

Francis Thompson

THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

1 I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
2 I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
3 I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
4 Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
5 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
6 Up vistaed hopes I sped;
7 And shot, precipitated,
8 Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
9 From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
10 But with unhurrying chase,
11 And unperturbèd pace,
12 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
13 They beat---and a Voice beat
14 More instant than the Feet---
15 'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'

16 I pleaded, outlaw-wise,
17 By many a hearted casement, curtained red,
18 Trellised with intertwining charities;
19 (For, though I knew His love Who followèd,
20 Yet was I sore adread
21 Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside).
22 But, if one little casement parted wide,
23 The gust of His approach would clash it to.
24 Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue.
25 Across the margent of the world I fled,
26 And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,
27 Smiting for shelter on their clangèd bars;
28 Fretted to dulcet jars
29 And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon.
30 I said to Dawn: Be sudden---to Eve: Be soon;
31 With thy young skiey blossoms heap me over
32 From this tremendous Lover---
33 Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!
34 I tempted all His servitors, but to find
35 My own betrayal in their constancy,
36 In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
37 Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.
38 To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;
39 Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
40 But whether they swept, smoothly fleet,
41 The long savannahs of the blue;
42 Or whether, Thunder-driven,
43 They clangèd his chariot 'thwart a heaven,
44 Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn o' their feet:---
45 Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
46 Still with unhurrying chase,
47 And unperturbèd pace,
48 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
49 Came on the following Feet,
50 And a Voice above their beat---
51 'Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.'

52 I sought no more that after which I strayed
53 In face of man or maid;

54 But still within the little children's eyes
55 Seems something, something that replies,
56 They at least are for me, surely for me!
57 I turned me to them very wistfully;
58 But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair
59 With dawning answers there,
60 Their angel plucked them from me by the hair.
61 'Come then, ye other children, Nature's---share
62 With me' (said I) 'your delicate fellowship;
63 Let me greet you lip to lip,
64 Let me twine with you caresses,
65 Wantoning
66 With our Lady-Mother's vagrant tresses,
67 Banqueting
68 With her in her wind-walled palace,
69 Underneath her azured daïs,
70 Quaffing, as your taintless way is,
71 From a chalice
72 Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring.'
73 So it was done:
74 I in their delicate fellowship was one---
75 Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies.
76 I knew all the swift importings
77 On the wilful face of skies;
78 I knew how the clouds arise
79 Spumèd of the wild sea-snotings;
80 All that's born or dies
81 Rose and drooped with; made them shapers
82 Of mine own moods, or wailful or divine;
83 With them joyed and was bereaven.
84 I was heavy with the even,
85 When she lit her glimmering tapers
86 Round the day's dead sanctities.
87 I laughed in the morning's eyes.
88 I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
89 Heaven and I wept together,
90 And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;
91 Against the red throb of its sunset-heart
92 I laid my own to beat,
93 And share commingling heat;
94 But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.
95 In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's grey cheek.
96 For ah! we know not what each other says,
97 These things and I; in sound I speak---
98 Their sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.
99 Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;
100 Let her, if she would owe me,
101 Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me
102 The breasts o' her tenderness:
103 Never did any milk of hers once bless
104 My thirsting mouth.
105 Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
106 With unperturbèd pace,
107 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy;
108 And past those noisèd Feet
109 A voice comes yet more fleet---
110 'Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me.'

111 Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!
112 My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,

113 And smitten me to my knee;
114 I am defenceless utterly.
115 I slept, methinks, and woke,
116 And, slowly gazing, find me stripped in sleep.
117 In the rash lustihead of my young powers,
118 I shook the pillaring hours
119 And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears,
120 I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years---
121 My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.
122 My days have crackled and gone up in smoke,
123 Have puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.
124 Yea, faileth now even dream
125 The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist;
126 Even the linked fantasies, in whose blossomy twist
127 I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist,
128 Are yielding; cords of all too weak account
129 For earth with heavy griefs so overplussed.
130 Ah! is Thy love indeed
131 A weed, albeit an amaranthine weed,
132 Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?
133 Ah! must---
134 Designer infinite!---
135 Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?
136 My freshness spent its wavering shower i' the dust;
137 And now my heart is as a broken fount,
138 Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever
139 From the dank thoughts that shiver
140 Upon the sighful branches of my mind.
141 Such is; what is to be?
142 The pulp so bitter, how shall taste the rind?
143 I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;
144 Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
145 From the hid battlements of Eternity;
146 Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
147 Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.
148 But not ere him who summoneth
149 I first have seen, enwound
150 With glooming robes purpleal, cypress-crowned;
151 His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.
152 Whether man's heart or life it be which yields
153 Thee harvest, must Thy harvest-fields
154 Be dinged with rotten death?

155 Now of that long pursuit
156 Comes on at hand the bruit;
157 That Voice is round me like a bursting sea:
158 'And is thy earth so marred,
159 Shattered in shard on shard?
160 Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!
161 Strange, piteous, futile thing!
162 Wherefore should any set thee love apart?
163 Seeing none but I makes much of naught' (He said),
164 'And human love needs human meriting:
165 How hast thou merited---
166 Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?
167 Alack, thou knowest not
168 How little worthy of any love thou art!
169 Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
170 Save Me, save only Me?
171 All which I took from thee I did but take,

172 Not for thy harms,
173 But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
174 All which thy child's mistake
175 Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
176 Rise, clasp My hand, and come!
177 Halts by me that footfall:
178 Is my gloom, after all,
179 Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
180 'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
181 I am He Whom thou seekest!
182 Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.'