Next it was a man
With ruddy face and fair hair spent with gray,
And somewhat stern of aspect, till he spoke—
A tall and vigorous form, a little bent
By too long prison years, in modest garb
A Puritan; who next in time was born
To him whom last I saw; differing in all,
In mien, in thought, in speech, yet each inspired
And saintly. As I looked I seemed to know
The wondrous peasant, who by dreaming thought,
Fine as the Bard's who sang of Heaven and Hell,
'Lightened his long duress, and for our aid
Has left a record of the Pilgrim soul
Faring to Heaven by rough and perilous ways,
Which myriads since have trod. And thus my guide:

"'Poor and of meanest rank, and most despised,'
At Elstow, in the dewy, daisied fields
Hard by the dreaming Ouse, was born the saint
Thou seest, ere yet the clang of civil strife
Frighted our land, and 'neath that large bold will
Which swayed the Commonwealth, his budding life
Ripened to manhood. In his father's home,
A humble cottage, with the timbered walls
Of older England, grew the stalwart youth
Whom blameless strength and rude untempered force
Urged sometimes headlong, prizing overmuch
The sports his skill made dear; the flying ball
Winged by the tireless arm; the joyous toil
Of emulous comrades when the deafening peal
Swung from the reeling tower, and bell with bell
Mingled reverberant chimes; the village green
When from the short sweet grass the merry din
Of youthful voices rose, till the tired sun
Lengthened the shadows, and the faint young stars
Relit the fading skies. And oftentimes,
In his hot youthful haste, his careless tongue
Would break in reckless and impatient speech,
And oaths profane, till sober hearers shunned
The rude wild youth. And yet his life was pure
Of grosser sin; the Fiends of Drink and Lust
Allured him not; only his hasty youth
Possessed his life too much, and hurried him
By earthly flower-set ways and far from Heaven.

But not the less his self-accusing soul
Suffered for his offence. Visions by night
Oppressed his boyish sleep. He saw Heaven's dome
Aflame with fire, the boundless firmament
Shivered by mighty thunders; over all
The loud Archangel pealing, and a throne
Set in the East, whereon sate One whose face
Shone like the Morning Star. Anon the earth,
Rent by a terrible earthquake, sank with him
Into the nether hell, 'mid the dread sights
And sounds of doom, when suddenly there came
One who, on shining wings descending, snatched
His fainting soul from that accursed throng;
And lo, it was a dream!

Soon, when the storm
Of warfare burst, upon the Midland fields,
A boy in years, against the faithless king
He served a soldier, for the cause he loved,
And saw his comrade at his side fall dead,
Shot through the brain. Yet when that bitter strife
Was ended, to his old rude life he turned,
As reckless as of old, until he found
A sweet girl-wife, devout, whose simple faith
Loving the ancient worship drew his feet
Sunday by Sunday to the gray old church.
Matins and Vespers, and the tranquil rite,
The surpliced priest, low prayer, and soaring chant
Worked on him, and the cheerful Sunday sports,
The dance, the race, the swift unerring shaft,
When hymns and prayers were done; and so he lived
A blameless, unawakened life.

Till last,

One fateful Sabbath morning, as he sate
Within the village church, the preacher's voice,
Bidding them keep the holy day of rest,
Seemed to the awakened conscience of the youth
To probe his inner soul. The merry throng
Crowded the green when the reproving voice
Was still, and with them he. But as his arm
Was raised to strike the ball, again the voice
Loud on his inner ear, and in the skies
A pitying Heavenly face, and all his strength
Sank nerveless, sudden as by that strange chill
Which strikes the paralytic, and he knew
Some vague awakened consciousness of guilt
And terror; but as yet no healing power
Refreshed his restless soul, only despair
And wretchlessness, and such ungoverned speech
That, hearing him, some hapless wanton once
Reproved him for his fault.

Then with sad heart
He strove to mend. He set a ceaseless watch
Upon his careless tongue, the sports he loved
He shunned as sin, all innocent delights
He dared no more enjoy; the game, the dance,
Music at last, and song, with iron will
He put from him, and of the mellow voices
Of chiming bells and the tumultuous joy
Of mixed reverberant sound partook no more, 't
Standing without, beneath the reeling tower,
An outcast in the darkness, grown at last
Afraid lest haply the impending walls,
As in Siloam erst, avenged his sin.
Thus did he strive long time with his own soul,
A doubter self-accused, till one fair day,
Working in summer, in the silent streets
Of Bedford, at his task, he chanced to hear
Three humble women, sitting in the sun,
Discourse of things Divine; and all his heart
Was kindled into faith in the new birth
They spake of, and again and yet again,
Day after day, he sought them; for his soul
Cared but for Heaven alone.

