

Father Damien

Leper Apostle of Molokai.

By an Admirer.

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[In 2009, Damien was canonized, and is known as Saint Damien of Molokai.]

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD.

In the little Belgian village of Tremaloo (Tremelo) near the town of Malignes, seven miles from the historic city of Louvain (Leuven), there dwelt a humble family of the farmer class named De Veuster. These worthy people, thrifty, hard-working yeomen stock, lived the quiet simple life of the country, working incessantly from sunrise to sunset, hard manual labour of the fields, tilling, sowing, reaping, with very little intermission or distraction save their evening rest round their comfortable fireside with a rare, occasional visit to the neighbouring city of Louvain.

Francois and Catherine De Veuster at this time were the happy parents of five children, and on 3rd January, 1840, a sixth child was born and was called Joseph, after Our Lady's Spouse.

From babyhood Joseph seemed drawn mysteriously to holy things and once at the age of four, being missed from his home on a busy pattern day in the village, was sought in vain by his distraught parents. He was found at length in the little church rapt in meditation at the foot of the altar, a lonely figure kneeling in the flickering rays of the little red lamp. It would seem as if he already felt that gentle call, which was to grow ever louder and more insistent, until it led him on in obedient and willing response to the shore of that living death on the Grey Island of Molokai. His natural instinct for religion was ever fostered by the devout example of his parents, especially of his mother.

Each evening, when the toil of the day was over, the family assembled in the farm-house kitchen, where the wood-fire crackled on the wide hearth and the copper utensils winked and shone in the dancing firelight. Then the mother took down the great volume of the lives of the saints printed in old Flemish and read the stirring episodes of those heroes and martyrs. These tales so powerfully impressed Joseph and his brothers that they even tried to imitate their glorious achievements by wandering off into the woods to become hermits with provisions enough to last about a day. Here they were traced by their anxious relatives at nightfall and brought back tired and cold but with their missionary zeal no whit diminished. As Joseph grew older, he showed intense love and spiritual understanding of the virtue of self-denial and mortification. This he practised in secret and went so far as to lie by night on a plank which he laid over his bed, secreting it by day, until his mother happening to discover it, forbade the practice.

Though quite a natural boy, he always seemed a little apart from his companions, liking to reflect and to listen to that inward voice ever vocal within his soul. He was extremely sensitive as all such rare natures are, and shrank under the slightest word of reproof; but at the same time of a most

happy disposition and engaging manner, with a winning smile that disarmed all unfriendliness. This sunny nature was to be one of his greatest helps when faced with the most terrible conditions in the material and spiritual sphere that ever human beings encountered. He loved to follow the flocks to pasture and was frequently to be seen in company with the shepherds, earning thereby the endearing appellation of “The Little Shepherd.”

His love of animals and sympathy for his neighbour in trouble are shown in a moving little episode in which we see him keeping an all-night vigil over a poor woman’s sick cow — her sole support and which was on the point of death. When morning dawned, the animal was definitely on the road to recovery.

His love for study seemed to indicate that he was not meant for agricultural pursuits. His parents therefore decided to send him to college at Braine-le-Comte, with a view to a commercial career; there being no idea as yet, that he would develop a religious vocation as his brother Auguste had done.

CHAPTER II.

THE PASSING YEARS.

At Braine-le-Comte, he followed his studies with the greatest zeal. A mission there held by the Redemptorist Fathers sowed the seed of his future vocation in no uncertain manner, or rather forced the growth of that seed which was within him from his earliest years. In a letter to his parents shortly after this, he hints of his vocation. His sister Pauline had already entered religion, and Auguste had become a novice in the Picpus Fathers. He asked therefore for their consent, and having obtained it, he entered the same Order, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. His education not being sufficient to qualify him as a candidate for the priesthood, he had to be content with becoming first a lay-brother, but by dint of hard work and study, he was soon admitted to the ranks of ecclesiastical students. He chose as his name in religion that of Damien, after the saint-physician who, with his brother, Cosmas, had suffered martyrdom; a well-chosen name surely for him, who was later to spend his life curing not only the spiritual but the terrible physical ills of his poor suffering leper children. He spent his novitiate in Paris, a zealous, holy novice practising mortification and self-denial on every occasion, a fit preparation for that life of sublime achievement awaiting him though all unconscious of the future. These voluntary hardships of mortification never affected his health, being of the most robust constitution and bodily strength.

The foundation of his future work was built up here in long prayerful commune with God, in arduous application to work and detail, in perseverance and intense, prolonged effort, developing a naturally strong character into a force and power, which was to fit him for the colossal task before him — the great act of martyrdom. This is not accomplished in a day or a year, but is the slow and steady growth, the outcome of a long period of daily and incessant self-immolation.

CHAPTER III.

DAMIEN SETS SAIL.

But Damien’s great desire was for the missionary life. This goal he never lost sight of, since he joined what was primarily a missionary Congregation. He had long taken the great missionary saint, Francis Xavier, as his special patron, and endeavoured to model his life on the “Apostle of the Indies.” In 1825, Pope Leo XII had placed the conversion of the Sandwich Islands under the care of the Picpus Fathers, and missionaries were dispatched there from time to time. His brother, Auguste,

now known as Pamphile, now ordained, was among the number selected to sail, but within a few weeks of his departure, he fell a victim to typhus fever. This was Damien's opportunity.

He offered himself in his brother's place, and though still in Minor Orders, his superiors acceded to his proposal, and Damien sailed in The Cross after a week's retreat and a brief visit of leave-taking to his home at Tremaloo.

The party, which included five fathers, met in Paris and proceeded to the port of Bremerhaven where their sailing vessel was ready for departure. In Paris before leaving, he had his photograph taken; it represents him with a strong face of intense earnestness, clear steady gaze, the face of an Aloysius, telling of latent powers of strength and endurance and burning zeal. A slight shortsightedness had lately compelled him to wear spectacles, which are noticeable in the picture.

Damien set sail on the Feast of All Saints, 1st November, 1863, bidding farewell forever to home and parents and country. After five months of rough sailing in the South Seas with terrific storms which threatened to wreck their vessel they rounded Cape Horn and ploughed through the Pacific (which on this occasion belied its name) and came to anchor in Honolulu, the capital of the Sandwich Islands, on the Feast of Damien's patron, Saint Joseph, 19th March, 1864.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS.

