

DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

If he would, Germanicus offered to mount him splendidly, and keep him near his own person, and make him the bearer of orders to the generals; in modern phrase, give him a place on the staff. Paulus, thanked the commander-in-chief briefly and respectfully, and asked to be allowed to wait till noon next day before giving a more definite answer than that he should rejoice to accept the gracious offer; his mother and sister had no protector except himself, and he should not like to leave them, without first hearing what they said. Germanicus assented.

During the short conversation of which this was the substance, Germanicus had moved slowly up the gravel-walk; and Paulus of course attended him, listening and answering, not sorry besides to put some space between himself and the unpleasant Jewish group. By the time they had finished speaking they had arrived opposite the couch where Tiberius, Antonia, and Agrippina were seated, with Germanicus's child, Caligula, as we have described, occupying a low stool in front of his mother Agrippina. Close by, leaning against a pillar, stood a youth in the uniform of a centurion who had a most determined, thoughtful countenance.

On the approach of Germanicus, he briskly quitted his lounging attitude to salute his commander.

"Young knight," said Germanicus to Paulus, "let me make you acquainted with as brave a youth, I think, as can be found in all the Roman legions; this is Cassius Choerias."

"Who, father," asked the shrill voice of the child Caligula, "is the brave youth, do you say?"

"Cassius Choerias."

"Are you so brave?" persisted the impudent child, shoving up his bandage impatiently, and disclosing a truly disfigured and malicious little face.

"I can't see you, or what you are like. But I think I could make you afraid if I was emperor."

The man destined hereafter to deliver mankind from the boundless profligacy, the wicked oppression, and the insane, raging, incredible cruelties of which it was daily the miserable victim by killing Caligula the emperor, looking steadily at Caligula the child, and said not a word.

"I should like to feel your sword, whether it is heavy," pursued the child. "Give it me," and he started to his feet.

"Silence! pert baby," said Germanicus, pushing him back into his place.

"It seems to me," said Augustus, looking round, and there was an instantaneous hush of general conversation as he did so: "that we have represented around us Europe, Asia and Africa. Young Herod and his friends may count for Asia."

"You," added Augustus, addressing the tall, Brahmin-like man who stood near Tiberius, "come from Egypt, do you not?"

"Mighty emperor," returned the other in measured and sepulchral tones, "I come from the land where great Babylon once was the seat of empire."

No sooner had this man opened his mouth than the observant Sejanus started.

Approaching his mouth to the other's ear, he whispered,

"I have heard your voice before; you are—?"

"I am," replied the other, composedly eyeing his questioner, "Thrasyllus Magnus—Thrasyllus, the student of the stars."

Sejanus smiled, twisted his moustache in his white fingers, and asked,

"Are you sure that you are not the god Hermes? and that you do not sometimes ride of nights, with your horse's hoofs wrapped in cloth?"

It was now the other's turn to start.

"Do you suppose," pursued Sejanus, still in a whisper, "that I had not every stable in Formiae searched the night you played that trick on the road? I know my master Tiberius's taste for divination and the various deep things you practice. You, then, are the oracle who reveals to him the decrees of fate?"

The exchange of further remarks between these worthy men was here

suspended; for Augustus again spoke amid general attention.

"I think," said he, "that we should all now be glad to hear Dionysius the Athenian." An eager hum of assent and approval arose from the jaded and sated, but inquisitive and critical society around.

"There are in your philosophy," continued Augustus, "two leading principles, my Athenian, in support of which I am both curious and anxious to hear you advance some solid and convincing reasons. You despise, as Cicero despised it, the notion of a plurality of gods. You affirm there is only one. You say that a god who could begin to be a god, or begin at all, can be no god; and that the true King of all kings, is the giver of whatever exists, and the recipient of nothing. That he is without a body, a pure and holy intelligence. That as every thing else is his work, there never were, and never will be, and never could be, any limits either of his power or of his knowledge. At the same time, you reject the notion, adopted in some Greek systems, that he is the soul of the visible universe, and this universe his body; affirming him to be antecedent to and independent of all things, and all other things to be absolutely dependent upon him.

"It is not so?"

"Yes," answered Dionysius; "such is my assured conviction."

"This, then," said Augustus, "is the first question upon which I wish to hear you; and the second is, whether that force or principle within each of us which thinks, reflects, reasons, and is conscious of itself, will perish at our death, or will live beyond it, and is of such a nature that it will never perish, as Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, and many other illustrious men and very great thinkers have so ardently contended."

"Ah!" said Dionysius, in a voice indescribably sweet and thrilling, while all turned their eyes toward him; "unless that God himself assist me, I shall be quite unequal to the task you impose upon me, Augustus. I am not worthy to treat the subject upon which you desire me to speak. You are aware that many learned persons in our Europe expect, and for a long time have expected some divine being to appear one day among men I see the able governor of Rome, Lucius Piso. None will accuse Piso of credulity, none will suppose him a weaver of idle fancies, or a dreamer of gratuitous reveries. An able administrator, an accomplished man of the world, and, if he will pardon me, more inclined to be too sarcastic than too indulgent, he, nevertheless, despises not this expectation. Our learned friend Strabo, whom I see near me, will tell you moreover how it prevails, and has from immemorial times prevailed, in various and often perverted forms, yet with an underlying essence of permanent identity, among the innumerable nations which make some thirty languages resound through the immense expanses of Asia. But Domitius Afer desires to interrupt me."

