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אורתא like the Talm. אור (Pes. 1a, R. Hash. 22b. Perhaps also Jb 24[14]) the commencement of the night.

The Jewish calendar, until its history is better known, must be left out of this inquiry. While it is most probable that at the time of our Lord the exact duration of a lunar month was known by those Sanhedrists who were initiated into the 'Mystery of Intercalation,' and that they were also acquainted with the Metonic Cycle, there is evidence that the rule *Badu* was not yet in existence. If the 15th of Nisan fell on Badu, *i.e.* on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday, the Day of Atonement would be either on Friday or on Sunday, thus creating two consecutive Sabbath days, and the Great Hosanna would be on a Sabbath. But from Men. xi. 7 we gather that the Day of Atonement did sometimes fall on a Friday, and from Pes. vii. 10 that the 16th of Nisan could be on a Saturday.

A. E. SUFFRIN.

Waterlooville, Hants.

Entre Nous.

FRANCIS THOMPSON'S POETRY.

II.

Poems on Children.

MANY poets have written about children. One cannot wonder, for to the poetical mind there is always an attraction about what is both mysterious and beautiful.

Part of the mystery of childhood is its intensity. The child traffics in what he himself fails to understand: it is as Tagore says in *The Crescent Moon*: 'On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships are wrecked in the tractless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.'[1] No wonder that the words of wisdom which they sometimes speak fall on the ear of the poet with a sound that pains even while it fascinates.

But among the many poets who have had something to say about children, not one has said such unforgettable things as Francis Thompson. Child after child came within his ken, and awakened songs that, if they were lovely, were also unspeakably sad. Some one has said that wherever he saw a cradle, there he saw a cross. The pure joy of Blake, the faith of Wordsworth, the childlikeness of George Macdonald, the Christian assurance of Christina Rossetti are all absent; nor did he, like Robert Louis Stevenson, speak as a child to children. But we would not have Francis Thompson's poems about children different. They, more than anything else that he has written, give us a glimpse of the real man; the man who for years wandered hither and thither amid the evil that is in the world and whose spiritual garments remained unsoiled. Though physically battered, 'Thompson's spirit rose from the penal waters fresh as Botticelli's Venus,' and his experience became a veil through which he looked back upon his own boyhood. As he looked, he said, 'Childhood is tragic to me.'

Daisies, that little children pull,
As ye are weak, be merciful!
O hide your eyes! they are to me
Beautiful insupportably.
Or be but conscious ye are fair,
And I your loveliness could bear;
But, being fair so without art,
Ye vex the silted memories of my heart!

. . . . . .

Not yours, not yours the grievous-fair
Apparelling
With which you wet mine eyes; you wear,
Ah me, the garment of the grace
I wove you when I was a boy;
O mine, and not the year's, your stolen Spring!
And since ye wear it,
Hide your sweet selves! I cannot bear it.[2]

[1] R. Tagore, *The Crescent Moon*, 3, 4.

[2] *The Works of Francis Thompson*, ii. 191, 192.

The reference in 'To Olivia' is convincing on the same point.

White flake of childhood, clinging so
To my soiled raiment, thy shy snow
At tenderest touch will shrink and go.
Love me not, delightful child.
My heart, by many snares beguiled,
Has grown timorous and wild.
It would fear thee not at all,
Wert thou not so harmless-small.
Because thy arrows, not yet dire,
Are still unbarbed with destined fire,
I fear thee more than hadst thou stood
Full-panoplied in womanhood.[1]

The little Meynells were not the only children whom Francis Thompson loved. Once he visited some poor little East-end sufferers at an hospital in which Miss Kate Douglas King took a great interest. Writing to him later, she said:

'When you were by your little genius's bed and the baby Percy with his white shoes on was at your knee, that was to me a revelation! I think of you now with that infant's serious, confiding face upturned to you. It was all so natural. To some people a child is a pretty ornamental *addition*. Your personality now seems incomplete without the child as the natural and exquisite finish to the whole man.'[2]

The words of Hawthorne, quoted in Mr. Everard Meynell's biography of the poet, might have been written about Francis Thompson: 'Lingering always so near his childhood, he had sympathies with children, and kept his heart the fresher thereby, like a reservoir into which rivulets are flowing not far from the fountain-head.'

The *Poems on Children* have the quality of Thompson's greatest work. 'Daisy' may lack somewhat in strength; but where could one find a more perfect picture of innocence? It is entirely after Thompson's manner, for while a Wordsworthian atmosphere pervades it — the 'clouds of glory' are certainly there—his sadness shows like a haze which dims but beautifies. Daisy's beauty 'smoothed earth's furrowed face,' but he knew he had to part from her:

She looked a little wistfully,
Then went her sunshine way:—
The sea's eye had a mist on it,
And the leaves fell from the day.

She went her unremembering way,
She went and left in me
The pang of all the partings gone,
And partings yet to be.

