

DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

"I speak roughly and plainly. I transfix him with his own principles. He is too honest not to feel the force of what I say. He cannot reply. Mark next: we live but a short while in this world; and if we be immortal, our state here is downright contemptible in importance compared with that which has to come; and yet he tells us that this contemptible point of time, this mere dot of existence, is to determine our lot for everlasting ages, and he that says this proclaims the being whose existence he certainly has demonstrated to be the very principle of love itself. Yet this being who will establish our destinies according as we please him, tells us not how to do it."

Again the Athenian refrained from breaking the expectant silence which ensued.

"Would not one imagine," said Strabo, "that the most particular instructions would be given to us how to regulate a conduct upon which so much depends?"

"Yes," observed Labio; "and not instructions alone, but instructors, to whom occasional reference would be always possible."

All eyes turned toward Dionysius. He blushed, hesitated, and at last said,

"You only echo thoughts long familiar to my mind. I cannot answer; I am not capable of solving these difficulties. Time is not completed. I think, like the Sibyls, that some special light is yet to come down from heaven."

Here the conversation ended.

Half an hour afterward, Dionysius, who had begged to be excused for that night from entering upon the second of the two doctrines which he had been challenged to sustain, was walking part of the way with Paulus toward the Inn of the Hundredth Milestone, along the fretwork of light which was shed upon the Appian Road by the moon and stars through the leaves of the chestnut-trees.

"I feel confident, Paulus," said he, "that Augustus will restore your family estates; and should you accept the liberal offer of Germanicus Caesar, and depart upon this German expedition to-morrow morning, I will watch your interests while you are absent."

"I know it well, generous friend," replied the other youth; "and I do hope my mother will not object to my going. Only think, I may come back a military tribune! Only think!"

"Yes," said Dion, "and enter that great castle which glitters yonder in the moonlight as proprietor."

"If so, will you not," said Paulus, "come and stay with us?"

"That is an engagement," said the Athenian, "provided some day you will all pay me a return visit at Athens."

"We'll exchange the 'tessera hospitalis' on it," exclaimed Paulus.

Thus they parted on the moonlit road, Dionysius returning to Formiae, and Paulus walking onward with long, rapid strides.

PART III.

Chapter I.

Next morning, before the gray of the dawn began to kindle into sunrise, Paulus had completed with swinging strides the distance between Crispus's inn and the camp outside of Formiae, and he stood before the Praetorium of Germanicus Caesar exactly as the commander-in-chief lifted its curtain door, and stepped forth.

"To come with us, or not?" asked Germanicus, smiling.

"To go with you, general," answered Paulus; "but my mother and sister grudge me this one day, and as Tiberius Caesar has made me a present of the horse which I broke the other evening, and as an army travels far more slowly than a well-mounted individual, will you permit me to follow you to-morrow? Before your vanguard reaches Faventia (Faenza now), nay, before you are out of Latium, I hope to report myself."

Germanicus mused.

"Nay," said he, after a moment or two, "wait you at that Hundredth Milestone Post-house till you receive further orders. You shall have them this night."

The commander-in-chief then slightly raised his right hand, over which Paulus, taking it, bowed low.

That evening, in the bower of the veranda overlooking the garden of Crispus's inn, our hero was seated, not smoking as so many generations of modern heroes have smoked, and not whittling as American heroes when at leisure think it necessary to whittle, but sedate and at his ease, listening to the occasional wise and keen observations of the Lady Aglais, and the less sparing conversation, the volatile empty prattle of his sister Agatha. While they were thus occupied, a well-known step came up the staircase from the garden.

"Dionysius!" cried Paulus.

The visitor brought them news for which they had not hoped. Augustus, who had first resolved not to listen to the suit of Paulus, had suddenly appointed a day for its hearing; and, moreover, it was agreed, by a sort of comity and indulgence, that Dionysius, although not a Roman lawyer, should be allowed to plead the case of his friend. Finally, the emperor himself, who, since the death of Maecenas, many years before the date of our tale, had desisted from this practice, was to preside in court for the day (to use modern parlance) as a judge in equity.

The wanderers were exchanging remarks of congratulation upon these important and unexpected tidings, when Crispus himself ran up the stairs holding out a large letter fastened with the usual silken tie, and addressed to Paulus. The handwriting was very delicate, and yet a little careless and easy, the handwriting of a man who, while accustomed to write more than the Romans of high station (except, indeed, the professed men of letters) usually did, could write the despatch of much business with a certain fastidious neatness even in trifles.

Paulus went to the dining-table, and opening the paper, out of which tumbled a gold ring, read as follows by the light of the scallop-shaped lamp at the top of the tapering pole which flanked one of the corners of the board:

"Germanicus Caesar to Paulus Lepidus Aemilius, the centurion, greeting."

"He makes me a centurion already," said Paulus.

