John Meade Falkner in Durham [1899-1932]
A perspective on a small cathedral city

Kenneth Warren

The visitor to Durham finds few obvious signs of the subject of our consideration. If, on his way from the cathedral to the lower town, he wanders down Windy Gap he may notice a small plaque attached to a door on the left. It merely records that John Meade Falkner had lived there and that he was a writer. In the cloisters of the minster itself, near to the staircase to the Dean and Chapter Library, is a much more handsome memorial containing a fuller record, though in these days of ignorance of the Classical language its message is closed to most of us. Neither account does justice to the richly diverse character of the man, nor to the role he played over a forty year period in Durham society.

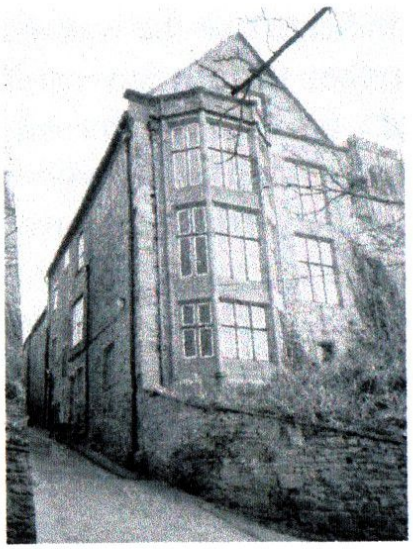
John Meade Falkner was born in the Vale of Pewsey, Wiltshire in 1858. For the first 20 years of his life there are no indications that he travelled outside Wessex. After finishing his school at Marlborough, he became an undergraduate at Hertford College, Oxford. Sometime in spring 1883 - I have found no record of the date - he came north to act as private tutor to the sons of Sir Andrew Noble, soldier, applied scientist and by then already effective head of the great engineering, armaments and shipbuilding business of Armstrong Mitchell and Company of Elswick and Walker on Tyne. Within a few years, having outlived his functions as tutor, Falkner was acting as a secretary in that concern. After that he became in turn Company Secretary, a top salesman, Director, Vice-Chairman and, between 1915 and 1920, Chairman. From 1920 to his retirement in 1920 he retained his seat on Armstrong's Board of Directors.

During the earliest years which he spent in the region Falkner lived as part of the Noble household in Jesmond Dene, Newcastle. Sometime in the early nineties he took lodgings in 42 South Street, Durham. He married, Evelyn, the younger daughter of the distinguished soldier, Sir John Adye, in 1899. In the same year they moved into what had been the home of the headmaster of the old grammar school on Palace Green. As he wrote to a business colleague, Falkner was thrilled by his good fortune - "I have been lucky enough to get what I think is a most delightful old house at Durham... Its name also pleases me - 'The Divinity House' " - Falkner always insisted on **The** Divinity House, though others were apparently not so strict in their usage. He made some alterations,

including the building of the large bay windows overlooking the river. It remained their home for over 30 years. When Falkner first came to Durham the city population was just under 15,000; when his connection with it ended it had increased by less than 1,400. The perspective which his life there provides is of a small town; indeed, it was more confined even than that, being essentially a view only of the old urban core, closely crowded around and dominated by the Cathedral and the castle, much of the latter now colonised by the University of Durham.

