

Cryer, 2004

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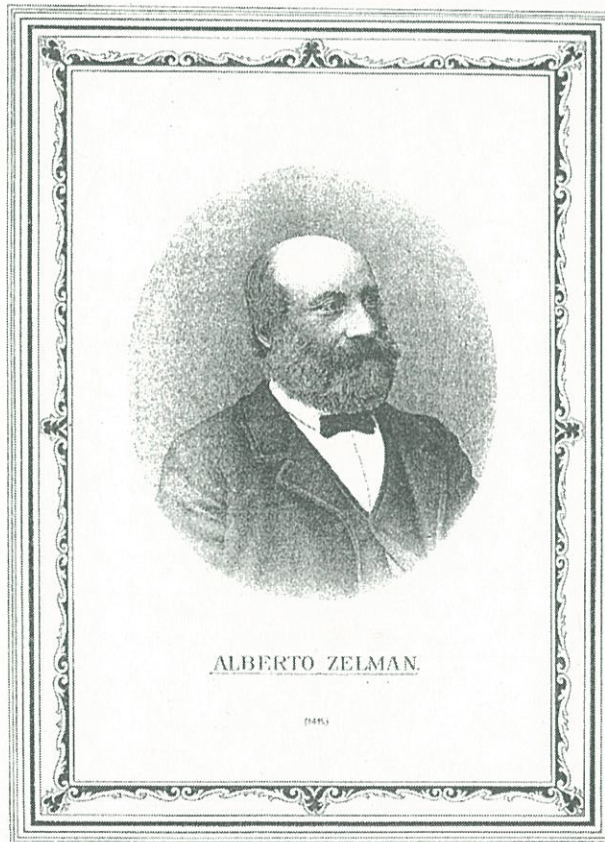
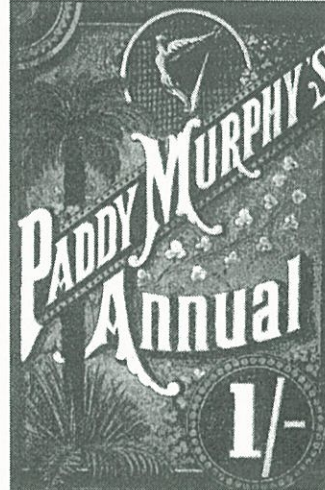
THE FERNLANDERS: BRACKEN AND WOODS 35

plus comment on fashion, competitions, poetry and humour – the mixture was lively.

Bracken had produced a volume of poetry in 1871 and continued to publish poems, some under his own name and some under the pseudonym 'Paddy Murphy'. Written in deliberate 'Irish speak', the Paddy Murphy pieces introduced New Zealand to the Irish phrase 'be the hokey' which, with some modification, survived to become famous 100 years later on New Zealand radio and television as Selwyn Toogood's signature expression, 'by hokey'.

Bracken was quick to contribute to, and encourage loyalties to, local scene and to the nation in general. Distant Britain was not eschewed, but he was also alert to any opportunity of establishing respect for the new homeland. In 1876 he published a poem of his own that would put him into the history books and eventually connect him with the Olympic prizewinners' podium. Readers of the *Saturday Advertiser* first saw the poem in July of that year, under the title 'God Defend New Zealand – a National hymn'. Its sub-heading proclaimed that 'National songs, ballads and hymns have a tendency to elevate the character of a people and keep alive the patriotism in their breasts'.

Although he had confidence in his own voice, Bracken knew (possibly from his Irish heritage) that a poem impinges itself more effectively on to people's minds if it is attached to a good tune. So, along with the five verses, was the announcement of a competition to find a tune to which they could be sung. The prize would be 10 guineas, an attractive amount in 1876. Bracken appointed an agent in Melbourne to organise judging of the entries. The man he chose, George Musgrove, was a knowledgeable operator (he later became concert manager for Dame Nellie Melba) who



Herr Alberto Zelman, the Melbourne musician who organised the judging of submitted tunes for the poem 'God Defend New Zealand'.

contacted a Melbourne-based musician of good reputation, Alberto Zelman. Initially Zelman was unwilling to take on such a responsibility but, having located two other worthy souls to share the decision (Herr Siede and Herr Zeplin), he agreed that the three would judge the entries.