And then again,
Like his own Pilgrim, who had travelled far
From the sad City on the road to Heaven,
Yet passed to Doubting Castle, he would make
A trial of his faith, still sore afraid
Lest he had none, bidding the little pools
Of water dry because the Word had said
That whoso should believe, even as a grain
Of mustard-seed, might work all miracles;  
And when he dared not put it to the touch  
Fresh doubts assailed his soul. Was he elect  
Among the saints of God? The day of Grace,  
Was it not past for him? Was there yet room  
For such as he? Ah, nay; too late! too late!  
The ranks of the elect were full, the tale  
Accomplished, and for him the Pit of Hell,  
Naught else, for all his prayers. 'Go sin; thy fate  
Is sealed, thou canst not change it,' pealed the voice  
Of Evil. But the undying voice within  
Answered, 'I will not.' And amid the gloom  
Gutter hopelessness he kept his feet  
From straying, though each trivial act or word  
He feared might turn to ill. Terror of death  
Pressed sore on him, lest he should die in sin,  
And yet he feared to live, lest haply use  
Might dull that healing pain. The lowest brute,  
Nay, the poor reptile on his path, he deemed
Happier than he; or if at times he held
Some hope of heaven, the Tempter came and bade him,
In visions in the watches of the night,
Renounce the Hand which saved him. 'Sell him,' cried
The Tempter's voice within him, day and night
Sounding through every trivial act and thought,
Sleeping or waking; till one night it seemed,
After long struggles and convulsive throes,
As if at last his weary, o'erwrought brain
Assented to the wrong. And straight the day
Grew black as night, the very stones cried out*
Against his sin.

And then, oh joy! there came,
Even in the Valley of the Shadow of Death,
To this poor pilgrim soul a heavenly Light
And Voice of Comfort. All his former sins
Of doubt or word or act, he knew forgiven
Of a great Love and Grace; and happiness
Unmixed with fear, and full assurance, filled
That self-tormented soul. Rapt in high joy,
When, like St. Francis 'midst his feathered throng,
He paced the new-sown fallows whence should spring
Life's seed, as for his soul, his jubilant heart
Would almost to the cawing rooks impart
His tale of Love Divine.

So that vexed soul
Found peace at last, and saw with clearer sight
"The heights of grace and love and mercy."
Soon
Within the lustral waters of the Ouse
His life was cleansed, and thenceforth dedicate
To preach the Word he loved, his eloquent speech,
Not tongue-tied by the learning of the schools,
Speaking to sinners. As one from the dead,
As one who bore a fire, oppressed by guilt
And terror, came he, whom nor guilt nor hell
Could silence, but 'neath humble roofs and low,
Or on the village green, beneath the skies,
Always he preached the Word. The liturgies
Dear to the saintly Herbert drew him not,
For whom each prayer rose new-born from the heart
To clothe itself in words, and so he spake
With full assurance, soul to soul, and led,
In part despite his creed, men's careless lives
To good and was content. Ay, though the fire
Of fierce sectarian passion and loud strifes
Swept the enfranchised land, and slander's tooth
Assailed his peace, yet worked he for his Lord
And was content.

But on those halcyon days
Broke the intolerant law. The warning came
That he, on pain of weary imprisoned years,
And exile, and the bondsman's death in life,
Should preach the Word no more. He took no heed,
But when they closed his place of praise and prayer,
In sheds or barns, or 'mid the shadowy woods,
He spake to kindling souls. Last, when the law
Forbade the freedom more, he scorned to obey,
Since if it were a sin to meet, and draw
All men to follow Christ, then sin he would.

Therefore to prison haled they him, away
From his loved home. His dear and ailing wife
He left; his helpless children four he left;
And one, his little daughter blind from birth,
Whom more than life he loved, to the hard world
And penury and suffering years he left,
To do God's will; though all his father's heart
Yearned to them, knowing all the bitter pains,
Cold, hunger, nakedness, which should await
The lives his faith made orphan. Yet his heart
Was steadfast. 'I must do His will, I must,'
'And venture all for Him.'

