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

—and so continues the most widely known and most warmly cherished poem of Francis Thompson, student from 1878 to 1884 of Owen's College later to become the University of Manchester; a poem written soon after the termination of his three years of almost unrelieved down-and-outness on the streets of London and one which has, surely, been endowed with a melodramatic glamour due to an over-ready, over-simple relating of its plangent remorse to a period of life felt as somehow fascinatingly sinful.

That the young man who so spectacularly surfaced from the social depths—an event due to his own literary gifts as well as to the responsiveness and kindness of Wilfrid Meynell, editor of Merry England—that this young man should have been an opium addict is, of course, what powers the switch for melodrama. By this the poem has gained something indeed; but it has also lost: so too the poet, who was, in fact, strikingly not quite an Ernest
Dowson, a Verlaine, or any other of the late nineteenth-century poets "under a curse". Even those least willing to concur in T. S. Eliot's distinction between "the man who suffers and the mind which creates" will be willing, I think, to agree that a poem is a *poem made*, not an actual confession overheard. St. Augustine says "And lo, You at the heels of those who are fleeing from you, God of Vengeance and yet Fountain of Pity, turn us back to Yourself in wondrous ways". It should need on more than this reminder of the antiquity of the central idea of "The Hound of Heaven" to warn us against too specific an alignment of biographical with poetic events. The glimpses of an outcast's life in London, too,—of one afoot both night and day, trudging under or sheltering beneath the city's arches, wandering in its labyrinth and through its mists—are there as *imagery* not as *scenery*; not as what is described, but as a way of describing.

The poem deals with a flight from God, and what we know of Thompson's life before he encountered Meynell (which is really much less than it at first appears) would lead us more confidently to locate this "flight" in the poet's period of indisputable moral dereliction, namely, the six years spent as a medical student at Owen's College; and who can say how long before, too, from when at the age of eleven he went from his home in Ashton-under-Lyne as a boarder to St. Cuthbert's College, Ushaw, intended there finally to attain ordination as a Catholic priest? He was rejected for orders because of temperamental unsuitability to a demanding, practical life, because of, to quote the authorities, "his strong, nervous timidity" and "a natural indolence which [had] always been an obstacle in him". It is stated by his biographer that "he betrayed no singular piety"; and though it was held by some near to the family that his disappointment was crucial in his life, there would seem to be no real evidence against the conjecture that in his understanding of a reluctance to be wholly "caught" by the Divine Pursuer he could draw on experience so far back in youth as to confound any detailed autobiographical identification. The poem is *not*, after all, a repentance for iniquity so much as a statement of the incompleteness of earthly, human satisfaction.
At any rate, a dreamy retiring youth, clearly no sociable extrovert and equally plainly one of little assurance or moral courage, he entered the Medical School here in 1878, not long after it had been amalgamated with the College. The Medical School was built in 1874. The College had moved from Quay Street to its vastly more splendid new buildings (those which surround the present quadrangle, minus the Whitworth Hall and Christie Library block) in 1873: and aesthetically unsatisfying as these edifices may be to a present-day viewer, they cannot justly be convicted of a power to dismay invincibly in 1878 even a sensitive ex-seminarian. Fr. Terence Connolly of Boston, Massachusetts, the great collector of Thompsoniana, writes as follows of his visit to England in 1938: "Ashton-under-Lyne has the flavour of a highly romantic and beautiful name. I had always thought of the place as one to which Thompson was happy to return from Manchester, and where his poetic nature could gain a grateful respite from the medical studies he loathed . . . my first real impression of the town was rather disillusioning . . . ." Ashton in 1878 would not be as Ashton in 1938; but it is fair, I think, to see in Fr. Connolly's remarks something typical of that uncautious thinking so readily promoted by any poet with peculiar appeal for a particular group, in this case Catholics (of whom the present speaker acknowledges himself one).

