

# DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

But none of the roof-doors were open that Wednesday evening. Something ailed the Holy City. Out of the hushed heavens, mysteries and a stern doom were brooding over Jerusalem. Already the fermenting germ of those dreadful factions which were to tear to pieces, with intestine rage, the whole Jewish body, while the city was writhing in the vain death-struggle against Titus, a few years later, had begun to make itself sensible to the observant. A fierce hatred of the Romans and an insane eagerness to re-establish the old Jewish independence had taken possession of certain youthful fanatics; and "possessed" indeed they seemed. On the one side, the Roman officers of the garrison, from Pilate down, had received anonymous warnings in the wildest style, requiring them to withdraw from Jerusalem within a given time, or they should all be executed in the streets, as opportunity might occur; on the other, the prefect of Syria had been earnestly requested by Pilate to strengthen the garrison; while in the city itself the soldiers were strictly admonished to keep to their quarters, to avoid late hours, and to hold no intercourse when off duty with the inhabitants. Leaves of absence were stopped. A few legionaries had been already murdered in the neighborhood of wine-shops, in the small winding alleys, and in places of evil repute, and no efforts succeeded in identifying the perpetrators.

But these were only the feeble and evanescent symptoms, destined to disappear and reappear, of a political and social phase which was not to become the predominant situation until another situation should have exhausted its first fury. This, the first, was to be the war of the Synagogue against the disciples of the Messiah, whom those disciples went about declaring to have risen from the tomb, according to his distinct promise; whom they went about declaring to have been already seen and heard and touched by themselves again and again.

No wonder, then, if Aglais and Paulus and Esther had discussed in hushed tones and in Greek the wonders and various portents attendant upon the supreme and central fact—that Resurrection of the Master which absorbed their whole hearts and minds, leaving no room for any other interest therein at this tremendous epoch—the grand turning point of human destinies and of our whole planet's history.

From the parapet against which they were leaning, they now gazed in silence upon the splendid scenes below and opposite. Across a maze of narrow streets they saw the mansions, the towers and that great supernal "Temple of God" all so soon to perish violently in a general, a complete and an irreversible destruction. They saw the play of light and shade upon one long treelined side of Herod's proud palace; they saw the ripple of quivering leaves reflected upon the white colonnades (and their tessellated shady floors) of Pilate's fatal house; and, while revolving thoughts and questions of unspeakable importance and solemnity, they all three suddenly beheld an acted picture a passing scene, voiceless to them, yet impressive, which blent itself into their recollection of other scenes, never to be effaced from the memory of mankind, which, not a week before, had been under those very colonnades enacted.

A woman in the attire of the Roman matron came quickly forth upon the first storey balcony in the house of Pontius Pilate, and leaning over the rail, waved her hand with an imperative gesture to some one below.

She was followed into the balcony more slowly by a man wearing the grand costume of an ancient Roman military governor, who held in his hand a sealed and folded letter, tied with the usual silk string. The man was evidently Pilate himself. He looked long and gloomily at the letter, and seemed to be plunged in thought. He even let what he carried fall at his feet, and did not appear to be aware of this for some moments. It was the woman who picked up the letter, and gave it back into his hand. Then Pilate leaned over the balustrade in his turn, and spoke to a man below in military costume, who was mounted on a powerful horse, and seemed to be equipped for travel. The soldier saluted, looking up, when he was addressed, and saluted again when his superior had ceased speaking; whereupon Pilate dropped the letter (a large and heavy despatch), which the soldier caught and secured under his belt,

inside the tunic, or "sagum," immediately afterward riding away at a canter. Our three friends saw Pilate, his head bent, and his eyes on the ground, slowly and ponderingly re-enter the house by a screen door, the same through which he had come out upon the balcony; but the lady, clasping her hands a little in front of her forehead gazed into the heavens with a face ashy pale, and with eyes from which tears were streaming.

It is a well known and for centuries universally received tradition besides being a fact recorded by one most respectable and trustworthy author (who besides, was not a Christian, but a Jew)—a fact without which the allusions to it in various authorities ancient together with Phlegon the Chronologer's subsequent recital of Tiberius's extraordinary conduct, would be unintelligible and unaccountable—that Pontius Pilate, harassed by the unappeasable reproaches of his wife, and something within his own bosom which allowed him peace no more until (sleepless, and unable again, unable for ever to sleep) he bequeathed, some years afterward by an awful death, whether intentional or not, his name to a great Alpine hill, a hill not henceforth named, or to be named, while time and mountains last, by any name but Pilate's among distant and then barbarous nations—it is well known, I say, that Pilate sent to Tiberius Caesar a long and minute relation concerning the life, the death and the disappearance from the tomb of him whom the Jews had crucified, together with a notice of the supernatural wonders wrought by him; his previous notorious announcement of his own intended resurrection; the directly consequent and equally notorious precautions taken to hinder it; the disappearance, in spite of this, of the body; the testimony of the soldiers that they were witnesses to the abstraction, which they were unable to stop, because they alleged that they were not witnesses of it (being buried in sleep); that, in fact,

their testimony proved nothing save the body's disappearance from the massively-sealed tomb (which would have stood a small siege); the failure of the Synagogue to account for the body; the account of it by the disciples; and, finally, the admission of the Pharisees that all their prophets had become unexplainable if this was not their Messiah, yet that such a conclusion was to them impossible, because he was to have been their king, and to have founded an empire extending through all nations and tongues; their stern and ever-growing disaffection to the Roman rule; the universal amazement, excitement and anxiety arising from the circumstance that, while neither the Synagogue nor the soldiers could throw any light upon what had become of the body, the disciples of him who had predicted his own resurrection explained the event openly and fearlessly by stating that they had again and again met him since the previous feria prima; that they cared for no protection except his alone; that the dead was once more among them—living and henceforth immortal—their Master and God; the ultimate Judge of this world, and the foretold Founder of an everlasting kingdom! Pilate added several strange and astounding particulars.

(To be Continued.)

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