

# DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

"Worthy," said a handsome man, with wavy, crisp, brown locks, in the early prime of life, whose military tunic was crossed with the broad purple stripe, "worthy of Athens in the days of Plato; and as Demosthenes addressed the people after listening to the reporter of Socrates, so Haterius shall tell this company what he thinks, after listening to Dion."

"Haterius is getting old," said Haterius.

"You may live," said Augustus, "to be a hundred, but you will never be old; just as our Cneius Piso here never was young."

There was a laugh. The Haterius in question was he to whom Ben Jonson compared Shakespeare as a talker, and of whom, then past eighty, Augustus used, Seneca tells us, to say that his careering thoughts resembled a chariot whose rapidity threatened to set own wheels on fire, and that he required to be held by a drag—"sufflaminandus."

Dion now rowed and was moving away, followed modestly by Paulus, who desired to draw no attention to himself, when the steward, or magister, glided quickly up the colonnade of the impluvium to the pillar against which Tiberius was leaning, whispered something, handed his tablets to the Caesar, and, in answer to a glance of surprised inquiry, looked toward and indicated Paulus.

Tiberius immediately passed Paulus and Dion, saying in an undertone, "Follow me," and led the way into a small empty chamber, of which, when the two youths had entered it, he closed the door.

"You are going to break the horse called Sejanus?" said he, turning round and standing.

Paulus assented.

"Then you must do so on the fourth day from this, in the review-ground of the camp, an hour before sunset."

Paulus bowed.

"Have you any thing to inquire, to request, or to observe?" pursued Tiberius.

"Am I ride the horse muzzled, sir?" asked the youth.

"The muzzle will be snatched off by a contrivance of the cavasson, after you mount him," replied Tiberius, looking steadfastly at the other.

"Then, instead of a whip, may I carry any instrument I please in my hands?" demanded Paulus: "my sword, for example?"

"Yes," answered Tiberius; "but you must not injure the horse; he is of matchless price."

"But," persisted Paulus, "your justice, illustrious Caesar, will make a distinction between any injury which the steed may do to himself and any which I may do to him. For instance, he might dash himself against some obstruction, or into the river Liris, and in trying to clamber out again might be harmed. Such injuries would be inflicted by himself, not by me. The hurt I shall do him either by spear, or by sword, or by any other instrument, will not be intended to touch his life or his health, nor likely to do so. If I do make any scars, I think the hair will grow again."

"He will not be so scrupulous on his side," said Tiberius; "however, your distinction is reasonable. Have you any thing else to ask?"

"Certainly I have," said Paulus; "it is that no one shall give him any food or drink, except what I myself shall bring, for twenty-four hours before I ride him."

Tiberius uttered a disagreeable laugh.

"Am I to let you starve Sejanus?" he asked.

"That is not my meaning, sir," answered Paulus quietly. "I will give him as much corn and water as he will take. I wish to prevent him from having any other kind of provender. There are articles which will make a horse drunk or mad."

"I agree," replied Tiberius, "that he shall have only corn and water, provided he have as much of both as my own servant wishes; nor have I any objection that the ser-

vant should receive these articles from you alone, or from your groom."

Paulus inclined his head and kept silence.

"Nothing more to stipulate, I perceive," observed Tiberius.

The youth admitted that he had not; and, seeing the Caesar move, he opened the door, held it open while the great man passed through, and then taking leave of Dion, hastily quitted the palace.

Tiberius, meeting Sejanus, took him aside and said:

"We have got rid of the brother! You must have everything ready to convey her to Rome the fifth day from this. And now, enough of private matters. I am sick of them. The affairs of the empire await me!"

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

The die was cast, and Paulus went away pledged to an undertaking which appeared sufficiently arduous, and some of the chances of which were even full of horror.