One learns from Everard Meynell that Thompson was so repelled by his medical studies (it was a physical repulsion, he himself told Scawen Blunt) that he continually cut classes, to read poetry in the Public Library, visit the Art Gallery or, in appropriate season, watch the cricket at Old Trafford. One learns, too, that it was not until four years had passed, and the examination had been failed a second time (or not attended), that his father approached the authorities and discovered his son's truancy. Yet, it may be worth noting, a regulation of the time states that "a daily record is kept of the attendance . . . in the lecture-rooms" and promises that "absences will be reported to the Principal, who will, at his discretion, cause the same to be notified to the parent or guardian of the defaulting student". Thompson is listed as a student in all the University calendars of those years, with attendance for most terms credited to him.
And there had been a genuine long illness in 1879 during which he was introduced to opium, in the form of laudanum (then both cheap and common), and during which his mother had given him a copy of De Quincey's *Confessions*. Thus began the addiction which accompanied him for most of his life, the cure effected by his stay with the monks of Storrington after the meeting with Meynell proving quite impermanent. Thompson was constitutionally delicate, emerged from his London years of deprivation so weakened that a doctor pronounced that "he would not live" and that to deny him his laudanum would be to "hasten his death", and when admitted to hospital shortly before he died was found to have only one lung and that diseased, and to weigh only 5 stone. It must be emphasized that the adoption of the drug in no way entailed the sort of sinister, squalid depravity that readers of fiction, of my time, at any rate, associated with it. There is not the slightest evidence for linking Thompson with "the large unseemly bed" in "the meanest and closest of small rooms" on which Dickens's Jasper, in *Edwin Drood*, came to, to find himself alongside "a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman"; buying laudanum was not frequenting opium-dens. For much of his life the drug seems to have been serving some degree of medical purpose; yet it is not surprising to find in the opening stanzas of "The Poppy", the at least partly sentimental poem addressed to the fifteen-year-old Monica Meynell, something strangely out of tone with the rest of the poem:

```
Summer set lip to earth's bosom bare,
And left the flushed print in a poppy there:
Like a yawn of fire from the grass it came,
And the fanning wind puffed it to flapping flame.

With burnt mouth, red like a lion's, it drank
The blood of the sun as he slaughtered sank,
And dipped its cup in the purpurate shine
When the Eastern conduits ran with wine.

Till it grew lethargied with fierce bliss,
And hot as a swinked gipsy is,
And drowsed in sleepy savageries,
With mouth wide a-pout for a sultry kiss.
```

There is a violence here, a sinister glare, that suggests a fearful fascination rather than what the flower ought, one feels, gently
enough to evoke in such a context. I am not wishing to avoid condemnation but only sensationalism in speaking thus of Thompson's addiction.

The *Manchester University Magazine* of December 1907 has the following in its "Personal Notes": "The death of the poet Francis Thompson has revealed the fact unknown to many of us, that he was at one time a member of the Owen's College Medical School. It is strange how little we know our own famous men. None knew that we had produced a famous popular novelist until Gissing died, and now with the death of Francis Thompson we realize that a famous poet has been in our midst. Perhaps it is that neither of these literary men passed a long and pleasant time amongst us, for both departed early to pursue their own whims untrammelled by the discipline of a large foundation, and never appeared prominently in the life of those who crowded in their footsteps, to whom they might have been a source of inspiration. Both hurried to London, and there both found reputation gilding the bitterest hardships and vicissitude."

This judgement, which smacks so much of a bygone age—the University now displays a commemorative tablet carved by Eric Gill, in the same corridor as the Bursar's Office—this sober judgement indicates apparently accurately the lack of mark made by Thompson on university life. Unlike Gissing he seems not to have contributed to the college magazine; neither published index nor the relevant issues of it reveal his name. Gissing, of course, had had the good fortune a year or so earlier to take the English Literature course (given by Professor A. W. Ward on Wednesdays and Fridays from 3.30-4.30, "History of English Literature from Chaucer to Spencer (inclusive)"). Certainly it is hard to see how Thompson can be shielded from such disapproval as is evident in the comment I have quoted, ill-informed though the columnist was; for even after the disclosure to his father, the following two years of study (which again culminated in failure) showed only a part reform.

