And then there came, last risen to the skies,
The newest of the saints I marked, who went
Only one brief year since to bear the palm
And wear the crown, a priest whose comely youth,
Dark kindly eyes, and broad and thoughtful brow
Showed still to haunting fancy marks of care,
Sobering its new-found joy. The gentle gaze
Lighted the gracious face, no longer scarred
By fell disease, that was his cross, his crown;
And with a double tenderness my guide
Made answer softly to my silent quest.

"From the long wave of the Pacific Sea
Rise the enchanted islands of the West."
There the green surge, translucent, flowered with foam,
Breaks creaming on the strand beneath the palms;
But from its tepid waters came no sound
Of rippling mirth, nor more the fair brown forms,
Half heathen, naked, joyous, crowned with flowers,
Floated as erst on the caressing wave,
Because some strange immedicable hurt
Consumed them, and they pined in hopeless pain,
Despairing, till a servant of the Lord
Was sent to them with succour for their need,
And cleansed the desperate lives, which, struck by
Cursing their fate, turned them to reckless ill;
And gave his life to serve them, till he died,
A leper in their midst.

At Tremeloo,
Upon the far-off Belgian plain, was born
He whom the admiring tongues of half the world
Call Damien. All the story of his days
Is full of pureness. A strange child, engrossed
In musing thought, he with the shepherds loved
To drive afield ere now the opening morn,
Loosed from its flood-gates in the illumined east,
O'erflowed the slumbering plains. There all day long,
A lamb amid the innocent lambs, in play
He whiled away the hours, till all his kin
And kindly neighbours knew his childish name,
'The Little Shepherd;' and the lessons learnt
From solitary musings, with the broad
Still plain ground, and the unbounded vault
Of Heaven above him, and no sound of life
Save bleating flocks and humming bees and songs
Of mounting larks, inspired his brooding thought
With visions not of earth, and framed his lips
To an unspoken praise; and when he heard
The 'Angelus' thrill o'er the twilight fields,
His childish soul rejoiced, and his young knees
Were bent in prayer, till all the country side
Cherished the strange grave child.  

And once, men tell,

At Whitsuntide, the holy feast, there was
A neighbouring fair of simple revelry,
And since the dawn none saw him. When they searched
The crowded village streets, they found no trace
Of the young truant; but his grandsire went,
Knowing his faith, to seek him, and, indeed,
He was not 'mid the careless peasent throng,
Nor jovial haunts of rustic merriment,
But in the church; for in the darkling aisles
They found the young child kneeling, rapt, alone,
Breathing some simple prayer. For all his soul
Was full of the Unseen, and all his heart
Turned heavenward as the sunflower to the sun.

But when his childish days were past, and now
Youth blossomed in him, youth with dim grave thoughts
And scarce confessed designs, he would not take
Thought of the priestly office yet, but spent
His ardent, eager life in wholesome cares
Fitting his budding age. Yet was his soul
Maiden and pure, and all who knew the boy
Praised his white life. Till one day, when his years
Touched close on manhood, in a church he knelt,
Where some strong Preacher, fired with faith in good,
Spake burning words; and straight his ardent heart
Kindled, and all night long he knelt and prayed
For guidance, and Heaven came to him and rapt
That yearning soul, so that he would no more
Do his own work, but God's.

And so he took
The priestly office, and there came command—
The priest, his brother, lying like to die—
He in his stead should bear the lamp of Faith
To the far isles of the Pacific Sea,
Across the world, alone. And when he heard,
His glad heart leapt within him, for he knew
That thus he best should do God’s will and work
His work upon the earth.

After long months
Of storm-tost days and perilous, with the spring,
Upon the day of his good patron saint,
S. Joseph, to his fated shore he came,
Hawaii, where he laboured year by year
In happiness, doing his Master’s work
With ceaseless toil. Once on a mountain side
He paused, knowing that somewhere nigh lay hid
A Christian village, where the hungry souls
Waited their coming priest. When, with great toil
Of hand and foot, on the precipitous steep
Climbing, he gained the summit, lo! beneath
A cavernous chasm yawned; but nowhere saw he
Traces of men. Yet, without thought of doubt,
He, by new difficult crags ascending, spied
Another loftier hill, and climbed again
And reached the summit; but again no trace
Of men or dwellings, but a lonely plain,
And then again a hill; and so at last,
After long toil, spent, bleeding hand and foot,
Calling to mind the sufferings on the Tree,
And that for those poor souls his Master died,
Tottering he found his people, and confirmed
Their faith, and was rewarded for his toil.