Into The Divinity House the Falkners - and essentially John Meade Falkner, for his household was emphatically a male-dominated one - welcomed countless guests, some humble or local, others distinguished visitors from a distance. Throughout the first 20 years there was occasional entertaining connected with the work of Elswick - from Lord Rendel, their distinguished Vice-Chairman, through to the time in July 1918 when Mrs Page, wife of the American Ambassador, Walter Hines Page, stayed with them before launching the aircraft carrier *Eagle*. There were many non-business guests. In the early years Falkner entertained his friends from Burford, the Vicar, Cass and his wife, and a lifetime friend from College days, Charles Lynam. Much later he made a friend of the heir-apparent to the headship of the Bodleian Library, Edmund Craster, who sometimes broke his journey back home to rural Northumberland to spend the night in what Falkner, with not untypical fancy, called his 'prophet's chamber'. Lilias Noble, elder daughter of his old employer and friend, first visited the sights of Durham with him in 1883. Over 40 years later he still found pleasure in a day visit she made from her home in Jesmond Dene. By this time of their lives they set themselves a leisurely programme - "We saw the familiar signs, had lunch, made a joint call on the Dean, came back to the sung service at 4, afterwards had tea, and sped our guest at 5.30". On a Sunday at the beginning of Autumn 1927 he had, as he put it, "that strange man, Arundell Esdaile", Secretary of the British Museum, staying with him. Falkner made an effort to introduce them all to the glories and grandeur of the city, and often to those of the region as well. Most were duly impressed. Esdaile had never been to Durham before, and Falkner was therefore pleased that on that occasion the cathedral "...was looking its very best, with strong lights and shades, a bright sky, and heavy masses of boding clouds racing by at short intervals". Lynam recalled a winter visit, and the 'unforgettable memory' of a walk with his host on the far side of the river - "the magnificent rock pile of the Cathedral and Castle stood out in

the moonlight over the misty riverbed. Together we were filled with the magic of the view, and later we went into the dim, brazier-lit Cathedral, wonderful, past all words."



Throughout the twenties and into the early thirties Falkner was first in semi- then, effectively, in full retirement. During this period, though his interests, contacts and travels took him far beyond, he was deeply involved in Durham life. Recollections of him by others and his own long, informative and elegant letters provide a colourful - and, inevitably with Falkner, an idiosyncratic - perspective on the daily round and the exceptional occasions of this small cathedral city, then as always an apparently quiet refuge in a region, nation and world, each in their various ways in ferment. This perspective seems particularly valuable for this period, when, though many of the old landmarks had been eroded by the Great War, much of the old Durham establishment still remained, and in which, therefore, so many of the ways of life, so much of the protocol and the physical context of both seem so remote from those of our own times.

Falkner was a businessman by employment, but academic and ecclesiastical - the latter word is used advisedly - in his intellectual interests. His wealth was very considerable: to all intents it was made wholly in Armstrongs' employment. At his death his will revealed an estate worth £210,000 net, or equivalent at today's values to roughly £3½ million. In short, he had ample means - to live comfortably, to travel widely in Europe, though especially to Italy, and to collect fine things, including furniture and objets d'art, but specifically books. His more immediate interests he was able to peruse from the exceptionally favourable circumstances of a home lying between the University and the Cathedral, and he was fortunate enough to have the intelligence, knowledge and enthusiasm which gave him ready entrance to the related, though not necessary fully compatible spheres of each. In short, looking outwards from The Divinity House, and largely through his correspondence, one can gain an insight into the character and condition of this city and, within it, of the three estates of church, learning and labour at what was in some ways a particularly interesting stage in the development of each.

A son of an Anglican clergyman, Falkner was widely regarded as a fine Christian gentleman. Of his faith it is not the privilege of any man to make a judgement. On the other hand it seems not to be unfair to him to say that the evidence of his own letters and the comments of others alike indicate that he was more attached to the fabric and the functions rather than to any carefully defined doctrine of the Church of England - his commitment was, as it has been expressively put, 'churchy'. He had long been involved in the worship and other activities of the Cathedral; retirement gave him the leisure to take a fuller and more regular part.