There followed then two briefly held jobs in the district, a rejection on medical grounds for the army, and the sudden running-away to London with a Blake and an Aeschylus in his pocket. Before leaving Manchester he wrote home for his fare
and it was sent. He was to see his father only once afterwards, though the father showed later, it would seem, unusual sympathy. His mother had died in his second year at college; a sister, Mary, subsequently Mother Austin of the Presentation Convent, Manchester, later maintained some slight touch with him by mail. Mother Austin, incidentally, died only four years ago and the present Reverend Mother, to whom I am much in debt for help in preparing this lecture, makes it clear that though Mother Austin considered Francis to be very much of "a cross" to her, and one from blame in which her father must be wholly exempted, she none the less believed that had the mother been alive he would never have left home.

Then came the hapless poverty of London, the charity shown to him by the street-girl—the equivalent of De Quincey's Ann, Thompson's account of whom has recently been accused of an exaggeration influenced by De Quincey's account; the temptation to suicide narrated by Thompson to Meynell, but also since accused of elements of literary fantasy; and the finding then of permanent care and attention at the hands of Meynell and his wife, Alice, herself a Catholic poet of much prestige.

A stay of a year or so arranged for him in 1889 at the Premonstratensian monastery in Sussex made free the energy or (perhaps, in the absence of laudanum) tethered the mind of the unquestionably dedicated poet, and Thompson there wrote that paeon of thronging images, the "Ode to the Setting Sun", an astonishing production to have met the anxious and hopeful eyes of his friends. Testimony, certainly, of recovered strength; promise, surely, of poetic force, the more certain when followed closely by the remarkable essay on Shelley, well-known now as a showpiece of "poetic" prose, but refused by the Dublin Review until after its author's death.

The "Ode" certainly speaks of powers and its echoes of Shakespeare, Coleridge, Milton, to name no more, witness to intimate and retentive acquaintanceship with the great poets; but the echoes remain echoes and attain no new being, and repeatedly though the eye is attracted to various parts, the poem by its very grandeur of scale the more repels participation. One admires the manner in which the quiet "Prelude" swells into
the body of the "Ode", deepening in tone and widening in range, flooding the mind as the setting sun floods the sky, then dwindles in the "After-strain" to complete the rendering, as it were, of the process of sunset. One warms to particular phrases and passages—

Who lit the furnace of the mammoth's heart?
Who shagged him like Pilatus' ribbed flanks?
Who raised the columned ranks
Of that old pre-diluvian forestry . . . ?

... The tiger velvet-barred,
The stealthy-stepping pard,
And the lithe panther's flexuous symmetry.

—to this, for instance, derived from Blake's "Tyger" though it be. But persistent forcing of language to revivify familiar conceptions, a forcing that can be demonstrated in instance after instance of largely adjectival heightening and rhetorical insistence, blunts the poem's edge and bruises the reader's mind; and the proliferation of fanciful conceit and hyperbole completes the breakdown in effect. And this, of course, very much because the poetic elaboration is beside the point of and superfluous to the argument of an argumentative poem, namely that the Sun is the type of the crucified and resurrected God of Christianity; an argument which loses force (without biographical support) by the very splendour of the address to the Sun in comparison with the sombre acknowledgement of the victory of the Cross, and the only slightly touched-in gentleness of Our Lady's intercession.

Even so, O Cross! thine is the victory.
Thy roots are fast within our fairest fields;
Brightness may emanate in Heaven from thee,
Here thy dread symbol only shadow yields.
Of reaped joys thou art the heavy sheaf
Which must be lifted, though the reaper groan;
Yea, we may cry till Heaven's great ear be deaf,
But we must bear thee, and must bear alone.

