

DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

"What was the threat?" inquired the triumvir.

"He said," replied the mother, "that my daughter showed as much spirit as if she was in Spain, and he hoped she might display no abatement of it when Tiberius Caesar should learn that she was yet in Italy."

"And who," roared the aged triumvir, "is Tiberius Caesar! I have been the—equal of his master."

His head drooped, and he added, in a mutter: "I have no legions now! Alas, we all helped to substitute caprice for justice when we lowered the Roman Senate into a court."

Aglaïs was in terror.

"Your bounty," said she, "together with the means I myself retain, place us beyond the fear of want. I have determined to seek concealment in a little villa or cottage near Rome; and, assuming a new name, there to await Paulus's return, and the result of Dionysius's efforts in our behalf. The sooner we depart, the safer."

"Let us neither run," said Lepidus,

"into snares, nor fly, without need, from tranquillity. If Tiberius has learnt that you are here, your attempt to leave me and your seizure would be simultaneous events; if he has not learnt it, your departure is not yet necessary. But I will give all requisite orders, nevertheless, and make every preparation, within three hours. Be of good heart. The power of flying shall be yours, from this very afternoon. There—enough! What a fallen man is Lepidus! Once, a world shook at my name; and now my gallant brother Paulus's widow and daughter imagine they are not safe under my roof!"

Rising from the table, he threw himself on a couch, near which some jewels were displayed on a stand. He took up a little casket, and said:

"Niece Agatha, I may never see your pretty face again after you once leave the Castle of Circello; wear this for my sake."

And opening the casket, he drew from it a twisted chain of gold, to which hung a jasper locket encrusted with other precious stones, and enclosing a miniature of a woman.

"Thanks," replied the girl. "If you will yourself place it round my neck, uncle, it will make the beautiful jewel more dear to me."

"There, my little lady," cried the old man, complying with her request; "what an ornament, to be sure, you are to the trinket!"

"The trinket to me, you mean," said Agatha. "What is inside this locket?"

"You open it thus," replied Lepidus, pressing a little ivory knob, releasing a blade of steel, and disclosing four golden signet-rings, such as Romans of distinction used to wear on the third finger of the left hand.

"The story of these rings," continued the triumvir, placing them in a row on the table, "is equally brief and curious. This is on the left, representing Aphrodite armed, was Julius Caesar's: I mean, it is precisely like his favorite signet-ring, with which he issued commands that were obeyed from the Tigris to Britain. The other three, going still from left to right, are all exact copies of the three successive signet-rings used by our actual master, Augustus; the last, which is a good likeness of himself as he was thirty years ago, being his present seal of orders.

"The one next to it presents a portrait of Alexander the Great. That was Augustus's previous—his second affection. The first was the Sphinx; see the inscrutable head! This, his first fancy, was an instinct. No affection 'there,' I can tell you. At the time of our quarrel and reconciliation, just after the war with Sextus Pompey in Sicily, Augustus gave me, as a mere token of private regard, the duplicate of his own seal-ring. Of course I have never used it for public purposes. To do so would cost any man his head. The other two were sent to me by the artist, as duplicates of what he had manufactured for Augustus, because it was I who had advised his employment by the Princes. The man was called Minas; he was a Rhodian; he was always grateful to me for my recommendation."

When Lepidus had finished this concise little history, he replaced the rings in the locket, and Agatha, round whose neck the chain hung, promised,

with many affectionate thanks, to keep the gift for her uncle's sake. And so that night passed away till it was time to separate and retire to rest.

Several days went by; and young Marcus reappeared not at the castle.

Chapter VI.

While time rang a monotone at Circello, an incident occurred at Formiæ.

Velleius Paterculus, who occupied rooms near those of Tiberius in the Mamurra palace, was alone in his bed-chamber writing. It was close upon midnight when he heard a timid knock at his door. He expected nobody, and the hour was one when he might have been supposed, asleep. He waited a moment, in a half-belief that his imagination had deceived him; but presently he again heard the knocking. He called to whoever was there to enter; and Claudius, the slave, obeyed, closing the door again cautiously behind him.

"Sir," said Claudius, after coming close to Velleius on tiptoe, "being released from duty for the whole of this day, I spent it at Crispus's inn, where my intended wife is living. Among the lodgers or customers is a young knight Marcus, a grandson of Lepidus the triumvir—he that has the palace at Circaei. Do not ask me how I have learnt what I have learnt; but in the common room a debauched seafaring-man, who drinks and chatters, seems to have had some masquerading order to execute, the effect of which was that my master, Tiberius Caesar, was deceived; in short, adopted a false conclusion respecting the movements of certain ladies."

Here Claudius paused, in apparent alarm.

"Ay?" interposed Paterculus. "Well?"

