

The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999

Newsletter No. 57

2018 SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MEMBERSHIP

There are just **five members** who have not paid this year's Sub. I am sure this is an oversight (at least, I hope so). I will send a gentle reminder with this Newsletter. It is still **only £10**.

ALAN BELL

I am very sorry to report that one of our first members (he joined on 11th May 1999) has passed away. After working with the National Library of Scotland, Alan became Rhodes House Librarian in Oxford, before moving on to be Librarian of the London Library. He retired to Edinburgh but came to Society meetings in Burford and Durham. He edited the Tragara Press edition of JMF's short story *A Midsummer Night's Marriage* in 1977 – resurrected from the *National Review* of August 1896. Alan's *Introduction* was a succinct commentary on Falkner's life and career.

NEW MEMBER

Antony (Tony) Clare, who lives in Ilkeston, Derbyshire, joined us in mid-January. He wrote: *When I was at School we read Moonfleet and I loved it. At the same time it was on TV. Having re-read the book, I wanted to re-watch the film and found that only the JMF society had a copy. I obtained a copy and re-watched; brilliant! Then through chatting to JMFS members I read his other books, which I also enjoyed. After that and through chatting with other members, thought, yes would be a lovely idea, to join the society. With reading the Journal, I'm happy to have done so and look forward to maybe meeting up with members.* We extend to him our usual warm welcome.

PS Thanks to **George Robson**, members can still purchase DVDs of the BBC production.

THE DORCAS SOCIETY

Miss Euphemia Joliffe devoted Saturday afternoons to St. Sepulchre's Dorcas Society. The meetings were held in the classroom of the Girls' National School, and there a band of devoted females gathered week by week to make garments for the poor.

The Nebuly Coat, chapter V11.

Here, and elsewhere in the novel, the St. Sepulchre's Dorcas Society features. But what is a Dorcas Society and what are its origins?

The Bible's Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9, includes an account of Peter's visit to the town of Joppa. Near the town lived a certain disciple named Tabitha which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms deeds. The chapter goes on to describe how Dorcas fell ill and died, after which two men set out to bring Peter to her house. Peter was told

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of Dorcas' great goodness and shown some of the clothing she had made to distribute to the poor and needy.

Peter asked to be left alone with Dorcas' body. He prayed and restored her to life. News of this spread around the district and many believed in the Lord. Dorcas became greatly respected among the people of Joppa, but she remained oblivious to the consequences of her magnificent life.

Many women throughout history have sought to emulate her by establishing Dorcas Societies that hold humanitarian ideals, engage in various relief activities and whose sole purpose is doing good. Most Dorcas Societies are associated with churches, as that at St. Sepulcre's.

George Robson

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Further to the article *Three Little Maids* in last July's Journal, it is of interest to note that JMF wrote again to his godchild, Rosemary Noble, on **15th May 1918**. One needs to be reminded that he was Chairman of a great armaments firm in the throws of the Great War.

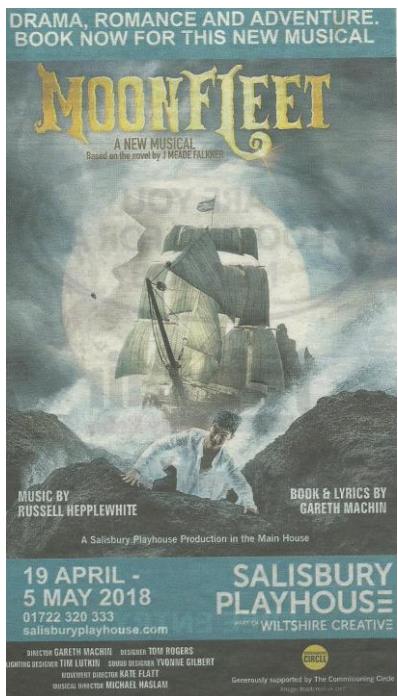
I must begin a letter to you. I don't know when I shall finish it because (i) I am – very naughtily – writing at Elswick, and people dash in every minute and (ii) an affliction has fallen upon me in the shape of Writer's cramp which Walter Scott would call Scrivener's Palsy. But whatever name is given it, it is simply an unmitigated nuisance and has taken away one of my greatest pleasures – writing...