This group of islands (also known as the Hawaiian) were discovered by Europeans in 1778 by Captain Cook, and even at this time idolatry and human sacrifice were largely practised, though the Picpus Fathers had been sending missionaries periodically for forty years. They were lucky, however, in the fact that the native king was favourable to them, and welcomed their arrival; nevertheless, a colossal task awaited Damien and his companions.

The islands were also covered with volcanoes, some very active with frequent eruptions covering the ground with lava and making travel, which was mostly on foot, no easy matter.

Before taking up his duties, Damien must complete his studies at the Island College and receive ordination. This took place at Whitsun (Pentecost Sunday) following his arrival in the Honolulu Cathedral by Bishop Maigret, who was henceforth to be his firm friend as well as superior. Next day, he celebrated his first Mass. We can well imagine the feelings of Damien on this, the greatest occasion of his life, this, the consummation of all his lifelong hopes and earliest desires — the signal acceptance by God of the complete dedication of his life. At this, his first Mass, he communicated to a large number of natives lately steeped in paganism, assembled to testify their belief in the One True God and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. What feelings of awe and fervour must have filled his heart at that sublime moment when he held between his hands the Body of Christ brought down to earth in obedience to the Words of Consecration.

English being the language spoken in the Islands, he took up its study, and with his usual thoroughness, mastered it quickly and spoke it constantly in later years. He was ordered first to the Island of Hawaii to the district of Puna, comprising some eight villages where Christianity was very little known, having been without a priest for several years.

His first work was to construct a church. His heart went out at once to his people, whom he described as "Gentle, pleasant-mannered, exceedingly tender-hearted, they are most hospitable and will deprive themselves of necessities to supply your every want if you ask a night's shelter of

them.” From the very first, he loved these, his pagan children, and in spite of hardship and exile, strangeness of scenes and surroundings he was happy.

Shortly after this, Damien took over a much larger parish at Kohala, which took thirty days to cover. Here he built two additional churches, mostly with his own hands. His great bodily strength and manual training stood him here in good stead. The lazy natives were ever in astonishment at his stupendous feats of strength and energy; they considered it a miracle when they saw him carrying huge beams of wood uphill, which three or four of them together could not lift. The bells for his church not having arrived from home as promised, he used a horn to summon his flock to service. The churches were usually made of timber and the worshippers seated on mats instead of chairs or benches.

For about eight years, he laboured at Kohala, and then in one of his letters home an ominous note is struck. The beautiful blue of sea and sky, the smiling face of lavish nature hid a hideous poison that lurked in its midst — the scourge of leprosy.

“Leprosy,” he writes, “is beginning to be very prevalent here. It is very rarely cured and very dangerous, being highly contagious.”

CHAPTER V.

THE SCOURGE OF LEPROSY.

Unclean! Unclean! With what horror has this despairing cry of the leper filled humanity down through the centuries! Nor is the cry silent even today.

Leprosy, that loathsome and deadly plague for which no cure has even yet been discovered, is as old as man himself. [Today, however, (2012) the disease can generally be cured with antibiotics. With early diagnosis and treatment, many leprosy symptoms and complications can be minimized or avoided all together.] Its beginnings are lost in antiquity; but authorities agree that it originated in the Valley of the Nile, and mention is made in the sixteenth century before Christ, in the Ebers Papyrus, of the scourge sweeping through the country. From there it spread to Italy and was carried by the Romans, in their invasion of the other European countries to France, Spain, and finally to England, where, in the time of the Crusades, it spread to such an extent that it is said that half the population was stricken with the disease, and there were lepers in the Church, in the State, and even on the throne. By the fourteenth century, it had almost disappeared, helped, no doubt, by the terrible Black Death that swept over Europe carrying off almost half of the population.

Leprosy became epidemic in the Hawaiian Islands about the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in 1865 had reached such proportions that an Act was passed to segregate the lepers. A settlement was chosen in one of the smaller islands of the group — namely, Molokai, an island seven or eight miles wide and about thirty-eight in length. The island was by nature admirably adapted for the purpose, being cut in two by enormous cliffs and mountains of volcanic origin. To this island, the lepers were shipped from Honolulu, and it was a heartrending sight to see these poor creatures being torn by force from their homes and relatives and friends to banishment and certain death in this abode of misery and despair at Molokai.

CHAPTER VI.

“I WILL GO TO MOLOKAI.”

Damien had frequently witnessed the heartrending scene of the departure of these unfortunate creatures doomed to exile in the living death at Molokai. In the words of an eye-witness, "These miserable beings, with a dazed look of lingering death in their fearful countenances, were soon disposed on the deck of a small outward-bound craft, and then in a few moments that intervened between the casting off of the shore line and her making for the mouth of the harbour, the pitiful wail of men, women and children was renewed. Those on the shore wringing their hands and tears coursing down their ashen cheeks. Those on the departing vessel brooding for a time as in dull agony, but anon an unearthly cry rang over the tranquil sea. It was their long farewell."

Damien, pondering on their fate, his heart torn with sympathy and longing to help them, reflected on what their life in the lazaretto must well be.

Faith must die from their despairing hearts with no priest resident or regularly visiting the island. Physically and morally, they were sunk in the very depths of degradation and abject misery; some of those were his own dear converts whom he had himself washed in the saving waters of Baptism, to lapse once more into utter darkness.

He knew no rest, no comfort until the desired opportunity arose to come to their aid. This chance was not long delayed. In May, 1873, on the dedication of a new church by Bishop Maigret at which several missionaries were assembled, his Lordship spoke with sadness of Molokai and the fate of the poor lepers where Government restrictions made it almost impossible to send a visiting priest. This discourse struck on the listening ears of Damien as the answer to his fervent secret prayer. Here was his chance then, and coming forward he offered himself with simple directness to his Bishop:

"Monseigneur," he said, "if you will be kind enough to allow it, I will go to Molokai and labour for the poor lepers whose wretched state of bodily and spiritual misfortune has often made my heart bleed within me."

This declaration, this voluntary offering, which sounded so simple, what did it mean? What but a self-imposed death sentence; self-condemnation to a living death of fifteen years duration, cut off from his own kindred, surrounded by unimaginable horrors, shortly to be in the grip of that same dread implacable disease that made the inhabitants of the grey island shunned by humanity.. He would be one of those forever; he, in that sense, would be also an outcast. The Bishop, though somewhat taken by surprise, knew enough of Damien's steadfast character to recognise that this was no rash impulse, no wild offer made on the spur of the moment; glancing at Damien's eager face lit up by enthusiasm, but, in whose quiet and steady gaze the light of calm, undaunted purpose shone, he accepted God's volunteer for front-line service.

