And then it was a youthful pair who came,
And noble both, who to each other clung
In tender love: he a young soldier tall,
With the proud mien and port of one who strode
From the far North to the extremest South
Before Rome’s conquering legions, o’er the world,
Bearing the eagles forth; she a fond wife,
Who clasped and kissed his hand, and gazed on him
With youthful eyes, while with the unbraided gold
Of her fair hair, bright as the crowns they wore,
He with pure yearning played. I knew them not,
Nor doth the world as yet, when thus my guide:

“Adrian, Tribune of the Imperial Guard,
When the tenth wave of blood assailed the Faith, 
Served in Bithynia. There, a youth in years,
He lived in wedlock with his youthful love,
Natalia, fair, and virtuous as fair,
And secretly of Christ. When came command
That all should kneel before the heathen gods,
The brave S. George tore from the city walls
The shameful edict. Then, with coward rage,
The Pagan Cæsars in one day haled forth
Two score to death with torture. In the hall
Of judgment Adrian, as beseemed his rank,
Stood with his soldiers. Fierce and fiercer still
The torturers plied their hellish arts; and he,
Seeing how firm the martyrs stood and bore
Fell malice and the black despite of men,
Wondered to see their pious constancy.
Last, his great heart grew sickened at the wrong,
And then the strong resistless tide of Faith
Took him, and he believed, because he knew,
'That this thing was of God; and his brave soul,
Which scorned concealment and the hypocrite's wiles,
Burst into word and act, and from his breast
He tore the glittering emblems of his rank,
And, flinging from him the dishonoured sword
Which served the Pagan, being now of Christ,
While all his soldiers wondered, knowing not
What thing he would, amid the painful throng
Of prisoners standing, cried aloud and said,
'I too am with them, for I am of Christ;
Torture me, slay me, too.' Then, with amaze,
The guards advancing haled him with the rest
To prison and to death. But he gave thanks
For what had been, and, glorying in his faith,
Went with his suffering brethren to his doom.

Now, when these things were done, there fell deep awe
And pity on all who heard, and to the house
Of Adrian hastened breathless messengers
To tell of what had been, and how its lord,
Spurning the Pagan gods, had braved his doom.
‘Adrian is Christian and holds fast the Faith,
And goes to torture for his Master’s name.’
Thus said they; and his wife, who heard the tale,
Felt her young heart beat slow, then cease with pain.
And swooned; but when her life returned again,
Gave thanks and wept for joy that he, her love,
Was worthy to bear witness to the Faith
And know a blessed death.

Quickly she rose
And hastened to the prison cell, and there
Fell prone on his beloved neck, and kissed
His heavy chains, giving God praise that he,
Like her, was of the Faith, and bade him keep
The Truth through death and torment to the end,
And comforted her love, and clasped him round,
And, on his dear lips showering kisses, went
Back to their lonely palace. Three long days
She spent in prayer for him, on whom the fell
Forces of evil worked their will, and doomed
His life to cruel death; but never again,
Loving with all her tender heart, would dare
To seek his prison cell, lest haply Love
Should conquer Duty; but her faithful prayer
Rose for him day and night, that he might live
Or die, if such God's will, true to the Faith.

But on the prisoner, Adrian, longing came,
When now he was condemned and the new day
Should bring him death with pain, if only he
Might see his love once more, and when 'twas night,
Though firm and constant in the Faith and strong
To die for it, an innocent desire
To look once more in those belovèd eyes,
And press once more those stainless lips, and hear
Once more that tender voice, and seem again
A lover as of yore; and, offering gold
And giving surety for his safe return
Ere the dawn brought the day when he should die,
The prison doors flew open, and he stole—
Free once again, as if the fateful Past
Were but a dreadful nightmare of his sleep—
Forth from the dungeon's close and filthy air,
Through the cool night, by the familiar ways,
None in the darkness marking him, to where,
Within his palace halls, Natalia mused,
Sad, silent, lonely, half distraught in mind—
Sad she should see no more the well-loved face,
Glad that her love bare witness to the Faith—
Seeking to exorcise her painful thought
With spinning.

Then one hastened in and cried,

'Be of good heart, dear mistress, for my lord,
'Scaping the dungeon, comes and will be here.
Prepare for flight; you shall live happy yet.
Have all things ready. Lo! the night is dark;
Take horse and flee.'

Then through that faithful heart
A thousand warring tides of passion surged—
Hope, fear, love, duty, natural joy and pride
Because she was a wife and rapt in love;
But at the last, the passion of the Faith
Prevailing, prone to earth she fell, and cried,
'Ah, miserable me, who am too vile
To wed with one who wears the martyr's crown!
Shall not all men cry shame on me, whose love
Led Adrian astray, who else had dared
The fiercest torments which the devilish spite
Of Hell devised for him! Oh, my lost love,
'Twere better I should love thee thus, and bear
Part in thy glory, though it came with death,
Than live with thee dishonoured and, through me,
Sinking in coward fear the love of God.
Nay, my sweet Adrian, not for me indeed
Shalt thou deny the Faith.'
Now Adrian heard,
Standing without, his wife's beloved voice,
And caught her words, and could not brook delay
An instant, but burst swiftly in and clasped her
Close to his heart, and lifting up his voice—
'Noblest and best of women, I give praise
To God that thou art strong, and that thy soul
Is steadfast as my own. I do but come
'To say to thee "Farewell," for with the day
I am condemned to die. Full well I knew
'Thy love would never tempt me to be false;
For only utter faithfulness is love.
But now thy loyal soul has smoothed my path
And left my duty easier, and I go
Back to my dungeon with a cheerful heart
'That I have seen thy face.'

Then she arose
And kissed him, and upon his breast she laid
Her wifely head; and straight, without a word,
They twain went unattended through the night,
Who might have fled, and by the well-known streets,
Hushed now and slumbering; guarded by no guard
Save their own honour, sought the prison gate.
And, much amazed, the warder marked them come,
Hand clasped in hand, and swung the sounding door;
And in his prison cell till dawn of day
They sate together, waiting for the end.

And Adrian, when the day was come, went forth
To judgment, and they scourged him sore and racked
His limbs with cruel tortures. But his wife
They drove forth from him, and he lay alone
On the cold ground, with none to comfort him,
Since well they knew what charity inspired
The womanly soft hearts which called on Christ;
And she, lamenting sore and half distraught
Because he suffered with no hand to soothe
His painful limbs, rose suddenly and took
A daring purpose. From her comely head
She sheared the golden treasure of her hair,
Donning man’s garb, and gained the prison gate,
Disguised, nor known to any as she went,
A man with all a woman’s pitying heart,
A woman with the courage of a man;
And, gaining entrance, sought her love, and bound
His piteous wounds, soothed him with loving words.
‘Light of mine eyes, how blest art thou,’ she cried,
‘To suffer for the Faith!’ and strengthened him,
And lulled his pain to sleep, and with him sate,
Sleepless herself, his head upon her breast,
Filled with deep grief and saintly ecstasy,
Until the slow dawn, glimmering, brought the day.

