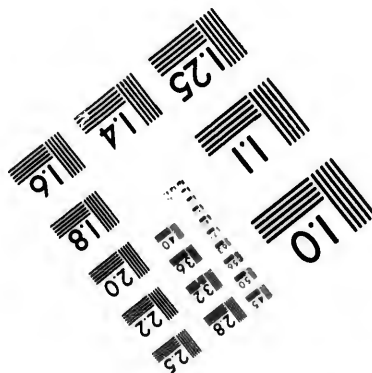
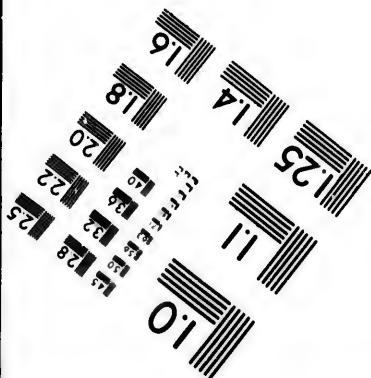
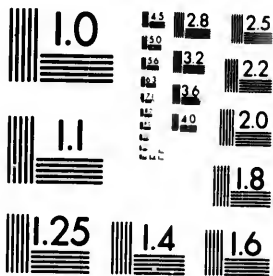


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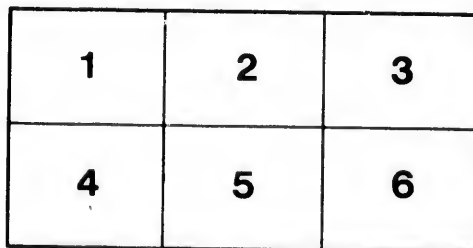
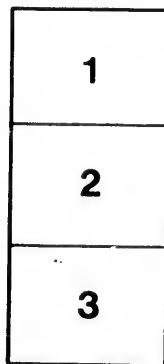
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038

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NESTORIUS.

A PHANTASY

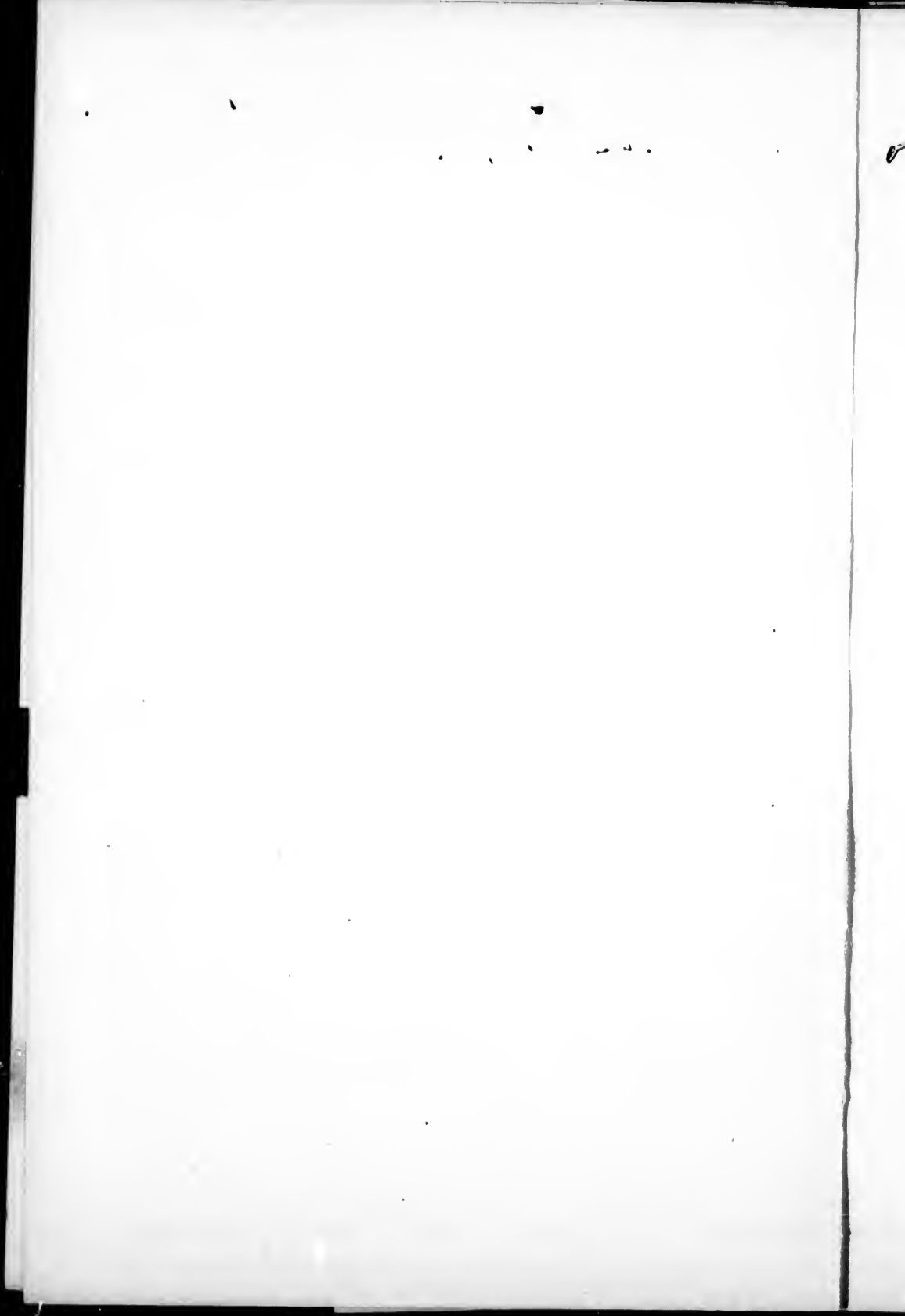
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1892



