

John Meade Falkner's Chant Book
Philip Titcombe

*The Divinity House,
Durham
November 29th 1911*

Dear Sir,

I am writing to ask if you will give me permission to print, in a collection of chants, a chant of yours in Db. It is a chant that I admire, exceedingly, and I should be very grateful indeed, if you would let me use it.

The collection is for the Psalter only, with no Venites. I have practically eliminated single chants, and there are very few minors. If you allow it, I propose using your chant for 'By the waters of Babylon' [Psalm 137]. I have tried to only use chants with real melody and power, not musical exercises, or invertebrate compositions – I am quite sure that among the great numbers of "chant-books" there is still ample room for something of this kind. I am publishing with Messrs. Novello – but at my own cost, and not for profit. The book will be well 'got up'. I will send you a copy; or as many copies, as you care to have. If you permit me to print, I will print with the chant that is printed by your permission, as I have arranged to do with all copyright and private chants.

I hope to receive your assent. I should feel that a great gap was made in my book, if I missed this chant for Ps CXXXVII with which I have learned to associate it.

*Yours very faithfully,
J. Meade Falkner*

Perhaps I ought to say that I am a business man, and a director of Sir W. G. Armstrong Whitworth & Co.

C.W. Pearce, Esq., Mus. Doc.

In any discussion of the *Ad Majorem Collection of Psalter Chants*, which, if you will forgive the pun, could be described as an unsung component of the Falkner canon, a wider consideration of the author's musical tastes is necessary. That music seems to have played a central part in JMF's life is exemplified in two of his books, although it is not possible to establish whether he learnt music as a child or how proficient he might have been. The poet Henry Newbolt, meeting JMF in his early Northumberland years, notes that 'of many things of art, he was a learned though unrecognised authority on old violins...'. It should also be remembered that the Noble family, with whom he was living, were musically highly gifted. At Nunnykirk, their Northumberland residence, 'The majority of the Nobles' guests and all the family were musically talented'. *The Lost Stradivarius* shows an understanding of the violin and its repertoire: 'From his earliest boyhood he had been passionately devoted to music and had attained a considerable proficiency on the violin.' Both John Maltravers and his friend William Gaskell enjoyed music-making, JMF pointing out that 'the practice of music was much less common in Oxford then (1841)'. The Chair of Music at Oxford was not established until 1856, music degrees being awarded a few years later. From his Italian travels, Gaskell brings back suites by Graziani, a minor seventeenth century composer from Rome. The New Grove Dictionary lists various musicians of the same name but one, a cellist of the late Baroque /early Classical period, seems to be the likeliest candidate.

A recent re-reading of *The Nebuly Coat*, reminds one that the character of the irascible organist Sharnall could be drawn from life. For Cullerne we might read Beverley Minster, which JMF enjoyed visiting. Not far away is York Minster, the organist of which, Sir Edward Bairstow, could be memorably unpleasant on occasion. It



Edward Bairstow

was recalled that a female pupil, leaving a lesson in tears with a door slamming, was followed moments later by the door re-opening and the music being thrown out. Sharnall's character is explicitly drawn. His complaints of the church authorities' continual underfunding, as well as the neglect of both music and maintenance of the organ, have a familiar ring. Sharnall accompanies Anastasia while she plays the violin; perhaps he is also teaching her, but he is sharply and unkindly critical of her performance. Chapter 6 of *The Nebuly Coat* involves the un-heralded arrival of the unknown Lord Blandamer during the first lesson of Evensong. Ignoring the clerk's officious admonition 'Ye cannot enter the choir during the hours of Divine Service', he takes his seat behind the lay clerks of the choir. One of the singers, impressed by the visitor's resolute and authoritative air, passes him a copy of the *Magnificat*. To the surprise of all, Blandamer sings the missing tenor part competently and mellifluously and subsequently joins in with the *Nunc dimittis* and the anthem. Sharnall is so impressed that he ends the service with a rendition of Bach's Eb *St Anne* Fugue.