But while his long laborious days he spent
In service of his Lord, his pitying eyes
Took many a sight of grievous misery
Which nought might heal. For on those blessed isles,
Where sea and sky wear a perpetual smile,
And all the lavish earth with flower and fruit
Laughs always, and from out the odorous gloom
Of blossomed trees a myriad creepers hang
Laden with perfume, and the feathery fronds
Of giant ferns spring upward twice the height
Of a man's stature, and bright birds flash by
On jewelled wings, a thousand brilliant hues,
Flower-like, among the flowers, and the clear sea
Holds in its azure deeps a thousand lights
Of sapphire scales, or gold, or glowing red,
Or tints which match the rainbow’s all in one,
Brighter than any which the cunning skill
Of painter limns; and, ’midst the tropic wealth
Of lustrous blossoms strange to Northern eyes,
Sweet roses blush, and lilies veined with gold
Droop their fair heads, and starry myrtles wake
Memories of classic grace;—amidst all these
And the poor joyous lives which, crowned with flowers,
Like the old careless gods of Pagan eld,
Let the hours pass, and were content, nor knew
Our Northern cares, nor thought of hell or Heaven,
Nought but delight; there came long years ago,
Brought from the teeming East, a dreadful ill,
Which nought might cure, and seized those hapless limbs,
And rotted them away, mere death in life,
Maimed horribly, and losing human form
And semblance, till at last the wretched spirit
Released itself and fled. And since the touch
Of hand or robe was thought to take with it
The dread contagion, from the land they chased
Those hapless sufferers, to where there rose
Sheer from the Southern Sea the frowning cliffs
Of Molokai. On its northern edge
The island rises into purple peaks,
With soaring heads veiled in a fleece of white,
And down each steep precipitous gorge the gleam
Of leaping waters issuing from the clouds
Lights the dark cliffs, and, where a sunbeam strikes,
Sparkles in rainbow mists; and at the foot
Of those great walls, just raised above the surge,
Stretches an emerald plain, white with the homes
Of lepers, none beside. Thither, when now
The unerring symptoms of that dreadful ill
Had shown in them, the hapless exiles sailed,
Bidding a last farewell to home and kin,
And love and life, till the slow-working plague
Consumed their limbs away. No hope was theirs,
Nor fear of God or man; only their doom,
Fixed on them undeserving, filled their souls
With horror and despair, and careless hate
Of Heaven, and utter recklessness of ill,
Since doomed they were, and an unchecked desire
To enjoy, since die they must. And so it came
That these poor lives, pining in misery,
Blasphemed their fate and lived in present hell.*
Yet, since no more they might return, nor those
Who tended them, long time they pined with none
To care for them, till one day, when the ship
Sailed with its fatal load, and the saint took
His last farewells with tears, the fire of Faith
Flamed up within his heart. Without a word
To friends, or care for clothing or for food,
Of a sudden Damien leapt on board, and went
Joyful to meet his doom of pain and death,
Like the brave saints of old; and for our age,
Our weakling age, sick of a deadly doubt,
Renewed the primal ecstasy of Faith!

