Thomas Toke Lynch

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Lynch, Thomas Toke

(1818–1871)

J. C. Hadden, revised by Leon Litvack

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Lynch, Thomas Toke (1818–1871), hymn writer and composer, was born at Dunmow, Essex, on 5 July 1818, the son of John Burke Lynch, a surgeon. He was educated at a school in Islington, London, where he was afterwards an usher. In 1841 he became a Sunday school teacher and district visitor, occasionally preaching and giving lectures on sight-singing and temperance. In 1843 he entered Highbury (Independent) college, but shortly withdrew, mainly from ill health. He was pastor of Highgate Independent Church 1847–9, and then until 1852 of a congregation in Mortimer Street, which moved to Grafton Street, Fitzroy Square. In September 1849 he married Sarah, daughter of the Revd Edward Porter of Highgate, and in 1852 delivered a course of lectures on literature at the Royal Institution, Manchester. Ill health, from which he constantly suffered, prevented him from preaching for some years. He resumed in 1860 in Gower Street, pending the opening of Mornington Church in the Hampstead Road (pulled down in 1888 for the expansion of Euston Station), where he worked until his death on 9 May 1871 at his home, 76 Arlington Street, Regent's Park.

Lynch's congregations were always small, and he was not a popular preacher. His *Hymns for Heart and Voice: the Rivulet*, a book of a hundred poems and hymns published in 1855, gave rise to a bitter controversy which deeply affected the nonconformist churches in England, particularly the Congregationalists and Baptists. Lynch's aim was to unite his appreciation of God's work in nature and history with a firm grasp of Christian truth, but his naturalistic imagery provoked a series of vituperative reviews from Calvinists in the religious press, in which the verses were described as pantheistic and theologically unsound. The so-called Rivulet controversy almost resulted in the dissolution of the assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. Lynch himself replied to his opponents, under the pseudonym Silent Long, in *The Ethics of quotation*, and in a pamphlet of doggerel verse entitled *Songs Controversial* (1856). The dispute was eventually settled by the intervention of Thomas Binney. Lynch's most notable hymns are 'Lift up your heads, rejoice', 'All faded is the glowing light', and 'Where is thy God, my soul?' He was also a composer, and set twenty-five of his own tunes to his hymns; these were published posthumously.

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Wealth at Death

under £1500: probate, 10 Nov 1871, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

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