



DELPHI  
CLASSICS

# Francis Thompson

## Complete Works

DELPHI POETS SERIES

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## Francis Thompson

(1859-1907)



### Contents

*The Life and Poetry of Francis Thompson*

Brief Introduction: Francis Thompson by Carroll B. Chilton

Complete Poetical Works of Francis Thompson

*The Poems*

List of Poems in Chronological Order

List of Poems in Alphabetical Order

*The Prose*

The Prose Works of Francis Thompson

*The Biography*

The Life of Francis Thompson, by Everard Meynell (1913)

*The Delphi Classics Catalogue*

*Francis Thompson*

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Version 1

D E L P H I   P O E T S   S E R I E S

**Francis Thompson**



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*Francis Thompson - Delphi Poets Series*

First published in the United Kingdom in 2021 by Delphi Classics.

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ISBN: 978 1 91348 752 2

**Delphi Classics**

is an imprint of

Delphi Publishing Ltd

Hastings, East Sussex

United Kingdom

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## NOTE



When reading poetry on an eReader, it is advisable to use a small font size and landscape mode, which will allow the lines of poetry to display correctly.

## The Life and Poetry of Francis Thompson



*Late Victorian photograph of Preston, a city in Lancashire, England — Francis Thompson's birthplace*





*Preston in recent times*



*The birthplace, Winckley Street, Preston*





*Memorial plaque to Thompson at his birthplace*

## Brief Introduction: Francis Thompson by Carroll B. Chilton



*From 'Catholic Encyclopaedia', Volume 14*

### FRANCIS THOMPSON

Poet, b. at Preston, Lancashire, 18 Dec., 1859; d. in London, 13 Nov., 1907. He came from the middle classes, the classes great in imaginative poetry. His father was a provincial doctor; two paternal uncles dabbled in literature; he himself referred his heredity chiefly to his mother, who died in his boyhood. His parents being Catholics, he was educated at Ushaw, the college that had in former years Lingard, Waterton, and Wiseman as pupils. There he was noticeable for love of literature and neglect of games, though as spectator he always cared for cricket, and in later years remembered the players of his day with something like personal love. After seven years he went to Owens College to study medicine. He hated this proposed profession more than he would confess to his father; he evaded rather than rebelled, and finally disappeared. No blame, or attribution of hardships or neglect should attach to his father's memory; every careful father knows his own anxieties. Francis Thompson went to London, and there endured three years of destitution that left him in a state of incipient disease. He was employed as bookselling agent, and at a shoemaker's, but very briefly, and became a wanderer in London streets, earning a few pence by selling matches and calling cabs, often famished, often cold, receiving occasional alms; on one great day finding a sovereign on the footway, he was requested to come no more to a public library because he was too ragged. He was nevertheless able to compose a little—"Dream-Tryst", written in memory of a child, and "Paganism Old and New", with a few other pieces of verse and prose.

Having seen some numbers of a new Catholic magazine, "Merry England", he sent these poems to the editor, Mr. Wilfrid Meynell, in 1888, giving his address at a post-office. The manuscripts were pigeonholed for a short time, but when Mr. Meynell read them he lost no time in writing to the sender a welcoming letter which was returned from the post-office. The only way then to reach him was to publish the essay and the poem, so that the author might see them and disclose himself. He did see them, and wrote to the editor giving his address at a chemist's shop. Thither Mr. Meynell went, and was told that the poet owed a certain sum for opium, and was to be found hard by, selling matches. Having settled matters between the druggist and his client, Mr. Meynell wrote a pressing invitation to Thompson to call upon him. That day was the last of the poet's destitution. He was never again friendless or without food, clothing, shelter, or fire. The first step was to restore him to better health and to overcome the opium habit. A doctor's care, and some months at Storrington, Sussex, where he lived as a boarder at the Premonstratensian monastery, gave him a new hold upon life. It was there, entirely free temporarily from opium, that he began in earnest to write poetry. "Daisy" and the magnificent "Ode to the Setting Sun" were the first fruits. Mr. Meynell, finding him in better health but suffering from the loneliness of his life, brought him to London and established him near himself. Thenceforward with some changes to country air, he was either an inmate or a constant visitor until his death nineteen years later.

In the years from 1889 to 1896 Thompson wrote the poems contained in the three volumes, "Poems", "Sister Songs", and "New Poems". In "Sister Songs" he celebrated his affection for the two elder of the little daughters of his host and more than brother; "Love in Dian's Lap" was written in honour of Mrs. Meynell, and expressed the great attachment of his life; and in the same book "The Making of Viola" was composed for a younger child. At Mr. Meynell's house Thompson met Mr. Garvin and Coventry Patmore, who soon became his friends, and whose great poetic and spiritual influence was thenceforth pre-eminent in all his writings, and Mrs. Meynell introduced him at Box Hill to George Meredith. Besides these his friendships were few. In the last weeks of his life he received great kindness from Mr. Wilfrid Blunt, in Sussex. During all these years Mr. Meynell encouraged him to practise journalism and to write essays, chiefly as a remedy for occasional melancholy. The essay on Shelley, published twenty years later and immediately famous, was amongst the earliest of these writings; "The Life of St. Ignatius" and "Health and Holiness" were produced subsequently.