And so his feet,
Pacing this weary wilderness, at length
Came on a certain place where was a Den,
And there he laid him down for twelve long years,
And dreamt his deathless dream

Dear prison cell
Above all others blest where self-immured,
Because he might not purchase liberty
With silence from good words, that suffering soul
Languished long years, no cloistered convent pure
Bore rarer fruit than thine, nor hermitage
Beneath the desert stars. There lives no race
Of Christian men but dreams thy dream, nor creed
But holds it dear, because its clear voice calls
Deep in the sacred silence of the soul!

For here it was that Christian rose and fled
The City of Destruction, and alone
Toiled on the rugged, narrow way, to where
The wicket gate was set, and a fair light
To guide to it. Here fell his feet awhile
Into the Slough of Despond. Here he found
The House of the Interpreter, and climbed
The Hill of Difficulty, and reposèd
Within the Palace Beautiful, and slept
In Peace, and from the ramparts with the dawn
Looked down upon Emmanuel's land, a fair
And smiling country, rich with flowers and fruits
And water-springs, and on the further heaven
Flushed with the rising Sun, the un trodden snows
Of the Delectable, Eternal Hills,
Hard by the City of God. And here he took
His armour, and went fearless down to fight
A pollyon, and prevailed, and saw beneath,
Stretched in thick darkness, filled with dreadful sounds,
The Valley of the Shadow of Death, and dared
To thread the darkling pass, where piteous wails,
And rising fiery smoke, and dead men's bones,
And dreadfuller, the onward rushing flight
Of Fiends unseen, the spectral shades of Doubt,
Assailed his steadfast soul. And here he saw
Vanity Fair, the sad world's counterfeit,
Whereof the martyred Pilgrim passed to Heaven.
And here the dungeon glooms of Doubting yawned,
The stronghold of Despair, which held him fast
Whose lips had tasted of the River of Life.
Here smiled the plains of Beulah, and beyond
Stole the dark deep which all mankind must cross,
Sinner and saint; and here the golden domes
Of the Celestial City beamed on him
Who after Life’s sad pilgrimage was blest!

But when to his dear home he came again,*
After twelve years of prison, free to preach
His message as he would, he knew what change
Time brings to all; dead was his sightless girl,
And bare his humble home. So with brave heart
He set himself to work, but chiefly vowed
His toil to Heaven. To labour for his Church
Was all his joy, and yet his worldly store
Increased, and he in great respect of men,
With his good wife, among his stalwart boys,
Flourished long busy years; and all the doubt
And misery of old were gone, and clear
The sunset of the evening of his days
Shone on him, tranquil gold. Through all the strife
Of those dark troubled times, he lived unmoved
A peaceful life, scorning the narrow bonds
Dear to the zealot, broad in tolerance
For every Christian creed or rite or name
Which loved the Spirit of God; and toiled for souls
In his dear native town, and was content.

Then while as yet his green, unbroken age
Was vigorous, came the end which comes at last
To all things living. One there was whose wrath
Burned fierce against his son, and he who knew
The blessing of the Peacemakers was fain
To reconcile the pair. And as he rode
Loving his task, upon the wintry way
A sudden rain-storm chilled his weary frame,
And fever racked his limbs. Ten suffering days
He lingered far from home, and with the cry,
' Take me—to Thee I come,' breathed out his life."

Which things when I had heard, my kindling soul
Burst into words: "Oh, precious gift and rare
Of Heaven, which from the slough of common life,
And stony wastes of penury, despite,
Oppression, want, despondency, canst raise .
The perfumed rose of Fancy, and the pure
White lily of the Saint! Ah, not alone
In cloistered convents cold, or storied shrines,
Springs up the saintly life, nor in the Halls
Of Learning blooms the flawless flower of thought!
Myriads of faltering feet have trod the road
Thou troddest once, and fought and fallen, or come *
Through thee to victory, and as they pass,
Fired with a broader faith and wider hope
Than that thou knewest; on their painful way,
Not wholly thine, but to the self-same goal,
Still solaced by thy precious allegory,
Take thee and thy quaint Dream for staff and guide,
Throughout the perilous pilgrimage to Heaven.”
Then came another, of priestly garb and mien,
A young man still, wanting the years of Christ,
But long since with the saints. Not as the priest
Of Sarum, or that peasant pilgrim, he
A poet with the contemplative gaze
And listening ear, but quick of force and eye,
Who fought the wrong without, the wrong within,
And, being a pure saint, like those of old,
Abased himself and all the precious gifts
God gave him, flinging all before the feet
Of Him whose name he bore—a fragile form
Upon whose hectic cheek there burned a flush
That was not health; who lived as Xavier lived,
And died like him upon the burning sands,
Untended, yet whose creed was far from his
As pole from pole; whom grateful England still
Loves, though his face I knew not. And my guide,
Breathing his name, spake thus:

"In Truro town,
Hard by the wave-worn headlands of the West,
When now the eighteenth century of the Faith
Drew near its end, its martyr that should be
Was Henry Martyn born. His father's arm
Long in the dark abysses of the mine
Slaved for his children's bread. His little son,
A weakly boy and studious, sate apart,
Shunning the school's rude games, too oft the sport
Of coarser wills and stronger, till he found
A stout young arm, upon whose ready aid
He rested and was happy; and his keen
And vivid brain grew stronger, and his thirst
For knowledge, till at length, a boy in age,
To Granta's venerable halls he went,
A student not obscure, and with hard toil
Laboured four happy years of blameless youth,
And took at last the foremost place, and rose
To fame and honour of men, and reaped the high
Reward of studious hours, the untroubled life
Spent in the contemplative courts where comes
No murmur of the world, but only thought
And knowledge draw the thinker, till sometimes
The careless soul, missing the wholesome stir
Of daily care, grows slothful, the quick brain
Sinks low in indolent ease and base content,
And bears no worthy fruit.

But not for him
These perils were, because a higher thirst—
Higher than wealth, or ease, or honour of men.
Or learning’s self—possessed his yearning soul;
When the same friend who helped his friendless youth,
Now to a full and finer manhood grown,
Bade him do all things not for fame of men,
But for God’s glory. And his sister’s voice
Thrilled on him in the pure unworldly words
Of simple fervour. Not at first his soul
Gave heed, impatient with those warning words,
And fired with youthful pride and hot pursuit
Of flying knowledge; but at length the spark
Kindled within him, and the sudden loss
Of the dear father of his love laid bare
The chambers of his soul, and filled his heart
With other thoughts than earth’s, till, when he gained
The meed of all his hopes, which opened to him
The path of earthly honour, the youth’s heart
Knew, with a sick surprise, his empty hand
Grasped but a shadow.

Then the awakened gaze,
Turned wholly from the earth; on things of Heaven
He dwelt both day and night. The thought of God
Filled him with infinite joy; his craving soul
Dwelt on Him as a feast, as did the soul
Of rapt Francesco in his holy cell
In blest Assisi; and he knew the pain,
The deep despondence of the saint, the doubt,
The consciousness of dark offence, the joy
Of full assurance last, when Heaven itself
Stands open to the ecstasy of faith.

Therefore, though all men smiled on him, though smooth
Life’s path lay stretched before him—wealth and fame,
The dignity of learning, the high meed
Which crowns the pleader’s skill, the Senate itself,
Waiting his keen young brain—he turned from all
To that untried, laborious way which lay
Across wide seas, to spend a lonely life
Spreading the light he loved, beneath the glare
Of tropic skies, by desert sands and wilds
Far from all Christian converse, and the gain
Of our long eighteen centuries, and pine
Alone ’mid millions, knowing not his Lord;
The Brahmins' fables, the relentless lie
Of Islam—these he chose to bear, who knew
How swift the night should fall on him, and burned
To save one soul alive while yet 'twas day.
This filled his thoughts, this only, and for this
On the pure altar of his soul he heaped
A costlier sacrifice, this youth in years,
For whom Love called, and loving hands, and hope
Of childish lives around him, offering these,
Like all the rest, to God.

Yet when his hour
Was come to leave his England, was it strange
His weakling life pined for the parting kiss
Of love and kindred, whom his prescient soul
Knew he should see no more, and, week by week
Tossed on the wandering wave, driven back once more
By battling winds, looked with deep longing eyes
On the dear shore? Yet never did he pray
The cup might pass from him, not when the curse
Of war assailed his gentle eyes and wrung
His soul with agony. A priest, he filled
All priestly duty, though his shuddering soul
Shrank from the sight of blood. Through storm and stress
And perils of the sea, through all despite
Of scoffing men, who lent no willing ear
To his high message, still the humble saint
Was instant in his work, and bore the jeers
And unbelief around him, he who left
His place of honour for the Faith, and did
His uncomplaining service. Thus at last
He reached the Indian shore, where he would spend
His life in saintly labours till the end.