The news of the arrangement spread through the palace of the Mamurras before he had well quitted Formiae. From the palace it circulated through the town, from the town it reached the camp the same evening; the next day the surrounding country knew it. Carrier-pigeons\* had borne to Rome a hint of the gayeties, the interest, and the splendor which the simultaneous occurrence of the emperor's visit, and the collection of an army for real fighting purposes, (in fact, to repel the German invasion,) were likely to call forth in the old Latian town; and now the same aerial messengers apprised many a sated circus-goer in the capital that a very pretty novelty indeed would be added to the contests of gladiators and the battles of wild beasts.

"It was some fifty years before, at the siege of Modena, that the first record instance, so far as I am aware, occurred of making the pigeon a letter-carrier.

The concourse pouring into and converging from all parts toward Formiae, which had already been so extensive, increased, therefore, into an enormous concentric movement. Nothing can better show what a prodigious multitude was thus accidentally collected than the fact that, even at Rome, (which then contained four millions of inhabitants,) a diminution of pressure was perceptible, for the time, to those who remained. This change resembled what Londoners experience on the Derby day.

Paulus, that evening, having passed a considerable time with his mother and sister, (to whom he communicated the fact of his engagement without alarming them by explaining its peculiar horrors,) felt little inclined to sleep. When, therefore, the lanista Thellus, who had, as Claudius said he would invite him to do, brought back Benigna to Crispus's inn, was taking his leave of the Lady Aglais and of Agatha, Paulus said to him:

"Do not go soon, but come down into the garden and let us take a stroll. We may not often be able to converse with each other hereafter."

"Gladly, my valiant youth," said Thellus; and they descended together.

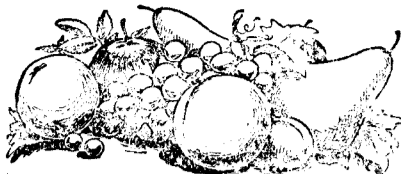
A beautiful starry and moonlit night looked down over Italy, as they sauntered in the fragrant garden, conversing a little and then relapsing into thoughtful silence.

Presently Thellus said:

"This adventure of ours makes me unhappy."

"Well," returned Paulus, "my mother and sister have such need of my protection that I feel no levity about it myself. I confess that it is a grave business."

They now walked up and down the laurel alley a few turns, absorbed in thought.



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Suddenly two men approached them along two different gravel-walks in the garden, one dressed as a slave, the other in the uniform of a decurion, a legionary officer, slightly more important than a modern sergeant of the line in the English army.

The slave had one of the worst countenances, and the decurion one of the most honest, that Paulus in his very limited or Thellus in his immense experience had ever beheld. Paulus recognized the slave at once; it was that Lygddus who had endeavored to bring him to the ground by a side-sweep of Cneius Piso's sword, which this man, as the reader will remember, was carrying at the time.

The decurion gave Paulus a letter, directed in the same handwriting, folded in the same style, and its silk thread sealed with the same device of a frog, as a certain communication which he had once before received.

The moon shone high, and so calm was the night that it proved easy to read the bold characters.

They ran thus: "Velcius Paterculius, military tribune, salutes Paulus Lepidus Aemilius. Renounce this absurd engagement, which cannot concern you. It is yet possible, but will be too late tomorrow, to plead ignorance of what you were undertaking. Leave wretched slaves to their fate!—Vale."

Paulus, after reading this note, begged the decurion to wait, and, turning to Lygddus, asked his business.

The slave stated his name, and said he was appointed to receive, dating from the day after the next, the provender which he understood Paulus to be desirous of furnishing for the use of the Sejan horse.

"Has Tiberius Caesar appointed you?"

"Sir, yes."

"Of course, then, you are used to horses?"

"Sir, I have always belonged to the stable," said Lygddus.

"But," pursued Paulus, "am I then forbidden to enter the stable myself, and make acquaintance with the horse I have to break?"

"Sir, I have orders," answered this Lygddus—who, as I think I have already mentioned, was destined, as the instrument of Cneius Piso and Plancina, some few years

(To be continued.)

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