

DION AND THE SIBYLS.

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

It was a fair evening in autumn, toward the end of the year eleven of our Lord. Augustus Caesar was a white haired, olive complexioned and somewhat frail-featured, though stately man of more than seventy-three. At the beginning of the century in which this was written, the face of the first Napoleon recalled to the minds of antiquaries and students of numismatic remains the lineaments, engraved upon the extant coins of Augustus. Indeed, at this moment there is in the Vatican a beautiful marble bust in excellent preservation, representing one of these two emperors as he was while yet young; and this bust almost invariably produces a curious effect upon the stranger who contemplates it for the first time. "That is certainly a beautiful artistic work," he says, "but the likeness is hardly perfect."

"Likeness of whom?" replies some Italian friend. "Of the emperor," says the stranger. "Sicuro! But which emperor?" asks the Italian, smiling. "Of course, the first," says the visitor; "not this one." "But that represents Augustus Caesar, not Napoleon Bonaparte," is the answer. Whereupon the stranger, who, a moment before had very justly pronounced the resemblance to Bonaparte to be hardly perfect, exclaims, not less justly, "What an amazing likeness to Napoleon! That sort of admiring surprise is intelligible. Had the bust been designed as an image of the great modern conqueror, there had been something to censure. But the work which, at one and the same time, delineates the second Caesar, and yet now after 1800 years recalls to mind the first Napoleon, has become a curious monument indeed."

The second Roman emperor, however, had not a forehead so broad, and commanding nor so marble smooth as Napoleon's, and the whole countenance, at the time when our narrative begins, offered a more decisively aquiline curve, with more numerous and much thinner lines about the mouth. Still even at the age which he had then reached—in the year eleven of our Lord—he showed traces of that amazing beauty which had enchanted the whole classic world in the days of his youth. Three years more and his reign and life were to go down in a great, broad, calm, treacherous sunset together.

After the senate had awarded the histrionic and purely make-believe moderation of its master—and in truth its destroyer—by giving to one who had named himself "Princeps" the greater name of Augustus, the former title, like a left-off robe, too good to be thrown away, was carefully picked up, brushed into all its gloss, and appropriated by a second performer. We allude, of course, to Drusus Tiberius Claudius Nero, the future emperor, best known by his second name of Tiberius. The first and third names had belonged to his brother also. Tiberius was then "Prince and Caesar," as the new slang of flattery termed him; he was stepson of Augustus and already adopted heir solemnly designatus. He was verging upon the close of his fifty-third year of cautious profligacy, clandestine vindictiveness, and strictly-regulated vices. History has not accused him of murdering Agrippa Vespasianus; but had Agrippa survived, he would have held all Tiberius's present offices. Aelius Sejanus, commander of the praetorian guards, was occupied in watching the monthly, watching even the daily decay of strength in the living emperor, and was pandering to the passions of his probable successor. Up to this time, Sejanus had been, and still was, thus employed. More dangerous hopes had not arisen in his bosom; he had not yet indulged in the vision of becoming master of the known world—a dream which, some twenty years afterward, consigned him to

cruel and sudden destruction. No conspirator, perhaps exercised more craft and patience in preparing, or betrayed more stupidity at last in executing, an attempt at treason on so great a scale. It was forty-six years since Sallust had expired amid the luxuries which cruelty and rapine accumulated, after profligacy had first brought him acquainted with want.

Ovid had just been sent into exile at Temesvar in Turkey—then called Tomos in Scythia. Cornelius Nepos was ending his days in the personal privacy and literary notoriety in which he had lived. Virgil had been dead a whole generation; so had Tibullus; Catullus, half a century; Propertius, some twenty years; Horace and Maecenas, about as long. The grateful master of the curiosa felicitas verborum had followed in three weeks to—not the grave, indeed but—the urn, the patron whom he had immortalized in the first of his odes, the first of his epodes, the first of his satires, and the first of his epistles; and the mighty sovereign upon whose youthful court those three characters—a wise, mild, clement, yet firm minister, a glorious epic poet, and an unsurpassed lyricist—have reflected so much and such enduring lustre, had faithfully and unceasingly lamented their irreparable loss. Lucius Varius was the fashionable poet, the laureate of the day; and Maecenas being removed, Tiberius sought to govern indirectly, as minister, all those matters which he did not control directly and immediately, as one of the two Caesars whom Augustus had appointed. Velleius Paterculus, the cavalry colonel, or military tribune, (chiliarch), a prosperous and accomplished patrician, was beginning to shine at once in letters and at the court. The grandson of Livia, grandson also of Augustus by his marriage with her, but really grand-nephew of that emperor—we mean the son of Antonia, the celebrated Germanicus, second and more worthy bearer of that surname—a youth full of fire and genius, and tingling with noble blood—was preparing to atone for the disgraces and to repair the disasters which Quintilius Varsus, one year before, amidst the uncleared forests of Germany, had brought upon the imperial arms and the Roman name. Germanicus, indeed, was about to fulfil the more important part of a celebrated classic injunction; he was going to do things worthy to be written, "while the supple courtier of all Caesars, Paterculus, was endeavoring to write something worthy to be read." Strabo had not long before commenced his system of geography, which, for about thirty years yet to come, was to engage his attention and dictate his travels. Livy, of the "pictured page" who doubtless may be called next to Tacitus, the most eloquent without being set down as quite the most credulous of classic historians—I venture to say so, pace Niebuhr—was over sixty-eight years of age, but scarcely looked sixty. He was even then thoroughly and universally appreciated. No man living had received more genuine marks of honor—not even the emperor. His hundred and forty-two books of Roman history had filled the known world with his praises, a glory which length of days allowed him fully to enjoy. Modern readers appreciate and admire the thirty-five books which alone are left, and linger over the beauties, quasi stellis, with which they shine. Yet who knows but these may be among the poorest productions of Livy's genius? A very simple sum in arithmetic would satisfy an actuary that we must have lost the most valuable emanations of the Paduan's great mind. Given a salvage of five and thirty out of a hundred and forty-two, and yet the whole of this wreck so marvelous in beauty! surely that which is gone for ever must have included much that is equal, probably something

