And then it was a saint, still, as it seemed,
Clad in monastic habit,—many a hand
Of painter limns him—with dark beard and hair
And melancholy eyes. Full well I knew
The worn ascetic figure, bearing with it
The lily and the lamb; the tearful gaze
Which wept the sad world's sin, while the high voice
Sang praise for all; the poet-monk who lit
Of his seraphic ardour the faint fires
And embers of the Faith. And thus I heard:

"To wealthy Bernardone and his wife,
Madonna Pica, seven long ages since,
In fair Assisi, on the Umbrian hills,
Was born a son, Giovanni, whom his fellows,
Because he loved the joyous tongue of France,
Would call 'Francesco.' Thence has come a name
Through every Christian realm resounding still,
Beloved for ever, and the ear which hears
'S. Francis of Assisi' knows it takes
A name in which all saintly memories
Are stored as in a precious vase fulfilled
Of spikenard, and the faithful listening soul
Rejoices at the name and is content.

Now, when the boy had come to youthful years,
Being his father's son, rich in all store
Of gay attire, and filled with pride of life
And luxury, yet would his generous heart
Stand at the gate of pity, prompt to give
If any asked; so that the citizens
Loved the gay, careless youth for all his faults.
Till, when he grew a stripling, a fierce feud
Between Assisi and her sister town
Of high Perugia, raging, burst in war;
And the young Bernardone, with the rest,
Bare arms, and, being taken, twelve long months
Lay prisoner in the fortress. When the strife
Was done and he set free, the burning grasp
Of fever seized him, and he pined long weeks
And months upon his bed. There, as he lay
Hovering 'twixt life and death, his sobered thought
Turned oft to Heaven, and all his reckless youth
Stood up accusing, and a great contempt
For this poor fleeting world and all its joys
Filled his reviving life, and crowned his years
With grave and sudden manhood; and he rose
Leaving his former self, a higher hope
Firing his soul than those low aims of yore.

Yet outwardly he kept his wonted use
Of splendour, and among the admiring throng
Of his dear town he seemed to fare as erst
A glittering youth, though 'neath his costly robe
He bore a painful garment, till one day,
Meeting some poor and humble wayfarer,
He knew a noble comrade who had served
With bravery in the war, leading the van
With glory, but whom now some sudden spite
Of Fortune left a beggar. When he saw
The honoured face seamed with the lines of want
And hunger, and the noble form obscured
By rags and penury, the love of God—
Which is the love of man—rose up aflame
Within his breast, and hurriedly he stripped
His broidered velvets from him, clothing round
The naked, as his Lord commanded him,
And with the beggar left his purse, and took
His rags, and through the thronged street passed unmoved,
Rapt by an ecstasy of sacrifice,
And gained his home, a beggar in men's sight,
But wealthy in the love of God and man.

'Thence ever in his breast the fire of faith
Burned higher, till one day, within the shrine
Of San Damiano praying, where he mourned
The high church half in ruin; as he knelt,
There spake within his soul a voice, which said,
'Build thou My falling Church.' And he who heard,
Deeming it was the ruin where he knelt
The strange voice bade him build, turning in haste
To seek his father's house, sold of their store,
And brought the priests the gold. But when his sire
Was angered for the thing, he fled in fear,
Doubting if he had heard the voice aright,
Which bade him build the Church of God indeed,
Not one poor tottering shrine; and when he came,
After long days, worn, pale, in evil case,
And hungry, all the people deemed the youth
A madman, and his father prisoned him
Within his house long time. But she, his mother,
The mild Madonna Pica, came to him,
And comforted her son, bidding him yield
Obedience to his sire. Yet, though he loved
His gentle mother well, the fire of faith
Burned bright within him, and he spurned the world
And its poor wealth. And when his sire at last,
Being a worldling wholly, summoned him
Before the Bishop, presently his son,
Kneeling before the holy man, flung down
His costly robe, as one who cast away
All worldly wealth, and all the ties of earth,
And gave himself to Heaven. And there he lay
Naked, except his painful vest of hair,
Until the old man, shedding grateful tears
Of tenderness, stooped down and gently raised
The suppliant, and round his limbs he cast
His own white robe; and thenceforth the young life
Died to the world, and lived for Heaven alone.
Thus the swift years passed by and left him, man.
And turning to the sick and leprous lives,
He spent himself in pity; and found peace
In happy daily labour, till his soul
Filled with the bliss of living, and his joy
And thankfulness and praise burst forth in song,
As o'er the sunburned Umbrian hills he fared,
He and his chosen Brother, year by year.
Summer and winter, when the high-built town
Glimmered in early dawn, and the thin towers
Gleamed mistlike; or when now a golden rose
Of sunset woke them, as it wakes to-day
His high arcades, his convent cells, where towers,
Leaving the files of sombre cypress-spires,
Church over church; or when the valleys slept
In twilight, and the shrill cicales chirped
Among the olives, and the passionate song
Of nightingales, from every bush and grove,
Throbbed liquid through the gloom, then would his voice
Rise clear to Heaven, and these the words he sang:

‘Almighty Lord Most High, to Thee belong
Glory and honour, and to none beside;
No soul there is worthy to name Thy Name.

‘I praise Thee for Thy creatures, oh my God,
And specially for him who gives us Day,
The Sun, my brother; radiant is his face,
And in his light we see Thy image, Lord.

‘I praise Thee, Lord, because Thy hand has made
The Moon, my sister, and the countless host,
In shining mail, which fills the lucid heavens.

‘I praise Thee for my brothers, Thy great Winds,
For Air and Cloud, Thy Heavens serene, and all
Thy seasons which give sustenance to men.
‘I praise Thee for my sister, the bland force
Of Water, who, to serve the needs of men,
Yields without stint her chaste and precious power.

‘I praise Thee for my strenuous brother Fire,
By whose brave aid Thou dost illume the night;
Jocund and fair is he, unquenched and strong.

‘I praise Thee for our bounteous mother Earth,
Who keeps and nourishes our race, and gives
A thousand kindly fruits to cheer our lives,
Sweet flowers of varied hues, and every herb.

‘I praise Thee for the souls which, for Thy love,
Forgiving evil, sorrow bear and pain;
Blessèd are they who meekly take Thy cross,
And gain, oh Thou Most High! to wear Thy crown.

‘I praise Thee for our sister bodily Death,
Whom none who live and breathe shall 'scape at last.
Woe, woe to them who die in mortal sin!
But blest are they, oh Lord, who do Thy Will;
They shall not dread the great, the second Death.

'ThY Name, dear Lord, let all men praise and bless,
And serve Thee still in utter humbleness!'

