THOMSON, James (1834-1882), author of *The City of Dreadful Night,* was born at Port Glasgow, in Renfrew­shire, on November 23, 1834, the eldest child of a mate in the merchant shipping service. His mother was a deeply religious woman of the Irvingite sect, and it is not improbable that it was from her the son inherited his sombre and imaginative temperament. On her death, James, then in his seventh year, was procured admission into the Caledonian Orphan Asylum, from which he went out into the world as an assistant army schoolmaster. At the garrison at Ballincollig, near Cork, he encountered the one brief happiness of his life : he fell passionately in love with, and was in turn as ardently loved by, the daughter of the armourer-sergeant of a regiment in the garrison, a girl of very exceptional beauty and cultivated mind. Two years later, when Thomson was at the training college at Chelsea, he suddenly received news of her fatal illness and death. The blow prostrated him in mind and body ; and the former endured a hurt from which it never really recovered. Henceforth his life was one of gloom, disappointment, misery, and poverty, rarely alleviated by episodes of somewhat brighter fortune. While in Ireland he had made the acquaintance of Mr Charles Bradlaugh, then a soldier stationed at Ballincollig, and it was under his auspices (as editor of the *London Investi­gator)* that Thomson first appealed to the public as an author, though actually his earliest publication was in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* for July 1858, under the signa­ture “ Crepusculus.” In 1860 was established the paper with which Mr Bradlaugh has been so long identified, *The National Reformer,* and it was here, among other productions by James Thomson, that appeared (1863) the powerful and sonorous verses “ To our Ladies of Death,” and (1874) his chief work, the sombre and imaginative *City of Dreadful Night.* In October 1862 Thomson left the army, and through Mr Bradlaugh (with whom for some subsequent years he lived) gained employment as a solicitor’s clerk. In 1869 he enjoyed what has been described as his “only reputable appearance in respect­able literary society,” in the acceptance of his long poem, “ Sunday up the River,” for *Fraser's Magazine,* on the advice, it is said, of Charles Kingsley. In 1872 Thomson went to the Western States of America, as the agent of the shareholders in what he ascertained to be a fraudulent silver mine ; and the following year he received a com­mission from *The New York World* to go to Spain as its special correspondent with the Carlists. During the two months of his stay in that distracted country he saw little real fighting, and was himself prostrated by a sunstroke. On his return to England he continued to write in *The Secularist* and *The National Reformer,* under the at last well-known initials “ B. V.”@@1 In 1875 he severed his con­nexion with *The National Reformer,* owing to a disagree­ment with its editor ; henceforth his chief source of income (1875-1881) was from the monthly periodical known as *Cope's Tobacco Plant.* Chiefly through the exertions of his friend and admirer, Mr Bertram Dobell, Thomson’s best known book, *The City of Dreadful Night, and other Poems,* was published in April 1880, and at once attracted wide attention ; it was succeeded in the autumn by *Vane's Story, and other Poems,* and in the following year by *Essays and Phantasies.* All his best work was produced between 1855 and 1875 (“The Doom of a City,” 1857 ; “ Our Ladies of Death,” 1861 ; *Weddah and Om-el- Bonain*: “The Naked Goddess,” 1866-7 ; *The City of Dreadful Night,* 1870-74). In his latter years Thomson too often sought refuge from his misery of mind and body

in the Lethe of opium and alcohol. His mortal illness came upon him in the house of a poet friend ; and he was conveyed to University College hospital, in Gower Street, where shortly after he died (June 3, 1882). He was buried at Highgate cemetery, in the same grave, in uncon­secrated ground, as his friend Austin Holyoake.

To the productions of James Thomson already mentioned may be added the posthumous volume entitled A Voice from the Nile, and other Poems (1884), which has the advantage of Mr Bertram Dobell’s valuable prefatory memoir and an etched portrait of the poet. This volume contains much that is interesting, but nothing to increase Thomson’s reputation. If an attempt be made to point to the most apparent literary relationship of the author of The City of Dreadful Night, one might venture the suggestion that James Thomson was a younger brother of De Quincey. If he has distinct affinity to any writer it is to the author of Suspiria de Profundis ; if we look further afield, we might perhaps discern shadowy prototypes in Leopardi, Heine, and Baudelaire. But, after all, Thomson holds so unique a place as a poet that the effort at classification may well be dispensed with. If he maintains his own lonely little height, it will be as a distinct individuality. His, it is absolutely certain, was no literary pessimism, no assumed gloom. The poem “Insomnia” is a distinct chapter of bio­graphy; and in “Mater Tenebrarum” and elsewhere among his writings self-revelative passages are frequent. The merits of Thomson’s poetry are its imaginative power, its sombre intensity, its sonorous music ; to these characteristics may be added, in his lighter pieces, a Heine-like admixture of strange gaiety, pathos, and caustic irony. Much the same may be said of his best prose. His faults are a monotony of epithet, the not infrequent use of mere rhetoric and verbiage, and perhaps a prevailing lack of the sense of form ; to these may be added an occasional vulgar recklessness of expression, as in parts of Vane's Story and in some of his prose writings. Time will reduce his noteworthy work within a narrow compass, but within that limit it will be found as remark­able as it is unique.

THOMSON, John (1778-1840), amateur landscape painter—Thomson of Duddingston, as he is commonly styled,—was born on September 1, 1778, at Dailly, Ayr­shire. His father, grandfather, and, as we are informed, great-grandfather also, were clergymen of the Church of Scotland. The father determined that his son should follow the ancestral profession, and, greatly against his natural bent,—for all his thoughts turned instinctively towards art,—he acceded to the parental wish. He studied in the university of Edinburgh; and, residing with his elder brother, Thomas Thomson, afterwards celebrated as an antiquarian and feudal lawyer, he made the acquaint­ance of Francis Jeffrey and other young members of the Scottish bar afterwards notable. The pursuit of art, how­ever, was not abandoned ; during the recess he sketched in the country, and, while attending his final college session, he studied for a month under Alexander Nasmyth. After his father’s death he became, in 1800, his successor as minister of Dailly ; and in 1805 he was translated to the parish of Duddingston, close to Edinburgh. The practice of art was now actively resumed, and it came to be continued throughout life—apparently without any very great detriment to pastoral duties. Thomson’s popu­larity as a painter increased with his increasing artistic skill ; and, having mastered his initial scruples against receiving artistic fees, on being offered £15 for a land­scape—reassured by “ Grecian ” Williams’s stout assertion that the work was “ worth thrice the amount ”—the minister of Duddingston began to dispose of the produc­tions of his brush in the usual manner. Tn 1830 he was made an honorary member of the Royal Scottish Academy. Besides that of art, Thomson had other singularly varied tastes and aptitudes. He was an accomplished performer on violin and flute, an exact and well-read student of physical science, and one of the writers on optics in the early numbers of the *Edinburgh Review.* His life passed peacefully away in the kindly and charitable discharge of his clerical duties, varied by the enthusiastic pursuit of his art, and the enjoyment of intercourse with a singularly

@@@1 Bysshe Vanolis : “ Bysshe,” as the commonly used Christian name of Shelley, Thomson’s favourite writer ; and “ Vanolis,” an anagram of Novalis, the pseudonym of F. von Hardenbebg (q.ν.).