Sanford Fleming, C. M. S. from the
author and subscriber, with warm respects
Ottawa, 1 Aug. 1892.

TO
G. W. WICKSTEED, ESQ., Q. C.
OF OTTAWA,
AMICO, PROPINQUO, SODALI,

These lines are inscribed.

NEW WESTMINSTER, B. C.
June 16th, 1892.

Nestorius the patriarch, the fourth in succession from Chrysostom, as bishop of Constantinople, was a native of Germanicia. At first a cloistered monk, he afterwards became a presbyter of Antioch. At the invitation of the Eastern emperor, he assumed the patriarchate, A. D. 428. To the advantages of a fine voice and a commanding person, he added an almost irresistible eloquence, and a mind richly stored with all the theological learning of the time. As a disciple of the Syrian school of Antioch, he had been taught to discriminate between the divine and human natures of Christ, and to abhor their confusion. The Virgin Mary was, to him, Christotokos, the mother of Christ, not Theotokos, the mother of God. Hence he was charged by his opponents with making two persons out of two natures, and thus denying the proper personal divinity of Christ. The Byzantine clergy, perhaps secretly displeased with the intrusion of a stranger, were in general bitterly opposed to the uncompromising rigidity of his doctrine; and after a long contest, marked by many vicissitudes, he finally succumbed to the jealous enmity of a rival patriarch, Cyril of Alexandria. He was condemned at the Council of Ephesus, deprived of his see, and banished. He died, an exile, in Egypt. His tenets spread widely in the East, and Nestorian communities are still to be found, partly on Turkish, partly on Persian territory, in the wild and almost inaccessible regions of Eastern Kurdistan, and, on Persian soil, in the highly fertile plain to the west of the Lake of Urmia.

NESTORIUS.

I.

The old Nestorius, worn with many woes,
Cast out, an exile, from the haunts of men,
To all a stranger and an alien,
And seeking only silence and repose,
Passed to the sands of Egypt.

Day by day,
Wrapped in the splendor of the sunlit air,
Which vested, there, a world so strange and fair,
He watched the mighty river glide away,
For ever passing, and for ever there.

II.

Haply he found, in that mysterious stream,
Some semblance to the current of his life :
Placid, at first, it rose, and far from strife,
Cradled in lotus-blossoms, with the gleam
Of dew-drops sparkling in the morning sun ;
Then through bare rocks of basalt, dark and grim,
Impetuous forced its way, with widened brim
Until, at last, its stormy life-ec done,
It sank in silence. It was so with him.

III.