There, sixteen years among those hapless folk,
He laboured. Long, beneath no sheltering roof
But open to the winds and rains of heaven
He slept, when sleep he might; for all his hours
Were spent to bring to God the perishing souls
Their great despair corrupted. Everywhere
His cheerful smile and faithful words allured
The lives his hands relieved, and everywhere
The people, struggling back to love and right,
Left the old vices of despair, the drink
That brought oblivion, and the sensual depths
Wherein they wallowed late, devoid of hope,
Forlorn of God; and day by day the sound
Of prayer and praise arose where blasphemies
Had rent the shuddering air. And since the power
Of lustral waters oftentimes works out
A miracle upon the tainted soul
As on the body, and what cleanses this
Makes pure the other; from a clear cold pool
High on the mountain, fed by rain and cloud,
He led the full stream's salutary flow
To every hut where lay those hopeless lives;
And straight those wretched lairs grew clean, the plague
Lightened, and with it pain, and their lips blessed
The saint who succoured them, and, through him, God,
And sinned no more, and hope reviving wrought
Its precious spell, and happy flower-set homes
Rose where the lepers huddled ere he came,
Rotting in misery, and the pious care
Of brethren far away, learning his need,
Sent food and money for his aid, and all
Was of his hand. And eager helpers came,
Nor of his Church alone, though of his Lord—
Brothers and sisters brave, who work to-day
His blessed work, though he is dead and gone.

Likewise he built a hospice, where the sick
Were gently tended. There, through every day,
He laboured in their midst, spake words of hope,
Dressed their sad wounds, brought them what delicate food
His means supplied, and when they came to die
Paid the last rites, and with his own hands laid
The dead in earth; and when the plague had rapt
Their hapless parents, 'twas his fostering hand
Cared for the orphans, doomed, maybe, to die
The same dread death, and pine meanwhile in pain.
And as faith's tide rose higher in their souls
He, with his own hands, planned and built a shrine
For long processions, and the solemn Mass
Served upon purest gold. So the swift days
Passed, and amid the misery around,
As one who bore a charmèd life, the saint
Laboured unscathed for twelve long toilsome years,
A father to the orphan, to the sick
A kind physician, to the suffering soul
A priest in every strait, and, when the end
Was come, a reverent hand to close the eyes
And smooth the maimèd limbs, and lay in earth
The poor dead clay whose life was hid with God.

Thus toiled he long contented years; and then
The creeping numbness took him, and he knew,
Though with no bodily sign as yet, nor scar,
Nor strength diminished, that the common doom
Waited him too. He did not quail, nor pine
That those long happy, useful years had reached
Their sure approaching term—the hand of God
Was over all, health, sickness, life and death—
‘Fiat voluntas tua;’ and he toiled
With scarce diminished strength, and zeal which knew
No shadow of abatement*, through long years,
A leper like the rest. And when he preached,
And when he toiled among the sick, or gave
His Church's solemn office, all his words
Were of 'us lepers,' glorifying in the load
The will of Heaven assigned to him, and proud,
Even as his dear Lord touched with healing hand
The lepers of old time and made them whole,
To be as these he loved in life and death.

And when his fading forces sank, there came
A band of helpers, priests and brethren true,
And ministering women, round his bed;
And there among his sick they labour still,
With others whom his bright example since
Inspired, lives dedicate like his to Heaven
And all the struggling suffering Race of men,
Working his work of mercy to the end.
Last, when, a year ago, his failing strength
Laid him upon his bed, keeping the use
Of his great Church, first would the good man make
Confession of his sins, and thanksgiving
Because the Lord had spared his life so long
To do his work. And round his dying bed
His people whom he succoured, a great throng
Of maimèd forms, swollen and scarred and bent
Out of all human semblance, came and wept,
And raised their poor hoarse voices in the hymns
He loved, and made a music dearer far
To the All-hearing Ear than any strain
Which skilful voices soaring to the vaults
Of dim cathedrals raise; and when at last,
After long weeks of suffering lit with prayer,
He gave his spirit back to God, and went
To be, at Easter, as he hoped, with Him
Who rose before, and the low passing-bell
Was heard, there went from that poor leprous throng
A solemn wailing, as from those who know
That they loved well and now had lost a friend."