Did Francis Thompson, unanimously hailed on the morrow of his death as a great poet, receive no full recognition during life? It was not altogether absent. Patmore, Traill, Mr. Garvin, and Mr. William Archer wrote, in the leading reviews, profoundly admiring studies of his poems. Public attention was not yet aroused. But that his greatness received no stinted praise, then and since, may be seen in a few citations following. Mr. Meynell, who perceived the quality of his genius when no other was aware of it, has written of him as "a poet of high thinking, of 'celestial vision', and of imaginings that found literary images of answering splendour"; Mr. Chesterton acclaimed him as "a great poet", Mr. Fraill as "a poet of the first order"; Mr. William Archer, "It is no minor Caroline simper that he recalls, but the Jacobean Shakespeare"; Mr. Garvin, "the Hound of Heaven seems to us the most wonderful lyric in our language"; Burne-Jones, "Since Gabriel's [Rossetti's] 'Blessed Damozel' no mystical words have so touched me"; George Meredith, "A true poet, one of a small band"; Coventry Patmore, "the 'Hound of Heaven' is one of the very few great odes of which the language can boast". Of the essays on Shelley (Dublin Review) a journalist wrote truly, "London is ringing with it". Francis Thompson died, after receiving all the sacraments, in the excellent care of the Sisters of St. John and St. Elizabeth, aged forty-eight.

CARROLL B. CHILTON.



*Thompson as a young man*



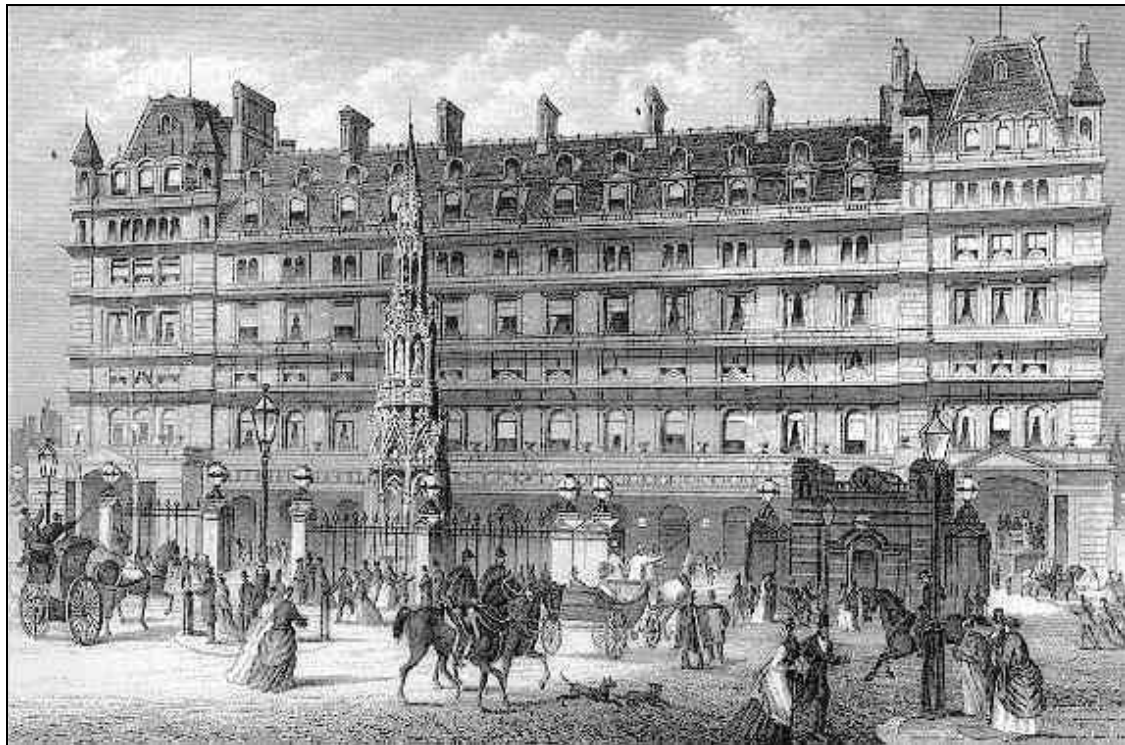
*The celebrated poet Alice Meynell in 1912. Meynell (1847-1922) was a British writer, editor, critic and suffragist. Thompson's poems were first published in Wilfrid and Alice Meynell's 'Merry England' and the Meynells became a supporter of Thompson.*





