



This Tune Went Round the World

A plaque in memory of Rimington-born musician and hymn-writer Francis Duckworth, who was born on Christmas Day, 1862, has been placed over the doorway of the former Methodist Chapel in the village. The plaque was commissioned by the local Women's Institute. Duckworth's hymn-tune *Rimington* has been sung in every land.

UNCLE John entered Robert Duckworth's grocery shop at Stopper Lane, near Pendle Hill, with his weekly farm produce: butter and eggs. He lived at "Lower Gills," a small-holding near the village. At this period—a century ago—it was commonplace for a farmer to deliver produce and at the same time buy those goods he could not produce at home.

When Uncle John ordered some groceries, young Francis Duckworth—the son of Robert—hastened to make up the order. The Duckworth family had moved to Stopper Lane from the village of Rimington, where Francis was born on Christmas Day, 1862. It was at Stopper Lane that his mother had died, which meant that at 12 years of age he had to leave school and help out in the business.

Uncle John, a devout Wesleyan Methodist, was also a cellist of repute. At that time an orchestra accompanied the hymn-singing at the weekly services. Stopper Lane chapel had become the musical centre of the district.

John began to debate with others in the shop the merits of hymn-writers, expressing a love for the older generation. Isaac Watts was the finest, he said. Raising his hands with a flourish, he fervently recited a line from a Watts's hymn: "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun!" He repeated the last three words with a special emphasis.

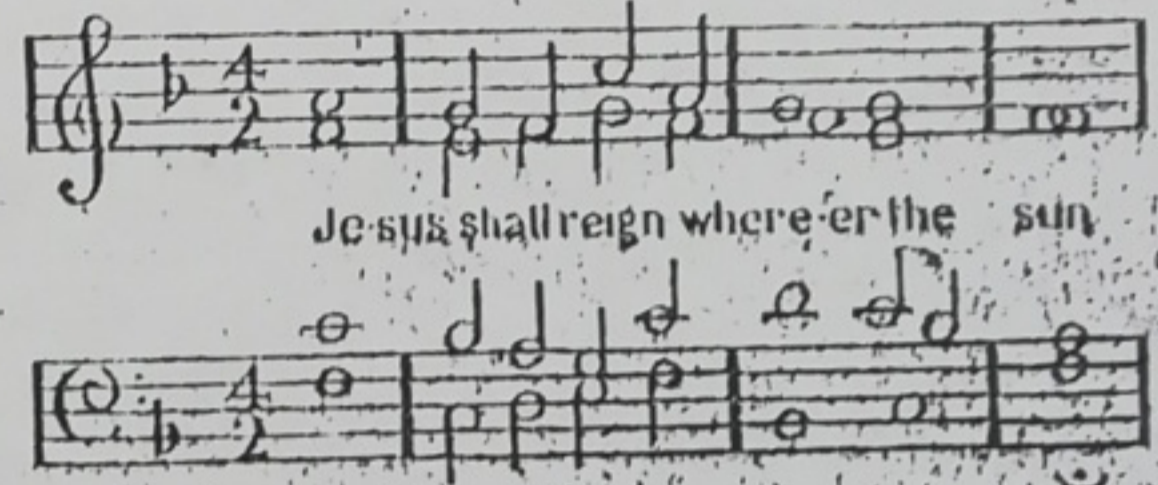
"Ah! Watts had the conception; he said more in one line than a lot of them say in a whole hymn," declared Uncle John. Francis Duckworth never forget the look

on his face. "It made such an impression on my youthful mind—that there and then I resolved that if ever I composed a tune it would be to Dr. Watts's great words," he was later to recall. The tune would be *Rimington*.

NOT for 30 years would the ambition be realised. After a quarter's music lessons—for which father paid 10 shillings—Francis began to play the new organ at Stopper Lane, his repertoire consisting of only four tunes.

It was a time of great social changes. The growing towns of the Lancashire cotton belt attracted individuals and families from the villages. Caleb and Joshua Duckworth, brothers of Francis, left Stopper Lane for Colne, where they served their time as drysalers.

Francis, aged 20, moved to Burnley to work for a cousin who was a tobacconist, and then he went to Colne. For six years he worked for his brother Joshua in the printing business.



The opening bars of "Rimington" are inscribed on Duckworth's tombstone at Gisburn.

The memory of early days in a village grocer's shop was so pleasant he took a grocery business in Market Street in 1889. He expanded it until he was a prominent wholesaler with good connections in Colne, Barnoldswick, Farby, Trawden and Barrowford.

Another early interest that endured was music. He was largely self-trained. A little time after his arrival in Colne, he was appointed deputy organist and later organist at the Albert Road church; when he resigned in 1929 he reversed the normal circumstances and, instead of accepting a gift, he made a handsome donation to the church.

He acquired a Mustel organ to further his musical interests. When he visited the premises of a London firm which announced there was a Mustel for sale, he was shown round by an old man who drew up a stool and began to extemporise. The elderly man was still playing an hour later when two strangers entered the room. One of them, by coincidence, was Monsieur Mustel, who was on his first visit to England.

THE hymn tune *Rimington* was published in 1904 and sung for the first time at the Colne Whitsuntide processions. The hymn was an immediate success. Francis

Duckworth lived to see it become a world-wide favourite, for Dr. Watts's "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun" commended it to the missionary societies. The London Missionary Society even included *Rimington* in a hymnal of the Sinebele language for the use of tribes in South Africa.

The tune came in the heyday of religious gatherings, being sung at Halifax by 40,000 people and at Nelson by a crowd of 20,000. It became a special favourite with bandsmen and, recorded many times (once by Besses o' th' Bārn), it featured in some early broadcasts.

Francis Duckworth is now associated with a single hymn tune, though he wrote many musical works, some of them appearing in *The Rimington Hymnal*. Contemporaries were Handel Parker of Shipley, who wrote *Deep Harmony*, and Robert S. Thornton, of Skipton, composer of *Adoration*, a setting of "Sun of my soul thou saviour dear."

Francis Duckworth died at his home in Colne in 1941 and was buried in the Anglican churchyard nearest his beloved Rimington, that of St. Mary the Virgin, Gisburn. The music of *Rimington* was inscribed on his tombstone.

W. R. Mitchell