Taking hurried departure for Honolulu, where a boat was leaving that very day with its sad contingent for Molokai, Damien and his Bishop got on board just before it sailed. So quickly had the whole matter been decided that Damien embarked without time to say good-bye to his friends or to collect his clothes and personal belongings. Empty-handed indeed he might be of material things, but oh! how full of spiritual gilts! — the offering of himself, soul, body, health, and happiness at the feet of the Good Samaritan whose example he would humbly follow.

As the steamer reached Molokai, the wretched inhabitants came trooping down to the shore to greet the new arrivals. Damien beheld his new parishioners, unkempt, dirty, ragged, in various stages of the disease, maimed and limbless some of them. The Bishop, having presented to them their new pastor, and with a final benediction and affectionate farewell to Damien returned to Honolulu.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE FOOT OF CALVARY.

Damien was left alone. He had put his foot upon the Calvary of his own choosing, he must climb as Christ did the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha's heights; there was no turning back and he would not if he could. But that does not mean that there was no sense of horror, no heart-sinking to almost panic in his soul as the boat faded into the distance and he was left alone — doomed forever in this living graveyard at Molokai. He would not be human otherwise, and Damien was very human and in the prime of his glorious youth and vigorous manhood, (he was now thirty-three). These feelings we can but dimly guess. He stood thus utterly alone, unaided, with no worldly possessions but the clothes that covered him, his hurried departure having prevented him from securing even a change of linen. Around him the tropical night is falling rapidly, he must seek some shelter.

Approaching some of the wretched huts, which served as dwellings for the most acute cases, he found from the terrible condition of filth and squalor, the nauseating stench that emanated from them, that shelter there would not be possible. Night in the open under the clear canopy of heaven would be immensely preferable. Looking about him for some kindly bush or tree beneath whose friendly branches he might pass the night, he caught sight of a large pandanus tree. Here he encamped for the night under a sky of sapphire blue, dotted with a million stars. What his thoughts, his feelings, his prayers were as he lay or knelt during the long watches of the night are known alone to his God with whom he held commune; we can but touch reverently on the threshold of such hallowed ground, it would be sacrilege to go further.

Let us take a brief glance around the Grey Island that is to be Damien's home. The island, the smallest of the group, is cut in two by enormous precipices running north and south. At the foot of these, lies a stretch of land forming a peninsula completely cut off by the towering cliffs from the rest of the island. This was the site chosen for the leper settlements of Kalawao and Kalaupapa. Well named "the Grey Island," the light of the sun never penetrated the rocky heights that reared above it, while below the sea roared and foamed, flooding in winter-time the flat plain that held the wretched hovels of the lepers. The soil was barren and rocky covered with lava formations from a volcano on the island. The lepers (about 800 in number) were housed in dilapidated huts that offered little protection from the weather. They were made of branches of trees covered with grass and leaves. In these, the worst and most helpless cases herded together, the less afflicted preferring to lie about in the open in the shelter of a wall, or rocky slope.

The condition of these wretched specimens of humanity was truly deplorable, clothed in rags, filthy, emaciated, in every stage of the dread disease, they lay about, many of them waiting for death; some whose very limbs had been eaten away crawled on all fours like animals. The better cases in whom the malady was less advanced sometimes came to the aid of those in extremis; but oftener they were engaged in amusing themselves as best they might by gambling, and drinking a home-brewed intoxicant made from a native plant called "Ki."

Work there was none; for agriculture, their only resource, was impossible owing to the untillable nature of the soil, and there was no one to organise or instruct them in building, carpentry, or other employment, nor raw materials for such. The Government did almost nothing for them, but shipped them there in their hundreds, gave them a few head of cattle and a very small quota of provisions and told them to shift for themselves for the rest.

Such were the conditions when Damien came to the Island. Mismanagement and neglect by the authorities, the conditions of the Island and of the lepers themselves constituted a state of affairs of indescribable horror. Starvation, lawlessness, and misery prevailed; the dying neglected and left to die untended; while the others ate up all the food provided by the Government and dosed themselves with “Ki”, which drove them mad until the place became a veritable hell of unimaginable horror.

Such was the doomed island when the gentle Damien came to its sinister shores. Such was the task he had voluntarily undertaken in this living graveyard — the task of reform, bodily and spiritual, of these human derelicts, and if we contrast this picture (no whit exaggerated) with the one he left behind him sixteen years later when his beloved children laid his body beneath that same pandanus tree with lonely, breaking hearts, we must only pause and with awe acknowledge that God has truly worked a miracle through his servant, Damien.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAMIEN BUILDS.

Whether Damien came to the island in the first instance with his mind made up to remain permanently is not known; but what is quite certain is that after a short time spent there and seeing the plight of its wretched inhabitants he resolved definitely and finally to be one of them to the end. As he says of himself later: “I made myself a leper among the lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ.” Coming primarily as a priest for the eternal salvation of his leper flock, Damien realised that, if he hoped to reach their souls he must start on the lower plane of their material needs. As we have seen, he was eminently practical, possessing a large amount of that very necessary quality in priest or layman — common-sense. This he made haste to apply. The first work to be undertaken was the matter of a water supply. The filthy condition of the people was largely due to lack of water, the only supply available being some miles away, and the lepers being mostly incapable of fetching it from such a distance. Having discovered a spring of constant fresh water not far from Kalawao, he applied to the Government for a supply of water pipes, and with the help of a party of the able-bodied lepers, the pipes were laid. This made a wonderful improvement in conditions, as the cleansing of their rags could be effected, and by degrees, bathing and washing became a daily routine. He next turned his attention to housing conditions. The recent storms and high tides having swept away their wretched huts, the whole community lay in the open on mats of grass and leaves, which greatly aggravated their condition.

Damien again made application to the Government for timber and other building materials. Soon he and willing helpers, roused to activity by his inspiring example and wonderful energy, were hard at work building and constructing strong wooden dwellings — the labourers’ cottages of the settlement. In a few years, hundreds of these were dotted over the peninsula, brightening the dreary landscape with their brightly-painted fronts. What a miracle of material progress in such a little time!

He next tackled the authorities on ‘the food question’. Hitherto the supplies had, been totally inadequate, and fresh milk, so necessary to the extreme cases, was entirely lacking. The supply under his continued demands became better and more regular, until finally each person was provisioned with a regular weekly ration of meat, milk, and poi (a species of native arrowroot).