All things had fallen from him. Where was now
The mitred patriarch, whose eloquence
Held multitudes enthralled in soul and sense,
With saintly aureole around his brow?
Where now the hierophant, who sate in state
So lately, on the throne of Chrysostom?
Gone, like a passing vision. He had come
To doubt his own identity. His fate
Had found him passive: and this was his home.

IV.

So, like the ancient Sphinx, whose sightless eyes,
Sublimely sad, still front the lord of day,
Yet have no apprehension of his ray,
He turned to stone. To him the mysteries
Of earth and sky, of morning and deep night,
Passed as an idle show before his mind,
Leaving no trace or memory behind:
Amid all pleasant sounds, and shapes of light,
Hearing, he heard not,—seeing, he was blind.

V.

Like some huge hull, some battered quinquere,
Wrecked and abandoned on a lonely strand,
Or as some vanquished Titan, from whose hand
The bolt has fallen, and he sits in dream,
Half doubting whether all be come to end,
Nestorius sate, with lustrous silver hair
Falling in waves upon his chest, half bare;
As one whom no calamity could bend,
Too proud to mourn, too gentle to despair.

VI.

Yet died he not, thus stricken ; for at last
There came a voice amid the darkness singing,
There rose a flower amid the desert springing,
And airs of Eden o'er his spirit passed.
—It was a little maiden, from the shore
Of Araby, who here had found retreat :
She came , she saw him : and, with gesture sweet,
Pressed to her lips the garment that he wore
And kissed his hands, and kissed his naked feet.

VII.

Oh, fair and innocent eyes ! Like those bright stars,
That wander softly through the summer sky,
And shed the balm of their serenity
On hearts slow breaking behind prison bars,
So fell your light on him. He woke, he rose,
With life new-throbbing in each pulse and vein,
Re-acting from the tension of that strain ;
He passed beyond the shadow of his woes,
Fronting the day, and was a man again.

VIII.

With tears but half repressed, " Who art thou, child ? "
He said, " and whence ? " " My name is Lois, sire,
" From Syrian Antioch ; there, for shepherd hire,
" My father served, at first : then, to the wild
" That lies about Mount Sinai, we passed ;
" Where died my parents. Orphaned thus, I found
" A home among the herdsmen scattered round,
" And journeying with them westward reached at last,
" This lonely stream, that seems of earth the bound."

IX.

So were they friends. And every day, at morn,
When first the flush of dawning lit the sky,
And desert flowers exhaled new fragraney,
She brought him luscious golden fruitage, born
Of broad-leaved trees, kissed by an Eastern sun,
And led him forth, and shewed him all the land,
The shapes of stone, half hidden in the sand,
Sphinxes, and winged lions, gods, whereon
Primeval man had gazed with lifted hand.

X.

The summer waned : the mellow autumn came ;
Not, as in Northern lands, with rain and chill,
And low clouds trooping over holm and hill,
But cloudless, warm, with noon-day's ardent flame
Tempered to soft luxurious dreaminess.
The shadows lengthened somewhat, but no sign
Gave hint or token of the year's decline,
Save that the wavering films of heat grew less,
And deeper azure robed the hyaline.

XI.

One morn, before the sun arose, the twain,
Leaving the palms which marked the river's way,
Rode forth into the vast, untrodden grey,
And lonely desert of the Libyan plain.
For many days, through the long hours of sun,
They journeyed, and, when evening gemmed the sky,
They sat dismounted, holding converse high,
And so, each wrapt in Arab cloak, lay down,
To sleep, amid the lone immensity.

XII.

Strange days were those! When all the visible world
Seemed limited to that pale disc of sand
Whereof they were the centre: all the land
Withered to dust, save here and there imperaled
With tremulous and tiny desert-blooms,
Shrinking, as if in loneliness and fear,
Beneath some sheltering rock. Yet even here,
A land of silence, as among the tombs,
The voiceless found a voice, the dark grew clear.

XIII.

The invisible took form: the world unseen
Became reality; low whisperings
Came from the void: the beat of angel-wings
Seemed always passing: and the dread serene
Out of its depths no doubtful answer gave
To those mute queries, which, as hidden flame,
Consuming, from the questioning spirit came:
The unsolved riddles of 'Trophonius' cave,
Old as the world,—in every age the same.