She left me marvelling why my soul
Was sad that she was glad;
At all the sadness in the sweet,
The sweetness in the sad.[3]

Memory and regret made his sadness bitter. As a young man he had failed to 'arise,' and he knew it. The arresting poem of 'The Poppy' tells us so. Its opening verses make a piece of wonderful word painting, revealing the bold touch of an artist who luxuriates in the effects of strong colour:

Summer set lip to earth's bosom bare,
And left the flushed print in a poppy there:
Like a yawn of fire from the grass it came,
And the fanning wind puffed it to flapping flame.

With burnt mouth, red like a lion's, it drank
The blood of the sun as he slaughtered sank,
And dipped its cup in the purpurate shine
When the eastern conduits ran with wine.

Till it grew lethargied with fierce bliss,
And hot as a swinked gipsy is,
And drowned in sleepy savageries,
With mouth wide a-pout for a sultry kiss.[4]

Doubtless Thompson meant but to 'frame' the simple picture that follows; that of a careless child putting a flower into the hand of a man who has many regrets. We know the man was Thompson: the poppy that Monica—Mr. Meynell's little daughter—picked and gave with 'keep it, long as you live' was found long afterwards in the leaves of his own copy of *Poems*—the only volume of his works that he kept by him. Hand in hand the two walked one summer evening:

But between the clasp of his hand and hers
Lay, felt not, twenty withered years.

Reading Morris's 'Dear Little Hand,' we note the contrast between the poets and their habit of thought:

Dear little hand that clasps my own,
Embrowned with toil and seamed with strife;
Pink little fingers not yet grown
To the poor strength of after-life,—
Dear little hand![5]

[1] *Works*, i. 20.
[2] *The Life of Francis Thompson*, 250, 251.
[3] *Works*, i. 4.
[4] *Ibid.* i. 6.
[5] *The Works of Sir Lewis Morris*, 46.

By a natural and childlike action, Monica sets Thompson dreaming:

> She turned, with the rout of her dusk South hair,
> And saw the sleeping gipsy there;
> And snatched and snapped it in swift child's whim,
> With—'Keep it, long as you live!'—to him.[1]

His dreams were troubled: 'the flower of sleep' awakened the memory of his 'twenty shrivelled years,' and the thought of what love for an unconscious and fickle child meant to him:

> I am but, my sweet, your foster-lover,
> Knowing well when certain years are over
> You vanish from me to another;
> Yet I know, and love, like the foster-mother.
>
> So, frankly fickle, and fickly true!
> For my brief life-while I take from you
> This token, fair and fit, meseems,
> For me—this withering flower of dreams.[2]

Then we have his reflexions on the 'sleep-flower' and his own withered life:

> The sleep-flower sways in the wheat its head,
> Heavy with dreams, as that with bread:
> The goodly grain and the sun-flushed sleeper
> The reaper reaps, and Time the reaper.
>
> I hang 'mid men my needless head,
> And my fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread:
> The goodly men and the sun-hazed sleeper
> Time shall reap, but after the reaper
> The world shall glean of me, me the sleeper.[3]

For his only hope in life is in those deathless dreams of his:

> Love, love! your flower of withered dream
> In leavèd rhyme lies safe, I deem,
> Sheltered and shut in a nook of rhyme,
> From the reaper man, and his reaper Time.
>
> Love! *I* fall into the claws of Time:
> But lasts within a leavèd rhyme
> All that the world of me esteems—
> My withered dreams, my withered dreams.[4]

'Look for me in the nurseries of Heaven.' Francis Thompson would probably imagine himself a playmate of children there. But the very awe he felt in the presence of the little Meynells kept him from getting a place in their memories 'like that of Brin, the friend who hit a ball over the farm roof, the boy who twisted the cows' tails as he drove the cattle up from the pastures at night, or the hard old man who, stooping over his work in the vegetable garden, suddenly rose up and threw a stone as big as a potato at a truant boy.'[5] These were things for a London child to marvel at. We scarcely think Thompson would have joined them in their games. 'The poet himself, as gentle as children, is remembered, and remembered vaguely, as part of the general gentle world.' But we believe he entered into their play with a sort of mystic fellowship. 'To Monica thought Dying' pictures him at the child's bedside, suffering to agony as he listens to the childish babble of her games in delirium:

> '*A cup of chocolate,*
> *One farthing is the rate,*
> *You drink it through a straw.*'
> This dreadful Death to his own dreadfulness
> Doth dreadful wrong,
> This dreadful childish babble on his tongue.
> That iron tongue made to speak sentences,
> And wisdom insupportably complete,
> Why should it only say the long night through,
> In mimicry of you,—
> '*A cup of chocolate,*
> *One farthing is the rate,*
> *You drink it through a straw, a straw, a straw.*'[6]