The letter continued:

"Do not follow the army directly. Go to Rome. Seek the house of Eleazar the Hebrew, near the lower end of the Suburra. Show him the enclosed ring, which he well knows as my signet, and demand of him the already stipulated sum of twelve millions of 'sestertii' (twelve thousand 'sestercia'), which is the pay of forty thousand of my common legionaries for one month. I mean to issue a fortnight's pay as a bounty, extending it to all (centurions and horse as well as legionaries.) 'Post nummos virtus'."

It would be far more convenient if you could bring this money to me in bronze or copper coin, the 'as'; but this will be utterly impossible; you could not find horses to carry the load, nor a sufficient guard to convoy it. You must therefore make Eleazar pay you as much as possible in gold: for instance, in the gold 'scrupulum', each coin equal to five silver 'denarii'. After receiving and reckoning the treasure, give him a written voucher signed with your name, and sealed with my signet. Pack the gold in strong iron chests or boxes; collect as a guard all the men you can of the fourth 'centuria', to which you are appointed, and hasten, night and day, join me at 'Forum Allieni' (now Ferrara,) on the Adriatic Sea. Farewell."

Paulus determined to start at day-break upon this important and confidential mission, and, in order not to multiply leave-takings, he said adieu to his family and to Dionysius that night.

Chapter II.

It was about sunset in Rome when four persons of splendid stature, a trained martial bearing, and eminently gallant appearance, sauntered along one of the principal streets. They loitered here and there at a portico, or paused under a covered colonnade, to swell the momentary groups who were watching some Sardinian jester

or who listened with wonder to a sophist from the Greek islands as he declaimed. Two of these four men — for whom, as they strode along, the rabble made obsequious room — were still in the physical prime of life, and two in the flower of early youth. They were all plainly but neatly and carefully attired, not in the toga, but in the "sagum"; for there was war in Italy; * and the Germans, everybody knew, were even now to be expelled beyond the sacred frontiers, with carnage, and shame, and a great overthrow. Another impressive lesson was to be taught to all barbarians. The four men who wore the sagum were also armed, and some who noted them wondered why such men were there, and not with Germanicus in Venetia. (News had been whispered, indeed, that the irruption had come much nearer than Illyricum, and that the barbarians, swarming round the top of the Adriatic, had defeated and dispersed the stationary guards, and were well within Italy proper.)

* Whenever there was war in Italy itself, the Romans donned the "sagum."

It soon grew dusk, and one of the four, who, although the youngest, seemed to exercise a species of authority over the rest, said:

"Now let us take a look at our stable, then at our men, after which the 'Suburra.'"

They went into an alley, threaded their way through a dense, motley, seething multitude of roystering idlers, the ebullition of which had once fermented clear into a Julius Caesar, and presently they passed under an archway into a courtyard strewn with sawdust, where all was comparatively quiet—a creek, so to say, running out of a high sea into sheltering cliffs on either hand.

As they peered under a low porch into a stable lighted by lanterns, our old acquaintance, Philip the freedman, came out with a dust-covered and grim face, and saluted respectfully the youngest of the company.

"Twelve fine, strong Tauric horses, master Paulus," he said, pointing to twelve clean, well-littered stalls, "besides the Sejanus," added he, turning toward the stall immediately opposite the door.

"Are these all we can obtain?" inquired Paulus.

"Ah! and lucky too, master Paulus, to obtain these," answered the freedman; "they wanted forty 'nummi aurei' a pair, but I chaffered them down a bit. This Rome is a nasty place, I can tell you, and, between ourselves, a dangerous place too."

"But," said Paulus, with a serious look, "if we cannot mount the soldiers, we must travel at an infantry pace; the vehicles cannot leave the guard behind. However, where are the men, Philip?"

"Hard by, master. I will conduct you to their thermopolia" ('wine-shop; tavern,' curiously enough, meant bookshop or stationer's).

Philip hereupon lead the way, and the four followed till just within the lower end of the Suburra; pushing aside a curtain, he introduced them from the street into what appeared to be a den of raging maniacs.

Ten stalwart men, dressed and armed as soldiers, were seated opposite to one another on benches at each side of a long table, five a side. Earthenware vessels, called "supoe," full of common draught wine ("vinum doliare"), loaded the coarse pine table, and each pair of soldiers appeared to be engaged in a deadly strife across the board. It was who should best "micare digitos," or "flash his fingers". The men were seriously gambling in that ancient traditional way which still survives in Italy under the name of "morra," a wonderful instance of the tenacious capacity which popular customs possess to outlive political changes, the overthrows of dynasties, the revolutions of states and constitutions. The men thus gambling in the reign of Augustus Caesar

(To be Continued.)

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One of the pictures is called

"Heart Broken"

We will not let the reader into the secret of what has happened, but one of the merry little companions of the woeful 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"

As 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.

The two pictures together will people any room with six happy little girls, so glad to be alive, so care-free, so content through the sunny hours amidst their flowers and butterflies, that they must brighten the house like the throwing open of shutters on a sunny morning.

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