Thus in an ecstasy of faith he lived,
Begging his bread long time; for all his wealth
He gave to build the churches which he loved,
And in his narrow cell below the hill
On which Assisi towers, hard by the shrine,
Our Lady of the Angels, happy years
He dwelt and pondered, till at length he knew
His mission to the world, to preach, to call
All people to new life, speaking the words
God gave him, not his own. And everywhere
There came a blessing on his work, and men
And pious women listened, and his words
Burned like a fire within their hearts. And last
Faring to Rome, the Pope, warned in a dream,
Wherein the pilgrim, of his strength, upheld
The tottering Church, gave to his saintly Rule
A blessing; and he turned with joyful heart
To his poor cell, and gathered round him all
His Brethren of the Faith, and there he spent
Long happy years of blessed Poverty.

Likewise, because for faithful souls the lot
Of God's dumb creatures presses with a weight
Of wonder whence they come, and for what end,
These humble helpers of our race, to whom
Their master is as God, or how the doom.
Of nothingness at last awaits their good
And honourable service; and because,
Loving his Lord, he loved all creatures too
His hand had fashioned; worm and creeping thing
Upon his path he crushed not, but would set
In safety; and the joyous songs of birds,
The soaring lark, the passionate nightingale,
He knew for hymns of praise, and oft would join
His jubilant voice with theirs. Around his feet,
As in the fields he walked, the innocent lambs
Would gambol, and the timid fur-clad things
Nestled within his bosom, fearing not
His gentle hand. But most of all the birds
He loved, the swift-winged messengers who pass
'Twixt earth and Heaven, and seem as if they bear
A double nature, close in brotherhood
With all he loved; and when he heard their song,
Pierced through with joy and utter thankfulness,
He with alternate praise would join with them,
And once, with soaring antiphons at eve,
Vied with a nightingale, till the brief night
Was well-nigh spent, and he could sing no more,
Since his voice failed him. And he bade the blithe
Cicale chirping in the acacia thus,
'Sing, sisters; praise the Lord;' and hearing him,
They shrilled their answering song, and he was glad.

And one, the foremost of his band, there was,
The Lady Clara, then and now a saint.
She with the Master lived in grave discourse
And holy converse, and one day it seemed,
When at their frugal meal upon the grass
She, with her sisters, sate around the saint,
He with such sweet discourse declared the Faith,
That they forgot their food and paused to take
The spiritual feast, with eyes and hearts
Raised up to Heaven; and all the folk around
Marked how the convent and the low church gleamed
With light which shone like fire, and, hasting there,
Found the saints wrapt in silent musing thought,
Forgetful of their meal, and knew the light
Was but the fire divine of Faith, which burned
Within those saintly hearts, and to their homes
Turned wondering.

But while he lived serene,

Dissolved in happy tears, his soul desired
The martyr's blessed palm, and fain would go
Forth to the Paynim host, which then bore rule
O'er all the sacred fields of Palestine;
But a storm drove him back. Then to the Moor
He yearned to preach; but grievous sickness came,
And stayed his feet. Last, by the fabulous Nile,
He gave his body to burn if they would take
The Faith of Christ; but when the Moslem heard,
Deeming such sacrifice too great for man,
He sent him home with honour. Not for him
The martyr's palm, but to build up the Church
By years of labour crowned with saintly death.

Thus ten years passed, and then upon the plain
Around his cell the Brethren of his Rule
In thousands flocked from every Christian land,
And by his triple Vow of Poverty,
Obedience, Chastity, bound fast their lives,
As the saint bade them, and to every clime
Went forth his envoys. He it was who first,
A rapt ascetic, with foreseeing mind,
Brought to the service of the Faith the lives
Whose path lay through the world, and the fresh zeal
Of Woman, from the peasant to the Queen.
Long from his place he governed far and wide
His nascent order, till at last, his soul
Grown sick for Heaven and heavenly thoughts, he passed,
Far from his brethren and the praise of men,
To some lone cell on the precipitous side
Of blue Alverno, high above the vale,
Above the winding river, above the heights
Of white Assisi, where his failing sight
Might rest upon the everlasting hills.
There, in rapt contemplation and fair dreams,
He spent his soul.

There, year by rapturous year,
The heavens stood open to his gaze; the face
Of the Madonna, with the Child Divine,
Beamed on him. There the blessed Presence filled
His yearning eyes. There, in an ecstasy
'Twas said, the failing body, strong in love,
And the pure soul cleansed from her earthy stains,
Took his dear Master's wounds, and bore again
The Passion; and the inmost Heaven, unsealed,
Opening disclosed the Angelic Host and all
The glories else unseen by mortal eye,
Till, in seraphic ardour, the saint's soul,
Throbbing with bliss well-nigh too great for earth,
Wore thin the walls of life, and sickness came,
And weakness, and his eyes grew dim with tears—
Tears not of sorrow all, but mixt with joy
For those his happy visions; tears of pain
For the world's sin; tears of a faithful hope
For Heaven and all the blessedness to be.

There, when he knew his end draw nigh, he hailed
The coming freedom; and, because his soul
Was humble, ordered that his bones should rest
Where, mouldering in unconsecrated ground,
The malefactors lay. Then, with weak voice,
Bidding them set him on the sweet bare earth
Beneath the evening sky, he murmured low
The Imploring Psalm, 'To Thee, Lord, have I cried;
Thou art my hope;' and struggling to the close,
'Bring my soul out of prison,' straightway breathed
His last pure breath.

Then those who loved him bare

His body to the tomb. And when they passed

By San Damiano, all the sorrowing nuns,
S. Clara and her sisters, weeping, knelt
And kissed his hands; and that dishonoured grave,
Since there a saint slept in the peace of Heaven,
Grew honoured for all time and consecrate.

And over him they built a stately church,
Wherein, beneath a costly pillared shrine
Of jasper and of sardonyx, he waits,
Who was so poor in life, the Judgment Day,
And named it by his name; and there, hard by,
They reared a stately convent of his Rule;
And church and convent, of the loving skill
Of painters whom the Faith's reviving fire
Kindled to Art, glow with celestial hues
Of beauty. There the archaic simple hand
Of Cimabue wrought. There Giotto dreamt
His saintly stories, only part of earth,
While the stern Bard of Heaven and Hell stood near
With counsel, honouring the name he deemed
'A sunrise on the world.' There, quaintly true,
Orcagna, Cavallini, Gozzoli,
Light the rich walls. There blooms the stainless thought
Of the Angelic Brother, and the pure
Rapture of Perugino, and the soul
He reared, the wonder and despair of Art,
Raffaelle, and a throng of names inspired
Who sought not fame of men. And compassed round
By those high glories lies the sacred dust
Of him who, wedding saintly Poverty,
Lived there long time despised, though now he soars
Higher than earthly thrones, a Saint in Heaven."
Next came a queenly, youthful figure, clad
In the Franciscan garb, a slender form
With dark-brown hair and eyes, whose lap was filled
With roses white and red, like those which crowned,
In token of her purity and love,
The brow of Cecily. Great tenderness
And pity beamed from out her saintly eyes,
And, kissing as she went her stainless robe,
Knelt many a soul her faithful voice and hand
Had raised from earth to heaven. As she came
This fair half-legendary tale I heard:

"To Andreas of Hungary the Queen,
His consort, seven long centuries ago,
Bore one fair daughter. All the realm that year
Was free from war, a bounteous harvest blessed
The peaceful land, and with her birth a saint
To bless the Church of God.