*Owens College (later The Victoria University of Manchester) was a university in Manchester — Thompson studied medicine here for nearly eight years. While excelling in essay writing, he took no interest in his medical studies; he had a passion for poetry and for watching cricket matches. He never practised as a doctor, and to escape the reproaches of his father, he tried to enlist as a soldier, but was rejected for his slightness of stature.*

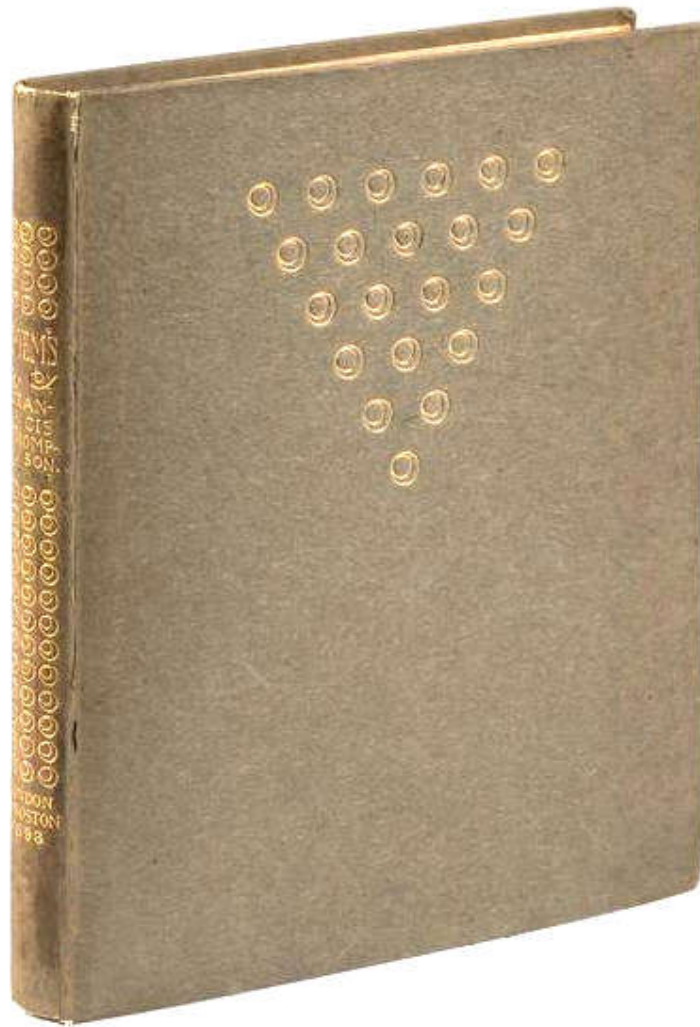




*The front entrance of Charing Cross railway station in a nineteenth century print — in 1885 Thompson fled penniless to London, where he tried to make a living as a writer. He became addicted to opium and lived on the streets of Charing Cross, with the homeless and other addicts. A prostitute, whose identity he never revealed, befriended him and gave him lodgings. Thompson later described her in his poetry as his 'saviour'.*



*Our Lady of England Priory in Storrington, West Sussex, is the former home of Roman Catholic priests belonging to a Community of Canons Regular of Prémontré — in 1888, after three years on the streets, the magazine editors, Wilfrid and Alice Meynell, recognised the value of Thompson's work. They took him into their home and, concerned about his opium addiction which was at its height following his years on the streets, sent him to Our Lady of England Priory for recuperation; he stayed for a couple of years.*

