

# DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

"Then, said the Sibyl, "either of those herbs would be fatal, if no medicines—"

"Precisely," interrupted the veiled lady, in her natural voice; and therefore I want them, in order to make sure that it is neither of these the nurse shall give him in her ignorance. There are comforting simples which resemble them and having the real poisons, I shall be able to compare.

The Sibyl fixed a long and steady glance upon the stranger, whose face was so closely covered, and said:

"Something tells me that, whether you succeed in your present design or not, it is probable you will have a short and wretched life ended by a dreadful beginning."

"Ended by a beginning!" answered the veiled lady in a scoffing tone. "That is truly sibylline. I thought it was the end which ended things, and a beginning which began them."

"Go and see, woman of the darkened face," exclaimed the Sibyl in a tone so indescribably solemn, sincere and mournful, that the stranger drew her recinnum with a shudder around her, uttered an exclamation resembling a scream, and fled across the moonlit fields to the lonely highway.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Everything had happened as Charicles had predicted. About dawn, Paulus awoke free from delirium, recognized with wonder and joy his mother, pressed the hand of Thellus, and with a smile which threw a quick and new light upon the alterations made by illness in his face, declared that he was violently hungry. It is needless to say with what a cheerful strictness of obedience Aglais and Dionysius adhered amid the fulfilled predictions of Charicles, to all the directions of that famous physician.

First, with a certain solemnity, Aglais administered the proportion of medicine contained in that phial to which the Greek doctor had attached such importance; then they gave Paulus a light breakfast and the prescribed quantity of generous wine. Already he looked quite different. A tint like that of the inside of a seashell was stealing into the haggard countenance; and presently he threw himself back upon the cushions and slept like a child.

The sun was high when Paulus was once more awakened, eloquently pleading his hunger. But the stern mother and firm friend were inexorable. They called him tribune at every turn, and extorted slavish obedience to their sovereign authority. Aglais pouring out his dose of medicine with the air of an Eastern queen, and Dionysius handing it to him with the concentrated firmness of an executioner.

"But I am miserably hungry!" expostulated the young soldier.

"Be hungry, then, my son!" said Aglais smiling ferociously.

"You are to be hungry," added Dionysius, with cruel glee; and hungry you must be!"

It was the fourth day of these peaceful scenes and this happy convalescence the sun of winter was diffusing an unusual degree of brief warmth over the landscape; Aglais and Dionysius were seated in the large porch, on each side of Paulus's couch, which had been wheeled thither for him; Thellus and the freedman, Philip, were pacing the gravel esplanade in front; and in the distance a group of soldiers (some of whom limped) who had just taken leave of the young tribune, believing his recovery to be at last secure, were seen marching south-west to strike the continuation of the Via Nomentana, and so return to Rome.

Dionysius, as the reader will remember, had communicated to Aglais at Circaei the favorable decision of Augustus, and now they had been conversing about the immense wealth with the memory of his ancestors, the rank of a military tribune, and the just fame which he had acquired so quickly by talent and courage, when the stewardess came from the house into the porch and said:

"Do not let this young lord stay too long in the air my lady; it begins to be cold and damp early of an evening now. His room is ready."

"How ready?" said Aglais. "You were to turn it upside down, you said, sweep it, and rearrange it; you have not had time."

"The new woman had been helping," replied the stewardess; "I ought to

have presented her for your approval, my lady. My master, the poet Lucius Varius, wrote to me to command that I should regard you and your family as masters of this place and of all his household. Marcia, come hither!"

The new servant came, with broom in hand, in working dress as she was and made her obeisance. She was a plain woman, in middle life, with red hair and a nut-brown complexion; put seemed on the whole to have the air of one belonging to a rather better class than that which performed menial labor.

The Greek lady made a slight inclination of the head, and the new woman retired.

"It is still warm here," said Aglais, addressing the stewardess; "we will go in presently. I see by the water-clock that the time for the potion has arrived"—and she held up the phial, which she had carried from the room and kept in her hand—"bring me a cyathus?"

As Paulus took the potion, his mother, looking at the phial, remarked that it contained three more doses.

The day passed; the family had gone indoors, and Paulus had been listening to his mother as she played ancient Greek airs upon the six-stringed lyre, when a gentle knock was heard at the door. Melina, opening it, admitted the new servant, who entered bowing, closed the door herself, and, approaching Aglais, said:

"I am the destitute widow, my lady, of a decurion called Pertinax, well known to your brave son."

Here Paulus, who was not asleep, opened his eyes: "Is poor Pertinax, then," he asked, "among the slain?"