Their interest in life was reawakened, and with it, a love of order and beauty. They took delight in the adornment of their houses and gardens, some of which were a pleasure to behold.

He next turned his attention to clothing. The few garments provided annually to each leper were totally insufficient and generally developed into raggedness in a short time, leaving them exposed to cold and wet, which added to their misery.

Damien, by collecting stores of clothing from charitable friends and interested benefactors accumulated the where-withal to open clothing stores in the few villages now established.

He then persuaded the authorities to grant an annual allowance to each leper for the purchase of their apparel. This, besides ensuring a better-clothed community, had the additional important effect of restoring their lost self-respect. Thus was Damien establishing a revival of civilisation among these poor benighted creatures. His next work was that of hospital accommodation. Hitherto the conditions for the treatment of the sick (or rather the extreme cases — for almost all were sick) were deplorable. There was no hospital in any way worthy of the name; no bandages, medicines, or medical supplies of any kind to alleviate the condition of the poor sufferers. The only substitute was an old disused shelter merely used to house the dying in their last hours. Into this, they were carried in the last stages of the disease and left there to die almost unattended.

We can imagine what horrors Damien encountered in his endeavours to tend the sick, to lessen their sufferings, and help them to die. With his usual energy and resourcefulness, he succeeded after a considerable time in establishing a regular dispensary where a doctor was daily in attendance. Meanwhile all he could do was to go about himself, with one or two helpers, and dress the sores of the more helpless cases — washing, bathing and nursing, often carrying out his ministrations during the long watches of the night. This, in addition to farming, building and carpentry during the day. Often, indeed, his bed never saw him at all, as with a hot bath and a light meal he began another day. He spent much of his day at carpentry, making all the doors and window frames of the houses as well as all the coffins used on the island.

Up to this the poor lepers, as they died, were thrown into the earth, often coffin-less, only a foot or two below the surface, where the wild dogs often disinterred them, causing acute danger to the general health of the inhabitants. During his sixteen years residence Damien is said to have made with his own hands 1000 coffins, and to have buried 1600 lepers.

This live-wire activity of his was not long in effecting a marked improvement in general conditions. He was then able to direct his attention to the building of a church. He collected some helpers from the abler-bodied men, who inspired by his enthusiasm became willing co-operators. He had soon a church established in both Kalawao and Kalaupapa, so that he was able to say in 1874: “These ten years I have been on the mission I have built a church or chapel every year.”

His keenest sympathies were called forth by the leper children, the boys and girls of the island who wandered about neglected and uncared for, many of them orphans and homeless. He formed the plan of establishing schools and orphanages for these poor waifs and strays, and in five or six years after his landing he had the joy of seeing his hopes fulfilled. He had succeeded in making two homes, one for girls and one for boys, and open-air classes for those children, who were able to reside with their parents. He was himself their teacher, and this was, indeed, a labour of love, for he was a passionate lover of children. To his poor orphans especially he was both an earthly and spiritual father. Their interests and their care were ever in his mind, and he could be constantly seen on his daily rounds surrounded by a group of these little ones or in the evening playing tag and ball and other games with them. Then he was at his best and happiest, then his laugh rang loudest. Even on his death-bed, the fate of these, his little leper-children, was his only cause of worry and

uneasiness. “What will become of my poor leper boys and girls when I am gone,” he asked anxiously.

CHAPTER IX.

DAMIEN’S REFORMS.

There was tough work, too, for Damien in another direction in reforming bad habits, abuses and lawlessness that existed on the island.

The worst evil and the source of most of the other vices was that of drink. The natives, as we have said, concocted a vile intoxicant made from a mountain plant called Ki, under the influence of which they became like lunatics and devils and ran around wild, committing every kind of excess. Gambling, impurity and every other evil could be traced to this source. Damien resolved therefore to attack this illicit distillation at its source and stamp it out. This was no easy matter, as the owners of these illicit stills refused to give them up. However, by dint of fines and the help of the law, where persuasion was of no effect, Damien succeeded in getting them handed over, but not without incurring many bitter enmities, all of which was to have its repercussion in the evil charges some of them brought against the saintly priest after his death.

His report to the authorities in 1886 describe the conditions he had to cope with since his arrival:

“Another source of immorality was intemperance. There grows along the sides of the mountains a plant that the natives call Ki, whose root when fermented and distilled yields a highly intoxicating liquor, which, owing to the crude and imperfect distilling process, is unfit for drinking. The distilling of this liquor was being carried on to a horrible extent when I arrived, and its consequences can be more easily imagined than described on paper. Under its influence the natives would abandon all decency and run about naked and acting as though mad...

“The Agent and I went around, and at last, by threats and persuasion got the natives to give up their stills.”

When first Damien came to the Island the non-Catholics outnumbered the Catholics, but by his colossal energy and superhuman activity before his death, the Catholics formed two-thirds of the population and their church-funds and property were considerable. Damien was a watchful shepherd, who did not hesitate at “lifting the lazy ones on with his stick.”

It is said that on Sunday morning as he ascended the pulpit he cast his searching glance over the congregation, marked the absent ones missing from their accustomed places, and Monday morning saw him early at their huts enquiring the reason of their absence and nothing but illness would he take as excuse. Nor was his work confined to the Settlements alone, but extended for a considerable time to the whole island.

Climbing the narrow trail across the mountain, he organised various parishes all over Molokai, and built several churches for the people. His zeal in the cause of the faith was unbounded — it extended to all to whom he considered he owed a duty; it was probably this fierce ardour that earned him later, in the opinion of Presbyterian, Rev. Dr. Hyde, the description of “bigoted and intolerant.”

If striving ceaselessly to convert the lepers to the Catholic faith and winning them to religion by every means in his power — if this was being “bigoted and intolerant” he must plead guilty to the

charge. But if he meant that Damien ever refused secretly or openly to come to the help of any poor leper because he was a non-Catholic, the charge was utterly false.

In the beginning, his help and energy extended to all lepers of every religion, but as the settlement developed under better Government control, his activities gradually limited themselves to the members of his own faith.

CHAPTER X.

DAMIEN'S APOSTOLATE.

Added to his other difficulties were many in his own spiritual affairs, among others his difficulty in finding a priest to whom he might confess. For this purpose shortly after landing, he went to Honolulu, but on his return, he was notified by the Government that the stringency of the leper-laws forbade his visiting the other islands again under penalty of arrest. Thus, cut off from intercourse with his Bishop and other priests his difficulty forced him on one occasion to have recourse to a striking and unusual method of confession.

