

DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

"General," said Paulus, "the plan seems to me to be sound. I may mention to the other officers, my seniors, that Germanicus Caesar for the moment has discharged me from being his message-bearer and has appointed me to command the greater part of one legion, stationed at the marshy pass between the eastern shore of the Lake and the river; I shall therefore not share in your first battle. All I would ask of our general is to let me have sixty or seventy carpenters and artificers, one more balista for shooting stones, and three more catapults for darts and for the triax."

"What is your purpose?" asked Germanicus.

"My men," replied Paulus, "have already, by using the axe and spade, made their position very strong with felled timber and earth between the lake and the river. I expect the enemy to arrive in front of it shortly after my return to the post; and I am in great hopes, as they cannot at this season soon get upon our flanks or rear, and must attack us upon a very narrow face, that a handful of Roman soldiers will be as good as thousands of savages. But I should be still more confident of holding my ground if I could turn one of their flanks."

Here Paulus forthwith was interrupted by a general laugh, and Germanicus exclaimed:

"Are you so oblivious of the very first rudiments of fighting? You, with about three-quarters of one legion, turn the flank of fifty or sixty thousand barbarians!"

Again the grim old officers forming the council laughed loudly.

Paulus reddened, and with a slight bow, in a slow and deliberate way, said: "I want the artificers to construct me a large raft, on which I will place the balista and the three catapults. I have obtained two small rowboats. They shall be tugs to my raft. I will have the raft towed up the lake, on my left hand, a little beyond the front or face-line of my small fortifications, out of reach of their own right will be galled and any hand-darts from the shore, and well secured against arrows, but the shore will be within the easy and powerful range of our own instruments, or tormenta, upon the raft. When the Germans attack me in front, tormented from the lake. This is what I call turning their right flank. I only wish we could have a similar establishment on the Adige, to turn their left flank also."

A sudden and frank murmur of applause succeeded to the previous derision, and the officers expressed their approval of Paulus's proposal. Germanicus took the same view, and gave orders that our adventurer should be supplied as he had asked; after which the council separated.

We need not detail the military operations which followed. The Caesar won a great victory where, about eighteen hundred years afterward, Napoleon, by very similar strategy, gained several others. But instead of immediately returning round the southern end of the lake, as at first he had thought of doing, he found he had time to do better; he pursued the enemy into the Rhaetian Alps, dispersed them completely, and, making a short and sharp deflection over the top of Lake Bonacus or Guarda, marched back to the south along its opposite or eastern shore. This movement brought him, one evening, upon the rear of the other German army, who thought at first a large reinforcement of their countrymen were joining them; and being attacked before they could at all understand who the assailants were, and straitened on both flanks between the lake and the river, while a fortification which they had not yet been able to take by assault prevented them from flying southward, they sustained one of the most terrible overthrows that a Roman army had ever inflicted upon barbarians. Many were slain, many drowned, having taken to the lake. A considerable number swam the Adige, and escaped. The rest threw down their arms, and claimed the mercy of the victors. The Roman general immediately ordered the carnage to cease, the wounded to be removed, and the prisoners to be secured. Had Germanicus not made the circuit of the lake, but simply returned round its southern extremity, he would have attacked the front of

the second German army instead of its rear; and, its retreat being open, its losses would have been less. On the other hand, had Germanicus, with the plan actually adopted, been beaten, he must have been completely destroyed. But he felt morally sure of the victory, partly through the effects of surprise, which was a strategical reason; and partly because, in a crowded hand-to-hand encounter upon a confined field, no weapons were equal to the short Roman sword and large buckler; and this was a tactical reason. Indeed, the bayonet of modern warfare would not have been equal to those weapons without firearms.

A soldier in our times must have his rifle, and he could not carry this and a shield and a sword too; the bayonet, therefore, is merely more handy as an adjunct to what has itself become indispensable. Still, might it not be worth while to add to a modern army a thousand or two thousand or five thousand men, armed in the old Roman fashion, with one small revolver of the best new pattern stuck in every soldier's belt? This body of men could not be used on every occasion; but where, from the accidents of the ground, they could first be brought (unexposed to fire) close up to the enemy, and then precipitated upon the flank of a thin infantry line, they would double it upon itself, and destroy it before the bayonet-carriers knew what was the matter.

CHAPTER IX.

Torrents of rain had fallen during the night, and during the next forenoon, following this great battle.

Germanicus, at midday, when the rain had ceased, called the legions into parade; saw more than thirty thousand effective men mustered after his two battles and the severe forced march which had intervened.

The general thanked his army, and made a short speech, in the course of which he remarked that, although they had already received one bounty, they should certainly have another forthwith. This was cheered with a violent outbreak of shouting and admiration, as a very sweet piece of oratory; and a veteran file-leader turned to the soldier behind him, and remarked that Germanicus knew how to speak almost as well as Julius Caesar was reputed to have done. When the noise of their literary and critical enthusiasm had subsided, Germanicus proceeded to read a list of promotions.

