

**MEMOIR OF GEORGE
THOMSON, CAMEROONS
MOUNTAINS, WEST
AFRICA**

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Memoir of George Thomson, Cameroons Mountains, West Africa by John Ebenezer
Honeyman Thomson

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JOHN EBENEZER HONEYMAN THOMSON

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GEORGE THOMSON,

CAMEROONS MOUNTAINS, WEST AFRICA.

BY ONE OF HIS NEPHEWS.



EDINBURGH:
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1881.

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MEMOIR OF GEORGE THOMSON.

CHAPTER I.

FORBEARS AND EARLY SURROUNDINGS.

'AT Victoria, Western Africa, on the 14th December 1878, died George Thomson, architect, late of Glasgow.' To most who read this intimation in the newspapers of the beginning of February 1879, it would merely convey the commonplace information that the malaria of the West Coast of Africa, so deadly to European constitutions, had proved fatal to one more white man. It might be that some might wonder why an architect had gone thither; but that would be all the attention given to the announcement. If, however, there were any who, having known the subject of the notice, were yet ignorant of the great purpose of his being in Africa, it would tell them that a kind, genial heart had ceased to beat,—a heart that had the fullest sympathy with everything that was noblest in life, truest in science, or most beautiful in art. Those

who, yet more intimate with him, knew what was the great aim of his later life, and what the object was that took him to that deleterious coast, would learn that a noble philanthropic effort to help the cause of missions and of humanity generally had been cut short by Death,—the great frustrator of human designs,—and would know that a life of unselfish devotion to the work of Christ had been brought to a close.

It has been thought by some of those that knew him best, that such a life as his ought not to be allowed to pass away unnoticed, but that some effort should be made to perpetuate his example, by telling the story of his work. It may be that some may be led to go and do likewise,—and there is room; and that others, when they read the story of unostentatious devotion of time, substance, and life to the great cause, may be led to take a more hopeful view of the future of our Christianity and of its missions. If the world is ever to be conquered for Christ, it is only by self-denying effort. If, then, the story of George Thomson's work move any one to equal self-sacrifice, something will be done toward this great end, and the aim of the present biography will have been attained. The real evidence for the existence of any force, spiritual or physical, is its power of doing work. Hence persistent self-denying effort for the spread of the gospel on the part of Christian people, is the one evidence for the truth of Christianity which no criticism can destroy,—the one argument which no sophistry can rebut or render of no avail. It may be, then, that the life of one who was

faithful even to death in his obedience to the divine precepts, shall be regarded as in some degree a proof of the truth of that faith in which he died.

George Thomson was born at Balfron, on the 26th May 1819. The village of Balfron has been little influenced by the later changes that have passed over the face of the country. The nearest railway stations are too far away from it, for its scenery ever to induce the Glasgow merchants to retire thither. It is still very much as it was sixty years ago. As one approaches it from Killearn, the village is seen rising above the haughs that lie beside the Endrick, in successive rows of whitewashed houses peering from amidst dark broad-leaved trees. Away behind the trees, and what of the village is visible from the road, is the stunted belfry of the village church. A broad but somewhat irregular street leads up from the water Endrick through the village, and terminates in a small group of houses which have gathered in front of the 'kirk-stile.' This group of houses is known as the Clachan, and is the nucleus of the present village. The houses arrange themselves in the form of a square, somewhat uncertainly, as if not quite sure of the correctness of the proceeding. In the centre of this square still stands the Clachan tree, now much decayed, which was in old days the favourite gathering place of the fathers of the hamlet, and where were held the village parliaments for talking over the gossip of the day. One can easily guess that there would, in the

first quarter of this century, be no lack of subjects for discussion ; for the eyes of the visitor can scarcely fail to catch the chimney of the spinning-mill down in the haugh by the Endrick ; and he will remember having heard, in passing through the village street, the whiz and clack of the loom. In those days every spinner and weaver was an ardent politician, and the country was seething with the Radical disturbances. We can imagine the indignant eloquence with which the corruption of governments would be criticised, and the humility with which the speakers would hint that if they only had the power, things would be much better managed.

On crossing the Endrick, the traveller entering Balfron from Killearn may see to the right a cottage with its back to the road, and before it a garden sloping down to the edge of the stream. It was in this cottage that George Thomson was born. From its windows are seen the long heathery slopes of the Campsie Fells ; and prominent among these, by its conical shape and its separation from the rest of the range, is Dumgoin, the westmost of them. Behind it, in summer-time, from the cottage door the sun is seen to set in his golden beauty. Continually within and about the cottage is heard the music of running water : the Endrick now gently murmurs at the foot of the garden in summer-time, and again, made tawny and turbulent with the winter spates, is heard rushing and roaring.

John Thomson, George's father, was book-keeper in