The Bishop was making one of his periodical visitations of the islands and as the steamer approached Molokai, he requested to be put ashore to enable Father Damien to make his Confession. This the captain refused, saying that it was contrary to the Government's orders. Instead, they cast anchor close to the shore, and signalling to the priest to approach by boat to the ship's side, the Bishop stood by the rail of the steamer, while Father Damien made his Confession in French, kneeling in the boat, separated from his confessor by a strip of water.

What a striking picture this conjures up in our minds — the steamer anchored in the tropical waters of the Pacific, brilliant blue of sea and sky, the Bishop leaning over the ship's side, his hand raised in absolution, the little boat far below where knelt the priest — penitent reciting his sins aloud in all simplicity and humility. Surely a striking and unforgettable scene and typical of Damien, who never allowed any difficulty to come between him and a definite duty.

Thus, Damien went with ceaseless activity from one reform to another, piling up a monument of work for himself, but with the satisfaction of seeing most of his projects materialising and his community emerging into a happy and ordered state of life. The Grey Island, the Doomed Island, could be called so no longer, despair was banished and a large measure of contentment and happiness reigned instead — in the words of a visitor: "The faces one sees are nearly always happy faces."

Writing about this time, he says:

"I am happy to say that my labours here, which seemed almost vain at the beginning, have, thanks to a kind Providence, been greatly crowned with success."

But the horrors his work brought him in contact with took all the sublime charity of Damien to hear. "Many a time," he said, "in fulfilling my priestly duty at their domiciles, I have been compelled to run outside... One day at a Sunday Mass, I found myself so stifled that I thought I must leave the altar to breathe a little of the outer air."

Later he adopted the use of tobacco, the smell of which helped to modify other offensive odours.

“Now my sense of smell does not cause me so much inconvenience, and I enter the huts of the lepers without difficulty. Sometimes, indeed, I still feel some repugnance when I have to hear the confessions of those near their end. Often, also, I scarce know how to administer Extreme Unction.”

His great zeal for souls and Catholicity was infectious and, led by his striking example, the results among his leper flock were most encouraging. Whenever the little church at Kalawao was open there was always to be seen a poor leper kneeling in adoration, in fact, the church was never empty. He kept up the ceremonial as best he could, using a set of golden altar-vessels — a gift from France, and was helped in the other church decoration and equipment by the nuns at Honolulu.

He also founded a confraternity called the Guild of Perpetual Adoration, whose rules included prayers for the world outside their stricken island. What a perfect interpretation of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

Processions of the Blessed Sacrament were also held on the principal feasts, these appealing powerfully to the natives, and causing them the greatest joy in their participation. Every leper, that could possibly do so, took part in these. Dressed in their best, the little leper children strewed petals from their flower-baskets on the path of the Blessed Sacrament borne by their beloved pastor. Men and women, old and young, the strong, the weak, marched reverent and happy singing hymns, and bearing banners, some crippled and almost limbless crawling bravely on all fours bringing up the rear.

Sick calls also, where Father Damien carried Holy Viaticum to the dying, were carried out with procession and lighted candles as in Catholic countries. Much joy and consolation filled the heart of Damien on these occasions.

Writing it 1874, he tells of the death of one of his flock. “His death was extremely edifying. Longing for heaven, he was constantly repeating the words of Saint Paul: ‘I long to be dissolved and to be with Christ.’ When I came with the Holy Viaticum to his bedside, his faith and love shone forth unmistakably on his countenance. He is buried under the great Cross I have erected in the middle of our new cemetery. With him, lie nearly two hundred other lepers, who have died Catholics this last year and a half.”

These consolations alone made his life on the island bearable. The bond of their common faith made a link that relieved his otherwise intolerable loneliness, for during the first five or six years’ residence every other inhabitant of the settlement was a native. Often the feeling of utter loneliness was so overwhelming that he confessed, “Without the Blessed Sacrament a position like mine would not be tolerable.”

The same Divine source of consolation he ever pointed out to his poor afflicted lepers in their otherwise hopeless misery and despair. “Go to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament,” he said, “He will not fail you. He alone will receive and comfort you and help you to bear your affliction. He will even turn your sorrow into joy.”

CHAPTER XI.

DAMIEN — THE MAN.

Thus, we have touched on Father Damien’s work as a priest and pastor, the Apostle bringing light and hope to the abandoned leper sunk in utter darkness and despair. We have seen him, alone and

unaided, facing hopeless odds, achieving the impossible. Where there was paganism and depravity, by his sublime courage and influence he brought hope, resignation and happiness.

Instead of stones, he gave these poor outcasts spiritual bread, relieving their misery by the consolation of religion and the hope of heaven. By the example of his burning zeal and loving sympathy he won over the poor leper to God, taught him a love and kindness to his afflicted brother and a respect for the dead. This was Damien's perfected priestly duty, for he was above all a missionary by vocation and desire from his childhood days. We have seen him, too, as a pioneer in more material things. He worked no less a miracle on the material plane in order to facilitate his sublime object on the supernatural one, for the souls of these poor afflicted ones must be reached by first alleviating their woes and improving their worldly condition, though never losing sight of the fact that it was as a Catholic Missionary he had come among them, primarily and before all — to win them to God. He was therefore a slave in their bodily service, their nurse, their doctor, the builder, the carpenter, the farm labourer, the coffin-maker; the versatile and many-sided genius who evolved order out of chaos, cleanliness, self-respect and happiness out of abject misery, a well-ordered community in pretty villages with churches, hospitals, and orphan-houses — and all accomplished practically single-handed.

But there is yet another aspect of this marvellous leper-priest, which it is worth while to examine — Damien the man. For saints, as we are sometimes inclined to forget, are also men and women of flesh and blood as we ourselves, subject to the same weaknesses and human frailties. To think that Damien never flinched from the horrors he encountered, never shrank in spirit from the future and its dread possibilities is to contemplate an impossible and scarcely human individual, Damien was none of these things. He was an exemplary priest, a perfect missionary, but he was a very human character withal. He was no visionary or contemplative, no Saint Francis or Saint Theresa, no high philosopher or metaphysician, or learned doctor of the Church as Saint Ambrose or Saint Thomas Aquinas, but a plain, simple man, whose theological and philosophical studies were perforce cut short by the exigency of missionary demands. He was not an ascetic except in so far as he had to deny himself all in the pursuance of his overmastering desire — the salvation of the leper. He was accused of many faults, and even vices later, by Rev. Dr. Hyde and others; but these were all refuted by an overwhelming balance of evidence as being the lying reports of venomous enemies whom every great reformer makes in the course of his reform. These enemies he unwillingly made among the Government whom he had to fight continually to force them to concede justice and humanity to his poor leper flock. Others he made among the abandoned, lawless elements of the community whose power he broke in vice and drinking. These were forced to yield to his rule, but implacable enmity later inspired them to repeat the foulest lying tales of the saintly Damien, tales that none but the prejudiced, envious mind of a Hyde would dream of entertaining.

