

To Naz'reth sixteen centuries before,—
The joyful tidings of a God made man,
First known to that blessed Three ere time began,
Then, whispered softly in a virgin's ear,
Now, echoed thro' the whole terrestrial sphere.
He knelt absorbed; his brother monks retired
To feed the mortal as his strength required,
Unconscious of the aged friar's stay
Behind them in the chapel, until they
Had reached the dining-hall, pronounced the grace,
Then found him absent from his wonted place.
Astonished not to find their brother there
All looked in wonder at the vacant chair.
None, since his entrance knew him yet to fail
In the observance of the least detail
Prescribed or sanctioned by the sacred code,
Time-honored and revered in that abode.
A sudden fear crept o'er the Prior's mind;
He in this rare occurrence ill divined,
And sent, forthwith, to search the spacious halls,
Cells, kitchen, garden, chapel, chancel, stalls,
Where brother Francis searched, but all in vain—
No tidings of the absent could he gain.
Then spoke the eldest 'mong the ancients, who
The divers habits of his brothers knew:
"Seek, Francis, where the Virgin's statue stands
"With beaming countenance and outstretched hands;
"There you'll behold him kneeling at her side,
"If still his spirit in the flesh abide."
Which Francis hearing, issued forth again—
Nor was the humble frater's search in vain;
Before Our Lady's altar wrapped in prayer,
Bent the possessor of the vacant chair.
But lo! a vision meets the brother's gaze;
Down from the statue streamed a flood of rays,
More brilliant than the noon-day's golden sheen,
Casting refulgent splendor o'er the scene.
Still as the statue knelt the monk below
With moving lips and countenance aglow,
Whilst two bright angels o'er a bridge unseen
Traversed alternately the space between.