

The Selected Letters of Alice Meynell

The Selected Letters of Alice Meynell:
Poet and Essayist

Edited by

Damian Atkinson

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P U B L I S H I N G

The Selected Letters of Alice Meynell: Poet and Essayist,
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Alice Meynell

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Wilfrid Meynell 1910 (Greatham)

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INTRODUCTION

In a review of Alice's Meynell's *The Rhythm of Life* in the *Bookman*, February 1893, the reviewer remarks of Alice's essays that "It is a voice crying, not in the wilderness, but inside a high-walled garden, and faintly, lest its timbre should suffer." Her essays were of a high literary standard, refined and certainly not appealing to a very large audience. The *Bookman* in April 1923 remarked that "Her appeal will always be to a few only, but of the excellence of her workmanship and the quality of her art there can be no question." And Alice's own statement in reference to some words in her essay *The Leg*: "I need not say it makes me turn cold to think of publishing anything that *anybody* would consider improper!" (Alice to John Lane, September 1892) tells us something of her character and position in society. After Oscar Wilde was sent to prison Alice remarked to her publisher John Lane "I am sure you will agree with me that the mention of Oscar Wilde by name is impossible. I never intended it to stand in any edition published after his experience" (19 February 1896). Alice was concerned about her age and appearance and in a letter to her husband Wilfrid in April 1914 she remarks on receiving an invitation to the Panama Exposition of 1915, that "If I were a little younger, so as to be more presentable, I should fly." Again in reference to her appearance she writes "And as for looks—I am not handsome" (Alice to Mrs Noble, 20 June 1881). In a letter to her first biographer Anne Kimball Tuell (14 December 1921) a year before her death she states "I have always refused to give the date of my birth. I am obliged to take thought as to the reputation of my books, because I am poor." Alice's privacy is noted by her sister Lady Elizabeth Butler in her *Autobiography* (1922): "Her wish to keep her personality always retired prevailed upon me to delete many an allusion to her which would have graced the text" (264).

Alice's father Thomas James Thompson was born in Rio Bureno, Jamaica, the son of James Thompson and his Creole mistress Mary Edwards, in 1812. He came to England on the death of his father and left Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1831 without a degree and then visited America. On his return he married Matilda Frances Christian and they had a son Thomas Melville who appears to have been an invalid and may have died in an institution and a daughter Matilda Frances, always known as Fanny. His wife Matilda died in June 1834 at the young age of twenty-three either in child birth or from consumption as she had given evidence

on oath as to the efficiency of medical treatment for consumption by a Mr John St John Long before William Stirling on 27 August 1830. Thompson failed on three occasions to become an MP, contesting Portsmouth, Yarmouth and Lowestoft as a Liberal. He was a member of Charles Dickens's Amateur Dramatic Company, the Travellers' Club and the Reform Club. He then met Christiana Jane Weller (once admired by Charles Dickens) who was an artist, a concert pianist of no small talent and later a composer. They were married on 21 October 1845 at Barnes and Dickens was a witness. The newly-weds travelled in Europe and their first child Elizabeth Southerden ("Mimi") was born on 3 November 1846 in Switzerland. After they returned to England Alice Christiana Gertrude was born on 11 October 1847 in Barnes. The children's early life was spent travelling with their parents in Europe, especially Italy. The sisters never had a formal education but were tutored by their father and as Alice remarks, by "the usual professors for 'accomplishments'" (Alice Meynell, "Elizabeth Butler", *St Nicholas*, 1 January 1883).

A visit to Malvern was a turning point in Alice's life when she became a Catholic on 20 July 1868 at St George's Church, Worcester, unaware that her mother had become a Catholic sometime earlier. Her father converted just prior to his death. In a letter to her daughter Olivia (19 September 1917) she writes:

I saw, when I was very young, that a guide in morals was even more necessary than a guide in faith. It was for this I joined the Church. Other Christian societies may legislate, but the Church *administers* that legislation. Thus she is practically indispensable.

This was her strength throughout her life.

Alice published her first book of poems, *Preludes*, in 1875 and it gained the admiration of John Ruskin. As a result of a review of *Preludes* in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the second major event in Alice's life occurred: she met the journalist Wilfrid John Meynell in April 1876. Wilfrid was a Quaker turned Roman Catholic and they were married on 16 April 1877 in London after finally allaying Alice's father's concern about Wilfrid's finances and prospects. Their early literary life was initially on Wilfrid's very short-lived *Pen: a Journal of Literature* from 22 May 1880 to 3 July 1880 and then focused on the editorship of the Catholic *Weekly Register* ("Reggie") for eighteen years from July 1881 to June 1899 and their own monthly *Merry England* which ran from May 1883 to March 1895. They were heavily involved in contributions to both. Indeed, Alice led a very busy life as mother and writer, contributing to the *Tablet*, *Saturday Review*, the *Art Journal*, the *Magazine of Art* and the *Spectator*, among

others. Her seven children were a major part of her life.