He was also accused of being dirty, intolerant and bigoted. It may be true that he was somewhat careless of his appearance. A visitor to the island describes him: "His dress was worn and faded, his hair tumbled like a schoolboy's, his hands stained and hardened by toil. But the glow of health was in his face, the buoyancy of youth in his manner, while his ringing laugh, his ready sympathy and his inspiring magnetism told of one who in any sphere might do a noble work."

His "intolerance and bigotry" as we have said above, can be dismissed as the Protestant inability to distinguish between Catholic missionary zeal and those undesirable qualities so entirely alien to Damien's real character.

His was a heart capable of the greatest love and devotion, which he poured out lavishly on his beloved leper children. He was their willing and devoted slave even to death. He was at the same time possessed of great power and influence over them, and though loved devotedly was also not a little feared, though more with the fear of dutiful children to a loving father. The erring ones often came up against his moral superiority and had to bend before it. He was of a happy and cheerful nature; his laugh rang out frequent and spontaneous. His temper was quick and sometimes betrayed him into saying somewhat unkind things; but a little later the episode would apparently be forgotten and he would speak as if the whole matter had passed from his mind. He had a most lively sense of humour and could well enjoy a joke even against himself. He was also accused of being autocratic and high-handed and hard to get on with. To be quite impartial, there would seem to be some truth in this statement. From time to time, a priest was sent to the settlement to help him; but they generally parted after a time having experienced a measure of failure to get on with one another. Possibly Damien felt that he, who had constructed all from its crudest foundations, understood the work and the problem as no one else could, and insisted on his way of handling it. This may have earned him the title of “high-handed” and “stubborn.”

All these points but emphasise his humanness, his natural limitations; but the consideration and acknowledgment of these slight frailties only serve to throw into relief the height to which his holiness soared — that lofty summit that leaves our poor dimmed vision strained in the effort of contemplation. But before he yet reaches that sublime peak his soul and body must pass through the darkest depths of agony and affliction, wringing from him the tragic declaration: “I make myself a leper among lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS.

From the beginning of his work among the lepers, Father Damien had always faced the probability, if not certainty, of becoming himself a leper; but up to ten years after his coming to Molokai, there was no definite sign of the disease having attacked him. Some accounts relate to his having suspicions that the malady was lurking in his system for many years before any unmistakable evidence was apparent. Under the circumstances the wonder is that it did not attack him long before, for he had been in the closest contact with the disease in the most advanced stages from the time he arrived in Hawaii in 1864. However, it was not until 1884 that there was any certainty about the matter. One Sunday about this time, he climbed the pulpit to address his leper congregation. Listening attentively to their beloved pastor, they heard him use the words:

“We lepers...”

This simple phrase conveyed the tidings of the dread reality to his fellow-sufferers; He was now their beloved apostle more than ever, one of them in the very fullest sense... How suspicion became certainty to Damien is related in one of his letters to his brother Pamphile, and also to his dear friend, Brother Joseph (Dutton), who tended him in his last illness. He tells of one day when he had taken a long and tiring walk and returning home decided to refresh himself with a hot foot-bath. He plunged his feet into the steaming water — but felt no heat, no sensation. Damien was too experienced in the symptoms of leprosy not to recognise what this meant, for one of the surest signs of the disease is the loss of sensation in any part.

On another occasion, when shaving, some of the scalding water flowed over his bare feet and he felt nothing. The dread conviction was thus borne in upon him — he was a leper. He was at this time

but forty-four years of age, of splendid physique, active, otherwise healthy and full of vigour. In the course of his duties, he never seemed to worry about the danger of infection, though exercising great care in the early days of his ministrations. However, as is, perhaps, only natural, familiarity with the disease tended to a gradual relaxing of precautions.

This was probably unconscious or else, he found, that undue care hampered him in his work. It seems he did relax his precautions and lived the same unrestricted mode of life as the lepers, taking part in their customs and social habits, often on his rounds having to share their meals and even their beds, besides constantly dressing their ulcers, hearing their confessions and administering Extreme Unction. He seemed to have no fear or undue anxiety of contracting the disease; once when asked if he was not afraid of becoming infected he replied: "If Providence sees fit to afflict me, while I am working among the lepers, whether I am worthy or not I shall gain a crown of thorns."

Yielding to the urgent advice of those interested, Damien tried many treatments and so-called cures. The "Goto" treatment from Japan was being much used at the time as a means of alleviating, if not curing, the disease. Damien followed the treatment in a Honolulu hospital for some time; but he was restless to return to his work, and we find him back again after a brief space in Molokai. Shortly before, he had written to his Bishop: "... Leprosy has attacked me. There are signs of it on my left cheek and ear, and my eyebrows are beginning to fall. I shall be soon quite disfigured. As I have no doubt of the real character of the malady, I remain calm, resigned, and very happy in the midst of my people."

Very shortly, it was no longer a secret that Damien was a leper. The news went out from the Island and spread like wildfire across the world. Letters, gifts, and alms — offerings of every kind came pouring in to Father Damien for his own relief and the help and comfort of his leper flock. His name was in every mouth. Protestants and Catholics alike applauded him and exalted his sacrifice — the eyes of the world were turned to Molokai. His own people were among the last to hear of it, as his mother being aged and ill, Damien feared to break the news to her. It was from a Belgian newspaper that the dread fate of her beloved son came to her as she lay dying. "Well then," was her only response, "we shall go to heaven together."

Towards the end of 1888, not many months before Damien's death, he was visited by the English artist, Edward Clifford, a staunch Protestant. He made a lengthy visit to the island spending his whole days with Father Damien accompanying him on all his journeys around the settlement, dining with him, and chatting together in the evening as they sat on the verandah of Damien's little villa-presbytery, and gazed over the purple-blue sea with a tropical moon casting its silver path across the waters.