Cullerne is, because of its size and its unusual musical tradition, a cathedral in all but name. Living at the Divinity House, yards from the North entrance of Durham Cathedral, JMF was intimately acquainted with its music. His friend Sir Edmund Craster recalls, 'When not in the Library he was in the Abbey Church. I can see him yet, clad in his Oxford gown, lolloping across to the Cathedral for afternoon service, a pile of music scores under his arm threatening

to spill itself on the path before he reached the great Norman doorway'. Reference to the music scores show us that JMF could read music. From the inventory of his books we see that he possessed some of the Cathedral Music collections which composers such as William Boyce had published. We recall lines from JMF's poem *After Trinity*:

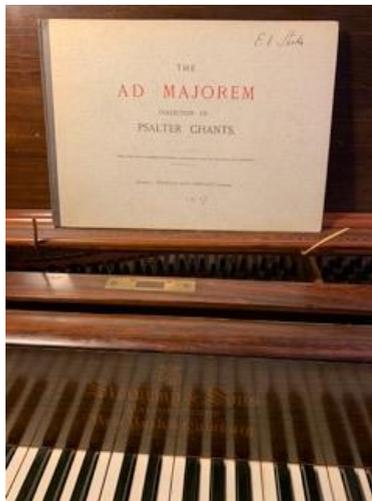
*In the stillness of autumn quiet,
We have heard the still, small voice.
We have sung Oh where shall Wisdom?
Thick paper, folio, Boyce.*

It would certainly appear that JMF's musical tastes were specifically drawn to church music. Another poem *The Last Church*, rightly praised by A. N. Wilson as 'most distinctively his [JMF's] own', has, among its memorable lines:

*We shall find no organ pealing.
No singing boys to hear....
But looking still to the altar,
Follow the monotone,
Change and change without falter,
Versicle, antiphone.*

THE AD MAJOREM COLLECTION OF PSALTER CHANTS is a slim volume, handsomely produced, the words *Ad Majorem* in Roman lettering, picked out in tasteful vermilion. Smaller italics highlight *Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery*, the words from the First Book of Samuel. Novello and Company, long-established London music publishers, are named at the base of the cover, and the Imperial Octave hardbound volume, measuring 7½ inches x 11 inches is done in

landscape format. With a single page Preface, the main body of the book runs from pages 2 to 70. The name E. V. Stocks, dated 1917 four years after publication, reveals this as an association copy, having belonged to the Durham University Librarian. A punctilious man, always wearing a gown, labouring in the library with very little help, and to whom Falkner could be slightly condescending, Stocks was not



well off. JMF, in his demeanour, had forgotten the modest circumstances of his own upbringing. It is almost certainly a gift from the author. Pencil comments include, against a chant by The Revd. H. J. Poole (see below), 'wretched stuff'. Throughout the book various musical solecisms have been noted.

As it is a comparative rarity, how many people know that JMF is the author of this unusual publication? My first sight dates from a visit to Kenneth Hillier occasioned during my time as a BBC producer. Childhood memories of a thrilling radio production of *Moonfleet*, a book to which I frequently returned, left me with determination to find out more about the author, and, always on the lookout for programme ideas, it seemed inevitable, at least in retrospect, that a programme about JMF would make good listening, as part of a planned literary series. Having been intrigued by the chant book it was a delight to acquire a copy from Philip Martin Music Books, former shop partners of the late George Ramsden, a friend and JMF Society member.

Chants, as used in Anglican choral services, are defined in the *New Grove Dictionary* as ‘Harmonised formulae used for the singing of psalms and canticles’. A single chant might be sung to one verse of a psalm, or a double chant to two verses. While their history can be traced back hundreds of years, Anglican chants as now known, are essentially a nineteenth century phenomenon. In the Book of Common Prayer, the hundred and fifty psalms are divided into those sung in the morning, referred to as ‘Matins’, and those of the evening, referred to as ‘Evensong’, for thirty days of the month. Where there is a thirty-first day, the Day 30 psalms are repeated using different chants. Matins psalms are always preceded by a single chant for the Venite (Psalm 95).