Late in 1921 Falkner was invited to become Honorary Librarian to the Dean and Chapter, and, after he had pointed out that he was frequently absent abroad and was ignorant of the more practical side of librarianship, he accepted. In collaboration with his predecessor, H. D. Hughes, he published a general history of the Library; Falkner's short contribution contained some typically eccentric emphases. In the library he seems to have been willing to undertake practical jobs and to be helpful to newcomers in the interpretation of its treasures. His willingness to help was not conditional on status; those starting research found him prepared to give them his time. Sometimes indeed his enthusiasm seems to have almost overwhelmed them: He also took part in grander Library occasions. When the ill-starred Alphonso XIII paid a visit to the Dean and Chapter Library, Falkner showed him round; it is not known whether the King realised that a decade earlier his gentle, scholarly guide had been one of those involved in the bids to build new dockyards and the nucleus of a modern Spanish navy at Cartagena.

Church music was another of Falkner's interests, and the evidence is that he was extremely knowledgeable in this field as in so many others. His involvement with music in Durham brought him into close contact with Philip Armes, the Cathedral organist, and still more with his successor, Arnold Culley. At one time he spent many Sunday afternoons working in the organ loft with Culley in the compilation of what was eventually published as the Ad Majorem Psalter. His correspondence shows that he delighted to deal at length and with apparent baffling erudition with the finer points - to the outsider it seems the most esoteric points - of church music. On one occasion he wrote a three page letter on 'chants'; it came from the unlikely setting of his office at the Elswick works. In retirement he would regularly cross Palace Green to Cathedral services carrying his own bulky copies of the great classics of church music, a distinguished, tall figure draped in the black, flowing gown and the cap of an

Oxford M.A. and with a characteristic swaying and ever more stooping walk.

To the members of the Choir School he became a father figure - a frequent spectator of their sports on Potters Bank, generous with his time in coaching older members of the school for university entrance examinations in the classics, often a willing support in their first steps towards jobs or careers and always interested in their problems or progress. The younger boys could not fail to be impressed by the various qualities of a man, seemingly to them an elderly and rather otherworldly man, who could obtain permission for them to go round HMS Warspite when she came to the Tyne for repairs, who, when he recognised them in the street, might press an extremely liberal gratuity of half a crown into their hands or, amidst the comforts of his home, entertained them to teas of the sort that not only fill the stomach but for very much longer remain in the memory and stimulate the imagination of a schoolboy.

During his retirement Falkner was a regular worshipper at daily services in the Cathedral. On Sundays he attended matins there, but for evensong often preferred either St. Mary le Bow or St. Margaret's, where he liked the more 'congregational' form of worship. He became a close friend of the Rector at St. Mary's, the Rev. Professor Alfred Guillaume and of his family. The romantic and the fanciful, the incongruous and downright eccentric were never far away from Falkner; they even broke through into his worship. For instance, he once speculated that the slight haze which might be seen in some circumstances in the nave of the cathedral was derived from the incense used there in the Middle Ages and which had impregnated the stone. In St. Mary's he would sit at the back of the church where there was room for him to stretch his long legs. At one point along the rear pew was a tap, at which the vases for the altar were filled. On at least one occasion Falkner found it impossible to resist the temptation to play with this tap. As by now his hands suffered from what was commonly referred to as neuritis, he was unable to stop the resulting flood.

Falkner's most interesting contacts within the ecclesiastical hierarchy were with the Bishop and Dean. He had come to live in the city in the early days of Bishop Wescott and was there through the whole of the episcopate of Handley Moule, with whose family his own had been in apparently close contact in Dorset many years before. With neither of these saintly men are there any relations recorded in his letters, though it must be admitted that his early correspondence has very little in it concerning Durham. To some

extent it may also be that business commitments and preoccupations narrowed his social and intellectual circle at that time. Additionally, however, it seems probable that their particular views of the Faith and of the true life of the Church were not congenial to Falkner. By contrast he became a friend of Dean Hensley Henson, and, then, before Henson returned from Hereford as Bishop, he also became closely associated with the new Dean, James Edward Welldon.