Then Damien would tell him of the wondrous story of his work upon the island and thus their friendship ripened and grew. Clifford spent Christmas at Molokai, throwing his heart into all Damien's Christmas plans and festivities. There was a beautiful Christmas Mass, with Clifford joining in the *Adeste Fideles*, (*O Come all ye Faithful*) and in the evening magic lantern pictures of the Life of Our Lord which delighted the lepers.

Before leaving the island, Clifford made a sketch of Father Damien, a sad testimony to the ravages the disease had made in his one-time splendid manhood. It shows little of his former grace and good looks except the curly hair and the smiling mouth. The rest was sadly disfigured, hands and face

covered with ulcers, ears terribly enlarged, nose deformed and the bridge collapsed — a travesty of his old vivid and attractive countenance.

About the beginning of the New Year, the Franciscan Sisters arrived to take over charge of the female orphanage. The change was not to be effected until after Damien's death, which was not now far off. Each day saw him growing visibly weaker and less equal to his duties. But the spirit of Damien could not easily be conquered, he was determined to die in harness. He kept up his usual routine as much as possible, saying his Mass daily until near the end, when his hands became so ulcerous that he could no longer do so. This was a terrible deprivation to him, but he accepted it as he accepted all the rest as the Holy Will of God.

Writing to his people about this time, he says:

"I am quite happy and contented and though seriously ill, all I desire is the accomplishment of the Holy Will of God. I am still able, though not without some difficulty, to stand every day at the altar, where I do not forget any of you. Do you in return pray for me, who am being drawn gently towards the grave. May God strengthen me and give me the grace of perseverance and of a happy death."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE.

He kept up bravely until the middle of March, but towards the end of the month, he took to his bed. This in Damien meant the end. But he remained steady and calm, preparing spiritually and temporally for his approaching death, giving minute instructions about business matters and handing over his various charges.

For a long time he had been worried about his poor leper children. "Who will look after my leper boys and girls when I am gone?" he would ask. That was now arranged for by the arrival of the Franciscan Sisters and his mind was at rest. "The work of the lepers is assured," he said, "I am no longer necessary to them so I am ready to go up yonder."

On 28th March, he made his general confession to his confrere, Father Wendelin, who said to him: "Leave me your mantle like Elias (Elijah), when you depart, that I may inherit your great heart," and Father Damien's reply showed that even in his last hours his sense of humour and merriment did not desert him: "But what would you do with it, mon pere? It is full of leprosy."

The nuns, too, after much pleading, were admitted to his bedside (he was extremely careful lest they should risk infection) and received his last blessing. Though almost incapable of speech, he managed to whisper: "Take — care — of — my — boys." Then having received their promise to do so, he lay back happy and satisfied. He seemed to rejoice at the thought of his membership of his religious Order and would murmur joyfully: "How sweet it is to die a child of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary." He had a happy conviction that he would be in heaven for Easter. "The Good God is calling me to celebrate Easter with Himself. May God be blessed for it."

On 2nd April, he received Extreme Unction, but he lingered on until Holy Week. On the Monday (15th April, 1899), the end came peacefully. With a smile on his lips, as quietly as a child dropping to sleep, Damien died. The long struggle was over, his great heart was still, that gigantic spirit, that mighty fire quenched at last. The long struggle was over; humble of birth — an obscure Belgian priest — yet at his life's close the eyes of the whole world were turned upon him. He died a hero and a saint.

The bell tolled its sad tidings across the Island and sorrow and gloom settled down on his poor flock. Who could ever take his place in their loving, grateful hearts? He was their oldest friend, to him they owed, after God, all that they were; had he not even given them their hope of heaven? Others there were at hand ready and anxious to carry on the work of Damien, devoted souls all, but he was their beloved first friend and deliverer, who had willingly shared their lives and their fate to the ultimate service — who had laid down his life for his leper children.

They bore him to his rest on their willing shoulders in sad procession — the nuns, his leper flock, his orphan boys and girls, with breaking hearts and tear-dimmed eyes. They laid him beneath the shade of the spreading pandanus tree, adjoining the church enclosure, that same tree, whose friendly branches were his nightly shelter for many weeks on his first coming to his leper home. This was his own choice. A simple monument marks the spot, on one side are the words, “Father Damien,” on the other the inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF REV. FR. DAMIEN DE VEUSTER: DIED A MARTYR TO HIS CHARITY FOR THE AFFLICTED LEPERS.

APRIL 15TH, 1889.

At Kalaupapa, there is a nobler monument, a Celtic cross on the road now called “Damien Road.” On the foot of this is written:

“The greatest proof of love man can give is to give his life for his friends.”

So passed the gentle Damien, leper-apostle, priest, saint and martyr. He embraced the forlorn cause of his leper brother and found heaven on the way. He came to Molokai, to a den of horror and misery untold, he came impulsively, he saw clearly, he conquered nobly, gloriously.

If Molokai today is a model of leper-settlements to the whole world, if, instead of hideous suffering, depravity, misery, and despair there is ordered cleanliness, care, and — yes, even happiness; if the lepers there have become a prayerful people, leading a life of comfort, holiness and civilised well-being, it is almost entirely the work of Damien. Others there may be who completed the work, that he made possible; but to Damien must be given the credit of the veritable miracle that was worked during the sixteen years he laboured there.

Vile tongues have not been wanting to defame his memory and depreciate his work, notably his Protestant contemporary, Rev. Dr. Hyde, who wrote vile accusations in the Sydney press a year after his death. This so outraged the feeling of Robert Louis Stevenson, who was personally acquainted with Damien and his work that he sprang to his defence in that well-known tract: A Reply to the Rev. Dr. Hyde, that buried that gentleman for ever in a grave of obloquy of his own making.

For forty-seven years has Damien slept among his leper children.

But his dear lepers must sorrowfully part with the body of their revered apostle, for it was decided to transfer the remains to his native soil. On the anniversary of his death (15th April, 1936), the American transport ship, Republic, took charge of the cherished casket, and brought their precious burden to San Francisco en route in the Mercator for Antwerp, which was reached on 3rd May, 1936. There it was met by 100,000 people, headed by King Leopold III himself and the Cardinal Archbishop of Belgium.

The body found its final resting place in the crypt of the Church of the Sacred Hearts at Louvain, a few miles from his own birthplace, where the grave was lined with earth and flowers from his former grave in his beloved Molokai.

There were sorrowful hearts among his leper children in Molokai — an empty grave, but he will have an eternal resting place in their grateful loving hearts. [After his beatification in June 1995, the remains of his right hand were returned to Hawaii, and re-interred in his original grave on Molokai.]

