

DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

One morning, before they had left their bedroom to join the triumvir's early repast, they heard his voice at the door, bidding them come quickly down, for Dionysius, the Athenian, had just arrived from Rome, and had brought tidings of Paulus, the military tribune.

"Of Paulus the 'military tribune'?" echoed the mother and sister, when they were all seated together at their 'jantaculum'. "How well it sounds! It is the very style and title of his father!"

"Ay," quoth the triumvir, "the splendid lad makes my valiant brother's name ring once more. Once more we hear of Paulus, tribune of the soldiers; but this youth will soon be a legatus."

"Where is he? Why is he not here?" suddenly asked Aglais, turning with alarm to the messenger, their friend Dion.

"He is recovering from a wound," said Dionysius, "in a hut near Verona, where he is attended by your old freedman Philip."

"But with no doctor," cried the mother, "and without me?"

"Let us both go to Verona at once," said Agatha. "Melena can wait upon us."

"He has had the advice of a doctor, and of the best doctor living," said the Athenian. "Moreover, I have reason to believe that it would be dangerous for you and Agatha to undertake such a journey. Agatha, in any case, should not leave this castle till Paulus returns."

"But I can," said the mother; "my stay here is no additional protection to Agatha, and my presence with him may save the life of Paulus. You must await us here, my daughter. I will go this very day, taking our slave Melena. She understands how to nurse the sick."

As not objections to this plan were raised, the Athenian lady left the room to give orders. When she returned, Dionysius informed them that Germanicus Caesar had re-entered Rome before he was expected, having entirely dispersed the Germans; that Paulus had distinguished himself during the operations which had led to this result even more by his military prudence than by his brilliant courage; and that he, Dionysius, having learnt that his friend was lying ill near Verona, had persuaded Charicles to leave all his lucrative practice in the capital for the sake of visiting the wounded hero; that the two Greeks had travelled together to Veatia; and that Dionysius had himself seen Paulus, who was rapidly recovering; and he had then hastened back to bear the good news to Aglais and Agatha.

"But this is not all," added the Athenian; "I have something of importance to tell you about your suit for the recovery of that part of the Aemilian estates which once belonged to the brother of our host, the triumvir—I mean to your gallant husband. Your suit is over, and well over."

"Has Augustus made up his mind?"

"Yes, but in a curious manner. You have heard of Vedius Pollio of Posilippo. He would have lived much longer only for his lampreys; but now he is gone. He died rather suddenly, the other day, blaming the gods for taking him, and mankind for not keeping him. Although he has several kinsfolk, he has willed his Vesuvian villa, his pottery and all his treasures to Augustus. But the emperor, who for some time back, had known how Pollio's lampreys used to be fattened, was wonderfully disgusted by the device. Indeed, so far as taking personal possession of the property was concerned, he renounced the legacy with an oath. I thereupon, seized my opportunity, brought forward again the case of your son, and urged upon Augustus that if he could not restore to the last of the great Aemilian race the Aemilian castle on the Liris, he might, at least, confer upon him this Cumean estate instead. The emperor pondered awhile and consented, but yet with a singular qualification. The lady Plancina, wife of Cneius Piso, had, it seems, some claims upon old Pollio; and Augustus has ordered a patent to be drawn out by the lawyers, conferring the property upon Paulus as an imperial grant, but, should he die without an heir, conveying it afterwards to this said Lady Plancina."

"I have heard of reversions to the young, after the old should die," observed Lepidus, "but the disposal which you describe is indeed a curious caprice

on the part of my once colleague. Paulus must marry at once, and defeat the possibility of so whimsical a remainder."

That day, the Lady Aglais, taking the slave Melena with her, departed for Rome in one of Lepidus's old fashioned carriages, while Dionysius returned to the capital in his own chariot at the same time. Aglais was glad of such protection and company on the road. There were two or three mansions, or little post houses, and two imperial mutations, where they calculated on obtaining changes of horses, as Dionysius had taken the precaution of furnishing himself with the requisite "diploma" or warrant, from Lucius Piso, the governor of Rome.

Besides a trusty-serving man of Lepidus's who acted as coachman, a couple of grooms went with the lady the first stage, in order to ride back the triumvir's horses. In Rome, it was planned Dionysius would see that Aglais should obtain the readiest and best means of continuing her journey northward; and the Athenian even promised himself to escort her all the way, and to guide her to the very house in which her son was now regaining his health and strength near Verona.

