

# DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

later, to be the cruel assassin of Germanicus—"I have orders always to admit you, and always to watch you."

"You to watch a Roman knight!" "For that matter, most honored sir," answered Lygdus, "the rank of the person watched does not alter the eyes of the watcher. I could watch a Roman senator, or even a Roman Caesar, if necessary."

"I will be security you could," said Thellus, whose great and almost diaphanous nostrils quivered as he spoke.

Lygdus, by way of answer, withdrew a pace. The decurion, meanwhile, had taken off his helmet, and the starry heavens were not more clear than his indignant, simple countenance.

"It is well," said Paulus. "I will ask for you at Formiæ. Go now."

Lygdus therefore went away. "Decurion," said Paulus, "say to the esteemed Velleius Paterculus that I am very grateful to him; but what must be, must be."

"And what is that, noble sir?" answered the decurion, "in case my commanding officer should ask me for an explanation?"

"That I have given my word adventurously, and will keep it faithfully," replied Paulus.

"Is this, noble sir," said the decurion, "what you mean by that which must be?"

"Have I, then," answered Paulus, "said anything obscure or confused?"

"Only something unusual, excellent sir," said the decurion; "but not anything confused or obscure. Permit me to add, that the whole camp knows the circumstances of this miserable undertaking, and wishes you well; and I feel in my single bosom the good wishes of the whole camp for your success."

"What is your name, brave decurion?"

"Longinus." "Well," replied Paulus, "if I survive the struggle with this creature, I mean to join the expedition of Germanicus Caesar, and I will have my eye upon you. I should like to be your informant that you were promoted to a higher rank, and to call you the Centurion Longinus."

Tears were standing in the Roman decurion's eyes as he bowed to take leave.

Thellus and Paulus, being now left again alone, resumed their walk up and down the laurel alley.

"I am not so conversant with horses," observed Thellus, "as I could for your sake at present wish to be. But all animals, I notice, are more quiet when blinded."

At this moment the branches of a cross-walk rustled, and a stately figure in the Greek laena (Xtaiva) approached them.

"Are you not Aemilius, the nephew of the triumvir?" asked the stranger.

"Yes," replied Paulus.

"Who is this?" continued the newcomer, looking at Thellus. "I have something to say which may concern your safety."

"You may trust this brave man," said Paulus: "it is my friend Thellus."

"Well," pursued the other, in a very low tone, "take this little pot of ointment; and two hours before you have to ride the Sejan horse, go into his stable, make friends with him, and rub his nostrils with the contents. He will be then muzzled, you know. You will find him afterward docile."

"Whom have I to thank for so much interest in me?" demanded Paulus.

"My name is Charicles," replied the stranger hesitatingly, and still speaking almost in a whisper; "and I have the honor of numbering Dionysius of Athens among the best of my friends."

"My mother," returned Paulus, "would, I think, be glad to see you some day soon."

"I shall feel it an honor; but pray excuse me to her tonight," said Charicles. "Tiberius Caesar knows nothing of my absence, and I had better return at once to Formiæ. I will visit you again."

"But would this ointment injure the horse?" inquired Paulus.

"Not by any means," said Charicles; "it comes from a distant eastern land. It will merely make him sleepy. I have been more than an hour and a half handling the ingredients, and I can hardly keep awake myself. Forgive my hurry—farewell." And the stately Greek made an obeisance as he disappeared.

Paulus remained, holding the pot, which consisted of some kind of porcelain, in his hand, and looking at it, when Thellus exclaimed:

"Why, this laurel hedge is alive!" In a moment he had sprung through it and returned, dragging in his mighty grasp Lygdus the slave.

"Not yet departed?" said Thellus.

"Sir, I was asleep," replied the slave, with a look of terror.

"I have but to tighten my fingers," cried Thellus, "and you will sleep so as not to awake in a hurry."

"Thellus," observed Paulus, "I am not depending either on this man's knowledge or on this man's ignorance. I have quite other hopes and other grounds of confidence. Let him go."

"Ah!" said Thellus, "I would like to have the chastising of you. But go, as this noble gentleman desires; go, then, as the young Roman knight bids you!"

He shook the reptile-headed, down-looking, and side-looking slave away, and the latter disappeared.

"O friend and noble sir!" said Thellus, "it nearly breaks my heart to see you thus bound hand and foot, and doomed to destruction."

"Have a good heart, dear Thellus," said Paulus.

So they parted, the gladiator returning to his vehicle, and Paulus retiring to his room, where, as he lay on his bed and listened to the splash of the fountain in the impluvium, he silently and calmly offered back to the great unknown God whom Dionysius worshipped the life which he, that unknown Deity, could alone have given.

## CHAPTER II.

Next morning, before the family were out of their beds, Phylis the slave had returned from Monte Circe with the following note:

"Marcus Lepidus Aemilius hails the widow of his brave and valiant brother. Come with your children. The last of mine has, alas! died under the clemency of one man, and the liberty of another. The clement man is Augustus, the liberal man was Maecenas. All that I now retain is yours; and yours shall be all I may be able to leave. Farewell."

But despite of this note, Paulus could not persuade his mother to depart from that neighborhood till after the trifling display of horsemanship, as he called it, which he had to afford for the amusement of the Roman world on the evening of the third day ensuing. A little ruffled at his failure to persuade the Lady Aglais to go away, he summoned their freedman Philip, and with him for a companion started on foot for Formiæ before noon, along a road as thronged at that moment and as animated as the road to Epsom is the eve of what Lord Palmerston has rather affectedly, and, as applied to an annual event, very incorrectly, called the Isthmian games of England.

Scarcely had he and Philip entered the southern gate, when they noticed a little crowd around some nurses, one of whom, apparently a Nubian, held the hand of a magnificently-attired child of any age between five and eight. At his side was an eastern-looking youth of about eighteen, whom the reader has met before. Thellus the gladiator was standing with folded arms on the outskirts of the suddenly-collected concourse. The child had dropped some toy, which a dog had seized in his mouth, and had thereby defaced. The dog was now a

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prisoner, held fast by the throat in a slave's hands.  
"The poor dog knew not what he was doing," said the nurse.  
"I care nothing for that," cried the child, who was purple with passion. "Strangle him, Lygdus."  
And accordingly Lygdus tightened his grasp of the dog's throat till the animal's tongue was thrust forth; the grasp was yet longer maintained, and the dog was throttled dead.  
"Is it dead?" screamed the child.  
"Quite; see," replied Lygdus, casting away upon the street the breathless carcass.  
"Ah! beautiful!" cried the child; "now come away."  
"Nice and neat as an execution," said a powerfully-built, dusky, middle-aged man, having a long, ruddy beard, streaked with gray, around whom were several slaves in Asiatic dress. This person also the reader has met before. "But," added he, "I am going up for my own trial, and I hope it will not be followed by another execution."  
"I only hope it will," cried the interesting child. "What fun it would be to see a man strangled."  
"Who is that infant monster, Thellus?" asked Paulus.\*  
\* I am aware of an apparent anachronism here of some four or five years, according to Dio, Tacitus, Suetonius, and others; but Caligula was, I think, a few years older than these authors represent; for Josephus furnishes a somewhat different calendar from theirs.  
(To be continued.)

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