Then, when the sun had risen, there came command
That he should die; but first, with hateful art,
His good right hand they severed while he lived.
And she saw all, and watched without a word,
And all her tender woman's heart stood still
To see his pain, and sain had borne it all—
Filled with high pride, yet tortured with regret
That she had wrought this thing; and round him cast
Her wifely arms, prayed with him, and sustained
His ebbing life, till, ere the headsman came
To sever from the trunk the well-loved head,
With one deep sigh, he breathed his last and gave
His soul to God.

But she, when all was done,
Kissed him upon the painless brow, and stooped
And took his severed hand, the dear dead hand
Which oft had smoothed her hair; and in her bosom
Upon her wifely breast, she hid it close,
The dear dead hand! and, hurrying to her home,
Safe in her palace chamber folded it
With linen herchiefs fine, and wrapt it round
With precious spices sweet and perfumed oils,
And by her lonely bedside kept it long,
And often, ere the grey dawn broke, would rise
And kiss and clasp it, giving thanks to God
That her love kept the Faith.

But the saint's b

Some faithful Christians stealing from the hill
Bore to Byzantium; there with pious care
They buried it, and costly obsequies.

But she, the sainted woman, dwelt alone
Long time within her palace, cherishing
The memory of her love. Caesar at last
Hating her constant soul, bade her prepare
For wedlock with some favourite of the Court,
A Tribune of the Guard. No word she breathed
Of disobedience, but one night she fled
Her widowed home, and, taking ship, sailed
To Argyropolis, across the sea;
And when they told her how her love
Hard by, within a costly sepulchre,
Live there long time, grown happier that she held
Her lord's beloved dust. Oft in the night
She took her to the tomb, and there
Kneelt, and full often in her weary sleep,
Henry with tears the blessed Adrian
Visied her in dreams, and shone on her
Drest with the glory of beatitude,
Bidding that she should follow, till her soul,
Submitting to earthly fetters, longed to rise
And join her lover. And so at length
Her earnest prayer was granted. Death set free
That faithful heart; and when at last it loosed
Heaven-sent spirit, lo! a glorious grace
Of Angel, and amid them Adrian,
To meet her as she rose; and sphere on sphere
Their souls together heave aword into joy, /
They dwell together for ever and are blest."

And as I listened, rapt in tearful thought,
And musing on the mystery of Pain
That wings the saintly soul, I heard again:

"Not only through the dungeon or the rack
Is won the Martyr's crown. Blest souls indeed
Are those which suffer openly, and reap
Through bodily pain the rich reward of Love—
Dear souls and strong; but those who only bear
The suffering of the soul, when the racked spirit
Gives love for faith, and dooms a life to die,
Dearer than life, for duty, and lives on
And bears and does not die, but wears its pain
For weary years, and hears no loud acclaim
Of heavenly quires, and bears no victor's palm.
But lives self-doomed to solitude and doubt,
And finds the closed heavens deaf, the past a dream,
And all the future dumb—for these, too, Heaven
Keeps its own crown, as precious as the pearl
Of sacrifice which decks the painful brow
Of agony,—its own triumphant crown.
For what is martyrdom but witness borne
To God and Truth, in body as in soul,
Through life and death, though sudden stress of pain
Or life-long suffering witness to the Right?"
'Twas an old man came next, who bore the palm, a
Mild and of venerable mien, with hair
And beard of silver, yet his sunburnt cheek
Showed ruddy with the hue of health which still
Smiles like an Indian summer on the lives
Of those who, like the first great Husbandman,
Breathe purer air far from the dust of towns,
And watch the fair flowers blow, the fruits grow ripe,
Changing their healthy toil for tranquil sleep,
And mingling works of mercy with pure thoughts
And meditations. Him indeed I knew not, .
And yet half guessed his tale.

And this it was:
"In Pontus, by Sinope, dwelt of old,
Three centuries after Christ, an aged man,
Phocas by name. He to his lowly home
Retiring from the busy city, spent
His life in meditation on the Faith,
Sweetening his honest toil. Day after day
Within his narrow garden-ground he found
Fit labour for his hands; eve after eve,
When the sweet toilsome day at last was done,
He strayed among the flowers and fruits his skill
Had reared—the roses red and white which filled
The air with perfume, like the fragrant flower
Of sanctitude; the white cups veined with gold
Of lilies, pure as blameless lives, which breathe
Their sweetness to the heavens; the flower which bears
The symbols of the Passion; the mild roots
And milky herbs which nourish those white lives
That scorn to batten on the blood and pain
Of innocent dumb brutes; such honeyed fruits
As our first parents ate in Paradise—
Rich apples, golden pears, pink pomegranates,
The pendent purple of the trellised grape,
And blushing peaches, and the perfumed globes
Of melons; all the flowers and fruits the isles
Of the enchanted dim Hesperides
Bore in the fabled eld. Of these he took
Sufficient for his hunger, praising God,
And of the rest he gave of charity
To all the poor and weak, free without price,
Following his Master’s word. And all the poor
And needy blessed him and revered the skill
Which reared them, and the venerable years
Of that good gardener. None who came to him
His generous hand denied, but he would give them
Shelter and food, and, when the day was done,
Converse on things Divine, and many a word
Truth which swayed the listener, if he were
A Pagan still, or heartened him indeed
If he already held and loved the Faith.

For while to some pure souls the thought, the dream,
The blessed visions are enough, the sounds
Heard by rapt ears, the opened heavens, the joy
Of contemplation only, when the sands
Of the desert or the cloistered vistas dim
Show ghostly 'neath the midnight stars, for some
Labour is best—not sordid labour vile
And turned to earth, but that which working still
For Heaven doth therefore gain a purer height
Than any; and for him the varied page
Of Nature painted by a hand divine
Brought meditation, and he found a voice
In every bursting flower and mellowing fruit;
In every life which, governing its way,
By heavenly rule, lived on without offence
And did fulfil its part; in every weed
Which cumbered earth, yet doubtless were of aid
If we might read its secret; every growth
Of poison, which from the same elements,
The bounteous earth, the wooing of the sun,
The same fair fanning breezes, as the grain
On which our lives are nourished, waxed and grew
To deal out death and torment. Long he mused
On all these things—how one great Husbandman
Planted them all, and framed them as He framed
The tiger and the lamb; and so he gained
Mild wisdom from his daily task, and awe,
And wonder, which is kin to faith, and thence
True faith in God and man, and was content
To sow the seed of good within his soul,
As in the earth, and root the evil out,
And living only for the Faith, to work
And be at peace, leaving the rest to Him
Who sends in season, sun and rain and cloud
And frost, and in whose hand are flower and fruit
To give or to withhold, in earth and heaven.