XIV.

Then suddenly, the desert seemed to end:
A line of foliage, indistinct and dim,
Rose on the far horizon's hazy rim,
Whose darker shade at first appeared to blend
By soft gradations with the violet hue
Of recent sunset. Silent and serene,
The rising moon shed splendor on the scene,
Lighting its shadows, which, on nearer view,
Widened and grew, an oasis of green.

XV.

It was a calm retreat, a place of rest,
A sanctuary, whose most welcome gloom
Pervaded everywhere by soft perfume,
And overhead in leafy richness drest,
Refreshed and soothed the weary wanderer.
It stood amid the wilderness of sand,
An island of delights, a charmed land,
Where summer sweetness ever filled the air,
And all the woes of earth seemed ever banned.

XVI.

Whereat Nestorius, gazing earnestly,
Exclaimed "Our way is ended; it is well:
"When sleeping by the Nile, it so befell
"That heavenly visions, voices from on high,
"Came to me in a dream, at whose behest,
"I go to drive from this fair paradise
"The old, discrowned, Egyptian deities,
"Who hither fled, of empire dispossessed,
"What time a stronger faith began its rise."

XVII.

They entered in, the maiden and the sage,
Around them closed the tall columnar trees,
Giants in growth, through whose interstices,
High-branched, with lofty crowns of foliage,
Clear moonlight fell, and chequered here and there,
The heavy gloom with points and lines of light.
Here slept they, through the soft autumnal night,
Till morning came: then forth they went to bare,
The secrets those recesses kept from sight.

XVIII.

Over the scented sward, for many a mile,
Beneath the wavering and uncertain shade
Which hanging epiphytes above them made,
Through many a forest path and dim defile,
Skirting, at times, a lonely sylvan pool,
Whose argent surface, as a mirror clear,
Was starred with flowers, the fairest of the year,
Silent they passed; and through the vapors cool
Of deep ravines, where all was grey and sere.

XIX.

So, at the last, when day was on the wane,
There rose before them, in the mellow light,
A palace, all of purest syenite,
Stately and vast, a Cyclopean fane:
Approaching then, they saw the long façade
Sculptured with forms of loveliness supreme,
Kings, priests, divinities,—the splendid dream
Some Phidias of the desert might have had,
Sleeping, at noon, beside the sacred stream.

XX.

Here came of old, in weariness of soul,
The Mizrite Pharaohs: here at times they found
A respite from the dull unvarying round
Of kingly state and sovereign control,
Here, in the summer heats, they passed the hours
Listening to songs of bards, or to the story
Of some Ionian improvvisatore,
Now perished all: for ruthless time devours
Alike the words of men, and ruins hoary.

XXI.

The last who came was smitten in his prime
As if by lightning. Garlanded and crowned,
The wine-cup at his lips, his senses drowned
In all the witching rapture of the time,
He passed away. There came a rush of wind
From Libya's wastes, a blast of withering air,
Which found the feasters in their palace fair,
And sweeping on in ruin, left behind
The dead, who still seemed holding revel there.

XXII.

They had not changed. So sudden was the blow,
So swift the shock of that invisible flame,
With such strange, subtle influence it came,
That they, through all the ages' ebb and flow,
Remained unaltered, fixed, without decay:
Each still retained his careless pose of yore,
Although the lotus-wreath, which then he wore,
Had faded, by the lapse of time, away,
And lay, a speck of ashes, on the floor.

XXIII.

So, at the last, Nestorius laid his hand
Upon the massive portal. All the air
Was filled with golden splendor everywhere
And silence lay upon the charmed land:
No sound was heard save when the tree-tops gave
A murmured whisper, a faint orison,
A dirge of parting to the setting sun,
A wailing, as if Horus, in his grave,
Sank in the shadows of oblivion.

XXIV.

Through the half-opened door the light streamed in,
Revealing all that ghostly gathering,
Sitting as statues ; and upon their king
The glorious sunshine fell, as if to win
The pallid phantom back to light and life :
Behold, he seems to move ! The rigid eyes
Relax and kindle with a quick surprise :
Is it a dream ? Oh, help him in the strife,
Thou Amun-Ra ! He must, he must arise.

