

DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

CHAPTER XIX.

At this period of the reign of Augustus there were in his court several great parties, or rather several other courts; for each party had a court of its own. We have alluded to some of them already—that of Antonia, that of Germanicus, that of Julia; and there were yet others. The most powerful of them was the party of Tiberius, who certainly may be said to have kept a very magnificent court before he was sole sovereign.

In this court, the prime favorite, the confidant of the next emperor, both before and after he ascended the throne, the depository of all his secrets (if any man then alive knew them all), was the smooth and polished, but stern, impene- trable, and subtle Sejanus, commander of all the Praetorian guards.

Velleius Paterculus was numbered with, and certainly belonged to the same party. He owed his promotion to Sejanus, who, for some reason or other was very fond of him; and it is most singular that, while this circumstance was not only known to Tiberius, but had opened for Paterculus the way into that prince's favor, yet Velleius contrived to remain to the last a friend of Sejanus, without either sharing his ruin or even incurring the suspicion of his master—a master who was nevertheless, perhaps, the most suspicious tyrant that ever vexed mankind.

Striking differences of character often subsist between men who entertain a strong friendship for each other. Velleius's history (although frequently apologetic rather than impartial) discloses the writer to us as a man who, for a pagan, had no mean notions of what honor and morality prescribe. On the other hand, the single fact we have mentioned is sufficient to prove that he was a consummate master of all the wary, precautions, the quick contrivances, and the supple dexterities by which alone an actor in such a sphere could at once continue to hold high office and yet keep his head upon his shoulders. One Englishman and two Scotchmen out of every three, would infer that such a head must have been worth keeping—either a good one, or good for nothing; and classic scholars know which.

A third remarkable personage, as the reader is aware, then in the court of Tiberius, was the physician whom Tacitus mentions as being signally eminent in his profession, and who so uninter- ruptedly maintained the confidence of his employer that, long afterwards, the same historian tells us he was at that sovereign's death bed. We mean Charicles.

Shortly after noon the day succeeding the events related in our last chapter, Velleius Paterculus sat working in his own private triclinium at his quarters in Rome, when a slave announced Charicles, who was at once admitted. The door being closed, Paterculus perceived that the Greek doctor was unusually discomposed.

"There has just been held a council," said he, "at the palace of Tiberius, about this slaughter of the troops yesterday, these cries for the liberation of the young Athenian lady, the mysterious movements of gladiators in the city, the disaffection of the army, the known fact that Germanicus Caesar believes that Tiberius is the contriver of the abduction, the appeal to Augustus which Germanicus declares he will make."

"But is there any young lady abducted?" interrupted Paterculus.

"My friend," said Charicles, impressively, "in a case like this a doctor in my position knows everything. Such hypocrisy ill becomes you; it would suit a stupid man. Do you suppose I come here to betray you? What service could that render me? What motives govern me in the present matter, think you? The family now in such dire affliction is Greek—nay, Athenian, and I too am an Athenian. The Lady Aglais and I have been friends these five-and-twenty years. We played together as children on the banks of the Ilissus. Do you think I am a man made of steel springs and lambskin by a Rhodian machinist? Of that lady's son, the heroic, the glorious youth, Paulus, I have saved the life. I left Rome and travelled night and day to North Italy to wait upon him. Of his beautiful, interesting, lovely, and lovable sister I have also saved the life; and by all that is sacred I hesitated whether I should not poison her instead, and end her woes."

Paterculus rose, and paced the room in grievous agitation. Charicles added: "Dionysius, my friend and fellow-townsmen, of whose fame I am more

proud than I am to be Caesar's physician, would lay that Phoebus-like head of his under the executioner's axe to save any member of this dear and sorrowing family from harm; and yet, I, his friend and their friend—I an Athenian, who have already saved both the brother's and the sister's lives—am so mistrusted by you, that you dare not show before me the interest you really feel for them."

"You wrong me," said Paterculus, "but without meaning harm, men sometimes repeat."

"Bah!" cried the Athenian; "this case is far too serious and terrible for idle gossip on my part. Besides, whose discretion need be less doubted than that of a doctor of my standing?"

