

The Decorations and Medals of John Meade Falkner

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INTRODUCTION

On the European system, Orders, with their associated insignia, are normally divided into several classes of award. There are some major orders which have only one class, notably in Great Britain the Orders of the Garter and of the Thistle, though the Orders of the Bath and of St. Michael and St. George have three classes, none widely given. By contrast the Order of the British Empire has five classes, of which the lowest two are liberally awarded.

For most Orders the insignia awarded for wearing in the various classes are as follows:

First class, a 'Grand Cross' for a Christian country, otherwise a 'Grand Cordon': a large breast star and a full body sash from which a badge is suspended.

Second class, that of a Knight: a smaller breast star and a neck badge, though the Sacred Treasure of Japan is the star only.

Third class, that of Commander: a neck badge only.

Fourth class or lower: breast badges, but Falkner only received Orders in the first three classes.

Several of the emerging nations in the mid nineteenth century devised honour systems on the European model as they sought to westernise their societies and political systems. John Meade Falkner was honoured by Japan and the Ottoman Empire with recently founded Orders, and by Italy with a rather older award. As we shall

see, he must have been one of the British civilians of his generation most generously honoured by foreign governments. Falkner proudly lists his overseas awards in his entry in the biographical reference book 'Who's Who' as "Grand Cordon Osmanieh, Grand Cordon Medjidieh; Rising Sun (3rd class); Sacred Treasure of Japan (2nd class); Commendatore S. S. Maurizio e Lazaro.", and in his Will drawn up in 1925 which bequeathes them to his brother Charles together with other items of family interest. Charles' son Tom later very generously donated his uncle's decorations to Durham Cathedral Library. In the Will Falkner lists the insignia as: Grand Cordon of the Osmanieh, Grand Cordon of the Majidieh (*sic*), Gold medal of the Liahkat, two orders of the Sacred Treasure of Japan and the star of the Rising Sun, the order of Saint Maurice and Saint Lazarus. I will discuss all of these in alphabetical order of the country of award.



ITALY

COMMANDER OF THE ORDER OF ST. MAURICE AND ST LAZARUS

The Edinburgh Gazette for 25th June 1920 has "Decorations Conferred by His Majesty the King of Italy. Order of St. Maurice and St.

Lazarus. Commander. John Meade Falkner, Esq. (Armstrong, Whitworth, & Co.)". The class of 'Commander' was the third of five. The very attractive badge has the conjoined crosses in green enamel for St. Lazarus and white for St. Maurice, and the insignia were made to the highest standards and presented in a plush felt box.

The grade of Commander is surmounted by a Royal crown, and the ribbon is green watered silk.

The origin of the Order of St. Maurice lies deep in antiquity as, by legend, Maurice was a centurion in the Theban legion of the Roman army. He was martyred for his Christian faith, in around 300 A.D., near Lake Geneva in what was then Savoyard territory, and a nearby town is still named for him. Amadeus, the first Duke of Savoy reigned from 1391-1440 and founded the Order of St. Maurice in 1434.

The Order of St. Lazarus was originally a hospital Order in the early medieval Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem with their prime function as a charity assisting those suffering from leprosy. The Saracen advance forced them from the Holy Land and they settled in Naples in 1311 where the Order and its hospital were revived. In 1572 the Orders were united by the Pope and from 1861 formed part of the honours of united Italy under Victor Emmanuel II as King and hereditary Grand Master. The Order could be conferred on distinguished public servants, those eminent in trade, science or the arts, and those performing good works who alone could distribute the income of the Order. Presumably, Falkner qualified under 'trade' as his citation identifies his place of work. Armstrong Whitworth had extensive business interests in Italy including the branch at Pozzuoli and the torpedo works at Fiume which, following the coup of Gabriele D'Annunzio, was annexed to Italy after the war. The Order is now obsolete as the Republic of Italy has only one decoration, the Order of Merit founded in 1952 and officially replacing all the former Orders of the monarchy, though the exiled House of Savoy still maintains it as a dynastic Order principally in the United States. The republican Order of Merit has been bestowed on English writers

with Italian connections including Sir Osbert Sitwell and Sir Harold Acton.

