

# Poems

## Some Reviews of *Poems*

The green wrapper version of Falkner's *Poems* was ordered by his widow in an edition of 500 copies. When giving up her London house about 1934, she sold the copies which had not been given out to her husband's friends, to Bernard Quaritch Ltd., who still had some copies in stock in 1960, when **Graham Pollard** wrote his bibliography of Falkner's works. When the firm's basement was sorted out much later on, the remnant was sold to the bookseller Peter Eaton. Half of the stock were, in turn, sold on to Jubilee Books who were trading in Burford [aptly, Falkner's own resting-place]. When Jubilee Books closed in August 1987, the remainder were sold by Bloomsbury Book Auctions. The green wrapper version turns up occasionally on the Internet, but the Society is hoping to publish a new edition, including several previously unpublished poems.

Falkner's versifying has received mixed comment. **Pollard** mentioned that "*some of his verses have been compared to those of Mr John Betjeman (The Times Literary Supplement, 12, 19 December 1958, 2 January 1959); and others recall the poems of Sir Henry Newbolt, but with less vigour and more flavour*". **Sir William Haley**, in his lecture of 1957, was brisk in his assessment: "*...let us dispose of Falkner as a poet. It can be done briefly. Falkner desultorily wrote poetry throughout his life, particularly for the Spectator. He was fond of such occasions as Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, Assumption Day and other church festivals, and commemorated them in both English and Latin verses...I doubt if even the most unexpected growth of his fame would make them worth reprinting. One sensitive critic has heard in them rhythms which were to find a surer hand in that of Mr John Betjeman. The sentiment is generally homely, especially in what I will call the church verses. A better note is struck in Epilogue:*

The painted autumn overwhelms  
The summer's routed last array,  
The citron patches on the elms  
Bring sunshine to the sunless day.

The creeper's hatchment red and brown  
Falls gently on the garden bed,  
The lurid snow-cloud on the down  
Can scarcely hide the winter's head.

The dahlias and chrysanthemums  
Droop in the dripping garden lane,  
A drowsy insect hums and drums  
Across the imprisoning window-pane.

*Of the different kinds of writing which he tried, poetry was the only one in which he was quite ordinary*".

Let **Kenneth Warren**, Falkner's biographer, have the last word: "*From the neglect or slight his verse has received for sixty years, John Meade Falkner deserves to be rescued. He was no master craftsman, not a poet of soaring thoughts, but he should not be dismissed as a mean practitioner or hackman*".