"Well, sir," continued Claudius, with a sort of gasp, "it was inevitable for me to be cognizant—to know, to guess—or, if I may so say, to be at least almost aware—"

"Go on," said the Praetorian officer, smiling; "to be almost aware—"

"Of the plot, the arrangement for the safety of those ladies; and to know, or to guess, who contrived the scheme. The young knight whom I have mentioned—the knight Marcus—seems to have some spite against those ladies, whose safety is very dear to me."

"Why do you come to me upon this subject, my good youth?" said Paterculus.

"Because I think—and, if I be wrong, I pray you to pardon me—that you also, illustrious sir, feel kindly toward the heroic youth who saved my life, and toward his mother and sister."

"You think what is true," said Paterculus.

"Besides, the knight Marcus," resumed Claudius, "has conceived the idea that he can pay his court and make his way by telling Tiberius both where the ladies are and what an elaborate imposture has been played upon Tiberius. This last information will be almost more prized than the first. Tiberius is proud of showing men that none can either deceive him with impunity or deceive him long."

"Very true," said Velleius.

"And this Marcus further imagines that he can trace the plot about the ship to its author."

"How?"

"The seafaring-man—"

"The seafaring-man will be of no avail in tracing the author. Can you trace him?"

"I! illustrious tribune?"

"Yes—for Tiberius?"

"For Tiberius? No."

"Then the author can never be traced," observed the tribune.

"I could swear I am glad," said Claudius.

"Swear, then, by me and na, as you are a scholar," replied the scholarly soldier, "you have meant this report to me in kindness. But why are you afraid?"

"Well, for this reason," replied Claudius: "A female servant at the inn, who heard you pleading with Crispus, the night when the ladies first arrived,

and who has watched all your subsequent visits, and especially the last, although she could not overhear what you said in the ladies' room, has come to the conclusion that you are in love with one of them, she knows not which, and has told the young knight Marcus as much. He considers you the contriver of the ship stratagem; and hopes great things from the favor of Tiberius by being the means of detecting a traitor so nigh his person, and of so important a rank."

"Leave that to me," said Paterculus. And, patting Claudius on the shoulder, the student dismissed him, finished a paragraph of his "Historical Abridgment," and went to bed.

Two days later, Sejanus, Cneius Piso, Lucius, his brother, Governor of Rome, with Velleius Paterculus, and some other officers of high rank, were in attendance upon Tiberius Caesar, while various subordinates lounged in an anteroom.

"Germanicus demands," observed Tiberius, "that the Praetorians should be in readiness to repel the barbarians from Rome itself. Does not this look ugly?"

"Public alarm before the struggle," muttered Sejanus, "enchances public delight at the victory."

"He lays also," continued Tiberius, "great stress on the necessity of supplying him largely with money. We know the condition of the 'oerarium sanctum'. He despatched the youth Paulus to Rome, did he not, on money business for the army?"

As no one replied, Tiberius resumed:

"Well, Lucius Piso, I have nothing but approval to express concerning your measures for the protection of Rome. You can go. We'll all return to town to-night. Our public business is over for this morning."

Lucius Piso, with his brother Cneius, and all the officers, except Sejanus and Paterculus, now took leave, after which, at a sign from Tiberius, young Marcus Lepidus was admitted. He showed much artificial firmness in that terrible presence. But he was obliged to introduce, as forming part of merely domestic news, the information which the cunning that often attends baseness had convinced him would be secretly valued by Tiberius. He was obliged to do this because he instantaneously felt that Tiberius would acknowledge no interest whatever of his own in the movements of the ladies who were at Monte Circello; and presently when the youth detailed the stratagem of the two boys attired as females in the boat, he was astonished to see Paterculus glance with a meaning smile at Tiberius, and the latter nod in grave assent.

"I was the only person, you may remember, my Caesar," said Paterculus, "who argued that all these circumstances might be a blind. And as to the residence, meantime, of the gallant and noble youth Paulus Aemilius's kinswoman, you will also remember my remark."

"You thought it was Circello," said Tiberius, "and I could not believe you. It seems they are at Circello still."

"That last point," quoth Velleius, "is the only one which admits of a doubt. They have since had time to sail for Spain in good earnest."

"It is of no consequence," observed Tiberius. And he then, with a nod, dismissed the young Marcus.

The latter, rejoining Herod Agrippa and some other youthful courtiers, who would have rejoiced in the disgrace of a man of letters like Paterculus, astounded them by an account of the short interview, the very shortness of which was itself, indeed, also a subject of surprise to them.

Once more alone, Tiberius looked in deep thought from Sejanus to Paterculus, and was at length on the point of speaking when the latter anticipated him.

(To be Continued.)

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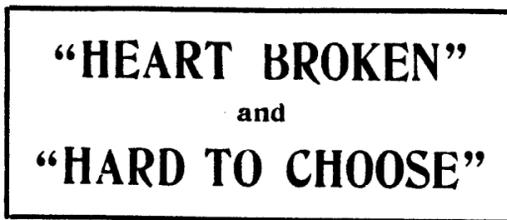
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"Heart Broken"

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.

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