ITALY: THE HOLY SEE (THE VATICAN CITY FROM 1929)



Papal Benemerenti Medals

From 1891 Papal ‘Benemerenti’ (for the well deserving) medals were struck from time to time without being permanent awards. In 1925 Pope Pius XI instituted such a medal to celebrate Holy Year and to be awarded in recognition of distinguished service to the Holy See. The medals are circular with the effigy of the Pope on the obverse and suspended from a device of the keys of St. Peter and the triple crown of the Papacy. They were worn from a ribbon half yellow and half white, and were always sparsely awarded, so a great honour. J.M. Falkner had the medal in recognition of his researches in the Vatican Library over many years. He and Evelyn regularly visited Rome, occasionally staying for several months and Falkner acquired a deep affinity with the eternal city, sometimes with unusual results as when he once addressed a restaurant waiter in perfect eighteenth-century Italian, of which the poor man understood not a word.

JAPAN

Early in the twentieth century the two island nations of Britain and Japan began to draw closer together through a mutual interest in maritime and naval development. In January 1902, they signed a treaty of alliance, thereby ending the British policy of 'splendid isolation' from diplomatic engagements and bringing an ambitious and westernising Japan within the European orbit. John Meade Falkner's participation in this process can only be described as enthusiastic, and I will quote later a verse from his poem celebrating this new friendship. The 1902 treaty was signed by Lord Lansdowne as foreign secretary and the Japanese diplomat Hayashi Tadasu, and was fully supported by the press of both countries. It was basically a defensive alliance with the 'key' third clause being a promise of support if either signatory became involved in a war with more than one other power. The friendship between the two countries was celebrated in 1910 by the Japan-British Exhibition, held in some style at The White City in London. The Japanese parliament voted a large sum to sponsor the show and sent huge quantities of the very best of the country's arts and manufactures with wooden buildings to display them and traditional gardens to set them off.

In the meantime our shipyards in north-east England began to enjoy Japanese contracts for the construction of battleships, and half of Japan's ironclads in her war with Russia in 1905 were British builds. I have in my collection a postcard of "The Royal Procession, Newcastle July.11.1906" with one of the background buildings displaying prominently a very large Japanese flag. In the same year Prince Arthur of Connaught led a mission to Tokyo on behalf of his brother the King to present the Order of the Garter to Emperor Mutsuhito. He read a message from Edward VII including "... to confer the dignity upon those Emperors, Kings, and Princes who are

in special and peculiar amity or alliance with the King of England". It will be recalled that Edward inspired the music hall ditty "There won't be no war while Edward is our king 'cos he's a peaceful sort of man and hates that kind of thing". In return Prince Arthur received the Order of the Chrysanthemum, to this day Japan's highest award. Also in the party was an old Japan 'hand' and, incidentally, grandfather of the Mitford sisters, Lord Redesdale, who returned home with the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun.



THE ORDER OF THE RISING SUN (KYOKUJITSU-SHO)

John Meade Falkner held this decoration in the third class of eight. The Order had been founded by the Emperor Meiji in 1875 for males only and for exceptional merit. The neck badge is very attractive with a red glass cabochon representing the sun surrounded by white enamel rays outlined in silver-gilt. It is suspended from a device representing the leaves and flowers of the paulownia tree, and

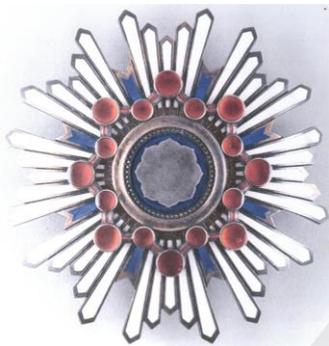
has a white silk ribbon edged in red. It is presented in a black lacquered balsa wood box. Japanese insignia have lettering on the reverse, in this case the back of the tree's leaves.