The translation, universally used in Cathedrals, is that of the Yorkshireman **Miles Coverdale (1488 –1569)** and, if the Psalms are to be sung in English, this version is by far the best, with memorable lines and appealing eccentricities such a *Neither delighteth*



he in any man’s legs, and Thou hast given us a drink of deadly wine. These are among many phrases which have delighted choristers for hundreds of years and have been a fertile source of quotation.

JMFs personal choice of 176 chants has no editorial attribution, but we know from the letter to Dr Pearce, that JMF had sent out requests seeking permission to include chants, and for which he prints various acknowledgements. The Pearce letter is pasted on the front end-paper of another chant book entitled *The Antiphonal Chant Book: A Collection of Anglican Chants* by Henry James Poole M.A. (sic). This is in Kenneth Hillier’s library. JMF’s Preface states that ‘The inclusion of Chants which possess a marked and easily

remembered melody.....are some principles which have governed this selection. If Chants are not thoroughly tuneful, any congregational singing is impossible’.

On what congregational singing did Falkner base his knowledge of chants? His Dorset upbringing might have included gallery bands and choirs as described in Thomas Hardy’s poems and novels. In such settings, psalms would not have been chanted, but sung to a metrical psalter. I have a worn copy of one such, probably early nineteenth century, containing hymn-tunes rather than chants, the words of the psalms in metre, often unconvincingly. At Oxford, JMF frequented the chapels of New College, Christ Church and Magdalen where significant choral foundations with daily sung services and chanted psalms were maintained. Once established in Durham, Cathedral choral services claimed almost daily attention from JMF.

Any church musician looking at the chants chosen by JMF would be puzzled by the comments in the Preface. The chants are often obscure, containing few elements of memorable melody, sometimes with prolix chromatic progressions which parish church congregations might have found hard to assimilate. The Pearce letter specifically states ‘no Venites’, yet chants for the Venite appear throughout. Since the Preface specifically refers to ‘congregations’ one has to assume it is intended for parish church use. Yet few parish churches would have maintained a choral establishment such as the fictional Cullerne. Instead, they would have required chants for other canticles regularly sung. Parish worship, being mostly on a Sunday, there would have been fewer psalms and fewer chants accordingly. A parish congregation would have been unable to use the entire gamut of the chants as chosen by JMF. They would not have remembered them well enough.

Of his choice, perhaps a mere thirty chants might have survived the test of time, with composers from the world of Victorian church music such as Mozart's pupil Thomas Attwood, Sir John Goss, Attwood's successor at St Paul's Cathedral, and S.S. Wesley, composer of the fine anthems. Beethoven, not noted as a composer of Anglican choral music, makes an appearance with a fragmentary and unconvincing version of the slow movement of the Seventh Symphony.

'Few Minor Chants have been introduced. Ordinary congregations are apt to find them tedious or dispiriting'. A measure of JMF's personal taste, surely, as there are fine chants to be found in minor keys. One psalm (137) *By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept* demands such. Composed of short sentences bewailing the exile of the Children of Israel, it is this psalm for which JMF has chosen the double chant in a major key composed by the aforementioned Dr C W Pearce. The choice is inappropriate; the chant unmemorable with awkward chromaticism.

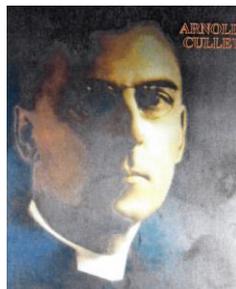
It seems probable that JMF noted chants which appealed to him when in other places of worship. He could write music as a small example is contained in the letter to Dr Pearce. The chant book



includes blank staves for the inclusion of further chants, something which I have never otherwise observed in a book of this type. However, although it has not been possible to research extant Durham Cathedral chant-use of the period, the evidence points to Durham choir chants being the principal source for the contents of book. Meade Falkner includes no less than seven chants by