And Mary replies:

"Lo, though suns rise and set, but crosses stay,
I leave thee ever," saith she, "light of cheer."

"'Tis so,"

acknowledges the poet:

yon sky still thinks upon the day,
And showers aerial blossoms on his bier.
It is in the long run the insufficiency of a large conceit for serious argument; and it is perhaps no wonder that a certain Canon T—asked the editor of *The Tablet* "what was the ode all about?" He couldn't in the least understand, but even if he had understood, he was quite sure it was not a thing to have appeared in a Catholic magazine! A poem of strong and versatile art, but as Wilfrid Meynell himself said, "deformed by violence of diction", and, I suggest, mistaken in its idea of the relation of sensory effect to logical argument.

It has of late been argued that the Sun in this is really Thompson's beloved opium, seemingly about to depart from him. Perhaps it may be accounted grace in me by any who should disapprove of my view of the "Ode" that I at least would deny the propriety of such an interpretation.

Thompson's ready fancy emerges again in the poem to the Meynell's baby, Francis, his godchild—the invitation to be godfather amply, one would think, to the trustworthiness of Alice Meynell's later description of him as "the most innocent of men"; with which her daughter Viola, in quoting it, agrees. I use the word "fancy" with Coleridge's meaning, as something inferior to "imagination". In this poem, though—very much the "occasional" one, there is a certain point and propriety in it, in its formal—may I say?—wit; for Thompson is by no means always so solemn as he may seem: there is very often in him a flavour of a "wit" dealing in the abrupt and direct conceit which is most reminiscent of the poets of the earlier seventeenth century; he writes, for instance, to the lady of "Love in Dian's Lap"—the poetess, Alice Meynell:

```
Ah! let the sweet birds of the Lord
With earth's waters make accord;
Teach how the crucifix may be
Carven from the laurel-tree,
Fruit of the Hesperides
Burnish take on Eden trees,
The Muses' sacred grove be wet
With the red dew of Olivet,
And Sappho lay her burning brows
In white Cecilia's lap of snows!
```

The metre and rhythm in this poem, of course, have numerous seventeenth-century ancestors, among them Crashaw, a Catholic
too, for whom Thompson had a very great admiration; who, oddly, seemed to him to show the flowering of the Metaphysical school of poetry—which he, again oddly, saw as "trying for a range": while Shelley was "the range found". If one can think oneself back into Thompson's position in the Romantic Movement's later days, one can see, I think, what he means, and realize that, though his taste and demands were not those of our time, there is in the Shelley essay, with all its imaginative expansiveness, a line of penetration firmly held, which may prepare us for the coherence and critical sureness of hand in much of his later criticism.

The period of recuperation I have spoken of saw the production of a number of poems which were to feature in his first volume, the *Poems* of 1893. Besides "The Hound of Heaven", in which imaginative expansiveness has a certain amount of free rein, there are, it should be remembered, signs of a sparer poet, more suggestive than declamatory. This, for instance, on "A Fallen Yew":

```
It seemed correlative of the world's great prime,
Made to un-edge the scythe of Time,
And last with stateliest rhyme.

No tender Dryad ever did indue
That rigid chiton of rough yew,
To fret her white flesh through:

But some god like to those grim Asgard lords,
Who walk the fables of the hordes
From Scandinavian fjords,

Upheaved its stubborn girth, and raised unriven,
Against the whirl-blast and the levin,
Defiant arms to Heaven.

When doom puffed out the stars, we might have said,
It would decline its heavy head,
And see the world to bed.

For this firm yew did from the vassal leas,
And rain and air, its tributaries,
Its revenues increase,

And levy impost on the golden sun,
Take the blind years as they might run,
And no fate seek or shun.
```
But now our yew is strook, is fallen - yea,
Hacked like dull wood of every day
To this and that, men say.

Never! — to Hades' shadowy shipyards gone,
Dim barge of Dis, down Acheron
It drops . . .