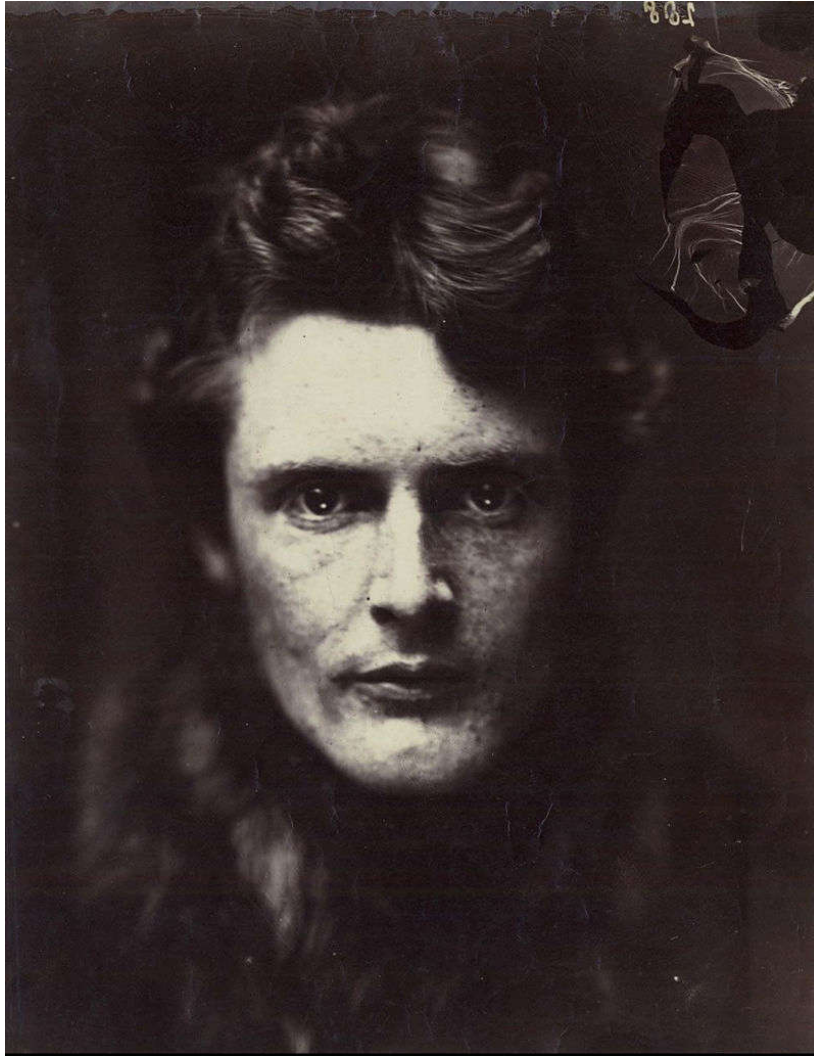


*The 1893 first edition of Thompson's first poetry collection, which included his most famous work, 'The Hound of Heaven'*

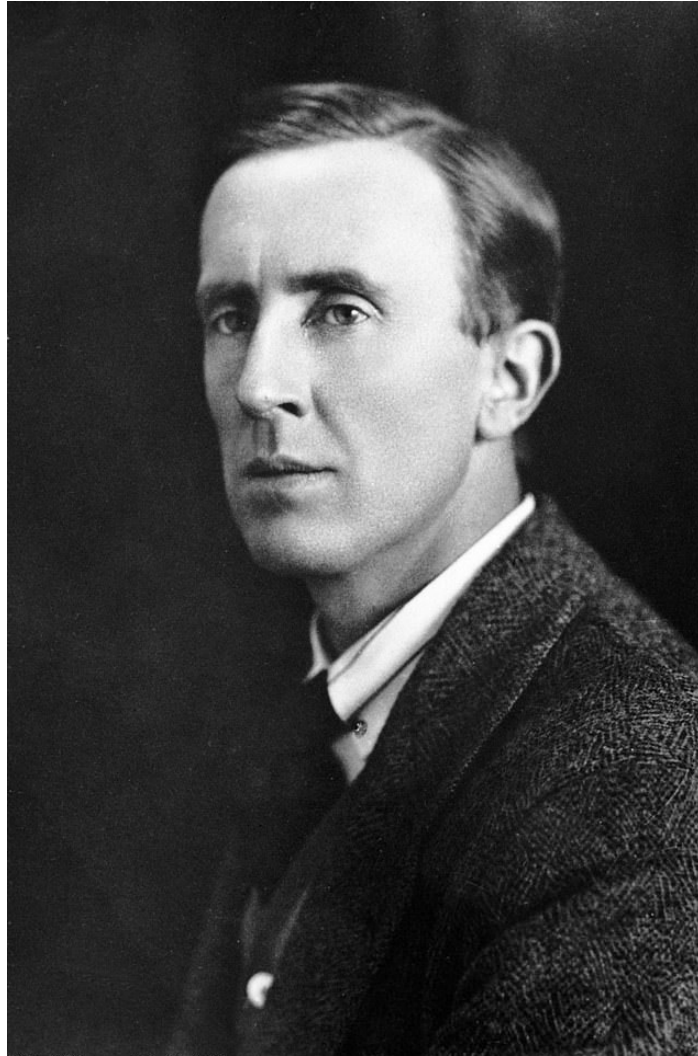


*Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) was an English poet and critic best known for 'The Angel in the House', his narrative poem about the Victorian ideal of a happy marriage. Patmore was a firm supporter of Thompson's work.*





*Wilfrid Blunt (1840-1922) was an English poet and writer. He and his wife, Lady Anne Blunt travelled in the Middle East and were instrumental in preserving the Arabian horse bloodlines through their farm, the Crabbet Arabian Stud. Blunt was a close friend of Thompson in his later years.*



*J. R. R. Tolkien in the 1940's — Thompson was also an influence on Tolkien, who presented a paper on his work in 1914.*





*End of Sample*