* From her first years

Saintly she showed and meek; no childish tear
Of petulance she shed, and when she spake
Her speech was as a prayer. All the broad plain
Of Hungary rejoiced to see her grow
As wise as fair, and through the land the fame
Of her young goodness spread and made men glad.

Now, when King Herman, of Thuringia, learned
This prodigy, he sent an embassy
To Hungary to ask of Andreas
His daughter in betrothal for his son
Prince Lewis, and the messengers returned
And brought the child with them, and, with her, store
Of costly stuffs and jewels the far East
And rich Byzantium yielded. And the King
Loved the child well, and with her love she lived,
Brother and sister; and her youthful heart
Was filled with Heaven, and every day that came
Brought its fair tale of saintly sacrifice,
And more and more for God and in His fear
She lived her girlish life, filling her days
With pity and compassion, till she showed
As 'twere some sweet child-angel whom the hand
Of a great painter limns. Not as a child
Of this poor trivial world she seemed, but grave,
As one who strayed from Heaven to earth and found
No meet companion. But the Prince loved well
His young betrothed, albeit well he saw
She was not as the rest, fearing sometimes
Lest she might choose to be the Bride of Heaven,
And not for him. Yet, while the good King lived,
None dared to thwart the young Elizabeth
In any work of pity, nor might the tooth
Of envy touch her. But when death cut short
His life, the stranger, now a friendless maid,
Dwelt long forlorn, because the jealous Queen
And her proud daughter Agnes, envying
Her saintly life, with scoffs and jeers would mock
Her sacrifice, and deepest contumely,
So that her young and modest soul would shrink
Within her at the cruel daily taunts
Which marred her life; and all the courtly throng
Marked her disgrace, and mocked her; and her sister,
The Princess Agnes, jealous of her love,
Would wring her heart, declaring that her brother
Wanted no nun for bride, but would dismiss her
To Hungary in shame. Such rankling shafts
Of venom launched they as the poisoned tongue
Of envious women can; and she, alone,
Unfriended, bare it, nor complaining word
Would speak to her betrothed, who marked it all
In silence, nor yet spake, being indeed
A youth as yet in tutelage, who owed
Obedience to the Queen, doubting, maybe,
Within his inmost heart if this pure soul
Were not too high for earth and earthly love.

But not the less his faithful love and trust
Sustained her soul. No public word he spake
Of comfort, but oftentimes, when she would sit
In tears within her chamber, sick at heart
For the despite and all the contumely
The others showered on her, her youthful lover
Would come to her, comforting her with words;
And when they were apart, his faithful thought
Fixed on her still, he, coming, brought with him
Some little gift she loved—a rosary
Of beads, a silver crucifix, a chain
Of gold in token of his love. And she,
Loving him next to Heaven, would dry her tears
And run to meet him, and throw girlish arms
Around him, and would strain him to her heart
And take his kisses as a maiden should
Who loves and is beloved, and with good heart
And cheerful bear her cross, nor cease at all
From works of mercy, trusting to her love.

Now one day, as it chanced, her lover went
With neighbouring princes to the chase, and stayed
Longer than was his wont, and when he came,
Or over-tired, or busied with his guests,
Brought not his wonted gift, nor did embrace
His love with kisses; and the jealous throng
Marked him; and she, perceiving with what joy
They saw his coldness, found her fainting heart
Sink in her, and she sent a messenger
Who should enquire of Lewis and his love.
And when he came, he found the weary Prince
Lying at rest; and when he asked of him
If he still loved the Princess, for the throng
Had marked his coldness; springing to his feet,
The Prince replied, 'Seest thou yon lofty hill
Which towers above us? If it were of gold
From base to peak, pure gold, Heaven be my witness,
I would give it all for her. I love none other.
I must have my Elizabeth; I love her
Better than all the world.' And then he drew
A little silver mirror from his purse,
Wrought deftly, with an image of the Lord,
And sent it her for gage; and when the maid
Took it, she kissed with joy and reverence
The sacred image, doubting him no more
Till they were wed—he a tall, vigorous youth,
Of ruddy cheek, blue eyes, and royal port,
And in his speech as modest as a maid;
And she a budding maiden, dark of hair
And eye, the large dark eye, which always glowed
With inward light of love and charity,
And which great pity for the labouring world
Ofttimes impared with tears.

And so long time

They lived together in happy wedded love.

But she, within her royal cloister, still

Kept her old penances, and oft at night

She left her husband while he slept, and knelt

On the cold ground, and oftentimes she scourged

Her tender flesh; and he, who loved her dear,

Would chide her, but in vain. Yet none the less

She did fulfil her lofty courtesies,

And rode out with him to the chase, and showed

A Queen for all to see. Though when he went

She donned a mourning weed, when he returned

She, in her royal mantle clad, would greet

Her spouse, and would embrace him as he leapt

Down from his charger, every inch a Queen,

Greeting her lord with wisely tenderness;

Yet when they sat at meat, 'twas bread alone

They served to her, and in her cup they poured
Not wine, but water only, till her spouse
Tasting the cup one day, it seemed to him
The water of her saintly penance glowed
Like some celestial wine pressed from the grapes
Of Paradise, and not a word he spake,
Because he held long time his wife was served
By angel hands and fed on angels’ food.

And one day, when her lord had made a feast
For all his brother princes, filled with pride
Of his fair wife, and willing that his peers
Should judge her beauty, he gave charge to her
That, clothed in costly robes, a Queen to see,
She should attend the feast; and she, who held
Obedience more than all, arrayed herself
In queenly garb. Upon her raven hair
She set a glittering diadem of gems,
And round her shapely form a royal robe
Of green and gold, and o’er her fair neck threw
An ermined mantle. As she issued forth
From out her queenly bower to join her lord,
Behold, a hapless beggar, spent with cold
And hunger, met her, asking charity;
And when he prayed her, in the sacred Name,
To succour him, she, with the holy fire
Of pity rising in her, stripped from her
The ermine, and around the shivering form
Wrapped it, and went, half doubting if her spouse
Would pardon her. And when he came, she ran
And, leaning on his bosom, told him all;
And while he stood irresolute, behold,
Her maiden with the mantle in her arms.
'Madam, I found your ermine in its place;
Why did your Highness leave it?' Then she clasped it
Around her; and her husband, as he heard,
Knew well the beggar was the Lord of all;
Willing to test her love and charity;
And they together went; and all the guests
Marvelled to see her beauty—such a light
Shone from her jewelled mantle, and her head
Seemed set with glory, and her tender eyes
Lit with the glow of Heaven and saintly love.

And one day, when she toiled amidst her poor
At Eisenach, she came upon a child
Outcast of all, because a loathly plague
Of leprosy possessed him, so that none
Would touch him. Straight she took him in her arms,
Moved by a holy pity, and up the steep
Carried him to her castle, while the throng
Of courtiers shrank from her, and in her bed
Laid him, and tended him with saintly love,
Despite the old Queen's anger, all unmoved.