—and so on. It is hard not to feel that here is a more resonant poetic voice. And one feels supported in this view by what Thompson told a friend not long after, during his five years or so stay at the Capuchin monastery, Pantasaph (from 1892 on); namely, that he had hitherto "fancied the end of poetry was in the stringing together of ingenious images . . . but that now he knew it should reach further and he hoped for an improvement in his future work".

At Pantasaph were written the pieces published in 1897 under the title New Poems and dedicated to Coventry Patmore, with whom he there became very friendly; and from whom he learnt much in respect of versification, in discussion with whom—and the monks—he advanced his religious thinking considerably. After returning to London in 1897, where he remained until the last year of his life, he seems to have written little verse except for commissioned occasional pieces such as that on the death of Cecil Rhodes in 1902.

It is in New Poems that we find his "Anthem of Earth," which seems to be a reply to Meredith's message of submission to Mother Nature in his "Earth and Man". The reply is gloomy, though Christian, and carries a sombre feeling for death—which "doth the crevasse bridge / To the steep and trifid God". It is an experiment with blank verse, and inevitably has often the flavour of Jacobean pastiche, but one notices a subdual of imagery to a defining purpose and an increased command over language and thought. In short, the poem seems to me to be an arresting testimony to developing powers, admitted none the less that its Christian purpose receives little positive expression beyond the turning of a post-Darwin sense of "Nature red in tooth and claw" into an attack on Nature-worship and rationalistic science:

I . . . nor thrust my arm in nature shoulder-high,
And cry—"There's naught beyond!" How should I so,
That cannot with these arms of mine engirdle
All which I am ; that am a foreigner
In mine own region ? Who the chart shall draw
Of the strange courts and vaulty labyrinths,
The spacious tenements and wide pleasures,
Innumerable corridors far-withdrawn,
Wherein I wander darkling, of myself ?
Darkling I wander, nor I dare explore
The long arcane of those dim catacombs,
Where the rat memory does its burrows make,
Close-seal them as I may, and my stolen tread
Starts populace, a gens lucifuga,
That too strait seems my mind my mind to hold,
And I myself incontinent of me.

There is, besides, the "Orient Ode", in the curious opening stanza of which—"Lo, in the sanctuaried East, / Day, a dedicated priest . . ."—the imagery seems to have displaced the object of its support; thereby setting an interesting little problem for the critical Catholic reader. But one can only mention the "Sight and Insight" group, the "Ultima" sequence, and such a poem as "The Cloud's Swansong", in all of which there is pleasure to be taken, in all of which fancy can be seen keeping her place and imagery handled more firmly; but which still permit the frequent incursion of literary echoes, and (again, unless one applies the support of biographical interest) present the disinterested reader too often with the poet taking a somewhat Shelleyan, vatic attitude, and excessively brooding on himself. About this volume Thompson's own written comment was this: "From the higher standpoint, I have gained, I think, in art and chastity of style; but have greatly lost in fire and glow. 'Tis time that I was silent. This book carries me quite as far as my dwindling strength will allow; and if I wrote further in poetry, I should write down my own fame." The comment has truth in it: its conjecture must remain a conjecture; though one should remember that there had been much critical hostility even to the first of his two volumes, of which he was well aware.

His remaining ten years of life, apart from a last brief spell in Sussex as the guest of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, were spent in London, always close to the Meynells, both physically and emotionally; his long standing Romantic, unpurposive love for Mrs. Meynell offering no bar to happy relations with the whole
family. Annoying landladies by his inability to get up in the mornings, incapable of noticing the approach of an hour of rendezvous (he even missed his much-loved Monica's wedding by being too early and presuming it over); totally without desire of possessions ("at no time did he possess a bookcase, nor sufficient books to crowd the slenderest shelf", we are told), he seems to have lived a life much in key with the Franciscan one he admired. "Franciscan simplicity", an entry in one of his notebooks reads, "is dignified, because it is unaffected... the Franciscan embodies in himself the poet's ideal, which is sensitive and candid self-realization and the spontaneous candour of a child combined with adult consciousness: while he has the natural amity towards his fellow-mortals which, in the case of the poet, is too often absorbed by egoism." Yet he did crave his laudanum and a regular portion of his scanty money went to provide what must by then have been strictly a medicine. It had, his last doctor affirmed, kept him alive in his last year or so.