Falkner shared aspects of Hensley Henson's Oxford academic background - though at a less distinguished level of achievement - a number of personal characteristics, the interests of his leisure time and also at least some of his theological positions. They visited each others' homes for dinner, and seem to have talked at length about a wide range of matters, especially in the years when Henson still lived in the Deanery. How fascinating it would be to have a tape recording of those long conversations at the table and continuing afterwards to late in the evening! Apparently the only account of their existence is Henson's diary. The entries there reveal the fascination which, apparently against his better judgement, he felt for the slightly older man. He was impressed by the width of Falkner's range of interests, and by the ability which this gave him to converse on all manner of topics. On the other hand he was shocked by his friend's belief in ecclesiastical authority - "What the church orders or does must not be criticised or resented... He has a positive horror of any attempt to make Christianity reasonable.", he once wrote in amazement. Henson also had doubts about Falkner's faith. Sometimes he found him exasperating. In 1916 he went so far as to write in his diary, 'That queerest of poseurs, Meade Falkner, came in to supper and stayed talking paradoxes until nearly 11 p.m.' When Henson returned as Bishop the contact was resumed, though it was not so close - presumably because of his absence in Bishop Auckland. Even so he still occasionally visited The Divinity House. Falkner responded with a warm regard. In autumn 1921 he reported to John Noble, that, journeying to London on the 'breakfast train' he had met the Bishop as a member of a group of 'earnest' people on the way to the Church Assembly. In such a setting "...it was a relief to find Hensley Henson always ready to appreciate the humorous side". In not unusual colourful style, he went on, "He is a discrete gourmet which is a particularly pleasant thing to come across in these days of pinch-faced prelates who, instead of being real prelates, are just confirming machines hurried from place to place in a presentation motor-car."

Before Henson returned to Durham in 1920 his replacement as Dean had also become a friend. James Edward Welldon was four years older than Falkner. He too was distinguished by his range of intellectual interests and accomplishments, including his brilliant classical scholarship. His career had been a noteworthy one, both academically and ecclesiastically. After a Fellowship and Tutorship at Kings, he was from 1883 to 1898 headmaster successively of Dulwich and of Harrow schools. For the next four years he occupied the key position of Bishop of Calcutta. There his outspoken advocacy of the Christianising of India alienated the Viceroy, Curzon. Taking ill-health as the occasion, Welldon resigned. He kept his title as Rt. Rev. Bishop, though more commonly he was popularly and unkindly referred to as the Dean who had been a Bishop. Welldon was unmarried, and coming to the North in his late maturity, he determined to make his new home into a centre of Durham hospitality. Like Falkner, he was a man of imposing stature, and he combined with this a great personality, mental strength and emotional fervour. On the other hand he could be occasionally impulsive in his public utterances. His intellectual distinction was widely admired, but some felt that, given his abilities, his achievements had been modest. Henson recorded the opinion which Falkner once expressed about this - 'He spoke of the Dean of Durham, for whom he professes a genuine regard. He marvelled at the curiously inadequate effects of Welldon's scholarly attainments. His academic record seemed to promise a refined and keenly sensitive interest in art and scholarship, but his adult career indicated an almost complete lack of such interest. He was just 'an overgrown schoolboy'.' Despite such a hard judgement, Falkner's friendship with Welldon remained close. To the Deanery Falkner took his visitors, there too he regularly had delivered some of the venison, the game or the salmon which John Noble, his closest friend, sent him from his estate of Ardkinglas on the upper shores of Loch Fynne. In summer 1927, while Evelyn Falkner was away visiting a sick sister in London, he invited Welldon to dine with him. The report of that meal which he sent to Noble was in words which vividly recall the episode in his finest novel, *The Nebuly Coat*, when the organist Sharnall entertains the Bishop of Carbury on the day of the confirmation service in Cullerne Minster. "Invited the Dean to a bachelor dinner. I told him to whose munificence the treat was due and we ate with a Deo Gratias on our tongue. He really did enjoy them and there was a touch of the now-vanishing 'selfish culture' of Oxford about the whole proceedings which, with book-shelves and a lamp on the table

for the totality of darkness of the day, produced a proper mis-en-scene."

