

Olivet to Calvary

John H. Maunder (1858-1920)

John Henry Maunder was an English composer and organist who today is best remembered for the cantata *Olivet to Calvary*.

Maunder was born in Chelsea and studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He was organist at St Matthew's, Sydenham (1876-7) and St Paul's, Forest Hill (1878-9), as well as churches in Blackheath and Sutton. He accompanied concerts in the Albert Hall and was conductor of the Civil Service Vocal Union from 1881. He also trained the choir for Henry Irving's original production of Faust at the Lyceum Theatre in 1887.

As a composer, Maunder wrote a large number of pieces for church use, including anthems, hymns, cantatas and services. He also composed a number of secular songs, instrumental pieces and two operettas. His music was widely performed and admired in its day, but is strongly characteristic of the Victorian era and fell out of fashion during the course of 20th century.

In 1922, a Maunder-supporter contributed the following to *The New Music Review* in America:

"An enthusiastic choirmaster once declared that the organists and choristers of the English-speaking world should unite to raise a monument to J. H. Maunder as a great benefactor of the human race in general and of church musicians in particular... He combined in his voluminous writings for the church two factors which are both most highly to be commended and yet which are seldom found in the same composer: a good musical style and great technical facility. The music of Maunder is always well-written and thoroughly musical and devotional in feeling, and yet it is always easy to sing. Any amateur parish choir can attempt it, and yet it is worth the attention of even the best choral organizations. There is always a fresh and apparently inexhaustible flow of melodic ideas and the harmonic fabric is always full of interest and color and yet never unduly complicated."

More recently, Phillip Tolley wrote the following rather more balanced view on the website of *British Choirs on the Net*:

"*Olivet to Calvary* is a fine example of music written for the Late Victorian/early Edwardian Anglican church. Considered by some to be over sentimental by modern tastes, it contains a sincerity and dedication which, despite being a definite product of its time, has carried the piece through to the modern era."

The words of *Olivet to Calvary* were written by Shapcott Wensley, the pseudonym of English author and poet, Henry Shapcott Bunce (1854-1917). Bunce was by profession a clerk in a soap works, but also seems to have been something of a lyric and libretto 'hack' for Novello the music publisher. His work was used by several composers, including Edward Elgar, Reginald Somerville and of course, J.H. Maunder.