Three adjectives used by Wilfrid Meynell, "frugal", "behindhand", "barren", to describe this way of life do not surprise—until one sees a fourth, "industrious"; his "frugal, behindhand, barren, industrious life"! The fact of the matter is that Thompson worked astonishingly hard in these years, as a contributor, chiefly of reviews, to the periodicals *The Academy* and *The Athenaeum* mainly; and it has been a loss, I think, that we should have had to wait until 1948 for a display of what he did. The prose volume of Meynell's standard edition contains only a few pieces, from which the Shelley essay has stood out for its, so to say, "poetic" prose; and it was not until Fr. Connolly, of Boston, published in New York his 500-odd page selection of Thompson's critical pieces that the picture was complete, or nearly so. The book,¹ it appears, is still virtually unknown in England. There are some eighty pieces in the collection, not one of which has been previously republished: most of them, originally unsigned, are now identified for the first time.

It would be foolish to look in a bygone critic for a taste and a set of judgements uniform with one's own, most of all with

regard to his contemporaries; one will not find such in any of the great critics. It is the temper of mind, the manner of approach, and the connectedness of judgements to a discernible centre of principle, that communicates value, rather than the opportunities of apparently checking one's score. Such value, I think, is offered by Thompson. Though I shall not suggest that he brought about or even attempted a revolution in criticism as did Wordsworth and Coleridge or T. S. Eliot, and though he quite obviously is a critic grown from Romantic seed in a Victorian climate, it is instructive to see him making an independent and clearly-motivated resistance to important trends in literary fashion:

On Ernest Dowson, for instance:

... it may be doubted whether the most accomplished morbidity can survive the supreme test of time. In the long run Sanity endures: the finest art goes under if it be perverse and perverted art, though for a while it may create a life under the ribs of death.

Yet with this great doubt, Ernest Dowson's work makes a present and delicate appeal to a generation itself sick of many ills. Not always of special originality or individuality, it is always dainty in form, finished in diction, and perfect in literary taste, with a sensitive avoidance of violence or exaggeration. ... It is altogether poetry of feeling, one might well-nigh say of a single feeling, or cast of feeling. ... Dowson sings in many poems of a frail grace, sweetness, and slender completion of form. But the central defect of power keeps him still a lesser poet—a poet of the bitten apple, without the core of fire which made Rossetti, for instance, far more than a lesser poet. And, then, too, unlike Rossetti, he has no brain, but just pure feminine sensibility.

Or consider the quite differently toned piece on the then popular, now forgotten poet, Lewis Morris. He reviews Morris's *A Vision of Saints* and quotes the blank verse description of Fr. Damien's death without verse lineation, to reveal it as, precisely, prose. He continues:

[Meanwhile] ... the poet has got hopelessly beyond us. Father Damien has undergone the second martyrdom for which he was resurrected, and Mr. Morris has concluded the volume with a select assortment of tinned Saints, packed layer on layer like sardines in his demulcent numbers. Let us, therefore, in lieu of further criticism, give the reader a receipt which, with a little practice, will enable him to prepare visions of Saints for himself. You wish to describe, we will say, a Saint's youth—a female Saint for choice, because that is prettier. First you set the thing down in prose—somewhat like this:

She remained solitary, absorbed in ecstatic contemplation, while the girls of her own age were running about the fields, or dancing to rustic music.
This, however, you can, if you like, copy verbatim from the nearest life of your Saint: but the next process is most important. You select from the best authors two or three passages to be worked in, which must, of course, correspond to the divisions of your own prose passages—thus:

**SOLITUDE**

His soul was like a star, and dwelt apart.—*Wordsworth.*

**MAIDENS DANCING**

Or on spring-flowered lea
Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy.—*Keats.*

**RUSTIC MUSIC**

To the jocund rebeck’s sound.—*Milton.*

Now chop fine, flavour slightly with Tennyson, and serve with a garnish of the same poet.