There ten long years he toiled on, day by day,
Writing his patient record of a soul
Which struggles for the Right. The home of friends
Who cared for him and Heaven would have kept him,
Impatient for his work, he left behind,
And straight, across the burning plains, alone,
Sped, cheerful, where no ray of Christ had risen
To break the age-long gloom; there, solitary,
Unfriended, solaced by no answering soul,
With little blessing on his work, or fruit
Of his great toil, reproaching every hour
He lost for God, knowing how short his span,
And how immense his task, now preaching oft
To careless ears, now spending his keen brain
As when he wrought for fame and honour of men,
With Munshi and with Pundit, if his skill
Might give to each, in his own tongue, the Word,
He spent his youth. Last, when his task of love
Was done, and seven long years of ceaseless toil
Had worked their will on him, there came fresh griefs
To try his faith. The woman of his love
Feared to leave all and give her life to his,
And both to God; his sisters passed away
To Heaven, nor saw him more. • There seemed on earth
Nothing for which to live, except the Faith;
The last of all his race, unloved, alone—
Only the Faith, the Faith! until his soul
Wore thin her prison bars, and he was fain
To rest awhile, or work no more the work
For which alone he lived.

Then over seas
Once more he took his way, leaving the land
Where he had hoped to die, along the roll
Of the warm tropic wave. Once more he saw*
Ceylon's green palm-fringed shore, the sumptuous tomb
Of him, his brother of old, who strove like him
To spread the Faith, and, like him, died for it,
S. Francis Xavier, and among the caves
Of storied Elephanta stayed; but soon,
His great zeal firing him, took ship again,
And, after weary wanderings, gained at last
The Persian wastes, and took the difficult way
To Shiraz through the desert. Day by day
The fierce sun blazed upon the sands; by night
The dead air, like a furnace blast, assailed
His fevered frame, and parched him and consumed him
With horrible thirst, and robbed his eyes of sleep
Till life was well-nigh spent. And then the hand
Which seemed to guide him always led his feet
To a sweet vale, England in sight and sound,
Hidden in the horrible waste, where cool airs blew,
Streams ran, and birds sang clear, and wheat was gold.
Then all his faithful heart burst forth in praise,
As did the Kingly Bard's: 'He maketh us
To lie down in green pastures, and beside
The clear cool waters leadeth.' Thus his soul
Made laud, and was content, praising the Lord,
In Shiraz.

There one happy toilsome year
He sojourned. Day by day the sages came
Who held the faith of Islam, and would hear
Of Him whose Name he taught. Through the long days
He laboured at his work, spending the gifts
God lent him, for the Faith. Last, when at length
The Gospel spake to Persian ears, he bore
His work to Tabriz, where he sought the King,
Faring by night along the moonlit vales,
Through bowery lanes, where the loud nightingales
Thrilled the white fields with song. Then feverish heats
Burned him upon his way, and sapped his strength;
And when, weak unto death, he reached the place
Where the King sojourned late, he found him not,
Only his courtiers' scorn. Then his great heart
Broke in impatient words. 'My God,' he cried,
'What have I done that men should mock me thus,
Save only love for Thee?' And when he turned
Despairing homeward, soon again he pined
Prostrate in pain, the fever seizing him
Two weary months, and his brain burned like fire,
A present death in life. Yet not the less
His faithful soul bare witness to the Faith.
Rejection, sickness, torment—what are these
To the believer's thought! And when he rose,
Musing upon the enormous waste which lay
'Twixt him and home, whither, his brave work done,
His longing eyes were turned, his weary heart
Fainted within him, and he looked no more
To press the hands he loved. Hopeless he fared
On his last journey. 'Neath the fabled peak
Of Ararat he stayed awhile, to rest
In the hushed convent with the Armenian monks,
A cheerful guest. And then again the grip
Of fever clutched him, and depressed his soul
With sad forebodings. Yet he struggled still
Towards Stamboul, though the plague slew day by day
Its thousands, and the affrighted tribes around
Fed the advancing Death. 'Thy will be done;
Lying or dying, oh, remember me!'
Thus writes the dying saint. And then long days
Of misery, which his languid hand records,
When now a fire consumed him, now the cold
Of palsy left him ice. Laid on the ground,
His soul was filled with God, his Company,
His Friend, his Comforter. 'Oh, when shall Time
Be done, and that new Heaven and Earth appear
Where dwelleth Righteousness?' Thus his hand traced
Its last pure words. Then but a few brief hours,
And he unfriended, far from help and home,
Alone, but having Christ, with no kind hand
'To close the eyes which saw the joys unseen
And vision of the blest, worn out, in pain—
Whether of fever or the deadly force
Of pestilence, none knoweth—breathed his last,
And bore the martyr's palm.'