He appointed two "legati," or generals, and directly afterwards called out, in a thundering tone, the name of Paulus Lepidus Aemilius.

No answer. There was a pause.

"Is Longinus the decurion here?" he next asked. Longinus was absent on account of a severe but not dangerous wound. No answer came, and another paused ensued.

"Is the decurion Thellus present?" cried the Caesar. "Adsum," answered Thellus, advancing a step beyond the ranks.

"You are wounded," said Germanicus. "How is it that no surgeon has extracted that broken dart from your shoulder?"

"Tis only the point of a little German thistle," said the stalwart arena-king. "I hardly felt it when it stuck in me during our great mowing-match yesterday." The legionaries laughed and cheered.

"What has become of the youth who commanded your intrenchment?" pursued the commander-in-chief.

"He is badly wounded, general; and, as I could not find where he lay till daylight, the rain had been drenching him all night long; I am rather afraid he'll go."

Germanicus ordered a doctor at once to accompany Thellus, and render what succor he could to the wounded

youth. He, moreover, bade Thellus inform Paulus that, on account of services to the army now assembled, both in securing a large treasure, which only for him would have been lost, and in contributing afterward to the success of the campaign, and all this as much by his prudence as by his courage, he considered him not only to have given a splendid example, but to have shown the qualities of a soldier whom it is for the interest of the troops to see promoted.

"The more authority persons like this youth, Paulus, possess," concluded he, "the better and the safer it is for the whole army." He thereupon declared Paulus from that moment to be a military tribune.

The announcement evidently pleased the troops.

Thereupon, Thellus led the doctor to a hut a mile away, whither he and two or three soldiers had carried Paulus. The young man was lying without motion or consciousness upon a rude pallet. The doctor looked at his wounds, which were numerous about the chest,—not one of them mortal in itself—but such as had caused great loss of blood. So many hours passed under the heavy rain of the preceding night, and the delay which had occurred before the wounds could be attended to, made the case dangerous. However, the medical officer ordered whatever his science suggested, and then left the hut, promising to pay another visit in the evening.

The commander-in-chief, not having anything to fear from the broken remains of the horde which he had dispersed, sent back most of the troops toward the south to take up their winter quarters in various towns. He had all the wounded who could bear removal removed; and for those whom he was forced to leave behind he built a wooden hospital, to protect which a small guard was assigned. He then took a few mounted servants with him and, crossing the Po by a bridge at Mantua, travelled very fast on horseback across the Apennines to Rome, whither Augustus and Tiberius had returned, and whither Germanicus was thus the first to bear an authentic account of his late operations.

A solemn triumph would readily have been decreed to him, had he not partly through modesty, and partly through a politic fear of yet further exasperating the suspicious jealousy and hatred of Tiberius) refused it peremptorily.

CHAPTER X.

The last we saw of Paulus's mother and sister was at Lepidus's Castle of Circaei, where Tiberius Caesar had just ascertained them to have taken refuge. The aged triumvir was not less disgusted than alarmed at the threat which the ladies (whom he was protecting under his roof) informed him had been uttered by his nephew Marcus.


However, as Marcus came no more, and the most undriven tranquillity for weeks together attended the lives of all at the castle, the thought of really embarking for Spain was abandoned by Aglais and Agatha, who would thus have postponed indefinitely their reunion with Paulus.

They now concentrated all their hopes and dreams upon that event, but could not always banish the idea that he might, alas! have fallen in battle. News travelled slowly; and how the war went none had told them.

(To be Continued.)

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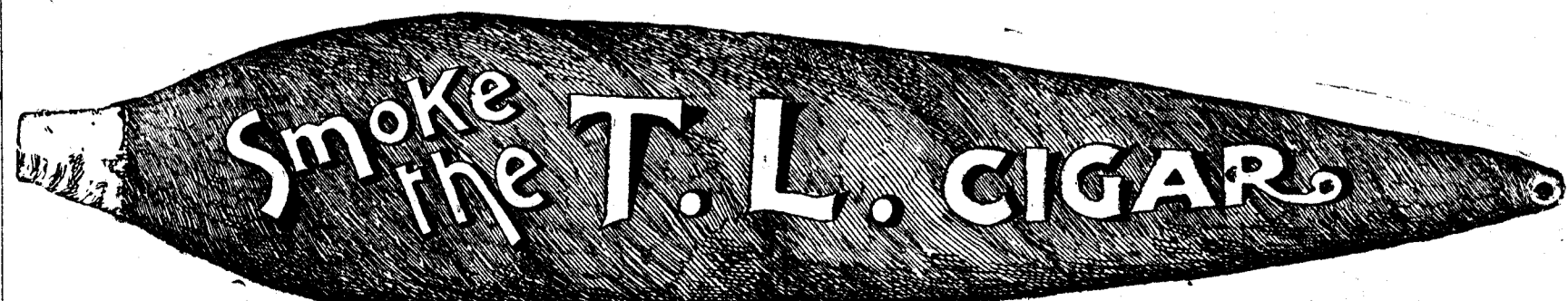
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