And when her lord returned, and they would tell him
What they had seen, he hurried to the place,
Half in disgust, and snatched the coverlet
Aside; and, lo! no leper child was there,
Only the childish radiant form which lay
Within the manger once at Bethlehem;
And as they gazed the lovely vision smiled
And faded, and was gone.

Again, one day,
When to her work she issued forth alone
In winter down the snows, and in her robe,
To feed the hungry, doles of meat and bread,
Upon the frozen path she chanced to meet
Her husband, and in jest he greeted her.

'What dost thou here, my Elsbeth, and what store
Lies hid within thy cloak?' Then, with a blush
Of modesty divine, which lit her face
With double beauty, she drew close her robe,
Lest he should see. But he, with a licent mirth
Persisting, drew it back, and in the fold
He seemed to see, amid those wintry snows,
Celestial roses red and white, which breathed
A fragrance not of earth; and when he sought
To clasp her to his breast, lo! from her eyes
An awful radiance shone, too bright for earth;
And, bidding her go forward on her way,
One heavenly bloom he took, and next his heart
He laid it, and, with head declined, and slow,
And pondering much, climbed to their royal home.

In such good works she spent her saintly life.
When famine vexed the people, and her lord
Was with his liege far off, she opened wide
The royal granaries to save, unasked,
Those starving lives; and when the pestilence,
A dread familiar following in its train,
Seized them, her hand it was that smoothed the bed
Of sickness, rearing hospices
For all, but chiefly for the helpless lives
Of children. When she walked among the throng,
A tall young queenly figure breathing grace,
As she little ones would cling to her and lisp
The sacred name of mother; and she stooped
And cherished them, speaking with homely words
Of comfort, and for them she sold her robes,
Her gems, and all the precious things she loved,
Nay, even the jewels of the State. And he
Returning, when they came and made complaint
Of all she lavished, with a smile would say,
‘Nay, is my dear wife well, and are they well,
My children? Ay? Then it is well with me.
If she but spare my castle, it is well;
Let her give alms.’ And she, with all her brood,
Came forth and flung her on his breast, and kissed
Her love, and welcomed him with tender words—
‘See, I have given the Lord what is His own,
And He preserves us these.’

Thus sped their wedded lives, till the sad year
When, the third time, the armies of the Cross
Sailed forth to fight the Crescent. At their head
The Kaiser went, leading the princely throng,
And Lewis with them. And the brave man feared
One thing alone, to see his sorrowing wife
Blanch at the news. Therefore the Cross he took
Not on his breast he bore, but carried it
Hid safe from prying eyes, because he dared not
Witness her pain. But one fair summer eve,
As they together sate within her bower,
Asking of him an alms for some good end,
Which he in jest denied, she with blithe heart
Snatched his purse from him, and beheld within
The Cross, and straight, knowing what thing it was,
Swooned at his feet; and when her life returned,
Weeping, she said, 'Dear husband, stay with me
If God so will;' and he dissolved in tears:
'Dear wife, I dare not; I am vouch'd to Heaven.'
Then she: 'God's will be done.' And so he went;
And she a two days' journey fared with him
Ere she could say 'Farewell,' nor saw her eyes
Her love again on earth; for when he reached
The far Calabrian shore, some swift disease
Seized him, and to the nobles round his bed
Commending his loved wife and children dear,
Within the Patriarch's arms the Landgrave died.

And she, when now the news of her lost love
Came to her, swooned away, and lay for dead
Long time, and at the last, a broken heart,
Tending her infant brood, she bore to live;
But when her shield, her stay, her strong support
Was taken from her, then she 'gan to prove
The vile despite they know who find the world,
The ungrateful world, scorning their feebleness.
From her proud castle home they drove her forth,
Her and her children, and, amid the snows
Of winter, down the rocky steep they went,
A sad procession. In her arms the Queen
Folded her suckling child, born when his sire
Was dying far away, and with her went
Three faithful ladies, bearing each a child,
Seeking some hind's poor hut; and as they went
Down the rough slippery way, her weary feet
Stumbling, upon the ground she lay, and then
A thing in shape of woman, whom her hand
Tended through sickness, mocked her as she fell.
Yet not the less her sweet and patient spirit
Was all unmoved to wrath; and, having found
Some humble shelter, day by day she wrought
At spinning for her children, whom her skill
Furnished with food and clothing, till the knights
From the Crusade returning, set her boy
Upon his father's throne, and gave to her
Marbourg for dower, where with her girls she dwelt
Long unmolested.

But a pitiless man,
Conrad the priest, within whose bigot soul
Pity nor mercy dwelt; whether to make
Her life one penance, that he might increase
His baleful power o'er that pure heart, or else
Wishing to set her name among the saints,
And his the honour, laid upon her soul
Penance too hard to bear. He took from her
Her children one by one, lest too much love
Might hinder her from Heaven. He took from her
The one delight of giving, which grows strong
With waning life; and when she fain would take
The vows of San Francesco, and would beg
Her bread throughout the world, this too forbade;
And when, with clothing torn and things of shreds,
She, who was once a queen, through her own town
Wandered, the children of her loving care,
Mocked her as one demented. Yet she bore
All this and worse, meek and without complaint,
Until the pious seemed to see once more
The lowly Clara and revered a saint.
Yet worse than all her unearned penances,
The tooth of slander would invade her peace;
And she, the saintly lady whose white life
Was all of Heaven, leaving within the grave
All earthly love, knew as a worldling might
The breath of shame—she whose fair delicate flesh
Was scarred with lashes which the fanatic rage
Of the dark bigot wreaked on her. And yet
Her cup of suffering was not full; but last
The dark priest took from her the faithful hearts
Who, knowing her in honour, were content
To cleave to her disgrace, and in their stead
Sent two base creatures, who should make her drain
Dishonour to the dregs, forbidding her
The alms she loved, or that which was indeed
Her second nature—her unsparing work
Among the poor and sick. No marvel then
That, ere her morning broadened into noon,
Her great compassion, languishing and pent
Like an undying fire within her soul,
Burned with a quenchless longing, and consumed
Her tender youth, which all her pains and stripes,
The scourge of slander, nay, her dead love’s loss,
Slew not; or that her life, laid on a bed
Of suffering, day by day waned low and lower,
Nor ever again revived, but sank at last
In that thick darkness which we christen Death.

And when upon her bed she came to die,
Being but four and twenty summers old,
When she had lain twelve days or more, they heard
Who tended her, a sweet and soaring strain
Sound from her lips, as to the wall she turned
Her wasted face. All her last day on earth
She strove in prayer, till by the mystic food
Her listening ear, enfranchised, seemed to hear
Voices of angels, and the Mother of God
In converse with her, and the sound of hymns
Sweeter than any sounds of earth; and last,
When now her strength had failed, one word she spake:
'Silence!'—no more, as one who fain would hear
The heavenly quires; and then she made response,
'Contempsi regnum mundi Domine.'
And then the voices ceased, and she with them
Closed her pure saintly life.