In the Otago town of Lawrence, 96 kilometres from Dunedin, lived John Joseph Woods, the head teacher of the local Catholic school. Born in Tasmania in 1849, Woods had seven brothers and seven sisters. He had come to New Zealand as a young man, arriving on the West Coast, and then working briefly in Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin and Invercargill. He had accumulated eight years of experience as a teacher, and while teaching in Invercargill, he applied for, and was appointed to, the Lawrence job. In 1874 he took up his duties there as head teacher at St Patrick's School, and also became choirmaster at the local Catholic church. Teaching with him was Harriet Conway (née Plunkett) from an Irish family, a widow with two sons, and a romance grew between them. Within a year of arriving in Lawrence, Woods married Harriet. A keen musician, reputed to be competent on 12 different instruments, Woods was also a capable singer: he sang a solo at his own wedding service accompanied by his very new wife on the harmonium.

It was a cold midwinter night when the mail coach arrived at Lawrence, and Woods collected his letters. In the *Saturday Advertiser* he saw the announcement that a tune was being sought for the published verses and went straight to his piano. Years later, in a letter to A. H. Reed, Woods described what happened: 'On reading the beautiful and appealing words, I immediately felt like one inspired ... I set to work instant and never left my seat 'til the music was finished late on in the night.'⁶ Woods dispatched his entry, hiding somewhat shyly under the nom-de-plume 'Orpheus'. At the *Saturday Advertiser* office, entries arrived from 11 other hopefuls, and eventually all 12 offerings were sent to Melbourne. Each of the

From *The Lode of Faith*
magazine, St Patrick's Church,
Lawrence

One morning in Sept 1874, the bells in the tower of St. Patrick's church-school pealed out more merrily than usual. They announced a wedding that must be rare in the annals of any parish school. Mr. John J. Woods the head-teacher, was about to wed Mrs. Conway, a widow, the assistant teacher. The bridesmaids were Misses Topsy and Tilly Wolfe.

Thomas Bracken was not a supporter of women's suffrage. Here is part of his long poem entitled 'Women's Rights', from 1890:

*Some people think that women should
Compete in life's swift race
And be by man in privilege,
Position, power and place.
I find that I cannot agree
With those progressive lights;
I'll tell you what appear to me
To be fair women's rights.
When passion's young ecstatic fire
First kindles in our veins,
Tis woman's right to bind our hearts
In Cupid's rosy chains.
She wields a queenly sceptre then
Which we must needs obey
We're building castles in the night
And dreaming all the day.*

GOD DEFEND NEW ZEALAND



*'The fact that we are
not buried, is no proof
that we are alive.'*

THOMAS BRACKEN

ON CHRISTMAS DAY 1876 in Dunedin's Queens Theatre, the new Bracken/Woods song had its first public performance, by the Lydia Howarde Burlesque and Opera Bouffe Troupe. The Dunedin Royal Artillery Band accompanied 16 soloists and chorus and the performance was counted to be a great success.

The competition's rules had assigned the total copyright of 'God Defend New Zealand' to the *Saturday Advertiser*. But within a year Bracken relinquished the complete copyright (words and music) to Woods. In the same year, 1877, sheet music of the song was beautifully printed and made available. Its cover announced that the song was dedicated 'by permission' to the Governor of New Zealand, the Marquis of Normanby – and, with absolutely no authority, proclaimed it to be New Zealand's 'national anthem'. Which simply wasn't true.