far superior to what time has spared.

There is a curious fact recorded by Pliny the younger, which speaks for itself. A Spaniard of Cadiz had, only some five months before the date of our story, journeyed from the ends of the earth to Rome merely to obtain a sight of Livy. There were imperial shows in the forum and hippodrome and circus at the time; there were races on foot, and on horseback, and in chariots; fights there were of all kinds—men against wild animals, men against each other; with the sword, with the deadly cestus; wrestling matches, and the dreadful battles of gladiators, five hundred a side; in short, all the glitter and the glories and the horrors of the old classic arena in its culminating days. There was also a strange new Greek fence, since inherited by Naples, and preserved all through the middle ages down to this hour, with the straight, pliant, three-edged rapier, to wit-ness which even ladies thronged with interest and partisanship. But the Spaniard from Gades (Cervantes might surely have had such an ancestor) asked only to be shown Titus Livius. Which in yonder group is Livy? The wayfarer cared for nothing else that Roman civilization or Roman vanity could show him. The great writer was pointed out, and then the traveller having satisfied the motive which had brought him to Rome, went back to Ostia, where his lugger, if I may so call it, lay, (I picture it a kind of "wing-and-wing" rigged vessel); and, refusing to profane his eyes with any meaner spectacle set sail again for Spain, where his youth had been illumined with the visions presented to a sympathetic imagination by the most charming of classical historians. The Spaniards from an immemorable age are deemed to have been heroes and appreciators of heroes; and no doubt this literary pilgrim, once more at home, recurred many a time, long pondering, to the glorious deeds of the Fabia gens.

How many other similar examples Livy may have recorded for him we moderns cannot say. Before his gaze arose the unfinished column from the fragments whereof we have gathered up some scattered bricks and marbles. Niebuhr had to deal with a ruin, and he who ought to have guessed at and reconstructed the plan of it, has contented himself with trying to demolish its form.

Long previously to the date of our tale, Augustus, trembling under the despotism of his wife Livia, had begun to repeat those lamentations (with which scholars are familiar) for the times when Maecenas had guided his active day, and Virgil and Horace had beguiled his lettered evenings. Virgil, as is well known, had been tormented with asthma, and ought possibly to have lived much longer but for some unrecorded imprudence. Horace, as is likewise well known, had been tormented with sore eye-lids—and with wine; he was "blear-eyed," (lippus). Augustus, therefore, used to say wittily, as he placed them on each hand of him at the symposium, which had been recently borrowed in Italy from the Greeks, but had not yet degenerated into the debauchery and extravagance into which they afterward sank more and more deeply during successive reigns, "I sit between sighs and tears." In suspiriis sedes et in lachrymis. But he had long lost these so-called sighs and tears at either hand of him. The sighs and tears were now his own.

(To be continued).

YOUTHFUL PHILOSOPHY.

A little girl wrote the following essay on boys: "Boys are men that have not got as big as their papas, and girls are women that will be ladies by and by. When God looked at Adam He said to Himself: 'Well, I think I can do better if I try again, and He made Eve. Boys are a trouble. They wear out everything but soap. If I had my way the boys would be girls and the rest dolls. My papa is so nice I think he must have been a little girl when he was a little boy. Man was made, and on the seventh day he rested. Women was then made and she has never rested since.'"

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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.

The two pictures together will people any room with six happy little girls, so glad to be alive, so care-free, so content through the sunny hours amidst their flowers and butterflies, that they must brighten the house like the throwing open of shutters on a sunny morning.

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