And round her bed
The people gathered, mourning, bathed in tears.
Four days she lay unburied in the midst,
While the crowd knelt and kissed.

And on the site
Of her poor home they reared the stately Church
Of S. Elizabeth, and her shrine within,
Built high on steps worn hollow by the knees
Of countless pilgrims; till the gathering storm
Of revolution burst, and violated
Those sacred walls, and one of her own blood.
The Landgrave Philip, came with reckless hand
And razed the shrine, and scattered far and wide
The relics of the saint; and no man knows
Their resting-place, but her soul rests with God."

Thus he; and then, with graver thought and voice,
My soul within me burst in words and cried,
"'Be good, be good!'—this is the word that Heaven
Proclaims, not 'happy;'; or if happiness
Come, 'tis despite the pain the careless world
Wreaks upon finer souls. Here there is strife,
Injustice, suffering, and the cruel sense
Of failure, when the victor's palm, indeed,
Is theirs to claim. Death comes and takes our lives
With half our work undone, and Faith itself
Breeds its own errors and misguides the soul,
And all our happiness seems sunk in night,
Till the Great Dawn arising brings with it
New heavens and new earth."
Then a form meek
And pitiful, in manhood's early prime,
With mild soft eyes, who wore the pilgrim's garb,
The scallop in his hat, the staff, the scrip,
The wallet, and yet seemed a noble still
For all his poverty; and my guide said—

"In Languedoc, of noble parents came,
When thirteen centuries were passed from Christ,
A youth, who bore upon his breast from birth,
Symbol of dedication to the Faith,
A tiny cross. Him with all pious care
His mother, Libera, for works of good
And sanctity, through all his glowing youth,"
Trained year by year; and on his soul he bore
The cross, as on his breast, and gave his life,
His heart, his all, to Heaven.

But not with him
The pale ascetic servours of the cell,
Nor cloistered virtues lived apart from men,
Where the rapt soul communes alone with God,
Prevailed; but life lived as his Master's erst,
Among the poor and weak, healing the sick,
And filled with pity for the fallen lives
Of sinners, raising them to light and hope—
Life spending happy, and laborious days,
Each bringing something of accomplished good,
And sinking at its close in well-earned rest;—
'Twas this blest lot he prized.

Thus, all his youth
He lived in innocence. But ere he reached
The gate of early manhood, Death, which comes
To rich and poor, took from him at a blow
His father's guiding hand, his mother's prayers,
And he, an orphan, rich in lands and gold,
Was left to work what work was his, alone.

Then with no pause of doubt, knowing the words
Of his dear Master, and remembering well
His answer to the youth who, rich as he,
Would fain obey, straightway he gathered all
His wealth, and of it to the poor and weak
Gave part in alms, and of the rest he reared
Hospices for the sick, wherein the skill
Of wise physicians, working under Heaven,
Might heal them; and he donned a pilgrim's garb,
And then on foot, obscure, like any hind,
Painful with staff and wallet toiled to Rome.

But when his feet had left the Alpine snows,
Crossing the Lombard plain, one eve, he climbed,
Through groves of oak, to where, its slender towers
Dark on the twilight glow, throbbing with noise
Of loud-tongued waters hurrying to the plain,
By Orvieto's city and sacred shrine,
Acquapendente hung. But as he came,
The nameless dread of some invisible ill,
The unguarded city gates, the tolling knells,
The sick and dying cumbering the ways
With none to aid, the still, deserted streets,
The sullen silence echoing cries of pain
From the blind, close-shut dwellings, smote on him
With a strange pity, and he hastened on.
And when he asked of one who fled, what ill
Befell the town, "The plague!" he cried, "the plague!
Fly too, or thou art doomed." But he who heard,
Without a moment's doubt, filled with great ruth
And eagerness, pressed onward, as a player
Who knows and loves his part, and round his feet
Dread signs of death and suffering everywhere
Grew thicker, till at length he gained the gate
Of the great hospice, thronged from floor to roof
With hopeless pain. Then, in an ecstasy,
He entered, and besought that he might serve;
And they consenting, he, with fervent prayer
And great compassion, and the finer skill
Which Faith can breed, and comfortable words,
And signing with the Cross where'er he came,
Heartened those helpless sufferers in such sort
That many, whom now the instant might of Death
Held in its grasp, escaped; and presently,
The fierce infection waning, all the land
Revered the youth, so young, so beautiful,
So fearless and devoted, and they grew
To hold him more than man, till to their thought
He showed as 'twere an angel sent from Heaven
To bid them live.

Thence fared he through the land

Of the Romagna. There by field and town
Was pestilence, and he was in the midst,
Dauntless amid the ham, tending the sick,
Himself unscathed. And thence to Rome herself,
Where too was plague; there three long years he wrought,
'Mid scenes of death and pain, tending the sick,
Always unscathed, and wheresoe'er he went
A blessing went with him upon his work.

Yet one incessant prayer his faithful lips
Would breathe to Heaven, if only he might earn
The martyr's palm: but never at all there came
An answer to his prayer, nor could he die,
Nor be at rest, for God had need of him.

Thus, year by year, from town to suffering town
He journeyed, still unscathed, rapt by good works
Of mercy. At the last his footsteps came
To fair Piacenza, where a dreadful ill
Consumed the people. There long time he served,
'Tending the sick. There, too, a blessing came
Upon his work, till one sad night he sank,
O'ercome by toil and watching, on the ground;
And when he woke, a burning fever raged
Through every vein, and on his breast, behold,
A horrible tumour. Then, because his pain
Had grown too great for silence, and he feared
To wake the suffering sleepers, he crawled forth
And laid him down to die; and when the guard,
Fearing the plague, constrained him, slowly crept,
Tottering in pain, upon his pilgrim's staff,
Beyond the city gates, to a thick wood
Where no man came, and there prepared to die.

But not yet came his Fate, for some poor hind
Succoured him, and would dress his wound and bring
His daily food, or, as some tell, there came
A bright angelic form to comfort him,
And he was healed; and when his strength returned,
Exulting in his soul that he was found
Worthy to suffer for his Lord, and filled
With holy pride, he rose and took his way
Across the swelling Apennines, the plains,
The Alpine snows, clad in his pilgrim's garb,
A worn and weary man, bent by long toil
And wan from mortal sickness, till he gained
His own fair native land; and to a town
Which was his own, and all the country folk
His vassals born, he came, so changed and bent
By long and suffering years, no living eye
Knew him, and 'midst the people who were his
The pilgrim walked unknown who was their lord.

And he, because he scorned to take again,
His lordly rank, but rather chose to be
In great humility and serve unknown
The suffering race of men, would speak no word
Of recognition, but, a stranger still,
Passed through the country side, nor claimed his own,
Loving the saintly poverty which brought
His soul to God, and set him free to move
Lowly amongst the lowly, doing good.