The arrival of Katharine Tynan in Alice's life (and indeed Wilfrid's) was to have a great impact. Katharine was an aspiring young Irish poet and a friend of W. B. Yeats. She and Alice formed a very close friendship, emotionally and with a common bond in literature, especially poetry. From Katharine's letters it is clear that she had a deep and loving admiration for Alice, whereas Alice's letters show this to a somewhat lesser degree, a constraint in her personality. Katharine's assessment of Alice as a person is given a chapter in her *Memories* (1924) appropriately entitled "The Dearest Woman—Alice Meynell". There is no doubt that outside her family Katharine was Alice's greatest friend though the Catholic poet Coventry Patmore would have hoped otherwise. Patmore was besotted with Alice despite his early lack of enthusiasm for her work as a poet after his initial praise and they became good friends and it is perhaps because of this infatuation that Patmore proposed Alice as Poet Laureate on the death of Tennyson. However, Alice recognised the danger of the friendship and later kept her distance until she ended the friendship "at her husband's urgent wish" (Francis Meynell, *My Lives*, 971, 51). Despite this she championed Patmore as a major poet throughout her life. The novelist George Meredith was another who recognised Alice's literary merits and Patmore was jealous of the relationship. There was at least one other important friendship in Alice's life: the poet Francis Thompson. His saving from the streets of London, but not from opium, by the Meynells, resulted in a fairly close but difficult friendship between the three and the inclusion of Thompson as a major Catholic poet of the period. But for the Meynells we may never have had "The Hound of Heaven".

Alice's first collection of essays *The Rhythm of Life*, reprints mainly from the *Scots Observer*, and its renamed *National Observer*, was published in 1893 to critical acclaim. Also that year saw Alice embark on the "Wares of Autolycus" column in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on Fridays from 2 June 1893 until she changed to Wednesdays from 25 March 1896 to 28 December 1898. This series of articles was written by women and unsigned. She still contributed to the *Pall Mall Gazette* under the signature "A.M." (not to be confused with the critic Anne MacDonnell) and on the resignation of R. A. M. Stevenson as art critic in 1899 may have contributed some unsigned art reviews with her signed art reviews from 1 May 1900 until 20 June 1905. She also published her *Poems* in 1893. Eight children (one of whom died at five months) over a period of thirteen years was a strain on Alice's health. Despite this she managed a busy social and literary life and Wilfrid was very busy working for the Catholic publishers Burns and Oates. Alice and Wilfrid were very close and even

when apart, either in London or Sussex, often wrote more than once a week.

In 1898 Alice's portrait was included as one of only two women in William Rothenstein's *English Portraits* the other being Lady Granby. The following year saw the publication of her second collection of essays *The Colour of Life and Other Essays* mainly culled from the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Her third collection of essays *The Spirit of Place and Other Essays* again mainly from the *Pall Mall Gazette* was published in 1899. A departure from her usual writings was offered by William Blackwood to write on Ruskin in the Modern English Writers series, a task which she found hard. Her *John Ruskin* was published in 1900.

In 1901 Alice was invited by her American friend Agnes Tobin to visit America and also give some lectures. This was a difficult decision for Alice as she could not bear to be away from her beloved family. Despite the separation from her family, especially over Christmas 1901 and the problems of travelling, Alice made a good impression on her various audiences and she wrote articles for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. She had a love of America and Americans and made many friends with whom she later corresponded. Francis Meynell in his "A.T. and A.M.", (*Agnes Tobin: Letters, Translations, Poems*, San Francisco: 1958, xviii) throws some interesting light on the relationship between the two. Agnes is seen by him as having "an ardour" for Alice which he says is "beyond affection" and in 1903 Agnes had a disagreement with Alice the cause of which is unknown but the friendship was later restored. However, most of Alice's letters to Agnes seem to have been destroyed.

Apart from her own writing Alice wrote a number of introductions to Blackie's Red Letter Library of individual poets, including Browning, Tennyson, Keats, Matthew Arnold and Christina Rossetti. Another major art project was her introduction to a portfolio of *The Work of John S. Sargent, R.A.* (1903) who had produced a pencil portrait of her in 1894. The book had a mixed reception despite the acknowledgement of Alice's hard work.

