

DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

About two hours later, while it was still dark, Sejanus, in obedience to a sudden and imperiously-worded summons, had left his bed, and was standing in the presence of Tiberius Caesar.

"To the world at large," said Tiberius "I am entirely ignorant of what may have befallen a certain damsel, ignorant where she is, disdainful of all that concerns her or hers. But you have been my confidant; you have been in all my secrets. How comes, then, this inexplicable and monstrous account which has reached me, on such authority that, perforce, I must believe it. Have you, or have you not delivered a certain damsel from a certain most respectable and noble house?"

"My sovereign, I have."

"And in this most extraordinary proceeding, have you or have you not, used the armed public force under your command?"

"Caesar, I have."

"And pray, why am I not, from this moment to cast you off as an enemy and traitor, dangerous to me; treacherous and audacious beyond all conception, and certainly ungrateful beyond forgiveness?"

"My Caesar, I merely obeyed the express orders of Augustus, who sent me as my warrant, his own signet ring."

Tiberius sank upon a couch, and visions of Rhodes, to which he had once before been banished for years by Augustus rose before his mind.

"Augustus then, knows all," he exclaimed. "Who brought his signet-ring to you?"

"Dionysius the Athenian."

After a few minutes of reflection, Tiberius resumed:

"The conclusion of this whole business is, that Cneius Piso has been guilty of a flagitious offence. So have you, if any participation of it can be traced to you. You must between you, bear the blame and the penalties (if any come); he chiefly, you partly; and I will enable you both to bear them. As for Lygdus, he must be put to death sooner or later; it would not be amiss if it were now; but we need him still for Germanicus at least, I of course need him not; but Plancina and Cneius Piso say that he is necessary to them for their plans about that pernicious pretender. Observe this: he must have a round sum of money, this Lygdus and disappear for a time. With regard to young Paulus Lepidus Aemilius and his mother and sister, I will load them with favors; everything which has occurred to them is entirely forgotten; in fact, nothing whatever has occurred to them so far as I am concerned. I admire them extremely; I like them very much. I have not had, I say, any share in, and I have not even had so much as any knowledge of their troubles. None whatever. I am completely and absolutely ignorant of everything which has aggrieved them. But this I will say that Augustus has been rather ungrateful and unjust to the only son of the brave officer who served him so well at Philippi; as he was indeed to that officer himself. So far from taking away the property of the family, Augustus ought to have bestowed a new estate upon them."

"I understand," replied Sejanus.

"With this understanding," concluded Tiberius, "that is with the understanding that I condemn and reprobate the conduct of Cneius Piso, and yours too, if it can be proved you are still my trusty Sejanus. Go! Farewell!"

Sejanus took his leave respectfully and gravely, but rode back through the streets grinning all the way.

CHAPTER XXI.

One morning, about a week later, when Paulus showed his mother and sister the signet ring remitted to him by Sejanus, adding that it was wonderful it had not been reclaimed by Augustus, and that he now would ask Dionysius or some one to give it back to the emperor, the ladies laughed and told him the history of the ring presented by the triumvir Lepidus to Agatha. But this could not quite explain what had occurred. Agatha mentioned that Esther Maccabaeus was to have shown the locket to Velleius Paterculus. Ultimately, by carefully piecing together various circumstances, they understood that Velleius Paterculus himself must have contrived the rescue; and that Augustus never wrote a certain remarkable letter to Sejanus at all. But, as Dionysius, and indeed Germanicus Caesar, were known to have appealed to the

emperor, both Tiberius and Sejanus would naturally believe that the emperor had really intervened. Hence the impunity of Thellus and of the gladiators; hence the absolute abstention not only from all other molestation of the family, but from all inquiry into the circumstances of Agatha's romantic deliverance.

The family were not only at peace for the reasons just stated but they were now wealthy. We have already mentioned that Augustus had given them the estate of Posilippo (which Vedius Pollio, the eater of slave-fed lamprays, had bequeathed to the emperor), instead of the Aemilian property on the Liris. But surprise followed surprise. Some relatives of Tiberius and of Germanicus, as the reader knows, were in possession of the Liris estates; and (finding Germanicus willing) Tiberius sent word to Paulus that, as he might naturally prefer the inheritance of his forefathers to a strange property, and as the value of each was nearly the same, he would exchange with Paulus if he wished. The offer was eagerly accepted; the lawyers drew the necessary reciprocal conveyances; and the wanderers, as soon as they could complete their preparations and purchases, went to settle in that great castle upon the Liris, which had attracted their admiration the very first evening of their arrival in Latium, and within sight of which (as the reader remembers, at the opening of the narrative) they had been all arrested by order of no other than the man who now, liberally and considerately, put them in possession of the mansion where the ever-burning brazier had cast its glimmer upon the Lares of so many generations of their own ancient and famous Aemilian line.

(To be Continued.)

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