The paulownia tree, or '*Paulownia tomentosa*', is a deciduous tree originating in China with large heart-shaped leaves and fragrant flowers similar in shape to our foxgloves, and its wood has various uses including traditional shoes and even musical instruments. In Japan a new tree is planted to mark the birth of a daughter and

when she marries it is cut down and the wood used to carve articles for her dowry. The seeds were used in packing export porcelain, so the tree spread widely in suitable climates. The chrysanthemum (kiku-no-mon) and the paulownia (kiri-no-mon) are used as Imperial heraldic crests. This Order, and the 'Sacred Treasure', are still very much part of the current honours system as the retention of the Emperor was the only concession requested by the Japanese in 1946. Falkner would have been horrified had he known of the atrocities committed by elements of their armed forces in the war.

By contrast, 'his' Japanese attracted a poem, 'The New Japan' celebrating the building of battleships at Elswick, which was first published in the JMF Journal for July 2017. Here is the final stanza:

The New Japan, the new Japan.
The astonished nations round her fawned
Her friendship to importune;
She looked about, and, others scorned,
With England linked her fortune:
So here we stand, joined hand in hand,
To overthrow oppression;
Let others squabble for the land,
The seas are our possession.



JAPAN: THE ORDER OF THE SACRED TREASURE (ZUIHOSHO)

The London Gazette for 15 November 1921 has "Decorations conferred by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. Order of the Sacred Treasure. Insignia of the

Second Class.” There follow six names including John Meade Falkner, Esq., John Henry Brunel Noble Esq., and Douglas Vickers, Esq. The other names are Sir Robert Hadfield, Bt., the metallurgist and industrialist, and two naval officers, Commander Sir A. Dawson Bt., and Rear-Admiral Edgar Lees. Falkner already had the third class, which is a neck badge, so the breast star of the second class made up the usual insignia of the knightly grade of an Order. Also at Durham is Falkner’s impressive bestowal document in Japanese calligraphy with the Imperial seal. There survives some relevant correspondence, including a letter of congratulation accompanying the insignia from Captain S. Kobayashi, the Japanese naval attaché in London: “Please accept my heartiest congratulations on the well deserved honour conferred upon you”. It is in fact a very high honour as the first class of the Sacred Treasure is normally reserved for royalty or Heads of State. The Order has a ribbon of white silk interwoven with light blue, yellow and red.

The Order was founded by the Emperor Meiji in 1888 as an award for either military or civil merit in eight classes. It could, from the start, be awarded to foreigners. The ‘sacred treasure’ itself comprises three ancient objects bequeathed by Jimmu, the first Emperor of Japan to his successors. They are believed to be a mirror, representing wisdom, a sword (valour) and a jewel (benevolence) and they are apparently kept at three separate shrines. The mirror and the jewel are represented on the insignia with the mirror in polished silver and the jewel as a circle of beads in red glass. The items are kept in great secrecy and are only seen by the Emperor and High Priests. They were apparently present at the enthronement of Emperor Akihito in 1993 but well covered up. Another unusual feature of the Order is that in Japan itself holders of the first three classes of award, although often civilians, were

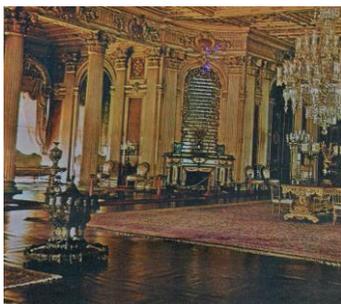
accorded military funerals. One wonders whether Falkner knew of this, if so he might have been amused.

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

INTRODUCTION

Falkner's Japanese customers journeyed to Elswick but he travelled to Constantinople himself several times in the early 1900's. Despite the frustrations over the relaxed negotiating style of the Turkish bureaucrats, lucrative contracts for ships and field guns were signed for Armstrong Whitworth.

In 1904 Falkner was granted the rare privilege of an audience with the Sultan, Abdul Hamid, at the Dolmabahce Palace overlooking the Bosphorus. The interview was conducted through a French interpreter who translated the Sultan's words for Falkner. Unfortunately, when backing out from the royal presence, he crushed his top hat against a pillar. The present writer visited the palace forty years ago on a cold December day with snow flurries circling around. The building appeared closed, and a few other tourists stood around looking disappointed, but suddenly a guide appeared and in we went. The interiors are stunning in the grande epoque manner. The strangest thing was that the entrance staircase was lined with large vases in a mysterious black metal which turned out to be solid silver, unpolished for decades. No doubt they shone brightly for Falkner when he came down with his Order of the Medjidjie and his squashed hat. **Salon of the Ambassadors**



I see from the pictorial guide I brought home that there are indeed two freestanding pillars in the Salon of the Ambassadors, and they lead into a more intimate window niche in the huge room where Falkner's interview undoubtedly took place. Otherwise, we read in the quaint English of the guide that "the crystal chandelier and candelabras create a pompous scenery in the large room". Falkner witnessed the dying days of the Ottoman Empire, dismembered after the Great War in which the country fought with the Central Powers.