"Alas! tribune, yes," answered the red-haired woman; "it was with him, I understand that Germanicus Caesar quartered you before the late battles. Hearing of your dangerous wounds, and learning you were so near, I felt glad in seeking employment, which my destitution now makes unhappily necessary, I should have found it where I could wait upon and serve one whom my poor husband so much esteemed."

"I am sorry for Pertinax," said Paulus.

"I have not been able to give him the rites of sepulture," said the woman. "He fell, wounded, into the Adige, and his body has not been recovered. Ah! it is dreadful, lady," continued she.

"You have had no sleep now for several nights; your son is no longer in danger; take, and let your waiting-woman take, the repose you both greatly require, and I will watch instead of you to-night."

Aglais refused this offer with many thanks. The red-haired, brown-faced woman bit her under-lip, and looked down. "Well," she said, "I will no longer disturb you, or keep the young tribune from his rest. I will merely refill and trim the water-clock and retire."

She trimmed the clepsydra as she said, she folded up and placed tidily aside some cloaks and wrappers, she arranged a more symmetrical order a few vases and the lamps; and finally, standing with her back to the glass between her and the table on which the medicine was placed, secreted the phial in her robe, and left in its stead another phial resembling it in shape, in size, and in the quantity and color of liquid which it contained. She then withdrew.

Before daylight next morning the good old stewardess crept into the room as she had regularly done ever since Aglais and her waiting-woman had come to the house, and inquired in a whisper how the night had passed. She then told Lady Aglais that just as the servant, the red-haired woman, was going to bed overnight, a man had come to the house to say that some peasants had found the body of Pertinax the decurion; and the widow thereupon seemed to be much excited, and commissioned the stewardess to excuse her to the Greek lady, for she herself must

go at once and see that her brave husband's remains were honorably buried. She added that, the young tribune being out of danger, she could be of no further service, and would not return. She had then departed with the man, who seemed to be a shepherd. All this the stewardess mentioned in a whisper; and, her tale told, she retired.

Shortly afterwards, Paulus awoke. It was now the time prescribed for the potion, which had hitherto been administered to him with such palpable benefits. Melina brought the phial to Aglais, who carefully measured out the proper quantity. Then looking at her son with a loving smile, the mother, who was so justly fond and so reasonably proud of him, bade him take his last dose.

A beam of the morning sun was shining through the chamber, and Paulus, before swallowing the liquid, held it in the ruddy light, and gazed awhile at the ruby color brought upon the surface, as if his eye in some languid whim was ensnared and held captive.

At that moment the liquid was darkened by a shadow flung from the doorway. There, as if framed against the sun's rays, stood the majestic figure of an aged, tall, and beautiful woman, wearing a long, dark mantle, but with a staff, her head uncovered save by her snow-white locks. The Athenian lady uttered a slight cry. But Paulus, laying his hand upon her arm, whispered reverently:

"Mother, yonder stands the Sibyl! It is she who bent over me in the early morning of that formidable day, near the old Latin town, and told me that fire would subdue the ferocious beast."

As he spoke, the noble and majestic figure had advanced up the chamber, saying in Latin, with a slow bend of the beautiful head, "Ave!"


"Ave hospes!" returned Aglais. "I greet you once more said Paulus," in a low voice, and with a look of profound respect.

She took from him the goblet which he had still held in his hand, gazed into it earnestly, breathed over it for a moment, set it upon the table, and then muttered, "I again saw her only three hours ago—the woman of the two voices—and I knew her even in the starlight, although the swift carriage was bearing her to her door along the smooth road. I am sent to you in time my son. You need no more medicine; but this cup has death in it. You, lady, and your son are called for in Rome. Hasten to Rome Lose not an hour. The lioness has lost her whelp, and Caesar himself could not hold the prey. On the road you will learn more. And now, vale et salve."

"But why do you use the words of a perpetual farewell?" asked Paulus.

As he spoke, Dionysius, who had slept in a neighbouring apartment, entered noiselessly.

(To be Continued.)



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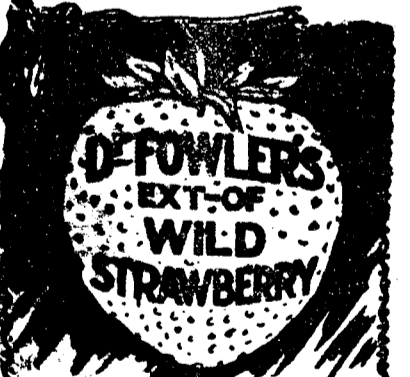
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