Afer said,

"I do not discern how this ancient and mysterious expectation which floats vaguely through the traditions of all mankind, and in a more definite shape forms the groundwork of the whole religion of the Jewish nation, can be at all connected either with the immortality of the thinking principle inside of us, or with the question whether there is one supreme, absolute, and eternal God who made this universe."

"All I would have added," replied Dionysius, "in regard to that expectation was, that after the appearance of this universal benefactor, many sublime ideas which hitherto only the strongest intellects have entertained, will probably become familiar to the meanest—common to all.

"I pass to the two questions which Augustus desires to hear argued; and, first, let me collect the opinions of this brilliant company; I will then compare them with mine. What does Antistius Labio think?"

"I should have to invent a term to express my notion," said Labio. "I think all things are but emanations from, and return to, the same being. What might be called 'pan-

theism", if we coined a word from the language of your country, best explains, I fancy, the phenomena of the universe. Every thing is growth and decay; but as decay furnishes larger growth, every thing is growth at last and in the total sum."

"Is this growth of all things under any general control?" asked Dionysius.

"Each thing," replied Labio, "is under the control of its own nature, which evidently it cannot change, and every inferior thing besides is under the control of any superior thing with which it may come into relations. Thus what is 'active' is superior as such to what is 'passive'; it is more excellent and a higher force to act upon, or sway, or change, or move, or form, than to be acted upon, moved, or modified. The mind of an architect, for instance, is a higher force than the deal weight of the inert stones from which he builds a palace."

"Then you hold that some things have force, and that there are greater and smaller forces?" asked Dionysius.

"Undoubtedly," said Labio.

"Which is more excellent," asked Dionysius, "a force which can move itself, or a force which, in order to exist, must be set in motion by another?"

"This last," said Labio, "is only the first prolonged; it is but a continuation, an effect."

"And an effect," pursued the Greek, "is inferior, as such, to what controls it; and inferior also in its very nature to that which requires no cause?"

"Certainly," returned Labio; "I am not so dull as to gainsay that."

"Now favor me with your attention," returned the Athenian; "I want you to extricate me from a dilemma. Either every thing which possesses force has received its force from something else; or there is something which possesses force, and which never received this force from any thing else, and which, therefore, has possessed it from all eternity. Which of these two alternatives do you select?"

Labio paused, and by this time the whole of that strangely mixed society was listening with the keenest relish and the most genuine interest to the conversation.

"I see whither you tend," replied Labio, "but I do not believe in that universal ruler and original mind, or first force, which you think to demonstrate. All things go in circles, and serially. Every force which exists has been derived from some other; and each in its turn continues the movement, or communicates the impact."

"Prettily expressed," remarked Velieus Patereulus.

"I beg Augustus," said the Athenian, "to mark and remember Labio's words. Every thing which has force has received its force from something else. Do you say 'every thing,' Labio, without exception?"

"Yes, every thing," said Labio.

"I conceive the claim to be endless."

"But 'not having,'" said Labio,

replied the Athenian, "goes before 'receiving'. I cannot, and you cannot, receive that which we have already. In order to say that we receive any thing, we must first be without it—must we not? The state of not having, I repeat, precedes the act of receiving. Does any person deny this? Does Labio?"

No one here spoke.

"Then, said the Athenian, "in maintaining that every thing which possesses force, 'has received' that force from something else, Labio necessarily maintains that every thing which possesses force 'was first without it.' I therefore perceive there must have been a time when nothing possessed any force whatever. The very first thing which possessed any, received it; but whence? For, at that time, there was nothing to give it. What says Labio? Is pantheism silent?"

"I wish to hear more," said Labio; "I will answer you afterward."

A momentary smile, like a passing gleam, lit up the faces of those around, as the Athenian, looking toward Domitius Afer, requested him the next to favor the company with his opinion upon the two momentous questions propounded by Augustus.

"I need not, like Labio, coin a term from the Greek," said Afer, "to describe my system. I am a materialist. I believe nothing save what my senses attest. They show me neither God nor soul; and I am determined never to accept any other criterion."

To be continued.

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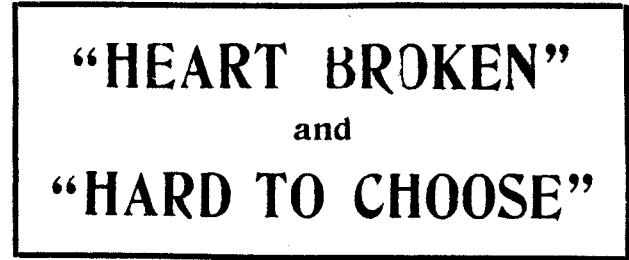
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One of the pictures is called

"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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