Then, since great strifes and bitter jealousies
Vexed all the country side, the folk who deemed
His pilgrim’s robe no other than a cloak
To hide the traitor, hailed him to the judge,
His father’s brother. No defensive word
He spoke, nor knew his kinsman, whom he doomed
To lifelong prison. And the pilgrim, glad
Of salutary pain, and holding all
Was of God’s will—the judge’s ignorance
Of his own blood, and all his punishment—
Kept silence till the end, and to his cell
And chains went silently, who for a word
Had been set free with honour. There he pined,
In a close dungeon pent, long weary years,
Leaving his fate to Heaven.
And when his hour
Was come, the jailor, taking to his cell
His bread and water, found the prisoner lie
Dead on his pallet, and around his head
And from his wasted face a glory shone
Which lit the gloom, and by his side a scroll,
Writ by what hand none knew: "Whoever dreads
The pestilence that stalketh through the night
Shall seek the intercession of the saint
Who lies here dead—Roch, Lord of Languedoc."

Then in a moment, looking on the face
Of the worn pilgrim-prisoner dead and cold,
They knew again the ardent, generous youth.
Who, gay with robes of price and gems and gold,
In the first bloom of manhood, beamed on them
And gave up all for Heaven, and tender ruth
For dim afflicted lives whom the hard fate
Of hopeless sickness took. And so their eyes
Were opened, and the judge, his kinsman, wept
His hapless fate, stricken with a deep remorse
For what had been; and, touched with vain regret,
His vassals laid him in a costly tomb
With tears and lamentations; and they thought
That from the sacred relics of the dead,
As when he lived, there went a virtue forth
In plague and sickness, so that still he seemed
To heal them.

And when now a century passed,
The strong sons of the Mistress of the seas
Who languished oft beneath the dreadful scourge
The seething Orient bred, sailed out and snatched
His sacred dust, and forth, with pious care
And honour, all the fairy city came
To meet them; and above him, presently,
They reared a church in honour of the saint,
San Rocco, and a pitiful Brotherhood,
Named by his name, to aid the poor and sick,
Wherein the proudest noble joyed to serve—
The Scuola di San Rocco,—and a house
Stately as any which the enchanted sea
Exhales in dreaming Venice. There the skill
Of Tintoretto and his scholars limned
On wall and ceiling stories of our Lord,
His Death, and his Ascension to the skies,
With lavish hand, so that it glows to-day
A miracle of Art, which fitly frames
A statue of the saint; and there he stands,
As stands his soul, among the heavenly host,
In honour now, who died a prisoner here."
Next 'twas a woman, bearing in her hand
A lily. Round her maiden limbs she drew
The habit of S. Dominic. Her worn face
Bore anxious traces still, as that of one
Whom, loving best the cloister, the sad world
Calls to its service and denies to Heaven;
And I bethought me of a cloudless noon
By Fonte Branda, 'mid the merry talk
Of thirsty peasants, while the churches towered
High on the rocky spurs, and her low home
Showed like a sacred shrine, where the saint once
Doubted herself, not God. And thus the voice:

"In fair Siena, on the Tuscan hills,
Giacomo Benincasa lived and died
Five centuries ago. To him were born,
And his wife Lapa, many stalwart sons
And fair-grown daughters. One, their dearest child,
Was Catharine, latest born and best beloved,
So fair, so blithe, so sweet in infancy,
The neighbours named her name Euphrosyne.

But as she grew, no longer the young maid
Showed as her comrades, but the world unseen
Made grave her gaze and checked the innocent flow
Of girlish laughter, and the pictured tales
Of saintly lives within the incensed gloom
Of the great churches drew her childish feet
With a strange charm. For one day, as she came,
Being but seven summers in the world,
She and her brother, from some natal feast,
They sate at sunset on the rocky hill
By Fonte Branda, and as Catharine gazed
On the tall campanile of the church
Above her, lo! beyond the slender shaft,
The heavens stood open, and her wondering gaze
Saw our dear Lord in glory, and the saints
Around Him. As she looked upon the sight
In ecstasy, her eyes grew fixed, and she
Gazed on, unconscious that her brother's voice
Called to unheeding ears; and when he turned
And drew her from her place, she saw no more
The opened heavens, and, sobbing from her heart,
Sank on the ground with bitter childish tears.

Nor ever from her thought the wondrous dream
Of that blest evening faded. More and more
Silent she grew, and grave, and wandered forth
In solitude, if haply once again
That glorious vision took her longing eyes;
But never more it came. But she, who read
The tale of Catharine and the sponsal ring.
Which bound her to the Lord, prayed if perchance
She also might be His; and when she came
To her full age, being sweet and beautiful,
Her parents, loving not her penances,
Her fasts, her vigils, her ascetic dreams,
Would give their girl in marriage; but her soul,
Fixed on that heavenly bridal, took no thought
For earthly love, and still her days were spent
In solitary prayer. Then, that hard toil
 Might check her wandering dreams, her parents laid
 Hard household tasks upon her, loading her
 With mean and weary toils, and all the house
 Mocked her and jeered; but in her heart she kept
 This comfort—‘Were not, then, the blessed saints
 Mocked even as I, and shall I be ashamed
 To bear as they did?’ To her humble tasks
 She bent her unrepining; food and rest
 Almost ‘she took not, yielding place to prayer;
 And, lest her fairness might allure the eyes
Of youthful lovers, from her shapely head
Sheared the luxuriant treasure of her hair,
To lay before the altar, offering all
Her youth, her life to Heaven. Thus she lived
A recluse self-ordained; but still her sire
Urged her to wed, till one day, to her cell
Chancing to come, it seemed a snow-white dove
Hovered above her as she knelt, and then
The good man, fearing lest his will withstood
The Spirit which thus visibly guided her,
Entreated her no more, leaving her free
To do Heaven's will. And to the holy house
Of Dominic she went, and there she sought
To serve, a penitent, but never yet
Made full profession, though she found no less
A penance for herself. On a bare board
She lay, a log her pillow, and no word
For three long years she spake; but from her cell
High in her father's roof, with earliest dawn,
And when the darkening ways grew dim with night,
Daily she climbed the steep where the tall Church
Of San Domenico towered, by whose thin shaft
She saw Heaven opened once, and there she knelt
Before the altar rapt in ecstasy.