She dwelt ecstatic, lonely as a star,
While her girl-peers would on the flowery lea
Run races with the wind, or to the sound
Of flute and rebeck blithe their kirtles flaunt
In hue the arum, where its stem’s dusk green
Holds spousals with the white.

We really feel tempted to compete for the Morresque succession. But, perhaps, on that throne there will never be another Louis le Grand. And his motto is or ought to be, “la Philistie, c’est moi”.

We have written in jest: we find it difficult to conclude in jest. It appears to us a blot on English letters that this man, who performs for the Laureate the office which the organ-grinder performs for our opera, should have received a critical applause one tithe of which has never been bestowed on fine living poets.

He could write like this about Andrew Marvell, this time in a piece I have myself hunted out in *The Academy* of 1905:

If there be any fault to find with Mr. Birrell’s book, it is that he has hardly given adequate space to the consideration of what, when all is said, constitutes Marvell’s one, indefeasible title to the name and rank of Man of Letters—his poetry, pastoral, imaginative and political, as distinguished from his later satirical verse. As a poet, Marvell shows affinity with several of his contemporaries: with Donne he revels in subtle imagery and the play of recondite conceits; with Vaughan he shares the passion for Nature, though the beauties he paints with Dutch minuteness are those of the pleasance rather than of the wilderness; while in consummate choiceness and propriety of word and phrase he approaches, if he does not actually rival, Herrick. This *curiosa felicitas* he derives from Horace, to whom he is also indebted for his skill in the poetical treatment of political themes.

The pieces range widely in subject—Leslie Stephen, Bunyan, for instance, Dryden, Burns, Daniel and Drayton, Carlyle, Tennyson, Courthope’s *History of English Poetry*, Montaigne, Yeats, Poe,
and so on: he even reviewed, intelligently, Henry James's *Golden Bowl*. Fr. Connolly's collection is a most interesting and awakening one: let me close my selection with the comments on Matthew Arnold in a review of Frederick Harrison's essays:

"Dramatic passion", "tumultuous passion",—not these, as Mr. Harrison regretfully supposes, does Arnold need. Wordsworth had them not, and yet soared into regions of which Arnold but desirously dreams. It is inspiring emotion, the solemn passion, intense in its still ardour, appropriate to intellectual poetry, which Arnold needs. It is really passion of the intensest order, deceptively calm through the weight of thought. The calm which results from the careful husbanding of effort may imitate it with the multitude, but can never deceive the elect. In the main, Arnold reaches only this latter calm; and that Mr. Harrison should identify it with that inspired tranquility and impassioned peace of Wordsworth (at his highest), the supreme Greek poets, and Dante, shows that Mr. Harrison—as we say—has not the keenest edge of poetic sensitiveness.

That is why Mr. Harrison feels that Arnold, though faultless, is "not of the highest rank". It is a misnomer, in fact, to call such poets faultless, whether it be Racine or Arnold, when in line after line there is the blot of absent inspiration, when there is not the only possible word in the only possible place. The greatest of all faults in a poet is to lack poetry, and that is theirs. At the same time Mr. Harrison does not, perhaps, lay sufficient stress upon Arnold's occasional success in touching the mark at which he aimed. The austere and noble sonnet on Shakespeare, with other brief achievements of the kind, are worth more than long poems full of fine thought, but only now and again inevitable in expression. For they are integral; and it is that quality which makes for permanence. Mr. Harrison (in this influenced by Arnold himself) is too apt to set store by detached lines and passages, which poets of no high power can often forge in tolerable quantity, to the great comfort of reviewers who pant for "quotes". He ignores too much the supreme value of relation and organism. Thus he depreciates, justly enough, the quality of Arnold's metre; but the reason he alleges is quite unconvincing and inadequate—namely, that Arnold has lines containing harsh collocations of consonants. The same could be alleged against Shakespeare, could be—and has been—alleged against Milton. Lowell rightly replies that metre may aim either at melody or harmony; that while the former demands smoothness, the larger music of harmony not only admits but makes use of occasional roughness, as discords have their function in the harmonies of music proper. To cite these individual lines of Arnold's, disjoined from their relation, proves nothing. Yet Mr. Harrison is right in his judgment, though defective in his reason: Arnold was lacking in metrical power, though he could strike out fine imitative music in occasional passages.

