

THE EQUINOX

SHELLEY. By FRANCIS THOMPSON. With an Introduction by the Rt. Hon. GEORGE WYNDHAM. Burns and Oates.

We would rather not refer to the Rt. Hon. George Wyndham in a paper of this character. Let us deal with Francis Thompson.

Had he no friend to burn this manuscript? To save him from blackening his own memory in this way? We were content to give him his appointed niche in the temple, that of a delicate, forceful spirit, if rarely capable of cosmic expansion. We did not look for eagle-flights; we thought of him as a wild goose sweeping from Tibet upon the poppy-fields of Yunnan. But the prose of a poet reveals the man in him, as his poetry reveals the god; and Francis Thompson the man is a pitiful thing enough. It is the wounded earthworm cursing the harrow; the snipe blaspheming the lark. Shelley was a fine, pure, healthy man whose soul was habitually one with the Infinite Universe; Thompson was a wretch whose body was poisoned by drugs, whose mind by superstition. Francis Thompson was so much in love with his miserable self that he could not bear the thought of its extinction; Shelley was glad to die if thereby one rose could bloom the redder.

This essay is disgusting; we were all trying to forget Francis Thompson, to remember his songs; and here we have his putrid corpse indecently disinterred and thrust under our noses.

The worst of it all is the very perfection of the wrappings. What a poet Thompson might have been if he had never heard of Christ or opium; if he had revelled in Venice with its courtesans of ruddy hair, swan gracefulness, and tiger soul! Instead, he sold matches in the streets of London; from which abyss a church meant warmth, light, incense, music, and a pageant of hope.

To-day, as in the days of Nero, Christianity is no more than the slum-born shriek of the degenerate and undersized starvelings that inhabit the Inferno of Industrialism.

So also Thompson, impotent from abuse of opium, reviles Shelley and Byron for virility. "O che sciagura essere senza cogl"—

Dirt, dogma, drugs! What wonder and what hope lies in the soul of man if from such ingredients can be distilled such wine as "The dream tryst?" Requiescat in pace. Let the flowers grow on Thompson's grave; let none exhume the body!

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