

# DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

It is probable that Lepidus would refuse the request submitted to him, and if he acceded to it, Crispina assured Aglais that the castle of Lepidus at Monte Circello, covering both the summit and the base of a cliff upon the edge of the sea, was sufficiently capacious, intricate, and labyrinthine to conceal a good part of a Roman legion in complete security.

Moreover, it had escapes both by land and by water; nor could any one approach it without being visible to the inmates for miles. "Considering," reasoned Crispina, "that there is no pretext for ostensibly demanding the surrender of the ladies, who have not committed any offence, and are not, or at all events are not supposed to be, under any supervision, this retreat will afford all the security that can be desired. But Master Paulus must never go near you when once you leave this roof."

Aglais admitted the wisdom of the suggestion. A letter, a simple, elegant, and affecting composition, was written by her, and intrusted to Crispus for transmission. However, as it was the unanimous opinion of all concerned that the family ought not to be detected in any communications with Lepidus, or even suspected of any, it was necessary for Crispus to observe great caution in forwarding the document. Several days, therefore, passed away before an opportunity was presented of sending a person who would neither be observed in going, nor missed when gone, and who could at the same time be implicitly trusted; none but old Philip could be found.

Crispus had been on the point of employing Claudius for the purpose, when Crispina resolutely stopped him. "I have a high opinion of that youth," said she, "or I would not consent that Benigna should marry him; but at present he is a slave, and a slave of the very person against whom we are guarding. Moreover, Claudius is young and very timid; he has his way to make, and all his hopes are dependent on this tyrant—I mean the prince. I do not wish even Benigna to know any thing about the present business. The more honest any young people are, the more they betray themselves, if cross-questioned about matters which they know, but have been told to conceal. If they know nothing, why, they can tell nothing, and moreover none can punish or blame them for not telling."

"A silent tongue, husband, like mine, and a simple heart like yours, make safe necks. There, go about your business."

During the delay and suspense which necessarily followed, Paulus fished, and took long walks through that beautiful country, many aspects of which, already described by us, as they then were, have for ever disappeared. He used to take with him something to eat in the middle of the day, but always returned toward evening in time to join the last light repast of his mother and sister. Each evening saw them reassembled. Four tall, exquisitely tapering poles, springing from firm pedestals, supported four little scallop-shaped lamps at the four corners of their table. The supper was often enriched by Paulus with some delicious fresh-water fish of his own catching. Benigna waited upon them, and, being invariably engaged by Agatha in lively conversation, amused and interested the circle by her mingled simplicity, good feeling, and cleverness. After supper, Agatha would insist that Benigna should stay with them a while, and they either all strolled through the garden, whence perfumes strong as incense rose in the dewy air, or they sat conversing in the bower which overlooked it. Then after a while Crispina would ascend the garden-stairs to their landing; and while she inquired how they all were, and told them any news she might have gathered, Benigna would steal silently down to say good-night, as Agatha declared, to some shadowy figure who was dimly discernible standing not far away among the

myrtles, and apparently contemplating the starry heavens. Such was their quiet life, such the tenor of those fleeting days.

One evening—the sweet evening of a magnificent autumn day—Paulus was returning across the country, with a rod and line, from a distant excursion upon the banks of the Liris. The spot which he had chosen that day for fishing was a deep, clear, silent pool, formed by a bend of the river. A clump of shadowy chestnuts and hornbeam grew nigh, and the water was pierced by the deep reflections of a row of stately poplars, which mounted guard upon its margin. There seated, his back supported against one of the trees, watching the float of his line as it quivered upon the surface of the beautiful stream, he heard no sound but the ripple of the little waves lapping on the reeds, the twittering of birds, and the hum of insects. There, with a mind attuned by the peaceful beauties of the solitary scene, he had traversed a thousand considerations. He thought of the many characters with whom he had so suddenly been brought into more or less intercourse or contact. He thought much of Thellus, and of his poor Alba, so cruelly sacrificed. He was puzzled by Claudius. He mused about Seljanus, about Tiberius, about Veljeius Paterculius, about the two beautiful ladies in the litters; he thought of the third gold-looking palanquin and its pallid occupant; of the haughty and violent, yet, as it seemed, servile patrician and senator, who had attempted suddenly to kill him, out of zeal for Caesar; of the singular reverse which had awaited the attempt; of Queen Berenice, and Herod Agrippa, and Herodias; of the various unexpected incidents and circumstances which had followed. He thought of his uncle Lepidus; of the fate, whatever it might be, now to attend his mother, his sister, and himself. He revolved the means of establishing his claims. Ought he at once to employ some able orator and advocate, and to appeal to the tribunals of justice? Should he rather seek a hearing from the emperor in person, and, if so, how was this to be managed?

From recollections and calculations, the spirit of his pastime and the genius of the place bore him away and lured him into the realm of day-dreams, vague and far-wandering! Up-stream, about a mile from where he was sitting, towered a splendid mansion. On its roof glittered its company of gilt and colored statues, conversing and acting above the top of a wood.