STEVENSON'S VINDICATION OF FATHER DAMIEN.

Robert Louis Stevenson's famous letter to the Reverend Dr. Hyde, the occasion of which is fully explained in the extracts given below, is regarded by admirers of Stevenson as a magnificent explosion of decent and virile indignation.

FROM ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S OPEN LETTER ON FATHER DAMIEN TO THE REVEREND DR. HYDE OF HONOLULU.

Sydney, February 25, 1890.

Sir, —

It may probably occur to you that we have met and visited and conversed; on my side, with interest. You may remember that you have done me several courtesies, for which I was prepared to be grateful. But there are duties which come before gratitude, and offences which justly divide friends, far more acquaintances. Your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage is a document which, in my sight, if you had filled me with bread when I was starving, if you had sat up to nurse my father when he lay a-dying, would yet absolve me from the bonds of gratitude...

If I have at all learned the trade of using words to convey truth and to arouse emotion, you have at last furnished me with a subject. For it is in the interest of all mankind and the cause of public decency in every quarter of the world, not only that Damien should be righted, but that you and your letter should be displayed at length, in their true colours, to the public eye.

THE REVEREND DR. HYDE'S LETTER.

(Published in the Sydney "Presbyterian," October 26, 1889)

Beretania Street, Honolulu, August 2, 1889

Rev. H. B. Gage,

Dear Brother, — In answer to your inquiries about Father Damien, I can only reply that we who knew the man are surprised at the extravagant newspaper laudations, as if he was a most saintly philanthropist. The simple truth is, he was a coarse, dirty man, headstrong and bigoted. He was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders; did not stay at the leper settlement (before he became one himself), but circulated freely over the whole island (less than half the island is devoted to the lepers), and he came often to Honolulu. He had no hand in the reforms and improvements inaugurated, which were the work of our Board of Health, as occasion required and means were provided. He was not a pure man in his relations with women, and the leprosy of which he died should be attributed to his vices and carelessness. Others have done much for the lepers, our own ministers, the government physicians, and so forth, but never with the Catholic idea of meriting eternal life.

Yours et cetera,

C. M. HYDE.

The Letter Analysed.

DAMIEN was coarse.

It is very possible. You make us sorry for the lepers who had only a coarse old peasant for their friend and father. But you, who were so refined, why were you not there, to cheer them with the lights of culture? Or may I remind you that we have some reason to doubt if John the Baptist were genteel; and in the case of Peter, on whose career you doubtless dwell approvingly in the pulpit, no doubt at all he was a “coarse, headstrong” fisherman! Yet even in our Protestant Bibles Peter is called Saint.

Damien was dirty.

He was. Think of the poor lepers annoyed with this dirty comrade! But the clean Dr. Hyde was at his food in a fine house.

Damien was headstrong.

I believe you are right again; and I thank God for his strong head and heart.

Damien was bigoted.

I am not fond of bigots myself, because they are not fond of me. But what is meant by bigotry, that we should regard it as a blemish in a priest? Damien believed his own religion with the simplicity of a peasant or a child; as I would, I could suppose, that you do...

Damien was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders.

Is this a misreading? Or do you really mean the words for blame? I have heard Christ, in the pulpits of our Church, held up for imitation on the ground that His sacrifice was voluntary. Does Dr. Hyde think otherwise?

Damien was not a pure man in his relations with women, et cetera.

This scandal, when I read it in your letter, was not new to me. I had heard it once before; and I must tell you how. There came to (Apia) Samoa a man from Honolulu; he, in a public-house on the beach, volunteered the statement that Damien had “contracted the disease from having connection with the female lepers”; and I find a joy in telling you how the report was welcomed in a public-house. A man sprang to his feet; I am not at liberty to give his name, but from what I heard I doubt if you would care to have him to dinner in Beretania Street. “You miserable little _____” (here is a word I dare not print, it would so shock your ears). “You miserable little...” he cried, “if the story were a thousand times true, can’t you see you are a million times a lower for daring to repeat it?” I wish it could be told of you that when the report reached you in your house, perhaps after family worship, you had found in your soul enough holy anger to receive it with the same expressions; ay, even with that one which I dare not print; it would not need to have been blotted away, like Uncle Toby’s oath, by the tears of the recording angel; it would have been counted to you for your brightest righteousness. But you have deliberately chosen the part of the man from Honolulu, and you have played it with improvements of your own. The man from Honolulu — miserable, leering creature — communicated the tale to a rude knot of beach-combing drinkers in a public-house,

where (I will so far agree with your temperance opinions) man is not always at his noblest; and the man from Honolulu had himself been drinking — drinking, we may charitably fancy, to excess. It was to your “Dear Brother, the Reverend H. B. Gage,” that you chose to communicate the sickening story; and the blue ribbon which adorns your portly bosom forbids me to allow you the extenuating plea that you were drunk when it was done...

But I fear you scarce appreciate how you appear to your fellow-men; and to bring it home to you, I will suppose your story to be true. I will suppose — and God forgive me for supposing it — that Damien faltered and stumbled in his narrow path of duty; I will suppose that, in the horror of his isolation, perhaps in the fever of incipient disease, he, who was doing so much more than he had sworn, failed in the letter of his priestly oath — he, who was so much a better man than either you or me, who did what we have never dreamed of daring — he too tasted of our common frailty. “O, Iago, the pity of it!” The least tender should be moved to tears; the most incredulous to prayer. And all that you could do was to pen your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage!

Is it growing at all clear to you what a picture you have drawn of your own heart? I will try yet once again to make it clearer. You had a father: suppose this tale were about him, and some informant brought it to you, proof in hand:

I am not making too high an estimate of your emotional nature when I suppose you would regret the circumstance? that you would feel the tale of frailty the more keenly since it shamed the author of your days? and that the last thing you would do would be to publish it in the religious press? Well, the man who tried to do what Damien did, is my father, and the father of the man in the Apia bar, and the father of all who love goodness; and he was your father too, if God had given you grace to see it.

STATEMENT

by

MRS. ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

to

Ave Maria Press.

As to the “Open Letter to Dr. Hyde,” nothing can make me believe that Louis ever regretted the subject-matter of that piece of writing. To me, up to his last hours, he spoke always in the same strain. His admiration for the work and character of “that saint, that martyr,” as he invariably called Father Damien, remained unchanged; and any mention of the cowardly attack on the dead man’s memory brought a flush of anger into his face and a fire to his eye that were unmistakable...