XXV.

Vain phantasies : for as Nestorius gazed,
Filled with the dreaminess of solemn thought
Which that strange vision in his mind had wrought.
The daylight faded out. As one half-dazed,
He saw the shadows deepen on the wall,
'The figures disappear, and all the room
Effaced and vanished in the twilight gloom,
So turned he, silent, from the regal hall,
And darkness gathered round the Pharaoh's tomb.

XXVI.

Night reigned. Beneath the shelter of a palm,
The maiden slept the starry hours away :
She joined her Syrian co-mates in their play :
Her soul,—like some fair lake, whose holy calm
Reflects the flowers that grow upon its shore,
And when these fade, and pass away, and die,
Retains the fallen petals lovingly,—
Lived o'er again the days that were no more,
Dreaming of home, and friends, and joys gone by.

XXVII.

Not so Nestorius ; awake he stood,
Watchful and waiting : not a leaf that stirred,
No breath of air, or fluttering of bird,
Escaped his ken, in all that solitude.
So came the noon of night : but e'er it past,
It seemed as though a judgment dealing wand
Were raised and broken, and a spirit hand
Were beckoning : the hour had come, at last,
When those old gods should perish from the land.

XXVIII.

A roseate light, a faint and wavering glow.
Played round the circuit of the palace wall :
And sounds, half-heard, yet soft and musical,
Fell on the ear, with cadence sweet and low.
The portal-valves flew back, and from within
A beam of sudden splendor, dazzling bright,
Lit up, afar, the shadows of the night ;
As when through clouds and vapors vespertine,
The star of evening breaks upon the sight.

XXIX

They woke, they moved : up-starting from his throne,
Rose the dead Pharaoh : and around him rose
The many who had shared his long repose,
Princes and bards and slaves : nor these alone ;
From out the dark recesses of the wood
Came mighty shadows of departed gods,
Who lingered yet about their loved abodes,
Osiris, Nephthys, and the twilight brood
Of light and gloom ; the spawn of Nilus-floods.

XXX.

Yet was their bearing kingly. Like a star,
Shone Ra, the sun-god, with his helm aflame ;
Crowned with immortal youth, fair Horus came,
Typhon, arrayed in panoply of war,
The dread Anubis, from the shades below,
Judge of the dead, and, as a lily fair,
Isis the Queen, with wealth of golden hair,
Yet something sad, as when the moon hangs low
O'er western hills, and silence fills the air.

XXXI.

All these, and more, in long procession wound
Along the alleys of the silent woods,
The ever-green eternal solitudes,
Where never sunshine came, nor storm, nor sound.
Forth, from their haunts, the forest Lemures
Peeped, with the Larvæ, starting back in fear,
To see the mighty concourse, and to hear
The chaunting of the Isiac votaries
Faint floating up, attenuate and clear.

XXXII.

Unfaltering in mien, Nestorius,
With white hair floating on his shoulders broad,
Erect in stature, as a Scythic god
Might stand amid the thunders ruinous
Of Lok and Hela, in the latter days,
Advanced to meet the dread divinities ;
When lo ! a mist of darkness veiled his eyes,
—A moment only,—then there met his gaze
A vision of long-vanished centuries.

XXXIII.

The wood was gone : and in its place was seen
A sphinx-lined avenue, a street of stone,
Whose marble structures in clear sun-light shone,
Irradiating all the splendid scene.
White colonnades of far-receding length,
Colossi, obelisks, and pyla fair,
Huge fanes, and broad-based pyramids, were there,
Temples that seemed eternal in their strength,
All bright and dazzling in the noon-day glare :

XXXIV.

And down the highway, like the ceaseless course
Of some majestic river, swept along
A multitude past numbering, a throng
Of strange-clad, many-nationed worshippers,
Priests in rich panther-skins and robes of white,
Princes urceus-crowned,—and sceptred queens.
Brown Abyssinian girls, with tambourines,
Slaves, warriors in cohorts infinite,
Bejewelled Khita, and wild Hagarenes.

XXXV.