Now, one fair summer eve, as Phocas sate
At supper, came a knock, and he in haste
Opening, three strangers waited at the door,
Whom he bade enter and take food and rest;
And when they were refreshed, he questioned them
What errand brought them. And they said in turn,
‘We seek a certain Phocas—know’st thou him?—
Who dares to call on Christ, and have command
To slay him found.’ Then tranquilly the saint—
‘Sleep now and rest. I know him. With the dawn
I will conduct you to him.’ And they slept,
Not dreaming whom they saw, and were content.

But he, when all the house was dark and still,
Stole out into his garden. The faint stars,
Pale in the radiance of the summer night,
Trembled above him; at his feet the flowers
He loved so well declined their heavy heads
And slumbering petals. One loud nightingale,
Thrilling the tender passionate note of old,
Throbbed from a flower-cupped tree, and round him all:
The thousand perfumes of the summer night
Steeped every sense in fragrance sweeter far
Than frankincense the skill of men compounds

In Araby the Blest. Then on the grass
He sate him down, rapt deep in musing thought;
And o'er him, ghostly white or gleaming red,
The roses glistened, and the lilies closed
Their pure white cups, and bowed their heads, and seemed
To overhear his thought. 'Should be then fly,
To live a little while, leaving his home
And all that made it dear, the flowers, the fruits
He loved, and preach the Faith a little yet
Before Fate called him? Surely life is sweet
To tranquil souls, which scorn delights and take
Something of Heaven on earth; ay, sweeter far
Than the old haste of flushed and breathless chase,
Strong pulses, vaulting projects, hot designs
To capture worthless ends. Haply 'twere well
For this, to leave the solitude he loved
As others wife or child.'

But as he mused,
The thought of full obedience filled his soul;
Submissive to the Heavenly Will which sent
Those fatal messengers, and destined for him
The martyr's crown, and swayed and took so fast
His doubtful mind, that presently he rose,
As one whose purpose halts not—rose and went
As in a dream, and coming brought a spade
And softly, half in dreams, began to delve
The flower-lit turf, within a sheltered nook
O'ergrown with roses and the perfumed gloom
Of blossomed trees. And as he wrought, he laid
Turf upon turf, and hollowed out a space
In the fresh virgin mould which lay beneath,
Shaped deftly in the semblance of a cross,
Large as might take the stature of a man.
And still half dreaming, nor confessing yet
What thing he did, deeper and yet more deep
He dug and laboured, till with earliest dawn,
Just as the waking birds began their song,
He flung the last mould upwards, smoothing fair
The edges of the trench, and knew at length
That all night long he laboured at his grave.

And at its foot were lilies white and gold,
And at its head were roses white and red,
And all around a pitying quire of flowers
Bent down regarding it; and when he saw,
Still half as in a dream, he whispered, 'Lo!
The narrow bed is ready; ere 'tis day
The sleeper shall be laid in it, and prove]
Unbroken slumbers blest, until the peal
Of the loud Angel wakes him from the skies.'
Then to his home returning grave and slow,
He sought his guests, on whom the new-born day
Was rising. They with half-awakened eyes
Greeted their coming host, and, bidding him
Good morrow, rose and took the frugal meal
His care provided. Then the question came,
‘Hast brought him whom we seek?’ And he: ‘I have.’
And they: ‘Where find we him?’ And he: ‘Behold,
I am the man—none else.’ Then deep distress
Took them, and great perplexity, who knew
The man whose life they sought the same who gave
Shelter and food. But he, revolving all,
The martyr’s palm and that unchanged resolve
Of the still night, bade them take heart for all
Their duty bade them. And he led them forth,
Through maiden flowers fresh opened to the day,
Brushing the dewdrops from them as they went
To where, set round with blooms, they found his grave
Fresh delved in daisied turf, and there they bound
Their willing prisoner, and the headsman's axe,
Even as he knelt, a smile upon his lips,
By one swift, skilful blow and merciful,
Upon the grassy margin, painlessly
Severed his life. And there they laid him down,

Amid the joyous matins of the birds,
In the sweet earth; and by his head there sprang
Lush roses red and white, and by his feet
Deep chalice lilies mingled white with gold;
And there he waits the day the just shall rise
And bloom, as these on earth, beyond the skies.

But when I heard the gracious tale, which showed
Like some fair blossom with a fragrant heart,
Thus would I answer: "Blameless anchorite,
Meek martyr, self-betrayed, some saints there be
Whose youthful suffering draws a readier tear
Than thine; and yet, for me, that duteous life
Of honest toil for others, that great faith
Thou show'dst, that simple eagerness to bear
The martyr's palm, that night beneath the stars
Of summer, fashioning thy flower-decked grave,
That lonely suffering, mark thy life and death.
With a more calm and gracious note than theirs
Who, 'mid the applauding saints around, the throng
Of heavenly faces stooping from the skies,
In the arena dauntless met their end;
A simpler nor less touching piety.
Than theirs who, 'mid the dust of mortal strife,
Shed their pure lives upon the sullen sand."
And then there passed a beautiful fair maid,
A virgin martyr, from whose comely head
Shone brighter than her crown, a ray serene
Of stainless purity. Her spotless robe
Gleamed with strange light, and at her breast she bore
Celestial lilies and a fragrant spoil
Of roses red and white, red as the blood
Of Martyrdom, white as the innocent life
Of maidenhood; and straight I knew the name
Of Dorothea, whose fair story fires
Poet and painter still; and as I gazed
I heard, with eager ears, my guide recount
The half-remembered tale, and thus he spake:
"In Cæsarea dwelt a noble maid,
A Christian, serving God with prayer and alms
And fasting. None more beautiful or pure
In all the city, and her fitting name
Was Dorothea. And the fame of her,
Her beauty, and her saintly life went forth
Through all the country.

