



The Poetry Of Francis Thompson: "The devil doesn't know how to sing, only how to howl."

Francis Thompson

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Francis Thompson was born in Preston on Lancashire in December 18th, 1859. Educated at Ushaw College, near Durham he studied medicine at Owens College in Manchester. However the medical profession held little interest to him but writing did. He moved to London in 1885 but found no success and was quickly reduced to selling matches and newspapers for a living. Ill health offered up opium as a solution and to this he quickly became addicted. Life became increasingly difficult and soon Francis was no more than a vagrant living on the streets, chiefly around Charing Cross and along the Thames. In 1888 he sent some poems to the publishers of the Merrie England magazine who were Wilfrid Meynell and his noted poet wife Alice. They quickly sought him out, arranged for his housing and other necessities as well as medical treatment and encouraged him to write more. This culminated in the publication of his book 'Poems' in 1893. The book, including the seminal 'Hound Of Heaven' was recognised as a great work by many critics at the time and encouraged further volumes; Sister Songs in 1895 and New Poems in 1897. Years of ill health, addiction and vagrancy had taken their toll upon Francis and he moved to Storrington in Wales where we continued to write though by now he was invalided. An attempt at suicide was aborted by a vision he had of Thomas Chatterton, the teenage poet, who had committed suicide a century earlier. However his remaining years were few in number and he succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of 48 on November 13th, 1907. He is buried in the Catholic section of Kensal Green Cemetery in London. G.K. Chersterton said "with Francis Thompson we lost the greatest poetic energy since Browning."

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