In 1905 the Meynells moved from Palace Court to 4 Granville Place, a disused top floor of the Burns and Oats premises which remained in the family when they moved to Sussex. In 1911 Wilfrid bought eighty acres of land at Greatham in Sussex together with two cottages knocked into one. Humphreys Homestead became the base of the Meynell family through the generations to the present day. Over the years Wilfrid built homes for his children and "the property" or "the colony" was a haven for Alice and the family while Wilfrid was in London.

The early years of the century were full of the fight for women's right

to vote and Alice was in general agreement with suffrage but not of the militancy involved. She attended meetings and also marched. In 1913 she was a Vice-President of the Women Writers' Suffrage League. The first world war intervened in the suffrage cause and Alice then concentrated on her family. However, in 1915 she managed the official translation of the *Pastoral Letter of His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines, Primate of Belgium, Christmas, 1914*, although she was not credited as the translator. As it was published by Burns and Oats this was not so surprising although her standard of French must have been high. This was a clear and thoughtful statement by the Archbishop clarifying his stance on the German occupation of his country. Alice contributed the initial article "The Catholic Suffragist" in the first issue of the *Catholic Suffragist*, 15 January 1915, writing that "A Catholic suffragist woman is a suffragist on graver grounds and with weightier reasons than any other suffragist in England." On 26 April 1915 she wrote to the American poet and journal editor Harriet Monroe "We are indeed unhappy about a war of which we deeply disapprove, so that we cannot wish our own country well." Later she was reported in *The Times*, 1 February 1917, as disclaiming any agreement with her son Francis who was a conscientious objector but respecting his conscience and adding that it was now a just war. This change in attitude may in part be due to the death of her son-in-law Percy Lucas, brother of the writer E. V. Lucas, mortally wounded on the Somme in July 1916. After the war Alice put her faith in the League of Nations to preserve lasting peace.

Peace enabled Alice and her family to return to some form of normality, though the death of Percy Lucas cast a long shadow. She concentrated on her literary work and her extended family during her final years.

In a letter to Katharine Tynan (21 September 1917) Alice, in remarking on her son Everard's *Life of Francis Thompson*, commented "I entirely object to lives anyway. That would not matter if they did not pretend to be. And lives are not for the public at all." This attitude was reflected in her dealings with her American biographer and after her death Wilfrid was of the same mind and prevented Tuell's study being published in England. However, Wilfrid obviously approved of his daughter Viola's *Alice Meynell: A Memoir* published in 1929, nineteen years before his death. Perhaps he wished one of his family to write of Alice rather than an outsider.

Editorial procedures

No edition of Alice's letters has previously been made but many are quoted and a few published by Viola Meynell in her *Memoir* (1929) and by June Badeni in her *The Slender Tree* (1981). The majority of Alice's letters are still in the Library at the family home in Sussex and the remainder are mainly in the UK and the USA.

This selection consists of three hundred and seventy letters. The layout of the letters has been standardised. The holding institution is indicated to the left of the letterhead. Any previous major publication or quotation of a letter is then noted. The position of the address is to the right irrespective of its original position and a printed or embossed address is signified by italics. Below the address the date has been standardised. Alice very rarely gave the year of a letter so dating is based on postmarks, letter content or an added date by an unknown hand although some of the latter letters had been erroneously dated which has caused problems.

The text of the letters has been standardised and postscripts are retained after the closure, whether written as an afterthought at the letterhead or not. Alice's spelling has been retained throughout, as has her punctuation, except where clarity demands an alteration or insertion. Her very floral handwriting varies with age and health and is often difficult to read. In a letter to her daughter Olivia in December 1901 she writes "I don't think my handwriting is decorative now because I have horrid pens." Cancelled passages are generally silently excised unless they are of importance and illegible words are indicated within square brackets and words inserted by Alice have been silently included. Where the sense demands, an apparently omitted word may be added within square brackets. The closing of the letters has been centralised irrespective of the original position.

Footnotes have been added where necessity warrants and I have included my sources in most cases. Where a reference in the text is unidentified a footnote has, in most cases, not been added.