When the governor,
Who hated Christ, holding the older creed,
Heard of her name and deeds, he gave command
That they should bring her to him. On a day
He sate on high in judgment, when they brought
The maid; and she, with mantle folded close
Around her, and chaste downcast eyes, drew near,
When he with threatening voice would ask of her,
'Who art thou?' And the maiden: 'Sir, my name
Is Dorothea, and I serve the Lord.'
Then he, with fury: 'Thou shalt serve our gods
Or die the death.' But she, with accents mild:
'If I shall die, the sooner shall my eyes
Behold His Presence whom they long to see.'
And he: 'Whom namest thou?' Then she: 'The Lord,
In whom I live, who is my Heavenly Spouse,
Who dwells in Paradise, with whom I long
To be, leaving this dead poor earth, and know
The heavenly fruits that in His garden ripe,
The roses that shall never fade, but bear
Such amaranthine blooms as heat nor cold
Withers, nor time, but blush for ever sweet.
Work thou thy will. For me to die is gain,
And to live, loss; but for thy Pagan gods,
I will have none of them, nor sacrifice
To wood or stone, the figments of men's hands.'

Then he, who could not bend that steadfast soul,
Commanded they should take her to her cell.
Thither he summoned an apostate pair,
Christita and Calista, once of Christ,
On whom the fear of swift and painful death,
The terror of the torments which the spite
Of men prepared for them, worked in such sort
That they renounced the Faith and knelt again
Before the old false gods. To these he gave
Great promise of reward if they should make
This noble virgin partner in their sin,
And to her prison cell, day after day,
Despatched them, and they strove to do his will,
Using the coward's weapons,—fear of death,
Hope of some baser happiness, and doubts
If 'twere indeed of God the Faith she held,
Or if 'twere haply best to live and serve
The elder gods to whom their fathers knelt;
And how 'twas sweeter far to know the love
Of spouse and children, and the joys of home,
'Than to fling life away upon a dream,
And feel the ravening tigers' jaws, the bite
Of the keen flames, withering the flesh, the keen
Thin knives, the crushing rack, and all the arts
Of the tormentors' hands. But as they spake
She with such faith reproved their perfidy,
That in despair they ceased.

At last, in turn,
With such clear thought and Heaven-sent utterance
She bore on them; dressed with such precious robes
The beauty of the Truth; spurned with such power
The Pagan lie; showed with such pitying love
The misery of unfaith, the joys they lost
Who did deny the Faith, knowing it true
And having once believed; that suddenly,
As self-convicted by the accusing voice
Of their own selves, those weak apostate souls
Shrank from her as from a consuming fire,
And, grown repentant of their wrong, confessed
Their fault, and, falling down before her feet,
Besought her she would pray for them, and seek
Remission of their sins; and she, indeed,
With great joy kneeling with them, sought in prayer
Forgiveness for their fault, and when they rose,
She kissed them, and they went, with steadfast voice
And joyful, openly confessing Christ.

But when the tyrant learnt what thing had been,
He gave command that those poor penitents
Should die by fire before the virgin’s eyes,
That she might share their pain. The fierce flames leapt,
The hapless sisters suffered, giving praise.
And Dorothea watched their pangs, and cried,
‘Fear not, dear sisters; suffer to the end,
And take for price of those brief fleeting pains
Eternal bliss in Heaven.’ So they died firm.
And she, in turn before the tyrant brought,
Was doomed to instant death. But ere she died
They racked her tender limbs, while she gave thanks
And bore their worst unmoved; and then they led her
To where the headsman with his gleaming axe
 Awaited her, and with him welcome Death.

But as she passed, there rose the mocking voice
Of one, a lawyer, who, when first the maid
Was brought to judgment, mocked the words she spake
Of the sweet flowers and fruits of Paradise,
Which ever in the garden of the Lord
Spring in perpetual beauty; nor doth there
Snow come, nor frost, but evermore the heavens
Smile on them, and they ripen, and they breathe
Celestial odours fine, celestial hues
Brighten them, and whoso shall take of them
Shall taste eternal bliss. Seeing her pass,
And mindful of her words, inflamed with scorn,
His shallow witless mirth and Pagan spite
Broke forth. 'Fair maiden hastening to thy Spouse,
Send me, I pray thee, of the fruits, the flowers
Of His celestial garden; for with us
'Tis winter, and no flowers nor fruits are here,
But only clouds and snows and bitter winds,
Scourging the naked fields. Send me of them,
For fain am I to take them.' As he spake
The maiden, bending, with a gentle smile,
Answered, 'I will.' And he, with scoffs and jeers,
Turned with his graceless fellows, mocking her;
But she went calm and cheerful to her death.

Now, when she reached the place where she should die,
She knelt awhile, bowing her head in prayer;
And when she rose prepared for death, there came
A precious portent. For beside her stood,
'To comfort her, a youthful Angel fair,
With locks of gold, and eyes as blue as Heaven,
And in his hands he bore, so runs the tale,
A basket, and, within, three golden fruits
Of Paradise, of scent and hue divine,
And with them three fair roses, sweeter far
Than the twice-bearing Paestine gardens bare,
Summer and autumn. Then, with a sweet smile
Of Faith triumphant: 'Pray you, good my lord,
Carry these fruits and flowers to him who spake
While I was passing to my death, and say,
"'Tis Dorothea sends them, and she goes
Before thee to the garden whence they came,
And doth await thee there."

Then with the word
She bent her gentle neck upon the block,
And took the blow which sped her soul to Heaven.

Now, as she died, the scoffing lawyer stood
Among his comrades, jesting at the gift
The maiden promised. But when now they sate
Feasting, around them gilded images
Of the false gods, taking no care nor thought
For what had been, the torture and the pain,
Lo! suddenly a heavenly presence showed,
From whence he knew not, fair, with shining face,
And locks of gold, and eyes as blue as Heaven,
And in his hand a basket with the fruits
And flowers of Paradise, who spake no word
But, 'Dorothea sends them, and she goes
Before thee to the garden whence they came,
And doth await thee there,' and having said,
Vanished as he had come.