Even as he ceased my soul within me leapt
In praise and thankfulness, and these her words:
"Ah! blessed life which finds its happiness
In succouring others, with what store of good—
Good thoughts, good deeds, merciful energies—
Didst thou ascend to Heaven, and take thy rest!
I count not all, thy pangs of pain, or sense
Of natural loathing overcome by love,
Or the short years which brought their certain doom.
These, saintly lives lit by the sun of Faith,
Despise: but to know failure in thy work,
As thou didst oft; the souls which thou didst love
Unfaithful, and the hiss of slander mock
Thy purpose and thyself; to hear no voice
Of praise save that within thee sent from Heaven
Or some low saint applause of kindred souls,
Far off almost as from a separate star,
Whisper across the world, while the base din
Of loud detraction smote men's ears; to long
For home and feel thy own act banish thee,
And know inexorable Nature lurk
Behind thee, a deaf Fury pitiless,
Wielding a scourge of fire; to ask sometimes
In deep depression, as thy Master asked,
'Hast Thou forsaken me?' and find no voice
To answer thee, nor pity, nor reprieve
For all thy sacrifice, nor favouring word—
A martyrdom of years;—this were, indeed,
Too hard to bear for any but a soul
Fired as thine was, nay is, with love immense
As Heaven itself, stronger than Life or Death—
The love of God through weak and suffering man,
The love of man through his Creator, God.
But many a saintly form I knew, and passed
Without a word, because no vision long
Endures, and that for all no mortal life
Might well suffice. Did I not note thy fair
Nude youthful grace, Sebastian—beautiful
As young Apollo on the Olympian hill,
Or Marsyas, his victim—fettered fast
And pierced by rankling shafts while thou didst raise
Thy patient eyes to Heaven? Saw I not thee,
Oh sainted childlike Agnes, with thick locks
Of gold, which, grown miraculously long,
Guarded thy maiden modesty; or thee,
S. Agatha, with thy white wounded breast—
Martyrs and saints? Or thee of recent days,
S. Vincent, who thy late-enfranchised years,
Free from the prison bonds thou long hadst borne,
Didst spend in works of mercy, and didst care,
As might a father, for the childish lives
Forlorn which no man heeded? Saw I not
Thee, saintly Jeremy, whose daily feet
Paced 'neath the long-armed oaks of Golden Grove,
Above our winding Towy; or thy mild,
Benevolent gaze, good Howard, who didst die,
Christ-like, for souls in prison? Saw I not,
Blessing our land, thy apostolic form,
Dear Wesley, through whose white soul Love Divine
Shone unrefracted, whose pure life was full
Of love for God and man, whose faithful hand
Relit the expiring fire, which sloth and sense
And the sad world's unfaith had wellnigh quenched
And left in ashes; or thy saintly friend,
Fletcher of Madeley, clean consumed of faith
And ruth for perishing souls; or thee, whose zeal
Laid all thy learning at His feet who gave it,
Eliot, apostle to the dying race
Of the Red Indian, on their trackless plains
Preaching in their own tongue the gracious news
Thy learning opened; or thy comely form,
Brave Dorothy, who thy abounding life,
'Neath smoke-stained skies, 'mid coarse and brutal souls,
Gavest to the maimed and sick, content to be
A happy life-long martyr, and didst die
Alone at last of hopeless torture, pains
Incurable, yet cheerful barest thy cross
Even to the end; or ye, oh priceless lives!
After long years of terror, day and night,
Till death itself seemed better than your dread,
Shed for the Faith by many a savage isle
Of the Pacific seas; or ye whose graves
'Mid fever-swamps or silent forest depths
The Moslem slaver mocks, sent to sure death
For Africa. Nay, nay, I marked ye all,
But might not tarry more, so vast has grown,
Lost in dim eíd, and longer, hour by hour,
The ever-lengthening pageant of the Blest.

And then there came no other name men know,
For now we passed along the close-set files
Of saints and martyrs, bearing each the palm,
Though marked no more by robes antique, or mien,
Or speech, but of the modern centuries,
And as we live to-day. So thick they rose
Streaming from earth, as when the autumnal year
Sheds its fair throng of meteors on the sky.
So those pure souls, white with a glittering train
Of light, flashed upward, till I might not take
Count of their number, for of every race
And hue and creed they came, of every age,
Both young and old—all to the heavens above
Rose upward; and an infinite thankfulness
Took me, and joy, because our day, that seems
To some so void of faith, so full of pain
And chilled with deadly doubt, not less than those
The faithful ages might, sent forth its tale
Of victories of the Faith. Nor bore they all
The name of Christ, but some there were who held
The old unchanging Faith from whence He came
Whom yet their fathers slew, and some who called
On that ascetic Prince who draws the East
With some faint law of Mercy and of Love
For all created essences, one hope
To be with God, even though Man's nature rush
To His as doth the river to the sea,
Absorbed in Him for ever; and of those
To whom the fierce false Prophet calling, taught,
Though stained with fanatic zeal and grovelling sense,
Amid the noise of base idolatries,
The unity of God, the pure, the wise,
Who sits to judge the world; there came who left
The sensual styre and rose above the din
Of the world's wranglings, and who were indeed
His saints, though Him they knew not.