Death's ironies press upon him, and such is the sincerity of the poem that his suffering haunts the reader; he is unable to lay it aside with the book:

> Why did you teach that fatal mouth to draw,
> Child, impermissible awe,
> From your old trivialness?
> . . . . . .
> Why have you taught—that he might so complete
> His awful panoply
> From your cast playthings—why,
> This dreadful childish babble to his tongue,
> Dreadful and sweet?[7]

'The Making of Viola' is a pearl of price. 'All other writers,' says Alice Meynell, 'make their words dance on the ground with a certain weight, but these go in the blue sky.' Much of the language in it is drawn from the ritual of the Church to which Mr. Thompson belonged; it came naturally to him. He himself stated that the spirit of 'The Making of Viola' was but the natural temper of his Catholic training in a simple provincial home. To a certain extent that may be true; but in a wider sense 'The Making of Viola' but gives expression to the thoughts of one who was of the great brotherhood of mystic poets. The Indian poet Tagore is of the company, so

[1] *Works*, i. 6. [2] *Ibid.* i. 8.
[3] *Ibid.* i. 8. [4] *Ibid.* i. 9, 11.
[5] E. Meynell, *The Life of Francis Thompson*, 118.
[6] *Works*, i. 11. [7] *Ibid.* i. 11, 12.

was the saintly Scottish poet George Macdonald. In his little poem 'Baby,' the latter has the lines:

> Feet whence did you come, you darling things?
> From the same box as the cherub's wings.

And both Macdonald and Tagore speak of the tear as a first gift of earth:

> Where did you get that little tear?
> I found it waiting when I got here.[1]

And Tagore:

> Baby never knew how to cry. He dwelt in the land of perfect bliss.
> It is not for nothing he has chosen to shed tears.[2]

But Francis Thompson gives to the thoughts the magic touch that makes imperishable music of them:

The Father of Heaven.

> Child-angels, from your wings
> Fall the roseal hoverings,
> Child-angels, from your wings,
> On the cheeks of Viola.

Angels.

> Linger, rosy reflex, a
> Quenchless stain, on Viola!

All things being accomplished, saith the Father of Heaven:

> Bear her down, and bearing, sing,
> Bear her down on spyless wing,
> Bear her down, and bearing, sing,
> With a sound of Viola.

Angels.

> Music as her name is, a
> Sweet sound of Viola!
>
> Baby smiled, mother wailed,
> Earthward while the sweetling sailed;
> Mother smiled, baby wailed,
> When to earth came Viola.

And her elders shall say:

> So soon have we taught you a
> Way to weep, poor Viola!
> Smile, sweet baby smile,
> For you will have weeping-while;
> Native in your Heaven is smile,—
> But your weeping, Viola?
>
> Whence your smiles we know, but ah!
> Whence your weeping, Viola?—
> Our first gift to you is a
> Gift of tears, my Viola![3]

Francis Thompson's *Poems on Children* are a poet's legacy. They give us the simple sincere thoughts of a great artist. And in making the child Jesus the subject of the last of the set, Thompson, as it were, inscribes upon the little collection the A.M.D.G. of his exercise books. Regrets and the pains of memory have no place in his thoughts of the Sacred Child. There are memories; but they are of the 'simple provincial home' in which there was a mother, and where religion had a big place; doubtless too he remembered the Church which gave him much of his early religious instruction.

> Little Jesus, wast Thou shy
> Once, and just so small as I?
> And what did it feel like to be
> Out of Heaven, and just like me?
> . . . . .
> Didst Thou kneel at night to pray,
> And didst Thou join Thy hands, this way?
> And did they tire sometimes, being young,
> And make the prayer seem very long?
> And dost Thou like it best, that we
> Should join our hands to pray to Thee?
> I used to think, before I knew,
> The prayer not said unless we do.
> And did Thy Mother at the night
> Kiss Thee, and fold the clothes in right?
> And didst Thou feel quite good in bed,
> Kissed, and sweet, and Thy prayers said?
>
> Thou canst not have forgotten all
> That it feels like to be small:
> And Thou know'st I cannot pray
> To Thee in my father's way—
> When Thou wast so little, say,
> Couldst Thou talk Thy Father's way?—
> So, a little Child, come down
> And hear a child's tongue like Thy own;
> Take me by the hand and walk,
> And listen to my baby-talk.
> To Thy Father show my prayer
> (He will look, Thou art so fair),
> And say: 'O Father, I, Thy Son,
> Bring the prayer of a little one.'
>
> And He will smile that children's tongue
> Has not changed since Thou wast young.[4]

Few people will read these little poems (there are but seven of them) without feeling that there are health-giving breezes other than those of nature's hills. They come from Francis Thompson's homeland.

[1] *Poetical Works of George Macdonald*, ii. 158.
[2] R. Tagore, *The Crescent Moon*, 8.
[3] *Works*, i. 14–16.
[4] *Works*, i. 21.

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