And the youth's heart
Was touched with awe and pity, and he rose,
And his heart melted, and he seemed to take
Of the celestial fruit, as one who takes
The Eucharistic bread; and straight his soul
Rose to new life, and held the Faith, and owned
The Holy Name, and bore like her his pain,
And passed from pain to life, and gained the crown
Of martyrdom, and is like her in joy."
And when he ceased, my soul within me cried,
"Oh, sweet celestial flowers and fruits divine,
Which are good words and faithful deeds that spring
From flower to fruit in Heaven! Shall any hear
This precious legend with a heart unmoved
By the ineffable gifts whose sign ye are—
The flower of loving words, which can disarm
The brute within our hearts; the precious fruit
Of faithful deeds, which he who tastes and makes
His own shall find indeed a heavenly food—
Strengthen his strength, make clean his soul, and breed
New thoughts within him, till his lower self,
Sunk deep in sense, dull, gross, denying Heaven,
Falls down from him, and, a new creature, comes
To soar through suffering to a higher life."
And then there seemed a breach in the long ranks
Of saintly lives. Till then I heard the tale
Of martyrdoms where the fierce Pagan raged
Against the nascent faith. Henceforth my dream
Was chiefly of white lives, which gained the crown
By too great scorn of self, who gave to Heaven
Not of its own alone, but part of earth's,
And yet grew blessed. Martyrdoms there were,
Even as of old, when with fierce bigot rage
Christian with Christian striving, plied anew
The Pagan's hellish arts of pain and death,
The dungeon and the stake, the rack, the sword,
Seeking—oh, shameful thought!—to chase from earth
The heretic God bore with. None of these
I saw, or seeing, asked not of my guide,
Because my soul grew sick, and could not bear
The piteous tale. But of self-sacrifice—
Lavish, indeed, yet blest—high sacrifice
Vowed to great ends and blest, my ears were full,
As one in pilgrim's garb, ascetic, seared,
Still with some ghost of pain, and some faint trace
Of sadness in his eyes, and yet withal,
Despite his humble garb and lowly port,
A Roman noble, met my curious gaze;
And this the tale I heard:

"When the first Innocent was Pope of Rome,
A Senator there was, Euphemian,
Who long with Aglae, his wife, had prayed,
Having great riches and no heir to take them,
For offspring of their love. At length their prayer
Was granted, and a son was born to them,
Alexis, fair of body and white of soul.
Him the pure vision through his growing years
Failed not, but always on his life there shone
The light of the Unseen, so that he fared
Through all the heats of youth a soul unstained,
Clothed in the spotless garb of innocence,
And, 'mid the pomp of rank and riches, still
Lived evermore in great humility
As lived his Master, and still kept a heart
Touched with compassion for the poor and weak;
And, being purer than the rest, was fain,
Through self-contempt and saintly diffidence,
To mortify the sinful flesh, and make
A daily penance for the wrong he loathed.

Therefore, while outwardly in silk and gold,
The emblems of his proud patrician birth,
He showed before men's eyes, he bore beneath,
Seeking to mortify this load of flesh,
Next to his flesh, a painful vest of hair;
And, though he walked before men's eyes a bright
And smiling presence, in his secret cell
Bewailed with vigils and with tears the wrong
He never did, a pure soul bowed and bent
By the great burden of the sinful world.

Thus sped the fleeting years, which crowned his youth
With manhood. Never did his dreaming thought
Turn to the earth or earthly things, but still
The heavens stood open; the immortal youth
Of the adoring angels dimmed the charm
Of earthly beauty, and he lived apart,
Like that rapt boy who saw as in a glass
A fair reflected image in the stream,
And loved it only. Then the sire and dame,
Because they fain would see their noble tree
Blossom before they died, would urge their son
That he should wed, and named to him a maid
Fair, modest, high of birth, higher of soul,
Whom from a child he knew, and well had loved;
And he, long time delaying, at the last,
Being dutiful and fain to do their will,
Consented, and the glad day dawned when they
Together in God's house, bridegroom and bride,
Knelt at the altar, and the vows were pledged
And the words spoken which should make them one.

So all day long the joyous marriage feast
Sped gaily to the cheerful sound of song.
But from his bride, her soft eyes looking love,
The young Alexis stood apart, and mused
As one whom some deep sorrow presses down;
And through the long halls passing, sad, distraught,
To all the greetings of the courtly throng
Made hardly answer. For before his eyes
Ever the beatific dream of old,
The virginal whiteness of the saints, the pure
Angelic faces bent before the throne,
Filled all his musing thought, until the feast,
The acclaiming friends, the mirth, nay, the meek face
Of his young bride, showed dim and scarcely seen
Before his rapturous gaze; nor could he brook
The innocent thoughts of love fulfilled which flush
The dreams of youth. Such thoughts were not for one
Who had seen the opened heavens, the throng of saints,
And the pure Virgin Mother; not for him
The pulse of earthly passion. Could he dare
To quench in deeps of sense the pale white fire
Of the ascetic soul? Could mortal love
Allure him from his heavenly home, or turn
His duteous thought to earth? Nay, nay; he could not.
A stern voice bade him fly, while yet 'twas time.
And yet 'twas hard to leave the home he loved
And those who loved him. But what said the Word?
'Who leaves not father, mother, wife, and child
For Me and for My kingdom, loves not me.'
'Love I not thee, oh Lord? Shall not I dare
To give all things for Thee? And yet Thy Word
Bids each man, leaving all, cleave to his wife.
How shall I dare desert her in her grief?
How shall I bear to leave her to men's spite
And mockery—a wife her husband shuns,
A bride yet not a wife. And my dear sire,
And gracious mother? Is not wedlock blest,
And are they not of Thee? Do I not cast
Reproach on those white souls, who lived in pure
And blessed union? If our Lord on earth
Dwelt in His father's house, and deigned to be
In Cana, at the marriage feast, nor scorned
To make the water wine, why should not I—
Being but a worm, indeed, a thing of nought,
Too low, too vile for Heaven, too weak for earth—
Why should not I, taking my humble part
In the great throng of life, foregoing all
My dim celestial dream, bearing the cross
In all humility, accept my part,
Rearing my children in the fear of God
And love of Christ, hastening the blessed hour
When all the world is His, and He shall tread
All earthly crowns beneath His feet and reign
A King among His saints? Surely 'twere best
To advance His kingdom thus? And then he turned
Back to the joyful feast, and sate beside
His innocent love, regarding well content
Her fair unsullied beauty, and would strive
To take the joyous greetings of his kin,
And look with loving glances on his bride.

So all day long the joyous marriage feast
Sped gaily to the cheerful noise of song.
And now the sun had sunk beyond the west,
And night had fallen, when a dread voice seemed
To summon him away, bidding him fly
The world and worldly joys. So clear it came
And awful to his ear, he could not stay,
He durst not tarry. 'I have need of thee, Alexis'—so it spake. And he, who heard
The voice as of the Lord, without a doubt,
Obedient to the heavenly summons, rose
And sought his bride; and on her hand he set,
In token of his love and troth, a ring
Of purest gold, and round her slender waist
A zone of precious gems, and on her head
A veil of costly purple. Then in tears,
The dread voice calling always, with one kiss
He left her, and flung forth into the night,
Unseen, and no man found him till he died.