Agatha wept bitterly at parting from her mother, for the first time, as it happened, in her whole life. Two incidents marked the afternoon of this first separation.

It was at midday that the sound of the receding wheels died in the distance and the aged Lepidus, patting the head of the fair girl, said:

"Come, niece, have fortitude! Your mother will soon return with our noble Paulus, and they must see you cheerful and happy, or they will blame me. Go to your apartments, and prepare for a little fishing excursion. I will call the slaves, have out our large galley, and give you a row up and down the shingle beach."

She laughed through her tears with a little gasp and obeyed. The castle was encompassed with gardens, and these again with an orchard, the whole being enclosed in a loosely-semicircular sweep of strong walls, with the sea-line as arc to the bow, almost like a fortification. A few Thessalian dogs, famed as watchers, with which Agatha had early established the most friendly and confidential relations, had been trained to range these gardens, and the whole enclosure, at will, and performed that duty or pastime very much with the air of disciplined soldiers.

While Agatha was dressing for the boat, she heard one of these dogs bay angrily; and when she descended into the garden, she saw her uncle in the act of shutting a heavy wooden door in the enclosing wall, and caught the following words addressed to a man on horseback of whom she only obtained a momentary glimpse.

"No more in my house after such a menace; but tell this to Tiberius you, if it will help your interest with him; tell him, I say, that very little is now required to induce Lepidus, once triumvir, to bequeath all his property to Tiberius Caesar. You fence with an old swordsman."

And while yet speaking, Lepidus slammed the door, and Agatha heard a horse gallop away.

"I've outgeneralled him, I think," muttered the old man, turning back into the garden.

"Who was there, uncle?" asked Agatha.

"One who shall not trouble us again while my brother's widow and daughter are under this roof," replied the triumvir. And he led Agatha to the boat.

Their fishing expedition was not very gay, and they were both content when it was over. It was evening as they re-entered the courtyard of the castle. They were met by an old slave, who held in Lepidus's establishment a place corresponding to that of a butler in modern families.

"I am sorry you were away, sir, an hour ago," said he to the triumvir.

"Just before you entered the boat, a knight, or more than a knight, whose horse was covered with foam, rode up to the door at the end of the garden, by which your grandson had departed, and asked for the Lady Aglais. When told she had left, he said hastily, 'What! in the ship for Spain?' When I mentioned for Rome, he asked had the young lady gone also? and when I said that the young lady and you, sir, were out fishing, he called for someone to hold his horse, and stated he would write you a letter. Searching for his tablets, he muttered that he must have left them in Rome. I offered to get him a paper, a reed and some cuttle-fish ink if he would enter the house. He did so looking much disturbed; and saying, as often as three several times that he had no one to send whom he could have trusted; and that he had been obliged to come himself; and that, if he did so at once, return, he should be Rissed. When he had written a few words, he folded up the paper, asked me for wax and taper, and sealed the letter with a signet-ring which he had on his finger. Then he held the letter so, without giving it to me, and at last tore it up."

"But," said Lepidus, "did you not ask who he was?"

"Yes, sir, and he told me he was a friend of the Lady Aglais and the young lady."

"Was he dressed as a military man?"

"No, sir; he had a sort of toga, only it was dark; the hood was brought over his head; he was belted. He was a handsome man under the middle age. But I was made certain of his rank by the voice, and by his general bearing."

"Well, did he leave no message?"

"None, sir; he merely said that it was very unfortunate he could see nobody, and especially that he could not speak to the lady, your sister. He then mounted his horse, and rode away swiftly."

"Here is the seal, I do believe!" said Agatha, picking up a piece of wax on the fragment of a letter.

"Ah!" said Lepidus, examining it. "How well I remember the hateful emblem. That used to be the signet of Maecenas, who brought my son to the block!"

"Uncle!" whispered Agatha, who also had looked at the seal, "come into the house, and I will tell you who this visitor was."

"You can go," said Lepidus to the servant, who retired.

"It was Velleius Patereulus, the Praetorian tribune," said Agatha. "That is his device—a frog, is it not? I have seen his notes before, sealed with that emblem. Some danger against which he would fain protect us is impending."

(To be Continued.)

Two neighbors were conversing the other day, when one said to the other:—"By the way, how is Mrs. Hogg, the invalid, going on?"

"Oh," replied the other, "they do not call her Mrs. Hogg now."

"Why, what do they call her?"

"Oh, they call her Mrs. Bacon now; she's cured."

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