But not yet found she peace or rest, for still
The Enemy of Man spread for her snares
To take her fast. Thoughts sent he to her soul
Like fiery darts, thoughts which she deemed of sin,
Such as assailed the blessed Anthony.
Or was it, surely, that to this white life
The dreams of blameless love, and hearth and home,
And the soft hands of children at the breast,
Seemed perilous for ill? But when they came,
She prayed anew for help, she took not food,
She scourged herself before the altar-place
Till her blood flowed. And when she called for aid
At midnight in the lonely church, she seemed
To see a visible Presence walk with her,
Speak to her words of sweetness, comfort her
As One alone might comfort, flood her soul
With faith, till, as she walked, the darkling aisles
Glowed with warm light, and the chill pavement smiled
Decked with sweet summer flowers; and evermore
The gracious accents of a voice Divine,
Filling her ears, made precious melody,
Waking the ghostly solitude with sound,
And blessed faces bent, and blest hands swept
Celestial lyres unseen. And then sometimes
They came not, nor the Presence, and her soul
Fainted within her, lest those heavenly dreams
Were nought but snares, unreal fantasies
Sent of the enemy to take her soul—
The dreams which bind the saintly dreamer fast
(Like siren voices sounding o'er the sea,
Which whoso heard, nor fled nor stopped his ears,
Lay bound for ever and lost); nor ever again
The healthful daily load of duty done
Allures, nor honest toil, who pines in chains
Self-forged, a prisoner to his brooding thought.

And so she turned from penance and from fast
And blessèd contemplation to the tasks
Of Christian duty. To the poor and weak
She lived a servant. One poor wretch there was,
Sick of a hopeless ill. For her she bore
Through wintry nights, on her bent back, the load
Of fuel for her fire. Another, white
With leprosy, she succoured where she lay
Houseless without the walls. In her own bed
She laid and tended her, till on her hands
The hopeless evil showed. Yet nought she earned
Of gratitude, and when the leper died,
She only, and none other, durst prepare
Her corpse for burial; and, behold, her hurt
Was cleansed from that same hour! And on a day
When from the town she went on some soft task
Of mercy, through the city gates there came
A sad procession; for a robber went
Forth to his shameful doom, rending the air
With blasphemies and wild despairing cries,
While in his wake the angry people surged
With curses; and her tender saintly heart
O'erflowed with pity, and she took her place
Beside him, speaking with such gracious words
That his hard heart was melted, and confessed
His heinous sin and its just punishment.
And while she knelt in prayer, forgetting all,
Lo! the poor penitent, 'like a gentle lamb,'
Went tranquil to his death, and she who saw,
Calling him 'her sweet brother,' laid his head
Upon the block; and when the keen axe fell,
She sate, his severed head within her hands,
All bathed in precious blood, while her rapt eyes
Saw the saved soul borne upward into heaven.
In such fair works of love the virgin saint
Spent her pure days, till through the land her fame
Spread far and wide; and when the Florentines
Grew rebels to the Church, the Pontiff named her
Arbitress of the strife, confiding to her
The terms of peace. But when she made her way
To Florence, straight a tumult, and she hid,
Learning too soon how base the ingrate throng,
Within the cloister. 'Twas her voice which called
The Holy Father home, her woman's voice—
None other. Weighty matters of the State
Were hers to adjudge, untrammelled, as she would;
So that the visionary girl of yore
Rose to the stately woman, ruling well,
As might a Queen, in honour and fame of men.

But in the midst of all the pomp, the glare
Of rank and power, still would her yearning gaze
Steal backward to the days, now long ago,
When painfully at midnight up the steep
Her feet would climb, and in the towering church
Pour out her innocent soul, and feel the breath
Of Love Divine upon her cheek, and walk .
Encompassed round with Heaven and the fair dreams
Which could defy the morning and waxed strong
Even in the blaze of noon; and she would prize
The contemplative life, the silent thought,
Which there she knew, above the clamorous din
And turmoil of the world, the hopes, the fears,
The slanderous tooth of secret enmity,
The envy of false friends. And so deep care,
Chafing the thin-worn vesture of her life,
Laid her at last upon her bed, and broke,
Before her footsteps trod life's middle way,
The silver cord, and loosed her soul to Heaven.

But as she lay upon her bed and knew
Her end drew near, one word she spoke alone—
‘Nay, Lord, ’twas not vainglory, as they say,
That drew me, but Thine honour, and Thine alone;
And thou, Lord, knowest this it was, not pride.’
And so she passed away.”

But when his voice
Was silent, all my soul broke forth in words
Of Love which conquered Doubt.

“Dear spotless soul,
Still through thy house men go, and wondering mark
Thy place of prayer, thy chamber, and thy cell.
Here ’twas the Lord appeared, and gave to thee
His sacred heart. Here, in this very spot,”
Thou clothedst Him as He sate in rags and seemed
A beggar. All the house is filled with thee
And the white simple story of thy life;
Still, far above, the high church on the hill
Towers where, in prayer, thou seemedst to walk wrapt round
By an ineffable Presence; thy low roof
Is grown as 'twere a shrine, where priest and nun
And visionary girls from age to age
Throng and repeat the self-same prayers, thyself
Didst offer year by year.

Comes there no end
Of yearning for our race on earth, nor stay
Of penance, nor unmingled happiness
Till Heaven is gained? or in high Heaven itself
Can fancy image, or can faith sustain,
No shadow, nor satiety of joy?
I cannot tell, I know not, but I know
'Tis not for happiness we are, but God.
George Herbert.

And then I saw a reverend figure come,
Walking with meditative steps and slow,
Who listened as the blest Cecilia erst
To high celestial music, else unheard;
And straight I knew the Priest, from whose full heart
Welled a clear spring of quaint and sacred song,
And seemed again to tread the dewy meads
Of Sarum, and to see the thin spire, pierce
The sunset skies, as I by Bemerton
*Strayed rapt in thought. And as we passed, my guide

"Not of one Church, or age, or race alone
The saints are born, nor of one clime they come,
But 'mid the grass-green English landscapes dwell
Pure saintly souls, as by the slender towers
Of olive-grey Assisi, or white shrines
Washed by the purple sea. There walked on earth
The saint thou seest, high of birth and name,
Yet lowly as his Lord, when once he gave
His life to Him, and with each day that dawned
Renewed his saintly vows, and lived content
For the brief years Heaven would.

Not always turned

His soul to Heaven; the splendours of the Court
Dazzled his youth, and the fair boundless dreams
Of youthful hope. For he, by name and blood
A noble, 'neath our Abbey's reverend shade,
Amid the cloistered shades of Westminster,
Drank with deep draughts the lore of Greece and Rome
And then within the time-worn Halls which watch
The slow-paced Cam; and there his studious eyes

Kept nightly vigil, and his sweet shy Muse
Tuned her clear voice for Heaven, a stainless youth
Who to his loved and gracious mother vowed
The firstlings of his song. For him the flow
Of sweet concordant descants soothed his soul
Till Heaven stood open. But not yet his thought
Turned to the Altar, since in high respect
And favour of his king, he stayed to take
What high advancement his unwearied thirst
For knowledge, and his gay and polished wit,
Wielding the tongues of France and Spain, and thine,
Great Dante, and his courtly presence clad
In robes of price, might offer. Then at length,
When now his growing soul grew sick of Courts,
Yearning for Heaven, the hand of Death removed
His potent friends, and last, the king himself;
And one by one the fetters broke which bound
His soul to earth, and soon he turned to hear.
His mother's pleading words; and, stronger still,
The voice within which called him set him free—
Free from himself and wholly vowed to God.
Then, when the courtiers scoffed at him and bade him
Choose him some nobler life and worthier,
Thus made he answer: 'Though the sacred name
Of priest be now despised, yet will I strive
To do it honour. All my little store
Of learning cheerful will I yield to Him
Who gave it, grieving sore I yield Him naught
Who made me His. Oh, let me strive to be
Likened to Him, and make Humility
Lovely in all men's eyes, following still
My merciful meek King.'

