

FRANCIS THOMPSON

IF ever a meteor fell to earth it was Francis Thompson. If ever a star ascended to that high place in the sky where sit the loftier planets in pleasant company, it was this splendid poet. Stalking through the shadows of the Thames Embankment to find his clear place in the milky way, is hardly the easiest road for so exceptional a celebrity. It is but another instance of the odd tradition perpetuating itself, that some geniuses must creep hand and knee through mire, heart pierced with the bramble of experience, up over the jagged pathways to that still place where skies are clear at last. Thompson is the last among the great ones to have known the dire vicissitude, direst, if legends are true, that can befall a human being. We have the silence of his saviour friends, the Meynells, saying so much more than their few public words, tender but so careful. What they knew, and what the walls of the monastery of Storrington must have heard in that so pained stillness, there, is probably beyond repetition for pathos. De Quincey had taught him much in the knowledge of hardship. Whether it is just similarity of experience or a kind of imitation in nature, is not easy to say. It was hardly the example to repeat. It is singular enough also, that De Quin-