And then once more *

I seemed to hear a voice,—was it my guide,
Or my own soul?—discourse:

    "Shall any ask,

Was all thy suffering naught, because the strength
Of Error still bears sway? Ah! too brief life,
So jealous of each hour, and counting lost
Each day not vowed to Heaven. What, hadst thou known
Thy labour thus in vain? Fourscore long years
Have passed since thou, like kindred souls to-day,
Diedst for the Truth; the long, slow, barren years
Mock us and all our toil. Hadst thou done well
To reap a little while thy well-earned meed
Of Thought in lettered ease? Hadst thou done well
To give thee to the pleader’s art, and strive
To make the Wrong seem Right, and sink at last
To wealth and praise of men, seeking, a judge
Scorning the graceless sophistries of old,
To cure thy former ill—thou whose keen brain
Had doubtless borne thee far? Hadst thou done well
To doze slow hours, sunk deep in mitred ease,
Soothed by sweet chants, lost in the vaporous grey;
Or, a great preacher, mark the moistened eyes,
Flushed cheeks, and quick-drawn breaths thy facile tongue
Had stirred, thyself unmoved; or shine a light
Of the Senate, till thy peers in high debate
Bowed to thy eloquent speech, and thou shouldst guide
The helm of our great England? Was it well
To hold this strange Twin-Nature of our Race,
Which soars so high and sinks so low, as thou,
Unutterably vile in thought, in will,
In every action vile, trampling thy soul
In dust before thy God, who made thee too,
And all things, and has left us free to take
The path we would, to Heaven or hell, and knows
His work not wholly base, nor framed too fine
For this our place of trial? Nay, I know
How many ways of safety He displays
To the awakened soul—the way thou trodd'st,
The way of San Francesco's blessed cell,
The honourable trivial road which leads
By silent saintly liturgies of home
Up to the selfsame Heaven. But this I know
Is certain, that thy lifelong sacrifice
Was best for thee, and best the voice which called
From love and friendship, ay, from all good things
Which make life happy, to the burning plains
Where thou shouldst spend thy few and evil days
Of toil and suffering, pouring forth thy life
Like water for the Faith, shedding thy blood
As did of old the Martyrs, drop by drop, i
Upon the ungrateful sand of heathen hearts.”
And then I saw a stately figure come,
Which seemed to wear the quaint and dovelike robe
Of silver-grey, the lawn that hid the hair,
The modest decent garb they love who vow
Their lives to Heaven, albeit no cloistered bars
Withdraw them from the world, but build around
A nunnery, and, 'mid the noise and din
Of all the sensual and wrongful world,
An oratory where the Spirit may dwell
And, long-awaited, claim its own; the band
Who struck the fetters from the slave, who tend
The halt and sick, and spend themselves in works
Of mercy for the prisoners who lie bound
In chains their sins have forged; and straight my eyes
Knew whom it was they saw, before my guide,  
With grave voice softening as it went, replied  
To my unspoken thought.

