

"I never saw them until just now, my commander and Caesar; they were here when we halted, and while we waited for our master, the favorite of the gods, these travellers seemed to be resting where you beheld them."

"As these gods favor me," said the other, "this is a fine youth. Can we not edit him? And yonder girl—have you ever seen my Sejanus, such eyes? But she is dead—pale. Are you always thus pale, pretty one, or are you merely ill? If but ill, as I guess, Charicles, my Greek physician, shall cure you."

Before the man had even spoken, the moment, indeed, when first his eyes fell upon her, Agatha had sidled close to her mother; and while he was expressing himself in that way to Sejanus, she returned his gaze with panic-stricken, dilated eyes as the South American bird returns that of a reptile; but when he directly questioned her, she, reaching out her hand to Paulus, clutched his arm with a woman's grasp, and said in an affrighted voice,

"My brother, let us go."

Paulus, in a manner naturally easy, and marked by the elegance and grace which the athletic training of Athens had given to one so well endowed physically, first, merely saying to the stranger, "I crave your pardon," (veniam posco), lifted Agatha with one arm and placed her in the travelling carriage. Then, while the freedman and the Thracian slave mounted to their bench, he returned to where his mother stood, signed to her to follow Agatha, and seeing her move calmly but quickly toward the vehicle, he took the broad-rimmed petasus from his head, and bowing slowly and lowly to the stranger, said:

"Powerful sir, for I observe you are a man of great authority, my sister is too ill to converse. You rightly guessed this; permit us to take her to her destination."

The man whom he had thus balked, and to whom he now thus spoke, merits a word of description. He appeared to be more than fifty years old. The mask of his face and the frame of his head were large, but not fat. His complexion was vivid brickred all over the cheeks, with a deeper flush in one spot on each side, just below the outer corners of the eyes. The eyes were blood shot, large, rather prominent, and were closely set together. The nose was large, long bony, somewhat aquiline. The forehead was not high, not low; it was much developed above the eyes and it was broad. A deep and perpetual dint just over the nose reached half way up the forehead. His hair was grizzled and close cut. His lips were full and fleshy, and the mouth was wide; the jaws were large and massive. His face was shaven of all hair. The chin was very handsome and large, and the whole head was set upon a thick, strong throat, not stunted, however, of its proper length. In person this man was far from ungainly, nor yet was he handsome. In carriage and bearing, without much majesty, he had nevertheless something steadfast, weighty, unshrinking, and commanding. His outer garment, not a toga, was all one color and material; it was a long, thick wadded silk mantle, of that purple dye which is nearly black—the hue, indeed, of clotted gore under a strong light. He wore gloves, and instead of the usual short sword of the Romans had a long steel stylus for writing on wax thrust into a black leather belt. This instrument seemed to show that he lived much in Rome, where it was not the custom, when otherwise in civilian dress to go armed.

As the reader will have guessed, this man was to be the next emperor of the Roman world.

"Permit you to take her to her destination?" he repeated slowly. "My Greek physician, I tell you, shall cure her. I will give directions about your destination." A slight pause; then, "Are you a Roman citizen?"

"I am a Roman knight as well as citizen," answered Paulus proudly; "and my family is not only equestrian, but patrician."

"What is your name?"

"Paulus Aemilius Lepidus."

The man in the black or gore-

colored purple glanced at Sejanus, who still unconcerned, stood with his splendid helmet in his left hand while he smoothed his moustache with his right; otherwise perfectly still, his handsome face, cruel mouth and intelligent eyes all alive with the keenest attention.

"And the destination to which you allude is—" pursued the man in black purple.

"Formiae," said Paulus.

"What relation or kinship exists between you and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, formerly the triumvir, who still enjoys the life which he owes to the clemency of Augustus?"

Paulus hesitated. When he had given his name, the younger of the two ladies had raised herself suddenly in the litter of ivory and gold, and fastened upon him a searching gaze, which she had not since removed. The other lady had also at that instant looked at him fixedly. We have already stated that, when Sejanus approached the group, he had not designed in any very cordial manner to salute or notice the second of the two gentlemen who had accompanied the litters on foot. This gentleman was very fallow, had hollow eyes, and a habit of gnawing his under lip between his teeth. He had unbuckled his sword, and had given it, calling out, "Lygdus, carry this," to a man with an exceedingly sinister and repulsive countenance. The man in question had now taken a step or two forward, and was standing on the left of Paulus, fronting the Caesar his shoulders stooping, his neck bent forward, his eyes without any motion of the head rolling incessantly from person to person and face to face, but at once falling before and avoiding any glance which happened to meet his. He looked askant and furiously at every object with an eager, unhappy, and malign expression. Paulus did not need to turn his head to feel that this man was now peering at him. Behind the two courtly palanquins, and beyond the shade of the trees, was a third litter still more costly, being covered in parts with plate gold. Here sat a woman with a face as white as alabaster, and large, prominent black eyes, watching the scene, and apparently trying to catch every word that was said.

Paulus, as we have observed, hesitated. The training of youth in the days of classic antiquity soon obliterated the inferiority of unreasoning, nervous shyness. But the strange catechism which Paulus was now undergoing, with all this gaze upon him from so many eyes, began to be a nuisance, and to tell upon a spirit singularly high.

"Have you heard my question," inquired Tiberius.

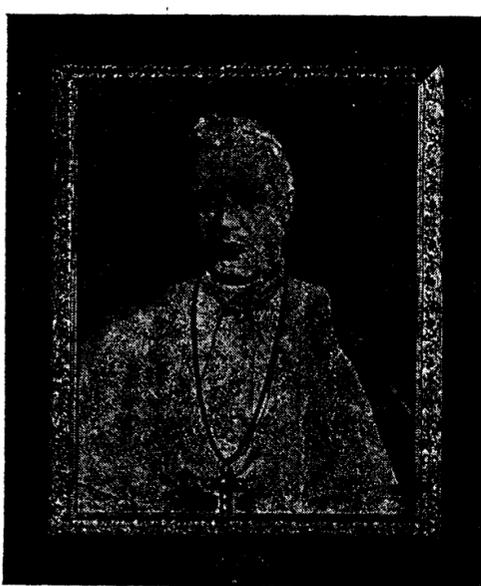
"I have heard it," replied Paulus; "and have heard and answered several others, without knowing who it is that asks them. However, the former triumvir, now living at Circaei, about forty thousand paces from here, is my father's brother." (Circaei, as the reader knows, is now called Monte Circello, a promontory just opposite Gaeta).

When Paulus had given his last answer, the ladies glanced at each other, and the younger looked long and hard at Tiberius. Getting some momentarily signal from him she threw herself back in her palanquin and smiled meaningly at the stooping, sinister-faced man, who had stationed himself in the manner already mentioned near Paulus' left hand.

"Your father," rejoined Tiberius, after a pause, "was a very distinguished soldier, and, as I always heard when a boy, he contributed eminently to the victory of Philippi. But I knew not that he had children; and, moreover, was he not slain, pray, at Philippi, toward the end of the battle, which he certainly helped to gain?"

"I hope," said Paulus, somewhat softened by the praise of his father "I hope that Augustus supposed him to have died of his wounds, and that it was only under this delusion he gave our estates—which were situated somewhere in this very province of Campania, with a noble mansion like the castellum upon the river yonder—to that brave and able soldier Agrippa Vespasianus."

(To be continued.)



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