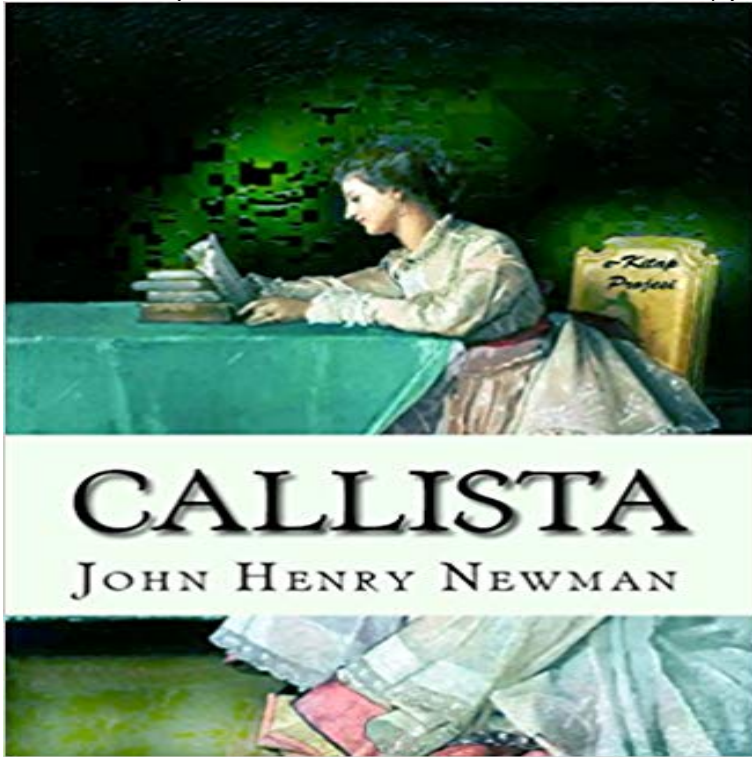


Callista (A Tale of the Third Century): Illustrated



Love thy God, and love Him only, And thy breast will neer be lonely. In that One Great Spirit meet All things mighty, grave, and sweet. Vainly strives the soul to mingle With a being of our kind; Vainly hearts with hearts are twined: For the deepest still is single. An impalpable resistance Holds like natures still at distance. Mortal: love that Holy One, Or dwell for aye alone. De Vere In no province of the vast Roman empire, as it existed in the middle of the third century, did Nature wear a richer or a more joyous garb than she displayed in Proconsular Africa, a territory of which Carthage was the metropolis, and Sicca might be considered the centre. The latter city, which was the seat of a Roman colony, lay upon a precipitous or steep bank, which led up along a chain of hills to a mountainous track in the direction of the north and east. In striking contrast with this wild and barren region was the view presented by the west and south, where for many miles stretched a smiling champaign, exuberantly wooded, and varied with a thousand hues, till it was terminated at length by the successive tiers of the Atlas, and the dim and fantastic forms of the Numidian mountains. The immediate neighbourhood of the city was occupied by gardens, vineyards, corn-fields, and meadows, crossed or encircled here by noble avenues of trees or the re-mains of primeval forests, there by the clustering groves which wealth and luxury had created. This spacious plain, though level when compared with the northern heights by which the city was backed, and the peaks and crags which skirted the southern and western horizon, was discovered, as light and shadow travelled with the sun, to be diversified with hill and dale, upland and hollow; while orange gardens, orchards, olive and palm plantations held their appropriate sites on the slopes or the bottoms. Through the mass of green, which extended still more thickly from the

west round to the north, might be seen at intervals two solid causeways tracking their persevering course to the Mediterranean coast, the one to the ancient rival of Rome, the other to Hippo Regius in Numidia. Tourists might have complained of the absence of water from the scene; but the native peasant would have explained to them that the eye alone had reason to be discontented, and that the thick foliage and the uneven surface did but conceal what mother earth with no niggard bounty supplied. The Bagradas, issuing from the spurs of the Atlas, made up in depth what it wanted in breadth of bed, and ploughed the rich and yielding mould with its rapid stream, till, after passing Sicca in its way, it fell into the sea near Carthage. It was but the largest of a multitude of others, most of them tributaries to it, deepening as much as they increased it. While channels had been cut from the larger rills for the irrigation of the open land, brooks, which sprang up in the gravel which lay against the hills, had been artificially banked with cut stones or paved with pebbles; and where neither springs nor rivulets were to be found, wells had been dug, sometimes to the vast depth of as much as 200 fathoms, with such effect that the spurting column of water had in some instances drowned the zealous workmen who had been the first to reach it. And, while such were the resources of less favoured localities or seasons, profuse rains descended over the whole region for one half of the year, and the thick summer dews compensated by night for the daily tribute extorted by an African sun.

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