But of all

The most part were of Him, each Christian race
Sending its cloud of witnesses to swell
The innumerable host. There, came the thralls
Of Duty, willing servants old and young,
Who kiss the chain that binds them, knowing well
That 'tis true freedom; men who toil enchained
Of household care, knowing not rest nor ease,
For those they love, and live their briefer lives
For Duty; or grave statesmen who toil on
To the laborious end, though life sink low,
Whom natural rest allures, but strive on still
While the sharp tooth of slander gnaws their souls.
Or women who have given their ease, their life,
To weary cares, nor heed them if they know
Their children happy; or who from the hush
Of cloistered convents serve with prayer and praise;
Or who amid the poor and lowly folk
Of all the Churches, as their Master erst,
Toil amid sin and pain, and are content
To live compassionate days and ask no more
Of wages for their service, but, consumed
Of pity, give their lives to save the lost
And hopeless; or who love to minister,
Spurning the weakness of their sex, the bloom
Of delicate ease, and grace and luxury,
And, 'mid the teeming homes of healing, bend
To succour bodily ill, while night by night
The sick and maimed, in restless slumbers tost,
Lie groaning till the dawn, and cries of pain
Wring the soft hearts whose duty binds them fast,
While the gay festive hearths of friends or home
Thrill with sweet music and the rhythmic feet
Of careless youth and joyance, and the rose
And lily of their gentle girlhood wait
Their coming, but in vain, till youth is past,
And with it earthly love. All these fair souls
In one incessant effluence of light
Soared from the earth, the army of the saints
Who in all time have set themselves to work
The Eternal Will.

And yet not all of pain
And suffering were they, that thus leaving earth,
Soared to high Heaven. To some, high sacrifice
Is joy, not pain. For some, from youth to age,
The even current of their lives flows on,
Broken by scarce a ripple, scarce a cloud
Veiling the constant blue—the daily use
Of humble duty, the unchanging round
Of homely life; the father's work, who toils
Ungrudging day by day, from year to year,
To keep the lives he loves, and dies too soon,
His children round his bed, nor knows at all
The tremours of the saint; the lowly tasks
Which fill the daily round of busy lives,
And keep them pure; the willing, cheerful care
Of mothers. Wert thou not among the throng,
Dear life long fled, who, after tranquil years
Unbroken and unclouded by great griefs
Or bodily pains, on the sad year's last day
Wentest from us: who threescore years and ten
Didst wear thy children's love; whose pitying hand
Was always open; whose mild voice and eye
Drew rich and poor alike, a love that soared
Not on great sacrifice, indeed, or high
And saintly pains, but trod life's level plain
As 'twere high snows, and daily did inform
Earth with some hue of Heaven; on whose loved tomb
No word is graven, save thy name and date
Of birth and death, because it seemed that none
Might fit the gracious life and beautiful,
Whose glory was its humbleness, whose work,
Built of sweet acts and precious courtesies,
The exemplar of a home? Nay, well I know
High Heaven were not Heaven, wanting thee
And such as thou. Within the gates of God
Are many mansions, and each saintly soul
Treads its own path, fills its own place, but all
Are perfected and blest.