SOURCES OF LETTERS AND SHORT TITLES

Atkinson	Damian Atkinson
Badeni	June Badeni, <i>The Slender Tree: A Life of Alice Meynell</i> (Padstow, Cornwall: Tabb House, 1981)
Berg	The Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations
Birmingham	Central Library, Birmingham
BL	British Library, London
Bodleian	Bodleian Library, University of Oxford
Boston	John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Massachusetts
Brotherton	The Brotherton Library, Leeds University
Brown	Brown University Library, Providence, Rhode Island
Bryn Mawr	Mariam Coffin Canaday Library, Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania
Cambridge	The Library, University of Cambridge
Chicago	University of Chicago Library, Illinois
Churchill	Churchill College Archives Centre, University of Cambridge
Colby	Colby College Library, Waterville, Maine
Delaware	University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware
Dublin	Trinity College Library, Dublin
Durham	Durham University Library
Fales	Fales Library, New York University, New York
Florence	The British Institute of Florence, Firenze
<i>FT and WM</i>	Viola Meynell, <i>Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell: a Memoir</i> (Hollis & Carter: 1952)
Girton	Girton College, University of Cambridge
Glasgow	The Library, University of Glasgow
Greatham	The Meynell Library, Humphreys Homestead, Greatham, West Sussex
Harris	The Harris Library, Preston
<i>Henley Letters</i>	<i>The Selected Letters of W. E. Henley</i> , ed. Damian Atkinson (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2000)
Hertfordshire	Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

Houghton	Houghton Library, Harvard University, Massachusetts
HRC	The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Texas
Huntington	The Huntington Library, San Marino, California
Lasner	Mark Samuels Lasner
Lilly	The Lilly Library, University of Indiana, Indiana
Manchester	The John Rylands Library, University of Manchester
<i>Memoir</i>	Viola Meynell, <i>Alice Meynell: A Memoir</i> (Jonathan Cape: 1929)
Mitchell	The Mitchell Library, Glasgow
Morgan	The Morgan Library, New York
Morris	Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
New England	University of New England, NSW, Australia
Notre Dame	University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana
Nottingham	Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham
NYPL	New York Public Library
Princeton	Princeton University Library, New Jersey
Reading	The Library, University of Reading
RLF	The Royal Literary Fund, London
Somerville	The Library, Somerville College, University of Oxford
Thompson	Everard Meynell, <i>The Life of Francis Thompson</i> (Burns & Oates: 1913)
Toronto	Victoria University Library, Toronto
UCL	University College Library, London University
UCLA	William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, California
Vassar	Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, New York
Wellesley	Wellesley College Library, Massachusetts
West Sussex	West Sussex Record Office, Chichester
Yale	The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library, Connecticut

A CHRONOLOGY OF ALICE MEYNELL 1847-1922

- 1846 Elizabeth Southerden ("Mimi") Thompson born,
Switzerland, 3 November.
- 1847 Alice Christiana Gertrude Thompson born at Barnes, Surrey,
11 October.
- 1848 Moved to Prestbury, near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.
- 1851 Travelled in France and Italy and lived at Sori, Italy. At 61
High Street, Prestbury, near Cheltenham, for 1851 Census in
April. Alice's half-sister Fanny living with them.
- 1854 Visited Florence, later stayed in England for a year.
- 1855 Visited Switzerland and Italy.
- 1857 Return to England and Betchworth, Surrey.
- 1859 Visit to Jersey, London then Italy.
- 1861 France and Italy then England.
- 1862 Visit Belgium and Germany.
- 1864 At Bonchurch, Isle of Wight.
- 1865 At Bonchurch. At Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.
- 1866 Short stay at Brompton then in Arundel, Sussex.
- 1867 At Summer Terrace, Onslow Square, South Kensington.
- 1868 Family in Malvern, Worcestershire, and Alice is received
into the Roman Catholic Church at St George's, Worcester,
on 20 July. In October they went to Italy.
- 1869 In Italy.
- 1870 Return in May to Isle of Wight and then Sumner Terrace,
Onslow Square, South Kensington.
- 1871 At Sumner Terrace in April. Return to Isle of Wight in
August.
- 1873 Alice and Mimi on a pilgrimage to France.
- 1875 Publishes *Preludes* her first book of poems. Visits Italy with
Mimi.
- 1876 Visits Tennyson. Writes for *The Tablet* and *Irish Monthly*.
Visits Italy with Mimi. Meets Wilfrid Meynell.