The other major institutional occupant of Durham's upper town was the University of Durham. By the standards of the cathedral it was a mere stripling, but among English universities its age ranked it behind only Oxford and Cambridge. Like them it was collegiate, with eight distinct residential subdivisions. During the twenties British university education was being expanded rapidly as part of an attempt to make up for the neglect of generations. Durham University was still small, with 1312 students in 1926-7, and many of even this small total were in the science and medical schools located in Armstrong College in Newcastle. Even so growth and change were occurring on scales dramatic by at least the standards of former decades, so that, as Dr. Gibby, who joined the university in 1926, has recently recalled, to those who were living through it, it seemed an age of 'revolution'. Falkner lived close to the centre of the University's life, was a companion of some of its leading figures, but was not a man to whom 'revolution' was ever a congenial thing. [On one occasion he gave not only vivid expression to his opposition to rapid change, but also indicated what sort of change offended him most. He wrote of a business problem "I try to banish it all from my thoughts, as I do Leningrad and China and other things non-nominandum..." Alfred Guillaume, Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages was one of his closest friends. With him, notwith standing his eminence in both academic and church fields, Falkner's relations were far from stiff and formal. He frequently visited the Guillaume household after dinner, and one of the abiding memories of members of that family then too young to be still up at that time of the evening is of the peals of laughter which would come up to them from the conversation below. It is part of the abiding fascination of Falkner, that, erudite and even forbidding as he could sometimes seem, he was capable of an almost schoolboyish sense of fun. Another intimate friend was the overworked University Librarian, Edward Stocks. During the twenties Stocks undertook the task of classifying Falkner's library for him, a job which took some years of spare-time work. At the Librarian's home in Quarry Heads Falkner seems to have been a regular caller, and he was popular there not only with Stocks himself but also with his wife and daughter. Half a century after his death the latter recalled him as '... The outstanding figure and influence of my early years'. Some of the most informal pictures of Falkner which survive are of a visit which he made with the Stocks to the nearby ruins of Finchale abbey. In the University as

in the Cathedral Falkner was given a position, as Honorary Reader in Palaeography; in this instance the duties involved seem to have been slight.

Few of the leaders of the Cathedral's life seem to have had close contacts with the University. Henson was 'Visitor', but is remembered as having little impact apart from exercising his right to appoint two Canon-Professors. One of the ambitions which Welldon brought with him to Durham was the forging of stronger church/university bonds, but he was already too old to carry through this project at all fully. His intellectual powers, which Falkner had been so concerned for, were also overlooked by those in the University. Apart from his letters to Stocks and references to him in his correspondence with John Noble, the University occupies a noticeably smaller space than the Cathedral in the surviving papers of Falkner. Meanwhile he paid regular visits to Oxford, whose university remained central in his affections. It seems probable, and, given his own background, not surprising, that he did not appreciate the part which a provincial university could play in the cultural life and the further economic development of an old industrial region. One, though perhaps minor, theme connected with the university buildings on Palace Green illustrates some of Falkner's interests and prejudices. He had always been ready to respond to and often to expostulate about the built environment - at least in 'pretty', rural England; there is no evidence that he did other than placidly accept the squalor of the Scotswood Road. As early as the mid 90s, in his *Handbook to Oxfordshire* he had expressed vivid opinions of the quality of the restoration of countless parish churches, and of the architectural styles of the collegiate buildings of Oxford. His colourful turn of phrase did not desert him in the North East - it is said that he once described the pillars which edge the Cathedral organ as reminding him of 'rolls of linoleum'. Naturally his lively concern was aroused by the building plans of the University, especially when they affected areas so near to his home. Above all he was interested in the designs of W.D. Caroe for the new entrance to the University Library and for the Pemberton Building. In May 1923 he wrote to Noble that he was due to meet Caroe at dinner and to "... 'talk round' the north porch". A few months later he seemed to be willing to be more open minded - "Architecture is indeed a perilous profession. Unless you do something 'original', everybody says that you have no guts, and if you do something original, everybody conspires to abuse." Notwithstanding the liberality of that statement, one wonders what his reaction would have been to the

university buildings which in recent years have been erected on what was once his garden just across Windy gap from The Divinity House.