And yet how few
Of that great congress saw I. He who spends
Lone vigils with the stars notes on night’s face
Some ghostly, scarce-suspected vapour gleam,
And turns his optic-glass to it; and, lo!
A mist of suns! wherefrom the sensitive disc
Fixes the rays, first scattered, then more dense
With longer time, star after hidden star
Stealing from out the unimagined void
And twinkling into light, till on its face
Those dark unplumbed abysses show no speck
Of vacant gloom, a white and shining wall
Of glomerated worlds, broad as the bound
Which feeble fancy, yearning for an end,
Builds round the verge of Space. So that bright throng
Grew denser as I gazed, till Heaven was full:
Of the white cloud of witnesses, who still,
As always since the worlds and Time began,
Stand round the throne of God.

Then while I gazed,

As in that vision fair which filled the eyes
Of the blest seer of Patmos, suddenly
The angels with veiled faces cast them down
Prostrate, and then a peal of glorious sound,
M mightier than any sound of earth, which chased
My dream, and well-remembered words I heard:
"Blessing and Glory, Wisdom, Thanksgiving,
Honour, and Power, and Might be unto Thee
For ever and for ever."

Then methought

My soul made answer:

"Yea, and victory
Over Thy Evil. Not Thy saints alone"
Are Thine, and if one soul were lost to Thee,
Thine arm were shortened. All the myriad lives
Which are not here, but pine in bitter dole,
Do Thou redeem at last, after what toils
Thou wilt, in Thine own time, of Thine own will,
Purged, if Thou wilt, by age-long lustral pain,
Banished for long. Yet through new spheres untried
Of Being let them rise, sinner and saint,
Higher and higher still, till all shall move
In harmony with Thee and Thy great Scheme,
Which doth transcend the bounds of Earth and Time;
Still let them work Thy work. Yet bring them home;
Let none be lost! For see how far thy Heavens
Are higher than our earth, how brief the tale
Of little years we live, how low and small
Our weak offence, transgression of a child
Grown petulant, on whom the father looks
With pity, not with wrath. On those dead souls
Which unillumined in the outer depths
Lie yet, too gross for Heaven, send Thou a beam
From Thy great Sun, and, piercing through them, wake
The good that slept on earth: and, like the throb
Of radiant light which pulses through the mist
With which Thy Space is sown, and wakes new worlds,
Atom by atom drawn or else repelled,
Or as the vibrant subtle note which thrills
Upon the sensitive film, and traces on it
Figure or figure, curve with curve inlaced
Into some flawless flower; so do Thou, Lord,
Sound with Thy light and voice the dark dumb depths
And, working on the unnumbered souls which lie
Far from Thee, shine and call, and, waking in them
A latent order, purge them. Make their will
Harmonious with the Will which governs all,
And orb into some higher form, and start
As Thy new worlds to life, till all Thy skies
A Vision of Saints.

Shine with recovered souls. Then shall it be
As those great voices would, and Thou fulfilled
Alike in Earth and Heaven."

But as I woke
To this poor world again, almost with tears,
Not wholly did the vision fade, but still
Those high processions lingering with me seemed
To purify my soul. What was the world,
Its low designs and hopes, its earth-born joys,
Base grovelling pleasures, and unfruitful pains,
To those and such as they—those eyes that saw
Not earth, but Heaven; those stainless feet that trod
Through lilied meads of saintly sacrifice
And strange unearthly snows? Surely 'twas well
To have seen them clearer than the mists of earth
Allow to waking hours. Come thou again,
Fair dream, and often, till thou art a dream
No more, but waking. March to victory,
Great army, from the legendary Past,
Through the brief Present, where Life's pilgrims toil
To-day, and rise triumphant, or fall prone,
Prest by their load; through that unnotated tract
Of the dim Future which our thought pourtrays,
Far fairer than the world's sad Past; which yet
Shall have its struggles too, its sins, its wrongs,
Its saints, its martyrs!

March in stainless line,
Lengthening the ranks of those who, gone before,
Are now triumphant, till the End shall come,
Which hushes all our lower strifes, attunes
Discords to harmonies, rounds and makes complete
The cycles of our Lives; till Sacrifice
And Pain are done, and Death, and the Dread Dawn
Breaks which makes all things new, and the great Sun
Rising upon the worlds, dispels the Night
Of Man's sad Past, and routs the gathered clouds
Of Evil, and ascends a Conqueror,
Wielding full splendours of unwaning Day
For ever!

THE END.