

DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

"I guessed it," observed Charicles, "for in her ravings she called your name. Tiberius, learning that, after being lodged in Piso's house and visited by that infernal Dame Plancia (to soothe her), she had fallen from fit into fit, and paroxysm into paroxysm, and would surely die if not succored, commanded me forthwith to attend her. I went. Revived by me from a swoon and hearing who I was, she clung to me, she kissed me, she called me her mother's friend, called me countryman, townsman, and prayed and adjured me to save her. I sent everybody away, and, as delicately as I could made her understand that although I might have the courage, I had not physically the power, to take her at once out of that place and restore her to her mother and brother. But I told her I had just returned from Paulus and had saved his life; that he had acquired imperishable glory; that he and the Lady Aglais were coming straight to Rome, and twenty other things by which I cheered the poor child. She actually laughed and clapped her hands, till I could have wept to see her. Dionysius has suggested to me that I might save her by applying something to her face which would destroy her beauty, if she would agree to it; and I know she would and joyfully."

Paterculus winced, but said:

"Better even than that—"

"Too late," exclaimed Charicles, shaking his head; "you have not yet heard what to-day's council at Tiberius's has decided."

"And pray, what?"

"That no young lady has been brought into the Calpurnian house at all, as those ignorant soldiers, merely to injure Tiberius, have, by some designing and ambitious man (say Germanicus, been taught to believe; and to prove this, any respectable person is to be admitted to explore the house to-morrow."

"And where will Agatha be?"

"Where indeed?" echoed Charicles; "where my remedies won't avail her, I fear. The Tiber hides much."

"Who formed the council?" asked Velleius, his face deadly pale. "Was Sejanus there?"

"Perhaps he was," answered Charicles, "and perhaps he was not; but I tell you who was for certain there—the base-born slave Lygdus, who would cut a man's throat for a nummus aureus, a woman's for a scrupulum, and a child for a denarius."

"Have you told all this to Dionysius?" asked the Praetorian tribune.

"No, and I would not be so cruel as to tell him. He has already, through Germanicus, appealed to Augustus, but you know the emperor: and now age every day augments his habits of delaying at first, temporizing afterward, and forgetting in the end. No hope, no hope, no hope," cried the Athenian.

"But hope there is!" retorted Paterculus, whose peculiar gifts made him a pilot in extremity. "Dionysius has appealed to Augustus; and not knowing all you know, naturally trusts that some notice may be taken of his appeal. At least, mark you, it would not surprise him if there were."

"I miss your meaning," said the Greek.

"No matter," returned Paterculus; "you'll understand it to-morrow. I once wrote a comedy which failed upon the stage; but I will turn this tragedy into as amusing a comedy as ever was acted in real life."

"You will."

"As surely as I am speaking. Does Sejanus know that Dionysius has made some communication, through Germanicus Caesar to Augustus?"

"I should think he must; in fact I happen to know he does."

"Then forgive me for asking you to leave me now and bear a good heart."

When Charicles had gone, Paterculus summoned a trusty slave called Ergasilus, who could write, but whom he never before had employed as his secretary, and, ordering him to sit at a table where all the necessary materials were laid out, dictated the following letter to be indited upon a peculiar and unusual species of paper which he selected: squeamish; one cannot take you always into the details of indispensable transactions."

"I am content to be ignorant of them," replied the literary soldier.

"But I am told there is something so serious pending that Dionysius the Athenian has gone to Augustus, himself."

"May all Greeks perish!" said Sejanus in a bland voice; and just then an orderly entered and announced that

a messenger from the palace of Augustus Caesar demanded to see the Praetorian prefect. "Admit him," quoth the Praetorian prefect; and Dionysius, entering silently and gravely with a stiff and somewhat disdainful bow, handed to Sejanus a large letter written upon the paper used only by the highest officials, and waited for Sejanus to open and read it. As the prefect opened it, he held to the light a seal-ring which had been enclosed; and at sight of it he rose from his seat at once, and perused the communication standing. He then returned Dionysius's salutation with a slight touch of the Athenian's own distance and loftiness, and said:

"My august master shall be obeyed!" upon which the Greek withdrew without uttering a word. When he had gone, Sejanus sneered. "Augustus is too late," he said; "Lygdus is prompt, especially when frightened."

(To be Continued.)

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