FRANCIS THOMPSON
1859–1907

The Kingdom of God

“IN NO STRANGE LAND”

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

5 Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air—
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumor of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places—
Turn but a stone and start a wing!
"Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendored thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.2

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Genesareth,3 but Thames!

1908

The Hound of Heaven

I fled Him,1 down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

1. Cf. Saint Augustine's Confessions 4.4.7: “And lo, Thou wert close on the heels of those fleeing from Thee, God of vengeance and fountain of mercies, both at the same time, who turnest us to Thyself by most wonderful means.”
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
   Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
   Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
   From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
   And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,°
   They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

I pleaded, outlaw-wise,
By many a hearted casement, curtained red,
   Trellised with intertwining charities
(For, though I knew His love Who followed,
   Yet was I sore adread
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside);²
But, if one little casement parted wide,
   The gust of His approach would clash it to.
Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue.³
Across the margent° of the world I fled,
   And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,
Smiting for shelter on their clangèd bars;
   Fretted to dulcet jars
And silvern chatter the pale ports o’ the moon.⁴
I said to dawn, Be sudden; to eve, Be soon;
   With thy young skye blossoms heap me over
From this tremendous Lover!
Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!
I tempted all His servitors, but to find
My own betrayal in their constancy,
   In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.
To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;
   Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
But whether they swept, smoothly fleet,
   The long savannahs° of the blue;
Or whether, Thunder-driven,
   They clanged his chariot ‘thwart a heaven
Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn o’ their feet—
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
Still with unhurrying chase,
   And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
   Came on the following Feet,

². The speaker, afraid that love of God will exclude other kinds of love, is seeking shelter in one of the warm dwellings associated with human love. But his pursuer cuts off his escape, forcing him to remain outside, an outcast (lines 22–23).
³. This line apparently means that Fear did not know how to escape so effectively as Love knew how to pursue.
⁴. I.e., shook the gates of the moon until they gave forth soft and silvery sounds.
And a Voice above their beat—
"Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me."

I sought no more that after which I strayed
In face of man or maid;
But still within the little children's eyes
Seems something, something that replies;
They at least are for me, surely for me!
I turned me to them very wistfully;
But, just as their young eyes grew sudden fair
With dawning answers there,
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair.

"Come then, ye other children, Nature's—share
With me," said I, "your delicate fellowship;
Let me greet you lip to lip,
Let me twine with you caresses,
Wantoning
With our Lady-Mother's vagrant tresses,
Banqueting
With her in her wind-walled palace,
Underneath her azured daïs,
Quaffing, as your taintless way is,
From a chalice
Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring."

So it was done;
I in their delicate fellowship was one—
Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies.

I knew all the swift importings° meanings
On the willful face of skies;
I knew how the clouds arise
Spumèd of the wild sea-snortings;
All that's born or dies
Rose and drooped with—made them shapers
Of mine own moods, or wailful or divine—
With them joyed and was bereaven.
I was heavy with the even,
When she lit her glimmering tapers
Round the day's dead sanctities.
I laughed in the morning's eyes.

I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
Heaven and I wept together,

And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;
Against the red throb of its sunset-heart
I laid my own to beat,
And share commingling heat;
But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.

In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's gray cheek.
For ah! we know not what each other says,
These things and I; in sound I speak—

5. I.e., Mother Nature's.
6. Blue canopy of the sky.
7. Overflowing with shining light from the sun (i.e., the children of Nature drink the sunshine).
Their sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.
Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;
Let her, if she would owe° me,
Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me
The breasts o’ her tenderness;
Never did any milk of hers once bless
My thirsting mouth.
Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
With unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy;
And past those noisèd Feet
A voice comes yet more fleet—

“Lo naught contents thee, who content’st not Me.”

Naked I wait Thy love’s uplifted stroke!
My harness° piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten me to my knee;
I am defenseless utterly.

I slept, methinks, and woke,
And, slowly gazing, find me stripped in sleep.
In the rash lustihead of my young powers,
I shook the pillaring hours
And pulled my life upon me;° grimed with smears,

My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.
My days have crackled and gone up in smoke,
Have puffed and burst as sun-starts° on a stream.
Yea, faileth now even dream

The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist;
Even the linked fantasies, in whose blossomy twist
I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist,
Are yielding;° cords of all too weak account
For earth with heavy griefs so overplussed.

Ah! is Thy love indeed
A weed, albeit an amaranthine° weed,
Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?
Ah! must—
Designer infinite!—

Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn° with it?
My freshness spent its wavering shower i’ the dust;
And now my heart is as a broken fount,
Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever
From the dank thoughts that shiver

Upon the sightful branches of my mind.

Such is; what is to be?
The pulp so bitter, how shall taste the rind?
I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds

8. Like Samson when he shook the pillars of the temple of Dagon and pulled down the roof on his head (Judges 16).
9. I.e., even his power of creating an imaginary world by poetry and song (“linked fantasies”) is now inadequate.
1. Unfading and immortal.
2. Draw, as with charcoal.
From the hid battlements of Eternity;
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.
    But not ere him who summoneth
I first have seen, enwound

With blooming robes, purpureal, cypress-crowned;
His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.
Whether man’s heart or life it be which yields
Thee harvest, must Thy harvest fields
Be dunged with rotten death?

Now of that long pursuit
Comes on at hand the bruit;° noise
That Voice is round me like a bursting sea:
    “And is thy earth so marred,
Shattered in shard³ on shard?
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!
Strange, piteous, futile thing,
Wherefore should any set thee love apart?
Seeing none but I makes much of naught,” He said,
    “And human love needs human meriting,
How hast thou merited—
Of all man’s clotted clay the dingiest clot?
Alack, thou knowest not
How little worthy of any love thou art!
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
    Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might’st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child’s mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home;
    Rise, clasp My hand, and come!”

Halts by me that footfall;
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
    “Ah, fondest,° blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.”

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3. Fragment, as of broken pottery.