... If we doubt his forecast of an extended future for Arnold, it is because we think his aloofness from the many is due to more than his mere distinction and those other fastidious causes set forth by Mr. Harrison. Arnold as a teacher was pre-eminently undecided (to use an adjective thrown out by Mr. Harrison
himself). A teacher of delicate incertitude, a watchman who has no word of
the night, a prophet who disclaims prophecy, and

"Whose only message is that he sees nought,"
is never likely to have acceptance with the many who still, as of old, ask for a
sign. And even among the few his cultivated stoicism and half-complaisant,
half-melancholy indecision is scarce likely to be the fashion of the future. Even
the cultured and sovereign few now begin to cry for a gospel and a hand from the
cloud. But that constant reference to conduct, which Mr. Harrison rightly
adjudges his dominant note, will doubtless secure to him long his measure of
influence with the practical Saxon mind.

There is to be seen throughout these pieces the most sure handling of practical prose. It is natural and it is educated; it has
style, in the best sense of the word. Yet it was mostly written
in the harassed conditions of reviewing. There is shown, in
brief, a mind as clear as the editor of The Academy, Lewis Hind,
said it was; there is an active positiveness, and a spirit of service
which does not entail critical servility. The fact that Thompson
developed no original system of literary theory seems to me to
count for little.

Biographically, this new aspect has something further to
suggest, I think: that the positiveness of mind now shown may
be good ground for seeing something like an intention in the
poet's seemingly inert way of life. If, as I suggested at the start,
"The Hound of Heaven" poetically gains strength from the only
doubtfully legitimate incorporation of particular biographical
suggestion into its imagery, it loses thereby a perhaps higher
standing as a more general spiritual meditation and its force as
a clue to the positive adoption or at least acceptance of a life of
abnegation, which I conjecture to have been submitted to in
something like penitence for earlier errors. If it is a little less as
poetry to coerce the poetic participation of the indifferent reader,
it is the more as meditation to illuminate the reader not in-
different: this on the strength of the reading of the poet's life
I have today proposed. So, too, with others of his poems that
I have not mentioned; for none, I think, reaches the poetic
maturity that his gifts promised, and many go no farther than a
"devotional", "hymnal" stage, offering merely a form of
words for the reader's private devotional self-expression. I see
no trace of truly "mystical" experience in his poetry or his life;
and his attempt to create such in "The Mistress of Vision"
seems to me to be vitiated by the very elements of "Kubla Khan" and of Edgar Allen Poe that contribute to its appeal.

The poem "In no strange land" was found among Thompson's papers after his death:

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

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 rumour 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-splendoured 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.

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

Although in this poem Thompson made a considerable poetic stride, there are, I think, finer poems—and religious ones—in the English language; and as it is a direct affirmation of a proposition it must always be open to the impediment of intellectual disbelief. There are literary standards—which are literary standards; and literary values are important. But they are not the only ones, nor are they wholly decisive; and this poem, resting on the poet's life as I have seen it, must retain a special value of its own; a value fitting to the man who wrote in his notebook the following: "After the Return to Nature, the return to God. Wordsworth was the poet of the one. I would be the poet of the other."