- 1877 Marries Wilfrid Meynell on 16 April in London and moves to 11 Inkerman Terrace, Kensington. Mimi marries Major William Butler on 11 June.
- 1878 Alice's first child Sebastian ("Bastian") Henry Tuke Meynell born 19 October.
- 1880 Monica ("Monnie") Mary Eve Meynell born 24 March. Wilfrid edits his short-lived *The Pen: a Journal of Literature*.
- 1881 Move to Phillimore Place, Kensington. Wilfrid edits the *Weekly Register*.
- 1882 Everard Henry Edward Manning Meynell ("Cuckoo") born 4 February.
- 1883 Wilfrid starts monthly *Merry England* with Burns and Oates.
- 1884 Madeline ("Dimpling") Mary Eve born 22 May. Meets Katharine Tynan.
- 1885 Viola ("Prue"/"Prudie") Mary Gertrude Meynell born 15 October.
- 1887 Vivian Meredith Meynell born 3 March but dies on 13 August.
- 1888 The Meynells meet Francis Thompson. Wilfrid buys land at Palace Court, Bayswater, London, to build 47 Palace Court. The Meynells take temporary accommodation.
- 1889 *The Poor Sisters of Nazareth* published.
- 1890 Olivia ("Lobbie"/"Beelie") Mary K. Meynell born 9 March.
- 1891 Francis Meredith Wilfrid Meynell born 12 May. Francis Thompson his godfather.
- 1892 Visits Coventry Patmore in June. Coventry Patmore visits the Meynells in August. *Poems* and *The Rhythm of Life and Other Essays* published in December.
- 1893 Writes first "Autolycus" article for the *Pall Mall Gazette* 2 June.
- 1894 Edits *The Poems of Gordon Hake*. Meets Sidney Colvin and Harry Cust in January. Visits Francis Thompson at the Franciscan Friary, Pantasaph, North Wales.
- 1895 Coventry Patmore suggests Alice as Poet Laureate.
- 1896 *Other Poems* privately printed. Has John Lane remove Oscar Wilde's name from *The Rhythm of Life*. Visits George Meredith in August. *The Colour of Life and Other Essays* published. Publishes *The Poetry of Pathos and Delight from the Works of Coventry Patmore*. Writes for the *Daily Chronicle*. Coventry Patmore dies 26 November.

- 1897 *The Children* published. Visits the Three Choirs Festival at Hereford in September with Agnes Tobin.
- 1898 *London Impressions* published. Portrait included in William Rothenstein's *English Portraits*. Visits George Meredith with Agnes Tobin. The Meynells and Francis Thompson visit Wilfrid Blunt. Final "Autolycus" 28 December.
- 1899 *The Spirit of Place and Other Essays* published. Short summer visit to France.
- 1900 *John Ruskin* published. Visits Italy.
- 1901 September travels on lecture tour to America. Writes articles for *Pall Mall Gazette*.
- 1902 Returns to England in April. *Later Poems* published. Woodcut by Robert Bryden included in William Archer's *Poets of the Younger Generation*.
- 1903 *Children of the Old Masters* published. Introduction to *The Work of John S. Sargent*. Various introductions to the Red Letter Library series. Monica marries Caleb Saleeby.
- 1905 Meynells move to 4 Granville Place. Chairs meeting of the Playgoers' Club, 26 March, London. Motoring with Madeline in the north of England, July and August.
- 1906 Visits Rome and writes articles for the *Outlook*. Visits Jersey with Viola.
- 1907 Madeline marries Percy Lucas. Francis Thompson dies 13 November.
- 1908 Everard marries Grazia Carbone. Alice and Wilfrid in Paris. Alice then visits Rome on her own to stay with friends.
- 1909 *Ceres' Runaway and Other Essays* published. George Meredith dies 18 May.
- 1910 Monica's marriage breaks down. Alice's mother dies 13 March. Mimi's husband General Sir William Butler dies 7 June. In November Alice visits Mimi in Ireland.
- 1911 Wilfrid buys Humphreys Homestead, Greatham, Sussex.
- 1912 Publishes *Mary, the Mother of Jesus: an Essay*. Attends suffragette meeting 17 March at London Opera House. Attends protest meeting in London 15 April. Joint letter to *The Times* re. suffragettes in prison, 24 June. Meets Rabindranath Tagore. Letter in the *Tablet* re. women suffragettes, 2 November.