In that mansion his forefathers had lived.

On one of the streams lay ancient Latium, where he sat, teeming with traditions—a monster or a demigod in every tree, rock, and river; the cradle of the Roman race, the seed and germ of outspreading conquest and universal empire. On the opposite banks was unrolled, far to the south, the Campanian landscape, where Hannibal, the most terrible of Romish enemies and rivals, had enervated his victorious legions, and lost the chances of that ultimate success which would have changed the destinies of mankind.

Suddenly, among the statues on the roof, Paulus beheld, not bigger than children by comparison, moving figures of men and ladies in dazzling attire. He perceived that salutations were exchanged, groups formed and groups dispersed. Happening, the next moment, to cast his eye over the landscape, he saw in the distance some horsemen galloping toward the house, through the trees in the distance. Losing sight of them behind intervening clumps of oleander, myrtle, and other shrubs, he turned once more to watch the groups upon the roof. In a short time new figures seemed to arrive, around whom all the others gathered with the attitude and air of listening.

Paulus felt as if he was assisting at a drama. A moment later the

roof was deserted by its living visitors, the statues remained alone and silent, gesticulating and flashing in the sun. Tidings must have come. Something must have happened, thought Paulus; and, as the day was already declining, he gathered up his fishing-tackle and wended homeward. On the way he met a man in hide sandals carrying a large staff and piked with iron. It was a shepherd, of whom he asked whether there was anything new. "Have you not heard?" said the man; "the flocks will fetch a better price—the emperor has come to Formiæ."

Full of this intelligence, and anxious at once to consult Aglais whether, before Augustus should leave the neighborhood, he ought not to endeavor by all means now to obtain a hearing from him, Paulus mended his pace; but while he thought he might be the bearer of news, some news awaited him. He passed through the little western trellis gate into the quoit-alley, and so by the garden toward the house. A couple of female slaves, who were talking and laughing about something like the impudence of a slave, and depend on it a love-letter it is, but it's Greek, which seemed to afford them much amusement, stood at the door of the lower arbor, which inclosed the foot of the stairs leading up to the landing of his mother's apartments. Noticing him, they hastily went about their business in different directions, and he ran up the stairs, and found his mother and sister talking in low tones, just inside the open door of the upper arbor in the large sitting-room, which, as the reader knows, was also the room where they took their meals.

"I am glad you have returned, Paulus," said his mother. "Look at this; your sister found it about half an hour ago on the landing in the arbor."

And Aglais handed him a piece of paper, on which was written, in a clear and elegant hand, in Greek:

"When power and craft hover in the air as hawks, let the ortolans and ground-doves hide."

Our hero read the words, turned the paper over, read the words again, and said, "I don't see the meaning of this. It is some scrap of a school-boy's theme, perhaps."

"School-boys do not often write such a hand," said Aglais; "nor is the paper a scrap torn off—it is a complete leaf. And, again, why should it be found upon our landing?"

"What school-boys could come up our stairs? There are none in the inn, are there? Have you been in all day?" asked Paulus.

"No; we were returning from a walk across the fields to see the place near Cicero's villa of Formianum, where the assassins overtook him, as Agatha, who ran up-stairs before me, reached the landing, she observed something white on the ground, and picked it up. It was that paper. Some stranger must have been upstairs while we were away."

"Crispus or Crispina would not have said this to us by means of an anonymous writing. They have given us the same warning without disguise, personally."

"But they spoke only according to their own opinion," returned Paulus. "Coming from some one else, the same advice acquires yet greater importance. Some unknown person bears witness of the danger which our host and hostess merely suspect, and at which Thellus, the lanista, hinted, as perhaps impending, but which even he did not affirm to be a reality."

"That is," added Paulus, "if this bit of paper has been intended for us—I mean for you and for Agatha, because I am not a ground-dove."

"Well, I do not see," said the lady, musing, "what more we can do for the moment. Our trusty Philip is on the way with my letter to your uncle; he may be by this time on the way back. Till he returns, what can we do?"

"I know not," said Paulus. "Have you asked Crispina about this paper?"

"We waited first to consult you," said Aglais; "and," added Agatha, "there is another singular thing—we have not seen Benigna all day, who was so regular in attending upon us. The hostess told us that Benigna was suffering with a bad

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We will not let the reader into the secret of what has happened, but one of the merry little companions of the woe-filled little maid who has broken her heart is laughing already, and the other hardly knows what has happened. Cut flowers nod reassuringly at them, and a bright bit of verdure covered wall stands in the background. There is something piquantly Watteauesque about one of the petite figures, suggesting just a touch of French influence on the artist.

The other picture presents another of the tremendous perplexities of childhood. It is called

**"Hard to Choose"**

In the other picture, we will not give away the point made by the artists before the recipients analyze it for themselves. Again there are three happy girls in the picture, caught in a moment of pause in the midst of limitless hours of play. One of the little maids still holds in her arms the toy horse with which she has been playing. Flowers and butterflies color the background of this, and an arbour and a quaint old table replace the wall.

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