Any criticism concerning the original sheet music was focused on another aspect: only Bracken's portrait was featured. The *Tuapeka Times*, in Woods' home territory, was alarmed that the composer's portrait did not appear and pointed out that 'As it stands, the inference is that the words are superior to the music, whereas they should be looked on in their wedded form as of equal merit.' That first edition had some other mistakes. 'Freedom' cropped up instead of 'free land' and 'enemies' wasn't spelt correctly. The first edition of the sheet music is now very

The council listened to all this, and after deliberation voted unanimously to recommend that the government adopt 'God Defend New Zealand' as a 'national song', preferably always to be sung straight after 'God Save the King'.

But the matter of legal copyright raised its head. Bracken had died in 1898 so the copyright on the words would expire in 1948 (50 years after the author's death) but Woods died in 1934 so the copyright on the tune would not expire until 1984. As the copyright owners, Begg's could legally have levied a charge each time the song was performed in public. Determined that the song should belong to the nation, rather than a business firm, McDermott maintained: 'It is unthinkable that a country's national song or national anthem be subject to performing rights - the Government must buy the copyright'.⁵

Negotiations began and in 1939 a contract was drawn up between Begg's and His Majesty the King and on 1 May 1940 W. E. (Bill) Parry, Minister of Internal Affairs, announced that the copyright for words and music of 'God Defend New Zealand' had been purchased in the name of the New Zealand government for a fee of £100. The document of agreement specified 'words and music'. This appears to have been a safety measure. Bracken had assigned the *full* copyright to Woods in 1877 so the wording eliminated any possibility of a problem over the words in the eight years left before 1948.

The New Zealand government had made 'God Defend New Zealand' available to all New Zealanders with no further payment of performance royalties and it could henceforth be freely used as New Zealand's national song or hymn, but not its anthem. 'I desire,' said Bill Parry, 'to remove any misconception which may exist that it is intended in any way to supplant the national anthem as the loyal anthem of the people.'⁶ James McDermott rounded off his long campaign with a graceful letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs to 'thank the Government for this beautiful gift to the nation'.⁷

New Zealand's parliamentary and local government structure had accepted Britain's quite recent 'tradition' that 'God Save the Queen' was an official national anthem - both of the homeland and of the colony. ('God Save the Queen's formal association with the British monarchy had only occurred 15 years before the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.) But no legislation in either country decreed this and the performance and status of the

Looking back, Olympic gold medallist Peter Snell is somewhat sceptical about 'God Save the Queen' still being used in 1960: 'In various talks I gave after the Olympic events I mentioned the anthem and made the point that the Brits were so lean on gold medals that they had to accept the fact that as far as getting the anthem some exposure in the main stadium the antipodeans were carrying the day.'

specifically for New Zealand citizens (the Queen's Service Medal and the Queen's Service Order), a local national anthem could be seen as a logical extension of New Zealand's becoming a truly Independent Sovereign Realm (which is what New Zealand now is - a separate kingdom).

On 17 November 1977, a supplement to the *New Zealand Gazette* announced:

With the consent of Her Majesty the Queen it is hereby announced that Government has decided that the national anthems of New Zealand shall be the traditional anthem 'God Save the Queen' and the poem 'God Defend New Zealand', written by Thomas Bracken, as set to music by John Joseph Woods, both being of equal status as national anthems appropriate to the occasion.

By way of explanation the Minister for Internal Affairs, Alan Highet, added that 'God Save the Queen' was required if the Queen or her representative were present but if the national identity of New Zealand was to be stressed, 'God Defend New Zealand' would be especially appropriate. Both anthems could be presented at the same occasion, but usually one or the other would be performed. The announcement did not cause any stir, mainly because most people thought it had already happened years before. But the fact was that in 1977 New Zealand finally gained a genuine national anthem which actually identifies this country and no other. The Jaycees were absolutely right: the new national anthem does at least mention the country's name.

Curiously, almost from the moment it became an official anthem, 'God Defend New Zealand' began a downward slide in the public's respect.