- 1913 *Poems and Childhood* published. Supports Stephen Phillips's application to the Royal Literary Fund. Joint letter in the *New Age*, 3 July, supporting suffragettes. Everard published his *Life of Francis Thompson*. Olivia marries Thomas Murray Sowerby.
- 1914 Publishes *The Shepherdess and Other Poems* a reprint of *Later Poems*. Publishes *Essays*. Francis arrested supporting women's suffrage. Alice invited to Panama Exposition in 1915. Madeline's husband Percy Lucas enlists. Elected to Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature. Francis Meynell married 20 August.
- 1915 *Pastoral Letter of His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines, Primate of Belgium, Christmas, 1914. Official Translation.* (By Alice). Writes for the *Catholic Suffragist*. D. H. Lawrence lives on Greatham estate for six months. Wilfrid's successful novel *Aunt Sarah and the War* published.
- 1916 Publishes *Poems on the War* (20 copies, privately printed). Percy Lucas died of wounds 6 July.
- 1917 Francis Meynell released after three weeks in prison as a conscientious objector. Publishes *A Father of Women* and *Hearts of Controversy*.
- 1921 *Second Person Singular* published.
- 1922 Viola Meynell marries John Dallyn 28 February. Alice's biographer Anne Kimball Tuell visits. Alice dies on 27 November 1922.
- 1923 *Last Poems* and *The Poems of Alice Meynell* published.

THE LETTERS 1858-1922

I

EARLY YEARS AND LITERATURE 1 MARCH 1858-27 AUGUST 1901

To Christiana Thompson¹
MS Greatham.

Westcott St [Dorking]²
1 March [18]58

Dear little Mammy,

We have got here quite safe.³ Bill was at the station. I am glad you did not give us that “Booby Ninni”,—so on, for I could not see the letter hole. The ground is covered with snow. Aunt Bessy sends her love to you and as I am writing to you today, Aunt Bessy will write to you tomorrow.⁴ We have been playing at hide and seek and we have been painting. Tell little cat Anna that I was so sorry not to see her before I went. We were alone all the way from London Bridge to Dorking in the railway carriage and we only stopped at Redhill and Reigate. There are a quantity of dear little daises in water.

Give my love to Loze, and Grandmamma & Grandpapa⁵ & little Anna, and give my respects to the three cats.

Dear Mammy
I have concluded
Dear Mammy

¹ Alice’s mother Christiana Jane Thompson (1825-1910), *née* Weller, had married the widower Thomas James Thompson (c.1812-81) at St Mary’s Parish Church, Barnes, on 21 October 1845. Christiana was living at St. Aubyn Cottage, Putney Hill, Surrey.

² The Thompson family arrived from Italy in 1857 and stayed at Betchworth near Dorking. After a visit to Jersey and later to London they returned to Italy in the autumn of 1859, returning to England in 1861.

³ Alice and her sister the military artist Elizabeth (“Mimi”) Southerden Thompson (1846-1933), *later* Lady Butler.

⁴ Alice was staying at Wescott Villa, Westcott Street, the home of Christiana Thompson’s sister Bessy or Betsy Southerden Weller (1824-85) who had married aged sixteen the widower James Crescent Shaw (1799-1876) on 4 November 1840.

⁵ Christiana’s parents Thomas Edmond Weller (1799-1884) and Elizabeth Dixon Southerden (1798-1879).

To Christiana Thompson
MS Greatham.

South Street, Dorking
Thursday 3 October [18]61

My dearest Mamma,

We have been very anxious about you travelling all alone but I hope that now you have arrived quite safely at Senanalle you must have been especially anxious of dear Fanny all through the journey—how delighted she will be to see you.⁶ Papa's letters to you were all opened by us for we thought of course they were for all of us, and I am glad that we did for they contained such good news.

We practise very regularly every day and do German, Italian, etc., all as Papa's wanted. Mary and Lucy are also joining us in wading through *Ollé*. We go very often to Boxhill and take a walk whenever it is fine. Amélie gets on very well with her two companions the cats.⁷ *Backie* by the bye has just been given to Mrs Parsons because we have surprised [*illegible*] of several rather unpleasant boys with whom your little boy would have rather a hard time. So the little thing stays at Boxhill until further directions from you. The first time we went there we arranged all Papa's books very carefully on the dining-room table, for we were frightened of the mice and the dust and the damp. We placed them very carefully so that none of their corners were knocked.

We amuse ourselves very much, my dear mamma, and our little coughs and colds are fast disappearing before the returned warm weather.

I hope we shall soon hear from you and how dear Fanny is progressing.

My best love to dear Papa.

I rest

Your affectionate daughter

A. C. Thompson

P.S. Mimi and everybody send their best love.