Then through that hapless house there went a sound
Of wailing. All the ways they searched to find
The truant, but in vain; and straight their joy
Was turned to grief, and they in garb of woe
Sate mourning, without hope, the son, the spouse,
Whom never should they see until the end.
But when the bridegroom fled into the night,
Leaving behind him light and life and love,
Obedient always to the heavenly voice
Which summoned him away, his faltering steps
Led him to Tiber’s bank, whereon he found
A little boat; and, clad in pilgrim’s garb,
All night he laboured seaward, till he came
To Ostia. There a bark in act to sail
For Asia took him, and he crossed the deep,
An exile self-pursued. No vain regret
For vanished riches held him, or lost love,
Or for the toil and hunger which he knew,
Following the heavenly voice, and so content.
Only at times some shade of doubt would come,
Considering all his mother’s love, his sire
Left childless, and the sad surprise which filled
His bride’s sweet eyes when he would go from her,
And how the house stood empty of delight,
And how those innocent lives must pine and droop
That he might do God's will; and all the load
And tangle of the too-perplexed world:

So, after storm-tost days, he gained at length
The Syrian-shore, and there long time he lived,
A hermit, at Edessa, lone, unknown,
Spending his days in alms, his nights in prayer,
Till gradually through the land his name
Waxed, and the people's voice acclaimed him saint.
Then he, who wept his wretchedness and was filled
With saintly thoughts of deep humility,
Fled once again, sailing across the sea
For Tarsus, where of old the sainted Paul
Hallowed the earth.

But a great tempest rose,
And drove the ship for many a darkling day
Far from her course; and when the sky grew clear,
Behold, the well-remembered coast again
By Ostia, where the yellow Tiber stains
The purple depths of the Tyrrhenian Sea,
And, lost in distance on the northern sky,
Rome and the stately palace of his sires.

But when Alexis saw the well-known shore
Hard by his ancient home, straightway his soul
Was filled once more with doubt, because he knew
That 'twas the Lord who ruled the storm, and drove
The strong ship from her course; and when he mused
On all the past, how the strange people turned
His humbleness to pride, it seemed indeed
That here was his best sacrifice—to live
Within his father's house, unseen, unknown.
For since long years of penury had worked
Their will on him, and seared his cheek, and bent
His body, and bleached his hair, and hardly left
The embers of his youth, he might deceive
The gaze of loving eyes.
So he set forth,
Wrapped in his pilgrim's cloak, along the still
Dead marsh, a solitary wayfarer,
Slow, leaning on his staff, obscured with dust
And weariness, until, at last, with eve
Rome and the stately palace of his sires.

Now when he gained the lofty gate where dwelt
His noble sire, the loved home of his youth
And manhood, where his fair unwedded wise
Still pined for him, the Lord Euphemian
Went forth with all his pomp; and as he passed,
Alexis—knowing all the work of time
And toil and fastings, and his whitened hair,
His furrowed brow, his straight form bowed and bent,
His ragged garb, which was a robe of silk,
And all the change, whose briefer name is age—
Stood forth, and threw him at his feet, and sought
Some humble food and shelter. And his sire,
Knowing his son was meek and pitiful
Of all the poor and weak, and how, perchance,
He, too, was now a wanderer poor as this,
Was touched with ruth and raised the suppliant,
Bade him be of good cheer, and signed to them
Who followed, they should give him food and place
Beneath his palace roof, and, charging them
That he should want for nothing, went his way;
Nor knew he by his blood’s unwonted thrill
That ’twas his son he looked on. So once more
Within his father’s house Alexis lay.

But those his careless menials, knowing naught
Of what had been, and deeming him no more
Than the poor wayworn wanderer he seemed,
Beneath the marble staircase of the house,
Found him some darkling cell, wherein he stayed
Being gentle and of great humility;
And seeing him so meek, no chiding word
E'er passed his uncomplaining lips, they deemed,
With the dull insolence of servitude,
That 'twas some idiot, weak of speech and brain,
Who lay there; and they plucked his beard and smote
His patient cheek, and on his suffering head
Heaped dust and ashes. But he spake no word
Reproachful of them, knowing well indeed
How great the load of his offence, and how
The Lord of all was mocked upon the Tree.
So in the house where he was heir to all,
He lay long years, knowing the bitter bread
Of penury, and cold, and all despite.
Long years he lived, below the lowest slave
In food and lodging, who was heir to all.

But harder than all else it was to bear
The daily, nightly sights and sounds of home;
To see his mother, ageing day by day,
Pass forth, still mourning for her son, and fear
To meet the eyes which, had they met his own,
Piercing his secret through, had ended all;
To know himself the cause of grief and woe
To her who bore him; yet withhold the word
Which spoken had brought joy to innocent hearts!

And most of all things was it grief to him,
In the dead hours when all beside was still,
Nightly to hear the sound of grief and tears,
And know the voice of her who was his bride,
Widow ere wedded. 'Whither, love, art gone?'
So wailed the voice; 'and wherefore didst thou wed,
To leave me thus to mourn for thee, and bear
Despite and scorn of men? Are we not one,
Knit by the law of God,—one flesh, one soul,
One being, fused by the mysterious word
Which spoken joined our lives? Return! return!
I weary for thy voice. Return! oh love!
But thou art far across the pitiless seas,
Or, haply, 'mid the sunless ways of death!

Night after night the wailings came and pierced
His heart, and banished sleep, and wrung his soul
With torture; for the suffering of the soul,
Deeper than bodily anguish piercing, wears
The writhing life. For sometimes he would dream
He heard the voice, and then a mocking fiend
Would chide him for his flight, and whisper, 'Rise.
Duty lies plain before thee. Rise and seek
Thy injured wife; ask pardon of thy sire,
And her thy mother. Pride it was—nought else—
Apeing contrition, drove thee, that thou wert
Not as the world, the dim unnoted throng
Of those for whom the trivial daily road
Lies between lilies. Rise and take thy place,
Bearing the wholesome load of common life,
As did thy sires before thee.'

Then the saint:
I may not know if I do right indeed,
Such doubt o'erclouds my soul; but this I know—
There is a whiteness in virginity;
There is a virtue in the life withdrawn
By desert sands or antred wilds, apart

From wealth, and ease, and crowded haunts of men.
There, on the vigils of the saints, the skies
Burst open sudden, and the Mother of God
Opens her virgin arms and clasps her Son,
Virgin like her; and round the throne there shine
Angels and high archangels, row on row,
Pure all and virgin; and below them stand

The virgin martyrs. These my eyes have seen;
These, when the desert stars shone clear and cold,
And lions roared around the springs; these, too,
These, when the hot noon quivered round the palms,
The opening heavens revealed. And shall I bear
'To tread the flowery paths of life and sink
To earthly joys? Nay, I am vowed, I am vowed!
'The fields grow white, the harvest of the Lord
Ripens, and shall men dream of wedlock, now
At the full end and judgment of the world?'