"Well, then," said Paterculus, "let us sit down and consult. Take that cushion. We will hold a council as well as Tiberius; and to prove I do not misdoubt you, I will begin it by confessing that I love this very damsel Agatha, and if she can be extricated from her present horrible position, I mean to ask her to be my wife."

(To be continued)

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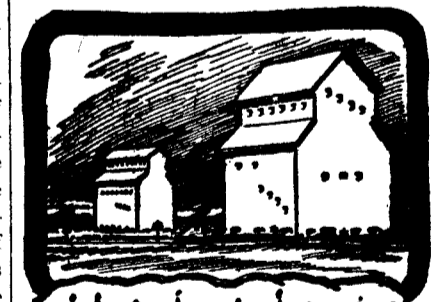
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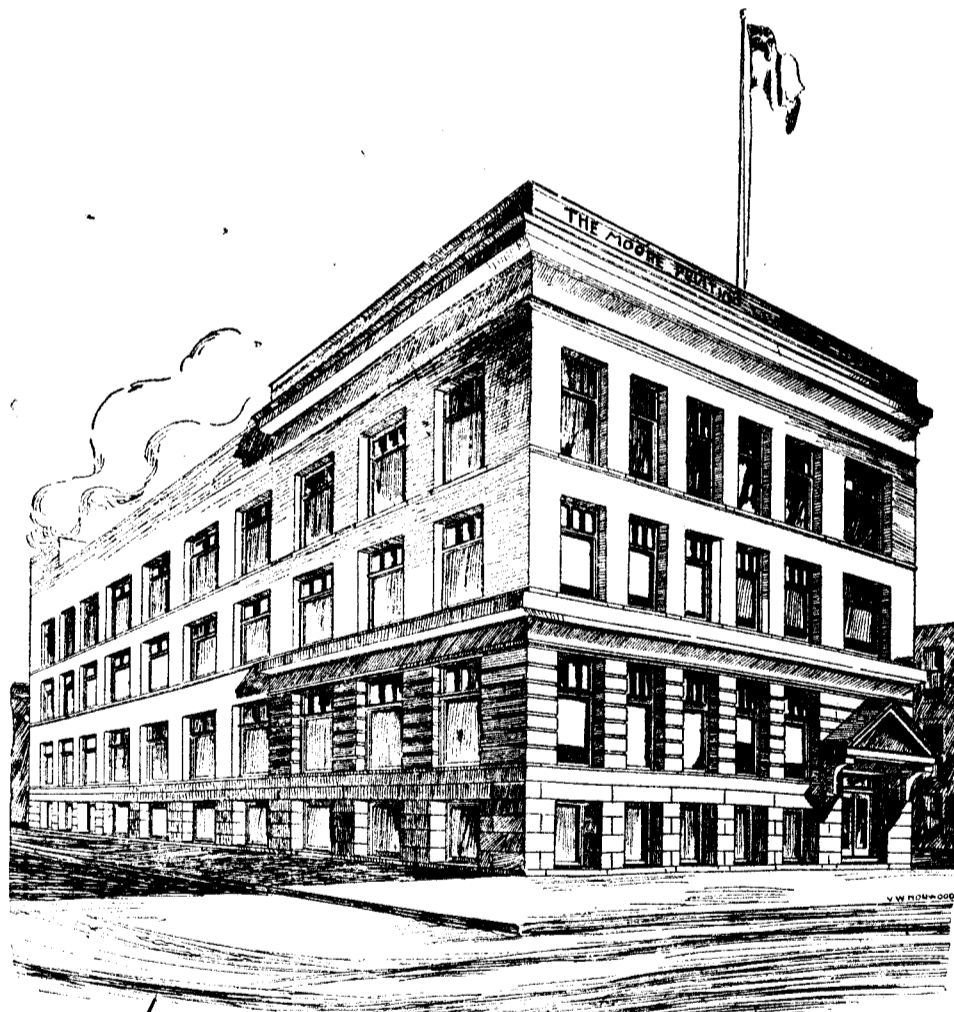
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