Far in the van, King Ramses Miamon,
The lord of victory, the eagle-eyed,—
A tawny lion stalking by his side,—
Stood in his car and seemed to lead them on ;
Still in his hand he held the mighty bow.
Which none but he might bend, of mortal men ;—
The quiver still he bore, whose arrowy rain
Showered death, like Amun's lightning, and laid low
The hosts of Syria, on Khadesh plain.

XXXVI

Nor were the great gods wanting : round the king
They fitted, honouring their mysteries,
Vast, shadowy, indistinct, with gleaming eyes,
Like autumn clouds, storm-laden, menacing;
The while, on either hand, the street was lined
With Egypt's myriads, clustered thick as bees,
Through miles of colonnade and sculptured frieze :
So passed the throng, low-murmuring as the wind
That wakes to turbulence the slumbering seas.

XXXVII.

Rapt in mute wonderment, immoveable,
Nestorius stood awhile, then raised his hand,
And uttered, in brief accents of command,
The words of power, the exorcising spell :
Whereat the vision vanished utterly.
Swift as the closing of an eagle's wing,
Night swallowed all that phantom-gathering,
And all was silent, save a mournful cry,
That lingered on, in echoes perishing.

XXXVIII.

Awakened by the sound, young Lois rose,
And saw the sombre shadows of the grove
Heavy with night, and saw the stars above,
And all the forest hushed in soft repose ;
But that fair palace which was there before,
Massive, Titanic, with its sculptures rare,
Was gone, was vanished, and its place was bare.—
So was the mission ended : and once more
The twain moved onwards, through the moonlit air.

XXXIX.

Back to the Nile!—Oh, fair and radiant river,
Who that has been beside thy shining stream,
And watched the splendor of the morning beam
On all thy thousand ripples' sheen and shiver,
But turns to thee! Mysterious, mighty flood,
Traversing many climates, from the rime
Of Habesh mountains to the Delta's slime,
Thou comest from thy southern solitude,
Rich with the benedictions of all time.

XL.

The cities wait on thee. The weary land
Crevassed and gaping with the summer-drouth,
Prays but for thee. Thou dost renew its youth,
What time the villages like islands stand
Amid the swollen waters; and the hind
Greets thee as king and father, who dost turn
Darkness to light, and from Amenthe's bourne
Preservest all, out-pouring, unconfined,
All chiefest blessings from thy sacred urn.

XLI.

Within the twilight of a deep ravine,
The wanderers now held their homeward way;
A cleft profound, and where the light of day
Seemed, e'en at noon-day, scarce to venture in.
Slow passed the days! till wider grew the space,
And in its midst there rose a bubbling spring
With a delicious sound of pa'ring,
Life-giving, cooling, in that lonely place
Set as a gem within an Ethiop's ring.

XLII.

They rested here. Soft balmy slumber crept
Upon the exile, lying in the shade,
Worn out with travel, while the little maid
Sate opposite, and watched him as he slept.
Then, as it chanced, there came, to quench his thirst,
A mighty lion of the Libyan waste ;
Towards the spring with stately mien he paced,
Till, seeing them, he stopped, amazed at first,
Then crouched, the while Nestorius he faced.

XLIII.

Swift as the lightning from a summer cloud,
Sprang Lois to her feet, and rushed to where
The sleeper lay, and stood before him there,
Panting and flushed, and would have called aloud,
But that the sudden terror froze her tongue ;
So stood she, statue-like, with lifted arm,
As if to save and shelter him from harm,—
A fine impersonation of strong will, yet young,
A child almost, with childhood's nameless charm.

XLIV.

There was a pause. With half repentant air,
The great brute rose and slowly passed her by,
Retiring thus, in silent majesty,
As if he could not injure one so fair.
So went he to his realm, the wilderness ;
And Lois, with removal of that strain,
Now that the hope of life seemed born again,
Fell to the earth, in mute unconsciousness,
Crushed as a lily in untimely rain.

XLV.

She faded from that hour. No more the earth
Seemed pleasant to her : she was deaf to all
The revelry of life, the carnival
Of choral harmonies and songs of mirth.
A mist of sadness lay upon her soul,
Hiding the beauty of all fairest things,
The flush of morn, the glow that evening brings,
The clouds of sunset, and the stars that roll
Through azure depths, while soft the night-bird sings.

XLVI.