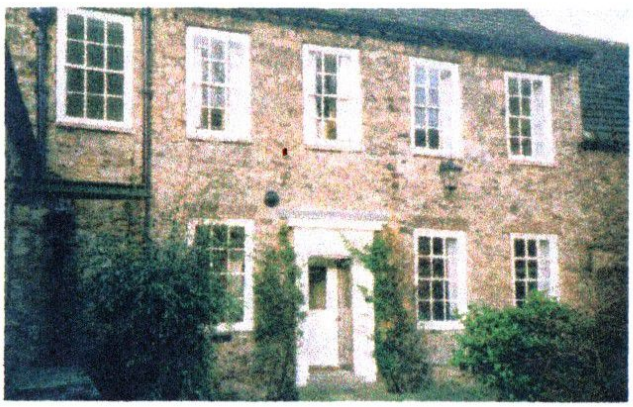
The great Cathedral, the expanding University and the housing, shops and offices lining the streets which made their curving way to them from the bridges, stood up above the mundane preoccupations of the rest of the town. Falkner himself once used the word 'acropolis' to describe the situation of the old core of the city. It was symbolic of his perception of the separation of two worlds, one cultured, reasonably comfortable and sheltered from most of the harshness of the workaday routine, the other, in material terms at least, poor at the best of times, and in the twenties blighted by chronic depression in the basic trades on which its growth had depended. Pits, steelworks and shipworks were already falling and being abandoned. Were such problems a matter for the attention of church or of higher education? Some within the University were soon to be involved in the study of the crisis in the regional economy. Those responsible for the preparation of the twelve major reports for the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship held in Birmingham in 1924 thought that the Church also should be concerned. For men like William Temple, at that time Bishop of Manchester, or Studdert Kennedy, now blazing to his untimely end, there was again no doubt that these were appropriate spiritual concerns. More than a generation earlier Westcott, saint and scholar though he was, had earned the title of the miners' bishop by the practical help he gave in resolving labour disputes and his perennial interest in the welfare of the working man. There was more ambivalence in the present Durham hierarchy. Henson wrote disparagingly of the efforts of Harold Begbie and other Christian Socialists to improve the lot of the workers, arguing that they were ignorant of economic realities and even that Christian principles had no relevance over much of the field of commerce and business. Not surprisingly his opinions did not make him popular with the mining community. In July 1925, on the day of the Miners' Gala, Welldon, who still dressed as a bishop, was severely jostled by a group of men walking alongside the Wear and was almost rolled into the river. It is said that he went so far as to remark, ruefully, 'They mistook me for Hensley Henson'. After changing his clothes, Welldon preached to the men a sermon 'full of kindliness'.

Falkner never expressed interest in or concern for working men as a group, although there is no reason to suppose that he was hard in his relations with individuals. More likely there was simply an unbridgeable gap of incomprehension between him and the hopes,

