

**FRANCIS THOMPSON, THE
PRESTON-BORN
POET, WITH NOTES
ON SOME OF HIS WORKS**

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Francis Thompson, The Preston-born poet, with notes on some of his works by John Thomson

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JOHN THOMSON

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Francis Thompson,

THE

Preston-born Poet

<with Notes on some of his works>.

— BY —

JOHN THOMSON.



PRESTON:
ALFRED HALEWOOD,
"THE TEMPLE OF THE MUSES,"
1912.

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PREFACE.



The idea of this brief outline of the life and works of Francis Thompson was suggested by the erection of the commemorative tablet on his birthplace, and by enquiries then made concerning his life and career. I am indebted to Mr. Meynell for permission to quote from Thompson's poems, to Sir Alfred Hopkinson for information as to the poet's stay at Owens College, and to the Rev. H. K. Mann (Newcastle-on-Tyne), for leave to reproduce the two photographs of Thompson which appeared in the *Ushaw Magazine* of March, 1908. I am also indebted to the Magazine articles referred to (particularly the *Ushaw Magazine*), and to the prefatory note by Mr. Meynell and the "appreciations" in the volume of Selected Poems issued by Messrs. Burns & Oates, Orchard Street, London, the Poet's publishers.

JOHN THOMSON.

44, Great Avenham Street,
Preston, September, 1912.

TO
FRANCIS THOMPSON.



THOMPSON, thy music like a deep stream flows
From mystic heights, and mirrors as it goes
The shades and splendours of that luring peak,
Where poet-dreamers dwell, and tireless seek
Their adequate strains; and thy song is fed
By cyclic hauntings from the cliffs of dread
Thou perforce clomb, a wider world to scan,
And catch lost echoes of the Pipes of Pan.

From other sounds aloof thy music rolls,
And men *must* hearken for it draws their souls:
Now thrills with awe, and now with such sweet stress
As linketh heart to heart in tenderness
By dire compelling, none save those may wield,
Whose birth-fused breath is fashioned for the yield—
Who reach the crownèd gates, and entrance gain
To highest Heaven, through the Arch of Pain!

J. T.

FRANCIS THOMPSON, POET AND MYSTIC.

Go, songs, for ended is our brief, sweet play;
Go, children of swift joy and tardy sorrow: —
And some are sung, and that was yesterday,
And some unsung, and that may be to-morrow.

Go forth; and if it be o'er stony way,
Old joy can lend what newer grief must borrow:
And it was sweet, and that was yesterday,
And sweet is sweet, though purchased with sorrow.
(F. Thompson).

FRANCIS THOMPSON, poet and mystic, "master of the lordly line, the daring image, and the lyric's lilt," was born at Preston, on the 18th December, 1859, in the house numbered 7, Winckley Street, now used as a solicitor's office. He was baptised at St. Ignatius' Church, in that town, on the 20th of the same month. His full name, as it appears on the register of births, is Francis *Joseph* Thompson; but his first published poem having been signed "Francis Thompson," it was thought advisable that he should, as he ever afterwards did, adhere to the shorter form. The commemorative tablet placed,

on the 10th August, 1910, over the doorway of the house where the poet first saw the light, gives his name in full. The tablet is the gift of Mrs. Catherine Holiday, of Hawkshead, (formerly of Preston,) and it is a sadly-curious fact that, only after many enquiries, could the exact place of birth of one destined "down the annals of fame to carry a name immortal"—the greatest of his proud town's sons—be found.

The poet's father was Charles Thompson, a physician of some note locally—a man (according to a writer in the *Church Times*, April 21, 1911) firm and kind, but somewhat austere in discipline, and with no poetic instinct; his mother, Mary Turner Thompson, formerly Morton. Both parents were Catholics: the mother a convert some years before her marriage. Francis was the second of the five children, all of whom were born in Preston. Two babies, Charles Joseph, the firstborn (who only lived a day), and Helen Mary, the fourth, are buried there.

Dr. Thompson appears to have lived in several houses in Preston—the one in Winckley Street, already mentioned; before that (probably from 1856 to 1858) at 12, St. Ignatius' Square; and after the birth of Francis, first in Winckley Square; and later in Latham Street. Two of the doctor's children were born at the house in Winckley Square (No. 33)—one in 1861, the other in 1862. It was whilst residing in Latham Street, in 1864, that his daughter Helen Mary died, and his last child was born. The doctor's removal to Ashton-under-Lyne towards the