"A hundred years  
Have passed since she thou seest, on the earth  
Came first, of gentle birth and wealth and ease,  
Where the grey Anglian city in the east  
Broods round its central spire. A blooming girl,  
In her gay youth she trod with eager feet  
The path of innocent pleasure; none more blithe  
At chase or festal than the lithe young form  
Who in her scarlet habit loved to fly  
Across the rushing fields, or listen rapt  
To stirring martial melodies, or tread  
The giddy measures of the dance, and take,  
With her young motherless sisters, what delight  
Beseeched their youth. Then, in her budding age,  
When only seventeen summers smiled on her,
The joys she scarce had known began to pall,
And she reproached herself with every thought
Which stole her hours from Heaven. Blind dreams of
good,
Yearnings for something higher than she knew,
Took her, and, knowing this perplexèd world
Moves towards the best, she felt her drifting life
A hapless bark which fronts the gathering storm
Without a pilot’s skill. But the great Hand
Was with her not the less, though yet unseen,
And soon the pleading of a kindred soul
Sent over seas woke in her inmost depths
Assurance mixt with tears, and presently
The dull world faded from her, and she gave
Her all to Heaven. Then all her costly robes
She left, and took the habit of a Friend
And their plain speech—slowly, and half ashamed,
Lest those who knew her scoffed; but not the less
She was convinced, and held the Faith to the end.
Thence through her long sweet life, her own hand writes
Her daily story. Through what deeps of doubt
And self-distrust, high yearnings, often dashed
By that o'erwhelming sense of grave offence
Which takes the saints alone, and oftentimes
What high and glorious certitudes of faith,
The heavens standing open, and the Lord
With gracious beckoning hand, they know who read
The story of her days. Love came to her,
And happy wedlock, and unclouded years,
And fair-grown offspring. All good things to hold,
Honour and high obedience, troops of friends,
A heart which turned to Heaven and dwelt with God—
All these were hers. Ofttimes she spake the Word,
Spurning the conscious weakness of her sex
And her own shrinking modesty; ofttimes
She nursed the sick, and did relieve with alms
The needy, works of mercy and of faith
Filling her life. And yet, not all-content
With such high duty, still her yearning soul,
Which not the weight of daily household care,
Nor love of spouse or children, satisfied,
Panted for more, and hastened to the work
Which keeps her memory green, and crowns her Saint,
And raised her to the skies.

'Twas in the foul
And crowded prison wards her pitying heart
Found its own work. Three hundred hapless lives
Huddled together, starving, naked, vile—
The innocent and guilty, the poor soul
Who stepped a foot-pace from the path of good,
Mewed side by side within that narrow jail
With those who had put off, for desperate years,
The last thin rags of shame; a dreadful band,
Brutal, unclean, without a bed to rest
Their miserable limbs, save the damp floor
Of the foul, reeking dungeon. Frenzied cries
Of rank offence, blaspheming God and man,
Worse than of madness, smote the shrinking ear;
And 'mid the dreadful throng, more piteous still,
The teeming ranks of children, the shrill note
Of childish voices trained in all the lore
Of wickedness, to beg, to sot, to steal,
To curse. Each sight and sound that had made Hell
More dreadful than before, the sight of lives
Which had been innocent once, now doomed and damned,
Forlorn of men, and quite forgot by God!

Nay, not forgotten! Since one human heart
Felt pity for them still. The faithful soul
Of that good nursing-mother blazed afire,
Hearing and seeing, and her inmost depths
Were kindled into flame. But not at once
Might she begin her life-work. Birth and Death,
Young lives that came and went, the loss of friends
And brethren, that strange hush and chill which comes
To every home when first the young flock dares
To spread weak wings and tempt the perilous air
Far from the nest—these held her three long years
Far from the work she loved.

And then one day
She found her footsteps free, and took her way
To the grim prison where that hapless crowd
Rotted in sin. Alone, with none to aid,
Like the old seer among the ravening jaws,
Or that diviner Figure which beamed hope
To the poor prisoned spirits waiting long
The Beatific End, she passed and brought
The light of fuller Day, with mild eyes filled
With gentle pity for their sin, with voice
So clear, so soft, so musical, the tongue
As of an angel. 'Mid the noise, the din
Of blasphemy, and rank offence, she spake
And hushed all other sound, except the noise
Of weeping from repentant hearts, and told
How, even at the eleventh hour, the Lord
Was strong to save, telling of Him she served,
Whose name they knew not yet; and on the depths
Of those poor rayless souls, sunk deep in ill,
Shone with some pure reflected light of Heaven,
And touched—a mother herself—the mothers’ hearts
With pity for the children who should come
To ill as they did, till the spark Divine,
Which never dies out quite, shone out once more,
And once again, from out the sloughs of sin,
Uprose toward Heaven some faint fair flower of good.

Thus she, and with her a devoted band
Of women, strove for God. With instant prayer
She pleaded with them; clothing, shelter, food
She gained for them, and tidings of the Word.
And for those hapless childish lives she found
Fit teaching; those poor souls the pitiless law
Doomed to the felon’s end, she fortified,
As did of old S. Catharine, with her prayers
Even at the gate of Death.

Nor could her pity
Stay here, nor bear the intolerable load
Of the uncaring law which played with life
As might a tiger, stern, exacting blood
For every trivial ill. With those vile powers
Unfaith and selfishness, which ruled the world
And mar it yet and will, she strove with might,
And did at last prevail; and ere she died,
No more the shameless wickedness was done
Which from all time had shed the innocent blood
In the pure name of Law, staking a life
Against each venial wrong. Oh, clear-eyed soul,
That saw the Right undimmed, above the mists
That blinded worldly eyes, because it knew
The rule of Right, one with the Law of God!