fears and preoccupations of the common man. This was suggested by various of his responses to the economic circumstances. Some of these reactions were in themselves trivial enough, but revealing. By autumn 1921 Britain was already in the midst of deep economic distress as she plunged into the first post-war depression. At this time, and presumably influenced by the crisis, the North Eastern Railway reduced its fares. Falkner referred to this when writing to John Noble - "The breakfast train has been [for me] an excellent institution but now they have reduced the price and I am not at all sure that it will maintain its standard. Last Monday kippers and sausages had fallen off, and if they have taken sixpence off the price they have taken eighteenpence off the quality." A letter of New Year's Day 1923 not only showed the finesse with which he handled words and his affection for his own snugly sheltered environment but also his insulation, even his alienation from the wider world - "Last night we had the newly-hung peal in active service, though there was some hitch in ringing the muffle and so it was omitted. But it sounded very soft, and half-muffled with a sordino of a moon-lit fog. I heard it to perfection, rejoicing like the saints in my bed, and on this acropolis no sounds of brawling reached us from the town." Three years later he was gradually severing his contacts with Armstrong Whitworth. A practical aspect of this was that he spent days at Elswick, going slowly through his papers and destroying them. [In the course of that process there was lost forever an invaluable sidelight on much of the industrial, military and political history of almost half a century.] At the same time he was carrying on a correspondence in an effort to hold on to the pension, which he had been given in 1920 when he retired as Chairman, and which Armstrong's rationalising new management wished - and eventually succeeded in abolishing. He put up a fight for his own interests, expressed some concern for the revival of the company's fortunes but, as far as the surviving letters show, never once referred to the desperate plight of the men laid off or on short time, those desperate thousands at home or standing forlorn in the drab streets of Elswick, Scotswood and Benwell or in the company's other main areas of activity around Walker or in the Openshaw district of Manchester.

Even in his refuge in Durham the outside world of troubles occasionally impinged on Falkner's life. When it did he either resisted it or looked at it from an unselfconscious, but none the less self-centred point of view. The short General Strike and still more the seven month long miners' strike of 1926 inevitably made an impact in a town set in the centre of a major coalfield. Late in June,

writing to John Noble, Falkner looked on the brighter side as seen from the perspective of Palace Green - "Up in this place, owing to the strike, there is for the present an eternal Sabbath quiet, which is not at all uncongenial to me. There is also a strangely clear atmosphere, which continually makes me forget my spectacles, and to do well without them, when they are forgotten. I hope it may not be the hush before a storm." By mid-August, with the miners still holding out and suffering all the privations of a lengthening strike, Falkner was enjoying the comforts derived from the shooting season, though there was at least some sign of a disturbed conscience. He wrote to thank John Noble for a brace of grouse which had given the ".. A pleasant feeling of opulence at our Sunday dinner'. But - 'At the same time I had a reproachful feeling that I was 'eating money', having just been told that grouse had sold in London on the evening of the twelfth at three guineas a brace. But, in spite of so serious a drawback, we very much enjoyed the grouse; the first grouse is like the first glass of champagne, nothing that follows after is quite so good."



The Divinity House

By the twenties, after living in Durham for thirty years, Falkner was one of those who had been longest resident in the upper parts of the city. He was firmly associated with and indeed to some extent a co-opted member of the society of both Cathedral and University. His highly distinctive figure had become one of the most familiar sights of Palace Green and of the nearby streets. This son of Wessex had long ago become warmly wedded to the life of the northern cathedral city. He still made trips abroad, and there were visits south to escape the winter, in the main to Weymouth and to Bath. More immediately to hand were those occasions - not apparently particularly taxing - which combined business and pleasure, the Tyneside meetings of the Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead Gas Company and the Newcastle and Gateshead Water Company. The latter, to his apparent almost childlike delight, occasionally took him into the peaceful attractions of rural Northum- berland to the company's Catcleugh reservoir. But from all these visits he returned, thankfully, to Durham, and from the bustle of the station and the noise and dirt

