical use in his library, probably bought when new, a number were published in the 1890s, when he was still living in his Durham lodgings. Collectors will recall how the sight of books piling up in corners or on tables promotes an interest in estate agents' brochures; they will also understand how a sparsely furnished new home with endless space

for bookcases stimulates and expands ambition. The promotion in the company that made it prudent for Falkner to buy The Divinity House also enabled him to fill it with treasures.

The catalogue gives some insight into Falkner's other collecting interests, notably furniture and silver, which must also have been stimulated by the purchase of a large and historic house. He possessed the 1895 reprint of Chippendale's *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (lot 146), the four folio volumes of Percy Macquoid's *History of English Furniture* (1904-8, lot 261), Arthur Stratton's *The English Interior*, 1920 (470), and C.J.Jackson's *Illustrated History of English Plate*, 1911 (241). Falkner's most noteworthy pieces of furniture, in the context of this study, were the "two large glass-fronted bookcases which belonged to George III", as they are described in his will. Kenneth Warren mentions that one at least was bought at Weymouth, where probably all old pieces of furniture were passed off as royal relics. In some respects the treasures of the Divinity House call to mind *The Spoils of Poynton*. Here was the displayed plunder of a lifetime's attentive travelling, especially in the huge bazaar that was nineteenth century Italy. But Falkner was spared Mrs Gereth's agony of worry about the future of her spoils. He looked forward tranquilly to his sale, and only prayed that it would not have to take place during his lifetime. Did Falkner read Henry James? There is no evidence for it in his published letters or his catalogue.

Glimpses here and there in letters and reminiscences give some insight into the practical side of Falkner's book collecting, the when, where, and how. In his youth he haunted the second-hand bookshops wherever his travels took him, and this was a pursuit for which nature had peculiarly fitted him. We lovers of Falkner would not claim that he was the greatest, or the most prolific, or the profoundest of writers, but nobody can deny that he was the tallest. Not even D.H.Lawrence, known to the boys in his teaching days as 'Lanky Lawrence', could have looked him in the eye. Like the giraffe in the jungle, Falkner had the advantage over lesser collectors of being able to browse the top shelves of bookshops without recourse to a lethal ladder. Increasing age and business responsibilities curbed his personal book-hunting after his move to the north, but in compensation his growing wealth enabled him to employ agents to watch the auctions and gained him valuable contacts in the great London bookshops. His extensive foreign travels for Armstrong-Whitworth gave him the opportunity to add large numbers of rare French and Italian books to his library. In

1920 he finally beat his sword into a ploughshare and exchanged his missiles for missals, and from that time book collecting, by then predominantly of liturgical works, became his main occupation.

Note by Godfrey Smith on Falkner's Liturgical Books

Falkner had a passion for collecting religious books that were mainly liturgical. Of the 487 lots in his sale almost 45% fall into this category. He collected both manuscript and printed books, specialising in English catholic works of the pre-reformation and Marian periods. He acquired very few post-1558 books in this field, seeking out only items that were of interest for their scarcity or the quality of their bindings, or (in the case of English books) that could be classified as recusant. For example, the sale includes only six editions of the Book of Common Prayer. A full analysis of the manuscript and printed liturgical books is given in the appendix, where they are listed according to the country of use not production, except in the case of a few monastic books where this cannot be determined. Where there is doubt the country of production has been used.

Of the English liturgical books (including the hours and primers, which were for the laity rather than the clergy) more than a quarter were manuscript items. Three were identified as for Monastic Use, two were of York Use, and the rest for the Use of Sarum. All were produced in England except five of Flemish origin intended for the English market. Among the more notable treasures were:

The 14th century *Buckland Missal*, lot 293 in the sale catalogue. This was used in Buckland church, Berkshire, until the Reformation, when it came into the possession of the Lord of the Manor, Sir Robert Throckmorton, a member of the prominent Catholic family. It is now in the Bodleian (MS Don. b 5).

The 14th century *Shepton Beauchamp Missal* from Dorset, lot 294. This is now MS 27 in Liverpool Cathedral's Radcliffe Library, which is housed in the Library of the University of Liverpool.

The 13th century *Muchelney Breviary* from Muchelney Abbey, Somerset, lot 96. This monastic commonplace book, on the many blank leaves of which miscellaneous jottings were made from the 14th century until the Dissolution, is now in the British Library (Add. Ms. 43405-6).

The 15th century *Closworth Missal*, lot 295. This unusually well-preserved manuscript, which was used at Closworth church in Dorset, features a fine painting of the Crucifixion. Sir John Noble presented it to the Bodleian (MS Don. b 6).

The 15th century *Flaunden Missal*, from Hertfordshire, lot 298. This is now in the Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana (MS 139).

The 13th century Psalter of Flemish work (lot 409) used by the nuns (Austin Canonesses) of the Priory of St Johns, Buckland Denham, Somerset. It is now in the library of the Society of Antiquaries (MS 713)

The 15th century *Bangor Missal*, lot 296. This very fine Sarum missal was presented to the church of St Giles, Eyton, near Oswestry, Shropshire, in 1554, during the Marian revival. It was bought by the National Library of Wales at the sale, even though the Sotheby cataloguer scouted the suggestion of a Welsh origin.