Then with divided soul Alexis rose——
It was the dead of night —and through the long
Hushed corridors, with noiseless footfall, sought,
If haply he might see his love again,
Himself unseen, the well-remembered door;
And, pausing at the threshold, spied within
His maiden consort, kneeling bathed in tears,
Keeping a vigil for the man she mourned,
And heard her loving lips pronounce his name
In grief. 'Alexis, whither art thou gone?
Return, my love, return!'

Even where he stood,
Hid by the arras, reached the wailing voice,
And, by her lamp's dim light, he saw the lines
On the beloved brow, which time and grief
Had drawn, and all for him; and then great ruth
And yearning took him, and he longed to speak.
But while he mused, loud on his watching ear
A voice, which seemed of God, arose and hushed
All thoughts beside. ‘Alexis, be thou strong.’

Then, with a groan as of a breaking heart,
His grief burst into utterance, and sighed,
‘No more, dear wife, no more!’

And then he stole,
Ghost-like, to his own place.

But she who heard
The words, and knew the voice, gazed with wide eye,
Then swooned, as ’twere his spirit greeting her;
Nor slept, but with the morning told the tale,
And, grieving deep, was somewhat comforted
To think that he had come to her from Heaven.

And he, when he had gained his poor retreat,
Slept not. His suffering heart was riven in twain,
His limbs refused their office, and his voice
Grew feeble, as by sickness marred, or age.
Nor from his humble pallet ever again
Rose he, but sank; with every day that came,
To deeper weakness still. At last he knew
His hour was come, and so implored of one
Who tended him, the means to write; and then
A letter wrote he, setting forth at large
The truth of all these things, and his sad life,
And prayed forgiveness of his sins, and hid
The scroll within his vesture, next his heart,
And then his face grew calmer, and his eye
As of a saint in glory. Till one day
They found him in his poor cell, lying dead,
Clasping the letter, on his face a smile.

Now, when Alexis lay in act to die,
It chanced that very day Pope Innocent
Said solemn Mass for Cæsar, and the Court
Knelt round, and, with the rest, Euphemian.
And when the mystic sacrifice was done,
And the proud concourse turned in act to go,
From the high altar pealed a voice which said
In solemn accents, 'Seek the holy man
Who this day comes to die, and ask of him
His prayers for Rome;’ and while in awe they stayed
Expectant, then the strange voice once again—
'Go, seek him of the Lord Euphemian.'
And he, who heard it, knew not what the words
Meant, but, the Emperor bidding him, went forth
To gain his home, while after him there came
Cæsar and all the Fathers of the Church,
With long-drawn pomp, the Pontiff at their head.

Now, when Euphemian gained his stately house,
Lo! dark upon the gleaming marble stair
The slaves had laid a lifeless body down
To carry forth for burial; and they said
To him who questioned them, 'My gracious Lord,
This was the pilgrim whom thou bad'st us take
Beneath thy roof years since, and he till now
Hath dwelt here of thine alms. An hour ago
He died, and soon we bear him to his grave;
But in his grasp he holds a secret scroll
Which never would he part with, night or day.
See! will it please you look upon his face?'

Then, with great awe, the Lord Euphemian
Drew near the bier, remembering the voice
Which sent him there and bade him kneel and ask
A blessing of the dead, like him of old
Who fed the holy angels unawares,
And, marked with reverent eyes the pilgrim garb,
The scroll grasped tight within the wasted hand,
And all the marks of saintly poverty,
Nor knew on whom he looked. But when he drew
The face-cloth from the visage of the dead,
His life stood still; for straight the father’s heart,
Through all disguise of penury and years,
Leapt to his son. For lo! the wayworn face
Grew young in death, a smile was on the lip
As of old time, but round the saintly head
There shone a glory brighter than the day—
Sign of his rank in Heaven; and on his knees
The father fell before the son, and wept,
Giving God praise. And while he knelt, there came
Cæsar and Pontiff, and they knelt with him;
And the Pope reverently pressed the hand
Stiffened in death, beseeching of the dead
That he should give the scroll. And straight his grasp,
Relaxing, yielded; and the Chancellor
Read to the assembled nobles the strange tale
Of Life and Death, which thou hast heard to-day.

But when within the house the news was told,
The childless mother and the widowed wife,
Descending, threw themselves upon the bier,
Kissing the wasted form; plunged deep in woe,
Yet taking comfort that the dead they loved
Reigned now among the saints. Seven days and nights
They watched and wept before him, and a throng
Of halt and sick, and many a one was healed
Of his infirmity. Such things the saint
Wrought, with God's help, upon them for their faith.

Then, lest some secular use might mar the place
Made sacred by his pain, upon the ground
Where stood that stately house, they reared the Church
Of S. Alexis, and the marble stair
Which sheltered him they left as when he died.
And there a sculptor carved him, in mean garb
Reclining, by his side his pilgrim's staff,
And in his hand the story of his life
Of virgin pureness and humility."
And, when the tale was done, again my guide:

"Shall any scoff, deeming the sacrifice
Was vain, a sheer self-torment all unasked,
Which wrecked four innocent lives? Does God then ask
Such service of His creatures? Does He cast
Contempt upon His gracious paths of life,
Which all alike may tread—the precious flowers
Which, by the sacred light and warmth of home,
Bloom fragrant to the skies; the childish eyes
Which bring back Heaven; the priceless liturgies
Of daily fruitful sacrifice; the joys
Shared, and so doubled; all the blessed pain
Of loss; the open grave; the sacred grief
That lifts us from the earth? Nay, nay, our lives
Are double, and our souls, as fitting those
Who move from earth to Heaven. Life has its joys,
And all may take them blameless. Yet there is
A something higher, too, than these—a thrill
Of ecstasy, a perfect path which hangs
Heavenward upon the everlasting hills,
Above the flowery meads, the harvest fields,
The blushing vineyards, 'mid the perilous snows
Where comes not life. Know we not well the snare
Of wealth, the deep retributive pain of sense,
Which oft times dog the sad wayfarer's feet
Who treads life's common paths. There are some souls
Too fine and pure to tread them. Were it well
That this brave heart had borne its share of love
And rank and riches, and had lived its life,
Making another's happy in like sort,
And spent its little tale of common days,
And passed and left no sign? Or was it best
To have touched a high ideal unattained,
To have grown from sufferance to high victory,
To have left the world a story, which shall serve
For ages yet, of soul defeating sense;
Of aspirations flown too high for earth;
Of life which spurns the binding chains of love,
And lower weal, and blameless happiness,
And soars aloft and takes the hues of Heaven?"
And then it was a girl who seemed a youth,
With pure sweet eyes, wearing a monkish garb,
Within whose arms a young child nestled close,
While she along the fields of Paradise
Plucked lilies for it. Spotless innocence
Shone from her, and around her comely head
A finer motherhood. And thus the voice:

"In Egypt long ago a humble hind
Lived happy. One fair daughter of his love
Was his, a modest flower, that came to bless
The evening of his days. But time and change
Assailed his well-loved home, and took from him
The partner of his life; and when the blow
Had fallen, loathing of the weary world
Seized him, and, leaving his young girl behind
With some who tended her, he went his way
Across the desert sands, and in a cave
Long time he lived, a pious eremite
Withdrawn from men. But when the rapid years
Hurried his child to budding maidenhood,
Knowing the perils of the world, his soul
Grew troubled, and he could not bear the dread
That day and night beset him for her sake;
So that his vigils and his prayers seemed vain,
Nor bore their grateful suffrage to the skies,
Since over all his mind would brood a doubt
For her and her soul's health, revolving long
How she should 'scape the world and be with him,
Because no woman might draw near the cell
Of any pious hermit. At the last
He counselled her, taking the garb of man,
To come to him, leaving the world behind;
And the fair girl, loving her sire, obeyed,
And lived with him in duty to the end.

And when he died, leaving the girl alone,
The brethren of a holy convent near, "
Seeing the friendless youth, and pitying
His loneliness, and holding high his love
For his dead sire, offered him food and home
Within the holy house; and there he served,
A young man in the blossom of his age,
Sweet natured, pious, humble, drawing to him
The friendship of the youths, the love of maids.

But all his soul was rapt with thoughts of Heaven,
Taking no thought for earth, and so it came
The youthful Brother grew in every grace
And great humility, and was to all
Example of good life and saintly thought,
And was Marinus to the monks, who loved
Their blameless serving-lad, nor knew at all
That 'twas a maid indeed who lived with them.

Now, as in all humility he served,
The Abbot, trusting him beyond the rest,
Would send him far across the desert sands,
With wagons and with oxen, to the sea,
As steward for the House; and oftentimes
The young man stayed far from his convent home,
With some rude merchant who purveyed their food;
And oft amid the wild seafaring folk
His days were passed, and coarse disordered lives;
And oftentimes the beauty of the youth
Drew many a woman's heart who deemed him man.
But still the saintly tenour of her way
The maiden kept, clothed round with purity,
So that before her face the ribald rout
Grew sober, and among the styes of sense
She walked a saint clothed round with purity,
A youth in grace, keeping a virgin heart.

But one, the daughter of his host, would cast
A loving eye upon him—all in vain;
For careless still he went his way, nor took
Heed of her love nor her, and oftentimes
He would reprove her of his maiden soul,
Knowing a-woman's weakness, and would say,
'Sister, I prithee think of whom thou art,
And set a watch upon thy feet.' But she,
Hating the faithful candour of the youth,
Fell into utter wretchlessness of sin;
And when her sire, discovering her disgrace,
Threatened her for her fault, a shameless thought
Seized her, and she, with feigned reluctance,
Sware he deserted her, and with her child
Came to the saintly Abbot, where he sate
Judging the brethren. And great anger seized
The reverend man that at his heart he nursed
A viper which thus stung him, and he cried,
'Vile wretch, who dost disgrace our holy house!
Thou hypocrite, soiling the spotless robe
Of saintly purity! I do denounce
Thy wickedness. No longer canst thou be
A brother to thy brethren here, who live
Pure lives unstained. My sentence on thee is
That thou be scourged, and from this reverend house
Withdraw thyself, and work what viler work
The brethren find for thee; and this poor child
Take thou with thee, and look that thou maintain
Its growing life, since thus thy duty bids thee.
Or if my mercy spare thee from the stripes
Thou hast deserved, 'tis for its sake, not thine.
Go, get thee gone, and never dare again
Pollute my presence.'

Long she strove to speak,
But her lips formed no word. And then she rose
Meekly, and, answering no word, went forth,
Bowed down with shame, and yet not ill content,
Deeming it but the penance which her sins
Had merited. And when the little one
Stretched forth its hands, she clasped it to her breast,
Her virgin breast, and all the sacred glow
Of motherhood, which lurks within the hearts
Of innocent maidens, rising soothed her pain;
And, wandering forth, she found some humble hut
For shelter. There by alms and servile tasks,
'Mid great despite of all who knew her once
In days of honour; hungry, lonely, poor,
And ofttimes begging bread, she pined long time,
Till the young life Heaven gave her throve and grew
In happy innocence, and all who passed
Might hear twin voices mingling in the hymns—
The father's, who was mother, and the child's—
And wondering went their way.

So that pure soul
Grew tranquil, even on earth. Yet in her heart
Deep down the rankling sorrow dwelt, and burned
The sources of her being, and sometimes
Her penance grew too hard, and almost broke
The bonds of silence; then again her soul
Took courage, persevering to the end,
Knowing her sins, and how the pain she bore,
Though undeserved, was nothing to the sum
Of her offence, dear heart! and hoping from it
The fair reward of utter faithfulness.

But not the less the insults and the shame
Consumed her life and strength, and day by day,
When now the innocent she loved had grown
To happy childhood, weaker and more weak,
Her failing forces waned, till on her bed
Stretched helpless lay the maid. And when she knew
Her hour was come, she summoned to her side
An aged woman whom she knew of yore,
What time she seemed a frank and eager youth,
Ere her shame took her; and when she was come,
Quickly with trembling hand she beckoned her,
Giving her charge, when she was dead, to take
Her child to the good brethren, with her prayer
That they should keep it safe.

Then with weak hand
She bared her innocent virgin breast and smiled,
A sad wan smile, and, looking up to Heaven,
Breathed her last breath.

And she who saw, amazed,
With mingled joy and tears, composed with care
The virgin limbs, and wrapped her in her shroud,
And hasting to the convent with the child
Left orphan, told the tale. And when he heard,
The holy Abbot knelt with bitter grief
All night before the altar, asking grace
Of Heaven, that he had wronged that saintly soul
By base suspicion; and the brotherhood
Mourned for the pure girl-saint, who bore so long
In blessed silence taunts and spite and shame,
Obedient and in great humility."