But not alone her works of mercy touched
The prisoner in his cell. When to their doom
Of slavery, worse than death, the senseless law
Had sent those hapless lives, over wide seas,
To the far underworld, it prisoned them
Mixed as of yore, the felon old in sin,
The almost innocent, and the young lives
Of children mewed together, month on month
Festering between the crowded decks, till came
The day when they were flung upon the shore
Of a new land, helpless, unclothed, unfed,
Tainted by forced companionship with ill,
To die of want or only live by sin.
These wrongs her prescient eye foresaw and gave
Her thought to mend. The young lives new to wrong
She from the guiltier set apart, and all,
When the new world loomed on their wondering gaze,
Found hands of welcome. Oft, in some frail skiff
Daring the wintry Thames, ere the sad ship
Sailed with its load, her soft imploring voice
Rose high for all, commending them to Heaven,
And pleading with such gentle words and pure,
Their hard hearts melted, and the flowing tears
Relieved their pain; and on the deck around
The rude rough seamen heard, without a word,
The saint's high message and the sweet clear tones,
And grew ashamed to scoff, while as she knelt
The helpless women checked their gathering tears,
In silence till the dark boat on the stream
Was lost in night, and took their only friend.

Thus throughout all the land, year after year,
She cleansed each teeming prison. 'The chill North
She traversed, and the melancholy West,
And by the perilous seas which welter round
The still-vexed Channel Isles, thence to fair France,
Still seeking what of help she could for those
Whom their sin imprisoned fast, and the low plains
Of deep-sunk Holland. Where her footsteps turned
She left a blessing. From the Russian snows
Came news of those her high example drew
To kindred deeds of mercy. Courts and Thrones
Paid fitting honour to her work, and she,
Amid the felons now, now set on high
With Queens to do her honour, kept unchanged
Her humble heart, breathing the self-same prayer:
‘By any ways, by any paths Thou wilt,
So men may come to knowledge of Thy Truth.’

But not the less the changing, chancerul world
Pressed on her, than on those blest souls of old.
The wealth she only prized because it gave
Power to do good; which gathers day by day
To crush the miser with its load, from her
Was taken for no fault; her stately home
She left a blameless exile. Time and Death
Knocked loudly at her doors. The saintly band,
Brothers and sisters, thinned; the loving eyes
Of children closed untimely; the young lives
Of children's children went, leaving her age
To mourn them. Fever coming swept the home
Of her dear son, and took him, the strong stay
Of his young flock. Who reads her story knows
A gathering tale of loss, to which each year
Brought its own added sum. Her natural force,
Before the allotted span, grew faint and weak,
And, spent with pain, month after month she lay
In suffering, till she prayed, if 'twere God's will,
That she might be at rest; and sometimes, weak
And sore beset, her saintly humbleness
Was dashed with self-distrust, and she who felt
The Everlasting Arms beneath her, knew
The natural fear which oftentimes vexes less
The sinner than the saint.

So when her hour
Was come, her children round her, she prepared
To meet the Lord she loved. She whose long life
Was lived for Him; whose earliest waking thought
Was every morn for Him; whose gathering years
Were crowned with deeds of mercy; whose dear name,
In every clime, thousands of rescued souls
Uttered with tremulous lips and full of praise;
Whose thought was always how to raise to hope
The poor, the sick, the fallen; how to strike
The fetters from the prisoner and the slave;
And save the piteous childish lives the State
Had left to certain ruin—she no less
Knew the Divine despondency which marks
The saintly soul. 'Pray for me,' said her voice;
'It is a strife, but I am safe.'"

"Dear saint,
Ay, thou wert safe," I cried, "because thy heart
Was humble! To what heights of purity,
What inaccessible awful precipices
Of duty, didst thou turn thy gaze whose soul
Knew this diviner failure? To what depths
Of inner heaven, to what perfectness
Of Him thy Great Exemplar, didst thou strain?
Not only in the cloister the rapt soul
Dwells with Him, or beneath the midnight stars
Mingles with Him and bears the sacred wounds
Of the Passion, but along the well-trod road
Of daily trivial life the race is run
To where the crown awaits them, and the palm.
Who loves the Right, loves Him who taught it too;
And whoso loves his brother, loves his Lord."