It is remarkable that Falkner managed to collect so many pre-reformation English liturgical books, which are now very difficult to find. During the Reformation they suffered under various injunctions. First there was a requirement to erase or deface all references to the Pope and Thomas Becket (see lots 227, 229, 230, and 296 in the sale catalogue). Later, there was an order to delete superstitious prayers etc., and finally the complete destruction of all such books was decreed, and their possession attracted heavy penalties. Most were burnt, but many vellum manuscripts were cut up by bookbinders and used to strengthen joints, and some were recycled as wrapping material. It is therefore surprising to find so many books of this period in one private collection.

The revival of the catholic religion during Mary's reign led to the panic production of large quantities of service books to replace the ones destroyed under Henry VIII and Edward VI. These have survived in larger numbers, probably because they were not hunted down so ruthlessly. Falkner possessed a number of Marian books printed between 1554 and 1557: seven Missals, two Manuals, two Primers, five Processionals, one Psalter, and eleven Breviaries.

With a few notable exceptions, the pre-Marian printed service books for the English church were produced on the

Continent, where the special skill of printing in red and black was available. Falkner had only five English examples, numbers 237, 282, and 283 in the catalogue by Wynkyn de Worde, no.236 by Pynson, and no.391 by Thomas Petyt. The remainder were mostly printed in Paris, Rouen, and Antwerp by such famous men as Regnault, Pigouchet, Hopyl, Kerver, Morin, and Prevost.



Appendix - Analysis of Manuscript and Printed Liturgical Books by Country of Use

Manuscripts

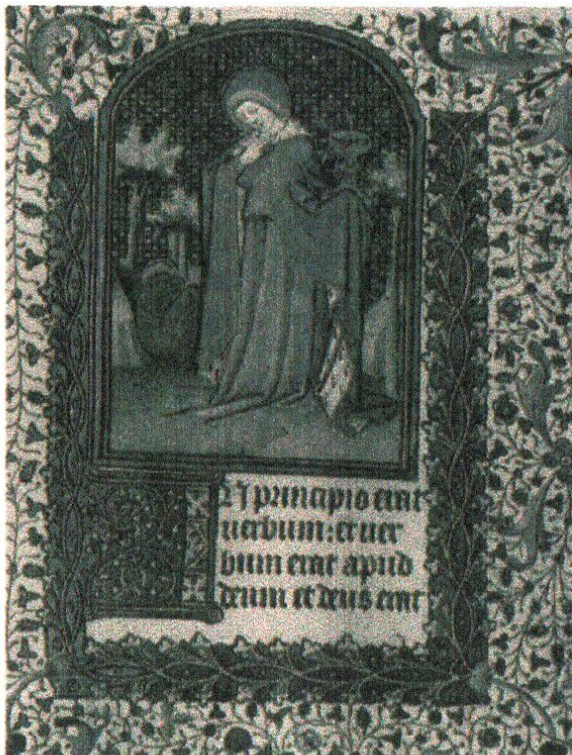
| | English | French | German | Italian | Flemish/ Dutch | Other* | Total |
|-----------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|-------------------|--------|-------|
| Antiphonals | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Benedictionals | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Breviaries | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 + | 16 |
| Graduals | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 2 |
| Horae (Hours) | 8 | 4 | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| Hymnals | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Legenda | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Manuals/Rituals | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 3 |
| Martyrologies | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | 2 |
| Missals | 9 | - | 1 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 18 |
| Pontificals | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Primers | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Processionals | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | 3 |
| Psalters | 4 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 6 |
| Sacramentaries | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Sequences | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| TOTAL | 30 | 8 | 8 | 14 | 3 | 3 | 66 |

* Swiss, Spanish, or unknown

+ a Cistercian breviary of unknown origin

Printed Books

| | English | French | German | Italian | Flemish/ Dutch | Total |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-------------------|------------|
| Antiphonals | - | - | - | 2 | - | 2 |
| Benedictionals | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Breviaries | 13 | 4 | 1 | 5 | - | 23 |
| Graduals | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Horae (Hours) | 14 | 1 | - | 5 | - | 20 |
| Hymnals | 3 | - | - | - | - | 3 |
| Legenda | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Manuals/Rituals | 10 | - | - | 1 | - | 11 |
| Martyrologies | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 3 |
| Missals | 29 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 50 |
| Primers | 6 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Processionals | 7 | - | - | 3 | - | 10 |
| Pontificals | - | - | - | 3 | - | 3 |
| Psalters | 3 | 2 | - | 5 | - | 10 |
| Sacramentaries | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Sequences | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | 3 |
| TOTAL | 91 | 14 | 8 | 29 | 4 | 142 |



Lot No.235
Horae Mortuorum.
Use of Besançon.
 Manuscript on Vellum

French, xv century
 first half