THE ORDER OF THE MEDJIDIE

The Order was named for the Sultan Abdul Mejid who reigned from 1839 to 1861 and founded it in 1852 in five classes for special services to the state, either civil or military, with provision for awards to foreigners. Many British officers received it for service in the Crimean war of 1854-56 and the Egyptian campaigns of 1882-86. The star has at its centre the Sultan's cypher or 'toughra' and a calligraphic inscription translating as 'ZEAL, DEVOTION, LOYALTY 1268'. The date in the hegira calendar equates to 1852 in the Christian one, the hegira deriving from Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina which occurred in A.D. 622, though the mathematics are not straightforward in arriving at the equivalent dates. The badge is suspended

from a red enamelled star and crescent and the sash is of red silk with a green stripe at each edge.

In the collection at Durham there is also a third class neck badge of the Medjidjie in its case, which Falkner held before being promoted to the Grand Cordon.



THE ORDER OF THE OSMANIEH

This was the Ottoman Empire's second highest Order and also awarded in five classes, in this case to honour outstanding civil servants, including foreigners. It was instituted by Abdul Aziz at the start of his reign in 1862, and named to

honour Osman, the first ruler of the Turkish Empire (1299-1326 A.D.), and founder of the House of Osman. Falkner's decoration is the highest class, the Grand Cordon, and it includes a breast star with, above a crescent, the legend translating as 'ABDUL AZIZ KHAN TURKISH EMPEROR HAVING FAITH IN THE LORD'. The sash is light green with red borders, thus reversing the colours of the Medjidjie sash.

The precise dates of award of Falkner's Turkish Orders are not known but probably date from the early 1900's when he was most frequently in Constantinople, and certainly before 1914 after which Britain was at war with the Ottoman Empire. The practice of listing foreign awards in *The London Gazette*, the British government newspaper, only began in the 1920's.

THE LIAKAT MEDAL FOR MERIT (LIYAKAT MADALYASI)

Falkner was honoured with this medal in gold, though it could also be awarded in silver. It was instituted in 1891 and is a conventional circular piece with a diameter of 25mm. It was both a military and a civil decoration, also available to foreigners, and for general merit in society. From 1905 women received the medal, normally for charity work. It is suspended from a metal bar holding a red and green ribbon, and the obverse depicts an elaborate heraldic device which is topped by the Sultan's tougkra.



Liakat Medal

THE WEARING OF FOREIGN DECORATIONS BY BRITISH SUBJECTS

British recipients of foreign Orders cannot just pin them on for wear on any occasion they choose, but have to apply to the sovereign for 'permission to wear'. This is normally only granted under strict conditions as "Restricted Permission", and a letter is sent in the name of the monarch's private secretary, setting out the rules.

Permission is granted to wear a foreign order as follows:

1. In the presence of the Sovereign, Reigning Prince, or Head of State of the Country to which the Decoration belongs.
2. In the presence of any Member of the Royal Family of the Country concerned.
3. At the Residence of any Ambassador, etc., of that Country.
4. When officially meeting any Officers of the forces of that Country.
5. At any ceremony in connection with that Country, such as a Memorial Service, unveiling a monument, etc.
6. On all official occasions whilst in that Country.

In Falkner's case, he could not have worn his Turkish awards anywhere after 1914, though Italy and Japan were our allies in the Great War. Yet, his honours are a very remarkable collection for a British civilian both for their number and the very high classes in which they were bestowed. The tact and charm he brought to his 'diplomatic' missions on behalf of Armstrong Whitworth were deeply appreciated on a worldwide stage.

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