⁶ Alice's half-sister Matilda Frances (b.1834) known as Fanny, daughter of Thomas James Thompson's first wife. She married Carlo Brocchi (1825-60) on 5 October 1852 at the British Consul's Office, Genoa. Carlo was killed fighting for Garibaldi at the battle of Voltorno on 2 October 1860. Fanny was at Senanalle, Macerata, Italy. She later married a Mr Edlmann.

⁷ Their Swiss nurse.

To Christiana Thompson
MS Greatham.

9 Brompton Crescent [London]⁸
18 July 1864

My dearest little Mama,

It is a horribly long time since I have written to you. I feel but we have been doing so much and we have been so tired that I have had very little time to spare. We were with Grandmama on Saturday evening and dined there on Sunday. To-day Mr Pollard took me to Winterbottom's who looked at my fangs and gave me some stuff to put in them I am enough tired of them to have them out.⁹ He is a very nice kind man. We have been twice to the Royal Academy and once to the French & Flemish which is a splendid little gallery, besides many other pictures, Mimi and I go about London beautifully—people here are quite accustomed to see young girls going alone. I am sorry to say, little thing, that my white bonnet became such a decided brown in the smoke and "blacks" that I have been constrained to get one—a black with blue strings, pretty and quiet, which will last me longer. Be sure to come as soon as you said, small, before everything shuts up. Captain Christian with his wife and daughter have been here to-day—they are such nice people.¹⁰ Mrs Christian is very handsome, with such lovely golden hair, and the girl is a perfect beauty. Meta is often here, she is enormously stout but looking very well. She brought Mrs Hill to-day. We want so horribly to hear *Faust*, but Friday is Adelina Patti's benefit,¹¹ and there will be such a crush that we have given up the idea—however they give it again this season when I hope we shall have a chance. Goodbye for the moment, little nice Mama. Love from everyone to you & Papa.

Your ever loving daughter
Alice Thompson

⁸ A Lodging House kept by Charlotte Keates (c.1820-89) with her sisters Eliza and Ann also living there.

⁹ Edwin John Winterbottom, 16 Sloane Street, London.

¹⁰ Edward Christian (1815-1903) was in the Merchant Navy and had married the artist Eleanor Emma Picken (1822-98) in September 1842. There were three daughters, Eleanor Elizabeth (b.1849), Ida (b.1856) and Geraldine (b.1858).

¹¹ The famous Italian opera star Adelina Patti (1843-1919) played the part of Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust* at the Royal Italian Opera company at Covent Garden.

To Wilfrid Meynell¹²

MS Greatham. Published in Badeni, 55.

3 Tregunter Road, S.W.¹³

11 April 1876

Dear Mr Meynell,

I never see the *Irish Monthly*, so if you can spare a copy containing your sonnet, I should very much like to read it.¹⁴

Pray do not let your coming depend on Fr Lockhart's many engagements.¹⁵ Your review of *Preludes* gave my father and mother so

¹² Wilfrid John Isaac Meynell (1852-1948) was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and moved to London after April 1871 where he became a journalist. He had become a Catholic in 1870. Meynell then worked for the publishers Burns & Oates in London.

¹³ The home of Alice's parents.

¹⁴ Wilfrid Meynell had read a review of Alice's *Preludes* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 July 1875, and composed his "Sonnet. To Miss Alice Thompson, Author of *Preludes*", *Irish Monthly*, 1876, 389.

TO MISS ALICE THOMPSON, AUTHOR OF "PRELUDES"

THOU art not like to others; in thine eyes
 There shines a light and sweetness all thine own;
 A melody unique is in thy tone,
 And in thy touch a mystic magic lies.
 With more than woman's wisdom thou art wise;
 Nature to thee her very soul hath shown,
 And all the hidden mysteries made known
 Of, birds and flowers, green earth and azure skies;
 And thy skilled hand doth tenderly unfold
 To us our mother's beauties one by one,—
 Her manifold secrets with a pen of gold
 Doth write in words that they may read who run.
 Thou art my "moon of poets"—and, all told,
 I love the moon far better than the sun.

¹⁵ Alice Thompson's first volume of poetry *Preludes* was published in May 1875 with her sister Elizabeth ("Mimi") providing the illustrations. The *Academy*, 3 July 1875 noted: "We have read all through very carefully twice without being able to find one poem sufficiently good to be worth quoting." The *Pall Mall Gazette* commented:

Miss Thompson is probably young, and therefore it would be unwise to form any decided estimate from this first in-gathering of her poetical

much pleasure that you need no other introduction.¹⁶ We are always to be found on Wednesday from 4 to 7 o'clock.