Philip Armes, Organist and Master of the Choristers at Durham from

1862. Holding the post for more than forty years, and Professor of Music at Durham University from 1897, he probably helped with the compilation and editing of the book. Alas, none of his chants is outstanding and the same may be said of the three chants by his successor, the Rev. Arnold Culley (1867-1947) Organist from 1907. Other Durham connections include five chants by the Revd. J.B. Dykes, notable hymn composer and Durham resident. William Ellis (1868-1947) who was sub-Organist at Durham from 1903 until 1918 has one chant. **Arnold Culley**



Other singularities have emerged in an examination of the index of composers, not least a plethora of esoteric names such as The Revd. Phocion Henley, M.A., J. Lemon, and Highmore Skeats. Included also, are a peer, Lord Mornington, six musical knights and two baronets, the latter including The Revd. Sir Fredrick Arthur Gore-Ouseley, founder of St Michael's College, an institution which matched JMF's aspirations, being a fully choral establishment with a choir school, based in a tiny village near Tenbury in Worcestershire. It was the last private educational establishment in England to sing services throughout the week. A rival to Cullerne?

This short essay is intended to illuminate what must otherwise be a lacuna for all but the most dedicated follower of JMF's work. Few, if any, copies of *Ad Majorem* can have been sold, perhaps only a few hundred printed. It joins an amorphous collection of chant books, now long discarded. The Anglican Communion has moved to a central Eucharist service on Sundays, discontinuing other services found in the Book of Common Prayer, and obviating the need for chants. The increasing popularity of Cathedral Evensong attracts large attendances, but these establishments, with uniquely talented

music staff, dedicated choir schools and virtually professional choral scholars, have their own selections of chants and have no need for books such *Ad Majorem*. For this writer, at least, the joy is in the possession of a copy of this 'well got up' book, with the unique thrill of its personal associations with the author.

PREFACE.

THE inclusion only of Chants which possess a marked and easily remembered melody, the very sparing use of single Chants, and of minor Chants, are some principles which have governed this selection.

If Chants are not thoroughly tuneful, any congregational singing is impossible. It is, of course, to be desired that *all* the parts should be tuneful, but from the congregational standpoint, it is with the melody of the treble part that we are mostly concerned. Congregations know little about part-singing, and the less attempt that they make to sing parts the better will be the result. For the sake of their tunefulness, a few of the florid 18th and early 19th century Chants have been included.

Few Single Chants appear. A Chant is a very short composition: it allows little room for development. It is difficult to do much within such Procrustean limits. But if this is true of Double Chants, it is much more true of single Chants. They are often characterless and ineffective.

Again, minor Chants have been sparingly introduced. To ordinary congregations they are apt to be tedious or 'dispiriting'. Minor Chants have not been used even for such traditionally minor-chant Psalms as the ~~xxx~~, cix., and cxxxvii.*

For any faulty harmonies or typographical errors, and for printing any copyright Chants without permission, a sincere apology is offered. Every effort has been made to ascertain rights, and to obtain the sanction of those in whom they are vested.

The Compiler expresses his sincere thanks to The Reverend G. E. Alvis, Dr. E. J. Bellerby, Sir Frederick Bridge, The Reverend Arnold D. Culley, Mr. Wm. Ellis, The Reverend Sir George Ralph Fetherston, Bart., Dr. Basil Harwood, Dr. Charles Harford Lloyd, Sir George C. Martin, Mr. Charles L. Naylor, Mr. Tertius Noble, Dr. C. W. Pearce, Dr. Ferris Tozer, for permission to print their Chants; also to Mr. Edward Oswald Dykes for permission to print the Chants of the late Dr. Dykes, to Mr. E. M. Oakeley for permission to print Sir Herbert Oakeley's Quadruple Chant, and to the Reverend Francis G. Wesley for permission to print the Chants of S. and S. S. Wesley. Several Chants are included of that past-master of Chant-writing, the late Dr. Philip Armes, by permission of the composer, ratified by his widow.

* A number of blank staves are given which will be available for the insertion of minor and single Chants if desired.

John Meade Falkner's *Preface* to his Chant Book