Yet lived she many days. But when, at last,
The palm-trees of the Nile appeared in sight,
She sank as one exhausted, pale and white,
As falls a flower before the winter's blast.--
Then came to them a hermit of the plain,
Compassionate, who prayed they might abide
Within his dwelling, by the river-side,
Until the maiden found her strength again,
And needful rest to both might be supplied.

XLVII.

His hut was all embosomed in fair flowers,
And shrubs of richest perfume, passing sweet;
For here, they said, had trod the sacred feet
Of Joseph and of Mary, and the hours
Had shed bright sunshine on the mystic child
Borne in the arms of loving motherhood :
And Nature, in her happiest, holiest mood,
Had showered all blessings, in profusion wild,
And made a garden of the solitude.

XLVIII.

So came the parting. In what better home
Could come the severance and sorrowing,
Than here where He, who took from death its sting,
And filled with light the darkness of the tomb,
Had dwelt, had lived in human infancy?
And Lois watched the sun's declining ray—
Shine on the wall, and pass in gloom away,
And said "My time is come: behold, I die;
"Yet would I speak with thee, while yet I may."

XLIX.

"Father and friend! I thank thee for the love
"Wherewith thou hast transfigured all my being,
"Lifting my heart to heavenly things, and freeing
"My soul to commune with the world above.
"Yet are there doubts that press upon my mind,
"Misgivings of a fear that haunts me still,
"And lies upon me as a winter-chill;
"I turn to thee, oh father, and would find
"Comfort and guidance in this seeming ill."

L.

"Tell me,—when death is past, and heaven's door
"Is opened wide, to let the blessed in,
"—If I, too, am allowed a place to win
"Among the happy ones who die no more,—
"How shall I fare when round me then I see
"The multitudes of saints, the great, the strong,
"How shall I dare with them to pass along?
"I am so young, so small;—I fear to be
"Lost and unnoticed in that mighty throng."

LI.

Weeping, the old Nestorius held her hand,
And whispered loving words of hope and cheer,
Whereat she smiled, and seemed to lose all fear,
As one who waits with calmness on the strand
Before embarking on an unknown deep.
The moonlight, like a watching presence lay
Upon the floor, a square of silvery grey,
And night-air murmured, with Æolian sweep,
The maiden's dirge.—So Lois passed away.

LII.

They buried her, and o'er her humble grave
Suns rose and set, the seasons went and came,—
Her few short years of life, her very name,
Forgotten soon by all, e'en as a wave
That rises for a moment, and is gone.
Yet, who can tell? Perhaps, the shade passed by,
She merged in light, and rose triumphantly,
To outlive Sirius and Oarion,
Crowned with the amaranth, no more to die.

LIII.

Darkened in spirit, stricken down by grief,
Nestorius sought again the ancient Nile,
And found beside its flowing, as erewhile,
A balm of consolation and relief.
Antæus-like, he touched the kindly earth,
And felt the loving sympathy that lies
In Nature's mystic depths, and seemed to rise
With strength renewed, sending his spirit forth
To face, as man, the chance of destinies.

LIV

So died he. But before the summons came,
For many months, the dwellers in the vale
Pressed round him, listening, while he told the tale
He knew so well,—so old, and still the same.
He raised them from the dust, and shewed them how
To worship worthily the common Sire ;
Re-fashioning, with Promethean fire,
Their thoughts, their lives, until each wish and vow
Was harmonized with his, as lyre with lyre.

LV.

To them, when came the final, parting hour,
It seemed the light had faded from their sky :
Bowed down, disconsolate, with wailing cry,
They kissed the hands now lying, void of power,
Folded and motionless upon his breast :
And sun-browned children of the desert bore
Bright lotus-flowers, such as he loved of yore,
And shed them o'er him, weeping. So, at rest,
He lay, in silence, by the river-shore.

LVI.

Uprose the morn ; in splendor shone the sun :
A thousand ripples, on the mighty stream,
Woke laughingly, beneath his earliest beam ;
Life stirred : a day of sunshine had begun.
But he, the sleeper, saw not, heeded not ;
No more to him the river's stately flow
Could bring sweet music : he no more might know
The suffering by human partings brought,
Or man's unkindness. It was better so.