So he became

A servant of the Altar, for awhile
A deacon only, fearing yet to take
The priestly office. At the last, when now
His struggling years had reached life's midmost way,
Whence turn our faces homewards, weak in frame
Though strong in spirit, 'mid the golden meads
He ministered a priest, where the gray spire
Of Sarum points to Heaven, and consecrates
The rich low vale with grace. There he should see
Three brief and saintly years before the end.

There from him all his courtly robes, his silks,
His sword, he put away, and in the garb
Of priesthood did endue himself, and vow
His contrite soul to Heaven. Within his church,
With all doors closed, he passed, as the law bade,
To take all seisin, and, their pastor now,
To toll, with his own hand, the bell which called
The faithful. Then because he came not back
After long hours, they sought him, and, behold,
Through the low casement looking, saw the saint
Prostrate before the altar, rapt in prayer
For strength to do God's work; and there he framed
His rule of life, and vowed to keep it still.
Even so the good Priest lived his tranquil days,
His saintly helpmeet working with him still
In alms and prayer. Daily the orisons
Of those pure souls, and theirs who dwelt with them,
Three orphaned girls, rose morn and eve to Heaven,
Following the sober uses of their Church,
Matins and vespers. All the country side
Loved that white life, and knelt with reverent hearts
Whene'er within the little oratory
The daily Liturgies were sung. The hind
Paused at his task when o'er the neighbouring leas,
Summer and winter, thrilled the solemn bell
That called the saint to prayer, and oftentimes,
Touched by some new devouter impulse, left
The brooding oxen at the plough, and knelt
Awhile within the reverend walls, and took
The good man's blessing, and returned with strength
Fresh braced for toil. Thus he, within a realm
Whereon the coming shadow of strife and blood,
The fanatic's guile and hate, the atheist's sneer,
Brooded already, and the darkling stain
Of worldly ease, and sloth, and sensual sin,
Renewed the pure devotion of a Church
Stripped of its Pagan gauds and robed for Heaven.

Ah! saintly life, for which the round of praise
And duty was enough, far from the din
And noise of Courts; for which to praise the Lord
And feed His helpless poor sufficed to fill
Thy days with blessedness! I hear thee yet
Bid the poor wife who stammered forth her need
Be of good cheer, nor fear to tell thee all.
I see thee, clad in courtly silks erewhile,
Stoop when thy neighbour's wagon, with its load
Of humble produce, on the rugged way
To Sarum fell, raise him, and from the mire
Replace his burden with long toil, and then,
Giving an alms and bidding him take heed,
Even as he loved his soul, to spare his beast,
Pace half-unconscious the astonished street
Of the prim city, mry, unashamed.

But clearer yet I see thee, when the strain
Of unheard rhythms filled thy happy ears,
Wander from field to field; and on the road
To the great Minster, when thy soul had need
Of new refreshment, and upon thy way,
Hoarding faint echoes of a voice Divine,
Glow into fervent verse, and stone by stone
Build up thy ‘Temple;’ and anon sit rapt,
Leaving thy humbler liturgies awhile,
Within the heaven-kissed fane the centuries
Mellow, and listen to the soaring chant
Sung daily still, the jubilant anthem’s voice
Of praise, the firstborn precious harmonies
Of England’s sacred song; the o’ermastering joy
Of the full organ-music glooming deep
From aisle to aisle, or caught from height to height,
Till lost at last as at Heaven's gate, and thou
And thy rapt soul floated with it to joy.

Ah, blessed blameless years, to which too soon'
Stern Nature set her limit. Thy weak frame
Three little years of too great happiness
Strained first, then wore out quite; thy failing strength
First to the Minster might not bear thee more
To foretaste Heaven. Then to thy lowly church
No more thy footsteps fared. Thy oratory
Thou still didst keep; and each succeeding day,
Matins and vespers, would thy feeble voice
Give praise as thou wert wont, nor would thy soul
Deny, while still thy body could, her due
Of worship to the Lord who succoured thee,
Lauding Him always. Last, when now 'twas grown
Too weak to serve, a faithful priest and friend!
Said the loved prayers, while thou with thankful heart
Listenedst and wert content, and on thy lips
Hovered a saintly smile!

Now when his life
Flowed nearer to its sea, there came a priest,
Sent from his saintly friend of youth and age,
Nicholas Ferrar. ‘Prithee,’ cried the saint,
‘Take to my friend this message. God is good,
And just in all His ways. Of His great grace.
I do rejoice in that which pleaseth Him,
Ay, even to wane and die. Tell him my heart
Is fixed on Him, and waits the appointed change
With hope and patience. Sir, I pray you, give him
This little book, the portrait of long strife
Betwixt my soul and Heaven, ere yet I took
My Master’s name, wherein I now go free.
See, it is called “The Temple;” it and I
Are less than His least mercies. Bid him, sir,
Burn it, if judged unhelpful to weak souls.
I prize it not. I look back from this place
On my past life, the music that I loved,
The beauty I held dear, the pleasant talk
Of books and men, and all are but a dream
And unreturning shadow, and I know
I go as did my sires, to make my bed
In darkness; and I praise the Hand which gives
Such patience to me now, and brings me safe
Through Death's dark gate to Heaven.'

And he, when come
To his last earthly Sunday, suddenly
Rose in his bed, and, taking in his hand
His viol, once again with feeble voice
Sang his own hymn :

'The Sundays of Man's life,
Threaded together on Time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the Eternal Glorious King.'
On Sunday Heaven's gate stands ope,
Blessings are plentiful and ripe,
More plentiful than hope!"

"More plentiful,"
I cried, "and poured from no unfruitful horn.
Ay, but thy hope was great, pure saint, who thus
From out thy dying chamber wentest forth
Cheerful into the void, and didst defy
The Enemy, yielding thy grateful soul
Into His hands who gave it. Shall thy life
Fade from our thoughts, dear heart? Nay, while thy clear
And yearning soul distils in verse that breathes
Fresh odours of the Heaven it loved, and decks
With quaint conceits thy Church, thy Faith, thy Lord,
As erst the kneeling kings who honoured Him
With frankincense and myrrh; nay, while the spire
Thou lovedst, still points its finger to the skies,
And this our England keeps her sober faith—
Not of the zealot born, nor of the priest—
And men still prize the gentle life and path
Of contemplation, lit with flowers of good,
And scented sweet with praise and works of ruth
And charity. The fashion of our lives,
Our thoughts, our faiths, our Heaven may suffer change,
But this one never.”