of the lower town went on to his retreat on the rock above. In these ways, actively and happily, the years went by and Falkner reached and passed his seventieth birthday. He had always been something of a hypochondriac - the descriptions contained in the letters written during his stay in a clinic in Weymouth in 1905, when he was only in his mid-forties are already full and colourful in their medical details. In retirement he began to be afflicted by a host of complaints - in autumn 1927 he recorded that a combination of heart trouble, secondary bronchitis and eczema 'has begun to hobble me in the old fashion'. There were visits to take the waters in Bath, periods of dependence on the regular services of a nurse and so on. The result of all this was that he aged rapidly. His hair was now grey and receding, though he still had dark, bushy eyebrows, shading eyes which were intense, brown and full of extreme melancholy. He was usually dressed in dark and rather heavy tweeds, with a high cut coat and waistcoat, a butterfly collar and a dark tie. His once tall figure was now bowed and the clothes seemed to hang in folds on his huge frame beneath. One who knew him only at this stage of his life met him walking on Palace Green, supported by a helper on either side, and described him as 'an absolute giant in ruins'. Edmund Craster was more eloquent - "Petrified he would have made a magnificent gargoyle - grotesque, benevolent and of great dignity."

Through to the end of 1931, Falkner kept up his correspondence with friends. By this time Britain's chronic industrial depression of the twenties had passed over into the unprecedented depths of the great slump. To all intents it seems to have passed Falkner by, and when, at this time, he did make one reference to workers it was as uncomprehending as ever of their real plight, though it suggests that he had attended worship with them - "It has been Miners' Demonstration here today with a steady downpour from morning to night; but rain and swamps of mud, and reputed shortness of money seemed to have little effect, and I never saw the cathedral so full before, though the seating capacity has been great increased." In Autumn 1931 he spent some time in Bath and then went to the Royal Marine Hotel on the waterfront in Ventnor. He was there over Christmas. At that time he became seriously ill. Eventually he recovered enough to convalesce in Weymouth. Sometime during June 1932 he returned home to Durham. On Thursday 30 June, after what seems to have been a long interval, Hensley Henson saw him again. He recorded the visit in his diary - "I called at Divinity House and found at home both Meade Falkner and his wife. Both looked extremely ill. He is a complete wreck and has a

moribund aspect and manner. I was painfully impressed." During the following weeks Falkner's condition worsened, so that he seemed for a time to hover between life and death. On Thursday 21 July Henson made enquiries about him and the reports seemed favourable: on the following night he died. He was cremated at Darlington and on 27 July his ashes were interred at Burford, where, over many years, he had played a large part in the embellishment of the parish church.

Falkner was warmly remembered by his Durham friends. At morning service on Sunday 24 July, Arnold Culley played the Dead March from Saul and Canon Lillingston spoke of Falkner's life among them. "We think of John Meade Falkner with deep gratitude for his devoted services. He had many interests in life, but, unless I am much mistaken, his chief love, certainly in his latter years, was this Cathedral and our Library, where he spent nearly all his time when resident in Durham. I use a commonplace, but I use it in no common way, when I say that it was a pleasure and a privilege to know him and to talk to him. Many of us here must feel that we have lost a very real and dear friend, with tastes and qualities that are not met with every day. Personally, I owe him not a little for various acts of kindness and words of encouragement, and many of us will say 'Thank God' for such a good and faithful man." Three days later a Memorial Service was held in the Cathedral to coincide with the interment of the ashes in Burford. Though the Newcastle Journal reported it the next day as an 'impressive memorial service', Henson's diary entry recorded - 'There was not a large gathering'.

Within a few months, and in accordance with Falkner's will, many of the fine contents of The Divinity House were dispersed by sale. The house itself was also sold. Eventually it was occupied by the University's Department of Music. Evelyn Falkner moved to London, where she died in 1940. In these ways there passed from the townscape and the everyday society of Durham one who had been a prominent part of both for almost two generations, and who had been an observant if idiosyncratic recorder of the city's life. Even more eloquent of his significance is the fact that, more than half a century further on, he is still remembered by some as a man whose distinctive personality was stamped on their memory at an impressionable age. In this sense, and much more vividly than in memorial plaques, however expansive and laudatory, it is perhaps not altogether fanciful to claim that, almost one hundred years since he came to live in the city, John Meade Falkner still has a part in the Durham scene.