

DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

Having said this she stopped suddenly and looked him full in the face. He replied in a quiet, cautious way: "You have done well to obey such a request." She then showed him the locket desiring him to open it, and remarking the contents of the locket, according to Agatha's expectation would authenticate the various statements which she, Esther, was now making. Paterculus opened the locket, and taking out the rings it contained, looked at them with an air of indifference at first. Suddenly he started, exclaiming: "How comes the signet of Augustus among these trinkets?"

In fact Paterculus, though he knew only the latest of them in date, held three signets of Augustus in his hand. He reflected a little time and enquired whether she felt authorized to entrust him with one of those rings for a few days. Esther felt not the smallest scruple or doubt about assenting to this at once; whereupon the Praetorian tribune thanked her with a smile, and said in an emphatic manner, that she could not better serve her fair young friend than by hastening to apprise Paulus of his sister's situation.

News, he added, had been received that Paulus (entirely recovered from his wounds) had set out for Rome with a body of troops, and ought even then to be somewhere on the Nomentana Via, not far north or north-east of the capital. "Dionysius, the Athenian," concluded Paterculus, "is with his travelling party, in which by the bye you will find also the damsel's mother Aglais; and in my opinion, it is nearly as important (if not more important) to let Dionysius know what has occurred, as it is to inform Paulus of it. Dionysius will convey the truth to Augustus himself."

Hearing this, Esther and Josiah thanked the Praetorian tribune, took leave of him respectfully, and being guided back through the garden by the same slave who had introduced them, hastened away upon their new errand.

CHAPTER XVII.

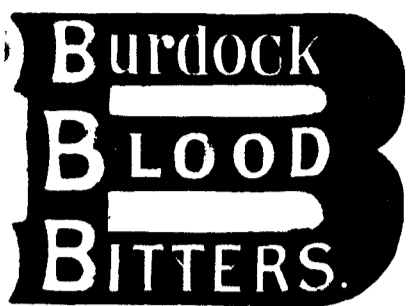
It was the first fresh hour after sunrise, about ten miles north of Rome. Thellus had taken the bridle of the Sejan steed from Philip the freedman, declaring he felt disposed for a ride, only he feared, upon that beast's back, it would be a short one, when Paulus himself, who had made his litter-bearers stand and let him out, overtook them, and, pointing to the white arches of an aqueduct which spanned the road a little way in front, exclaimed:

"Friend Thellus, I feel as though I were stronger than before my wounds. I will mount my tawny slave here, the Sejan horse. You see we are close to Rome; gather all these fine fellows, these brave soldiers, in order of march, who so faithfully stood by me in the hours of suffering; we will enter the city in military fashion."

Mounting the bank at the roadside, he leapt from it upon Sejanus. The great steed, after his wont, stood still as if electrified, and then bounded into the air. This was enough to tell him who the rider was; and thereafter, he paced forward with a grave, steady, and mighty stride—perfectly docile, and proud of what he carried. In front, moving at an easy pace, was the carriage of Dionysius, in which the Lady Aglais travelled; and ahead of this again was the smaller vehicle containing Dionysius himself. Paulus rode for a while by the side of his mother's carriage, conversing about Agatha, and arranging that, the very moment he should have reported himself to Germanicus, they would start together for Monte Circeio, and joyfully surprise Agatha by appearing unannounced. He then spurred forward, and in like manner accompanied the vehicle of Dionysius, expatiating on this pleasant little plan with immense zest, and urging the Athenian to come with them.

Dionysius, however, entertained certain fears and anxieties concerning Agatha which, at such a moment especially, he could not find it in his heart to mention to so affectionate a brother. This was the fairest and happiest time Paulus had ever known; a single word, a mere hint, would suffice to change all that mental sunshine into darkness and storms. The Greek affected to consider the invitation; and Paulus, reining in his horse, waited for his mother's carriage in order to inform her; but when it rolled abreast of him he caught her in tears.

She had been musing over those words



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of the sibyl—"The lioness has lost her whelp, and not all the power of Caesar can keep the prey"—and, remembering the venerable woman's command to haste to Rome, and her prediction that on the way thither more would be learnt not a bird had flown by without startling the lady, until, at last, her concealed anxiety overcame her firmness. At Paulus's look of astonishment and distress, she smiled and made some excuse. Paulus determined to call a halt of half an hour or more, and take breakfast in a neighboring grove of elms and sycamore trees not far from the highway in the very centre of which grove was a well, overflowing into a tiny brook upon a gravelly bed. It was a pretty place, with a fretwork of shade and morning light adorning the turf under the boughs. Cushions were soon arranged by the soldiers, who, retiring to the roadside, imitated the example of their superiors in a ruder fashion, and partook of less delicate fare.

Thus were they engaged, when, along the straight road, looking small in the distance, some sort of conveyance was seen approaching. There are queries which seem too trivial to be asked in words by any person of any other person but which each person asks himself in thought: such as was the query which the soldiers by the wayside, now lazily watching this vehicle rolling toward them, were all propounding mentally: "Who comes yonder, I should like to know?"

(To be Continued.)

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