

17.
Thomas
Young.

in their line of thought and discovery, have to the present day remained popularly unknown to their countrymen, who have not only neglected but reviled them, allowing their great discoveries to be taken up as their own by foreigners. Such was Dr Thomas Young, whom many educated persons at the present day cannot distinguish from the author of 'Night Thoughts.'¹ The great founder

¹ Thomas Young (1773-1829), a native of Somersetshire, attained equal eminence by his discoveries in connection with the undulatory theory of light, in which he was the first to assert the principle of interference and that of transverse vibrations, and by his discovery of the key to the system of hieroglyphics. Of his discoveries and suggestions some were published in anonymous review articles (so especially his hieroglyphical papers); some in his Lectures on Natural Philosophy, delivered early in the century at the Royal Institution, and published 1807; some in the 'Transactions of the Royal Society' (from 1800 onwards); and some in various collective works, especially the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.' The remarkable fact that Young, of whom Helmholtz says ('Vorträge und Reden,' vol. i. p. 279) that he came a generation too soon, remained scientifically unrecognised and popularly almost unknown to his countrymen, has been explained by his unfortunate manner of expression and the peculiar channels through which his labours were announced to the world. His frequently unintelligible style, his obscure and inelegant mathematics, the habitual incognito which he preserved, his modesty in replying to attacks, and his general want of method in enunciating his ideas, contrast very markedly with the writings of some of his rivals, especially

in France, where the qualities of style, method, and elegance were highly developed, and where recognised organs existed for the publication of works of genius. The historian of thought, however, must not omit to state that several great names contributed, by the authority they commanded, to oppose Young's claims to originality and renown. Lord Brougham, shielded by the powerful anonymity of the 'Edinburgh Review,' and ostentatiously parading the authority of Newton, submitted the views of Young to a ruthless and unfair criticism, the popular influence of which Young probably never overcame. The great authority on optics, Brewster, who has enriched that science by such a number of experiments and observations of the first importance, never really adopted the theories of Young and Fresnel. In the other great branch of research with which Young's name is now indissolubly connected, in the science of hieroglyphics, the authority of Bunsen decided against Young and for the Frenchman Champollion. But this decision, which did so much to obscure the merits of Young, was founded on an insufficient knowledge of the dates of Young's publications. Since these were collected by Leitch in the third volume of the 'Miscellaneous Works' of Dr Young (London, 1855), the chronology of his discoveries, which begin