I forgot to ask you never to tell Mr de Vere that I reviewed either his own or his father's works in the *Tablet*.¹⁷

Believe me,
Faithfully yours,
Alice Thompson

harvest. All that she possesses of imaginative faculty may be uttered in this volume, but we may reasonably hope that these lyrics are but an introduction to work of really lasting value.

The *Daily News*, 19 August 1875, found "no distinct individuality in these poems". The *Morning Post*, 28 August 1875, commented that the book "may fairly take rank with the thousand-and-one volumes of verse which annually appear on the poetical horizon, fading altogether very soon out of the public sight and mind".

William Lockhart (1819-92), was received into the Catholic Church in 1843 prior to John Henry Newman becoming a Catholic. Lockhart joined the Rosminian Order of Charity in Rome in 1845 and later became the Order's procurator-general. He edited the *Outline of the Life of Rosmini* (1856) the founder of the Order.

¹⁶ The *Tablet*, 21 August 1875, called *Preludes* "a very graceful little volume" but marred by some obscurity.

¹⁷ Aubrey Thomas de Vere (1814-1902), Irish poet and critic converted to Roman Catholicism in 1857. His father was the poet Sir Aubrey de Vere, Bt (1788-1846). Alice's review may be that of "Sir Aubrey de Vere's Sonnets", *Tablet*, 18 December 1875. A new edition of the senior de Vere's *Sonnets* was published in 1875. Alice and de Vere corresponded over the years with him giving her encouragement and advice.

To Wilfrid Meynell

MS Greatham. Quoted in Badeni, 56.

3 Tregunter Road, S.W.

2 May [1876]

Dear Mr. Meynell,

I do so want to make peace with you that I have been turning over the letters of my most valued correspondents to find you an autograph or two.

I send a signature of my dear Ruskin's, one of Sir Henry Taylor's,¹⁸ one of Coventry Patmore's,¹⁹ whose exquisite poetry I hope you know and love, one of Mr. Smiles, the well-known author of *Self-Help*;²⁰ Edwin Arnold²¹ is the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and the writer of the gushing leaders of that excitable journal; Mrs. Bishop you may know as the author of the *Prisoners of the Temple*.²² She is the writer of the severe (but not the *most* savage) serial articles in the *Saturday Review*. Perhaps you do not know or care much about Allingham,²³ a small but nice poet; but you ought, (if you do not) to know Sebastian Evans,²⁴ who is much more than that.

Faithfully yours
Alice Thompson

¹⁸ The poet, playwright and Colonial Office senior clerk Sir Henry Taylor (1800-86).

¹⁹ The poet Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore (1823-96) had become a Catholic in 1864 and later formed an intense devotion to Alice. She in turn championed his work.

²⁰ Samuel Smiles (1812-1904), writer, surgeon and journalist, who wrote on political and social reform. He published biographies with an emphasis on moral character but is remembered for his very popular *Self-Help* (1859) which preached thrift and general self-improvement.

²¹ The poet Edwin Arnold (1832-1904) was chief editor of the *Daily Telegraph* from 1873 to 1889.

²² *The Prisoners of the Temple* (1874) was written by Maurice C. O'Connor Morris according to the Bodleian Library and the British Library, among others. Fr. Matthew Russell, S.J., in an article "The Literature of King's County", in the *Irish Monthly*, July 1904, remarks that Miss C. O'Connor Morris, later Mrs Bishop, wrote the book. Maria Catherine O'Conner Bishop (1830-98), née Morris. No articles under either name have been identified in the *Saturday Review*.

²³ The poet William Allingham (1824-89) whose wife was the well-known artist Helen Allingham (1848-1926).

²⁴ Sebastian Evans (1830-1909) wrote on religious matters and history. His *In the Studio, a Decade of Poems* was published in 1875 to a favourable review in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Wilfrid reviewed Evans in "Some Recent Poetry", *Irish Monthly*, 1877, 5, 151-9.

To Wilfrid Meynell

MS Greatham.

Tregunter Road, [London]

26 May [1876]

My dear Mr. Meynell,

I send your book by this post. Had I known where it was you should have had it sooner. I should like to know what you think of it. I think some passages simply exquisite, but the whole is monotonous, don't you think so?

What you say of my little successes gives me great encouragement, and I think it very kind of you to take such interest in the fortunes of my *Preludes*.

Mama does not think it at all a bore to call on Mrs. Procter. It is an acquaintance we shall be particularly glad to make.

Believe me
Faithfully yours
Alice Thompson