...I love getting letters from you, but this last letter was more than usually pleasing...there was in it the sprig of rosemary, redolent of the Spring and – of you. I wonder why they call it sea-dew, rosée de mer. Was it because it grows so luxuriantly on the Mediterranean coast, and in the little coast-wise islands with the tamarisk. How sweetly aromatic it is! "The scent of thy garments is as the scent of Lebanon", and the scent of rosemary is not altogether unlike the cedars. A week or two ago I was in Somerset bicycling just from church to church (for the churches down there are very fine) and everywhere in cottage-gardens was the rosemary...

...I seem to hear the curlews even in these Elswick shops. You mustn't think by the way that there is no romance in Elswick – There is a good deal of romance – only I dare say one must be middle-aged before one can perceive it! One needs must be bred up in Elswick for it to look anything but black and smoky.

Falkner finishes by talking about the Ice Saints of May which heralded a touch of frost. Who else could write such a charming letter – and in the midst of War!

"MOONFLEET" – A NEW MUSICAL



The above poster, reproduced in a local Newspaper, was kindly sent to me by member **Celia Grover**. There was also a short write-up about the forthcoming production, which I partly reproduce:

Set amongst the cliffs, caves and downs of 18th century Dorset, Moonfleet is the story of a young man's search for adventure and fulfilment. Haunted by the ghost of the marauding pirate Blackbeard, Moonfleet is a village of intrigue and drama where shadowy smugglers lurk.

Against this backdrop, young orphan John Trenchard dreams of Blackbeard's long-lost treasure and the wealth and happiness it could bring.

There have been several **Reviews** of the production. I reproduce two very different ones below.

Mark Shenton is associate editor of *The Stage*

This new musical based on J Meade Falkner's melodramatic Victorian 1898 novel, Moonfleet is a lumpen, deadly earnest affair.

The story swirls with derring-do. John, a 16-year-old orphan, stumbles upon a smuggling ring as he searches for a lost diamond. But the show itself is more cheesy costume jewellery than 24-carat gold.

It's not the first time it has been adapted for the stage. Troubadour Chris De Burgh based a 2010 album on the novel. This version boasts a new score by Russell Hepplewhite, best known for writing contemporary operas for young audiences and choral work.

Set to clunky rhyming verse by Gareth Machin, who has also adapted the book into stodgy drama as well as directing, it's a relentlessly busy production that manages to frequently feel simultaneously convoluted and shapeless. While indulging in some of the worst excesses of the through-sung British musicals of the 1980s, it also seems irredeemably old-fashioned, as characters step out of the narrative to sing of their emotional states, slowing down the action instead of advancing the plot.

Machin's atmospherically murky staging, with Tim Lutkin's lighting frequently pouring out haze, is at least handsomely designed with Tom Rogers' wood-slatted set evocative of a ship. A game cast use robust voices to animate characters that are little more than dramatic clichés. Ryan Heenan is appealing as the ardent youthful hero, but Phantom of the Opera veteran Earl Carpenter can only simmer malevolently as the local magistrate whose daughter young John falls in love with.

Southern Daily Echo - Brendan McCusker

This is a brand new musical version of John Meade Falkner's fascinating, thrilling, classic novel, first published in 1898.

Set in 1757 and based around the atmospheric coastal village of Moonfleet in Dorset, the exciting action also moves to the Isle of Wight and Holland. This is the story of teenage orphan John Trenchard – beautifully played by Ryan Heenan – and his search for adventure, romance and fulfilment.

The stunning stage set – almost inevitable now with the Playhouse – is darkly atmospheric, creatively adroit, and compellingly effective. Brilliant Musical Director Michael Haslam leads a wonderful live orchestra including woodwind, cello, keyboards, and percussion.

The brand new score with swirling music by Russell Hepplewhite and tight intelligent lyrics by Gareth Machin drive the dramatic storytelling.

Among ten superb vocalists, Ashley Mercer as Blackbeard excels through his deep tones and sheer dramatic presence. Simon Butteriss delivers an appropriately serious Reverend Glennie and a mesmerising Aldobrand in the Dutch diamond scene.

Particularly compelling is the scary church crypt scene with the smugglers' illegal contraband lurking beneath the foggy floorboards.

The dangerously deep well in Carisbrooke Castle where young John searches for Blackbeard's hidden treasure, the genuinely horrific hot branding scene, and the scarily convincing shipwreck are unforgettable.

This fantastic new production may be set for a glittering future in British theatre – enjoy it in Salisbury while you can. Moonfleet runs until May 5, matinees Thursday and Saturday.

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Best Wishes

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