

DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

Paulus and his mother were conversing as has been described in Greek, while the serving man, despite his ignorance of that language, had the air of half-following the drift of what they said, and of catching the main purport of it with wonder and awe. There was, indeed, at that moment, only one topic in all Jerusalem. He who, less than a week ago had been crucified, and with the time of whose coming (as much as with all the particulars of His life, teaching, works and death) the old prophecies were found more and more startlingly, circumstantially, unmistakably, the more they were studied, questioned and canvassed, to agree, point by point, down to what would seem ever trivial details (indicated as if merely to emphasize the incommunicable identity of the Messiah)—he had himself stated, distinctly and publicly, that by his own power, he would rise from the dead in three days; that, in three days after he should be "lifted up" and be made "a spectacle for men and angels;" in three days after they should have destroyed it, he would rebuild the holy temple of his body. And now these rumors—these minute, these positive accounts—had he, then, really re-appeared, according to his word and promise? Was it possible? Was it the fact?

Many had, on the previous Friday night, stated that, of a verity, they had seen their deceased parents and relatives. Again, on the Saturday, many declared, amid awe-stricken groups of listeners, that the unknown land had sent them its visitants, in various places, under various aspects, to startle the guilty city; which, after killing the King's messenger-servants, had just killed the King's Son, who had come, as had been a thousand times announced in the very fulness, the exact maturity of days, to deliver the final embassy to men.

On that Wednesday evening, there was, in truth, but one theme of conversation, one subject of thought, all through Jerusalem, and already far beyond Jerusalem; among the poor and rich, high and low, natives and strangers, the robbers of the Syrian hills and Arabian deserts, the dwellers in the city, the travellers on the roads and at the inns, among Sadducees, Pharisees, Romans, Greeks, Egyptians and barbarians.

No wonder, then, if the humble serving man, as he watered the flowers, penetrated the drift of the mother's and son's discussion. For him and such as he was the message. The poor Syrian had once, for a while, rendered occasional out-door service to the family of Lazarus; and he had known Lazarus in three states—had known him living, dead, again alive. After days of death in that fierce climate, where inanimate flesh putrefies fast, he had beheld Lazarus at the call of one upon whose lineaments he gazed, at the time, with unconscious adoration, come forth, not merely from death, but from incipient decomposition, back into balmy life—

Now, was he who, in that instance, had allowed it to be perceived, and felt that he was really the Lord of life, whom death and rottenness were manifestly unable to disobey—was he himself, as his disciples declared he was, living again among them, since the morning of the last Sunday (the feria prima), according to his own public prediction and distinct promise? Was he not? Was he?

Aglais and Paulus had heard more than one circumstantial account of this, his reappearance according to that, his promise. By this one and by the other he had been met. They had gazed upon him, spoken to him, heard him in reply, touched him, in such a place, on that bridge, that road, in such a garden. He had walked conversing with them, had sat with them at meat, as was his wont, had then vanished.

Where was his body, over which the Pharisees had set their guard of soldiers? Not in the grave. No; but where? Had the Pharisees accounted for it? Could they tell what had become of it? Could the soldiers? The disciples could, and they did.

"Mother," said Paulus, "do you know what those soldiers say? One of them once served in a legion which I commanded. Do you know what they say?"

"You mean," replied Aglais, "about their inability to hinder the abstraction. What?"

"That an act to which they are the only witnesses could not be stopped by them, because of it they were not witnesses, being buried in sleep."

"Consistent," said the Greek lady, "Yes, but a much weightier fact is that expectation of the disciples to prevent the realization of which the Pharisees set their guard."

"What expectation? And why weightier?" asked the General.

"That their Master would keep his word, and fulfil his prediction of rising from the tomb on the third day. If they saw him again alive within the promised time, they and the people would worship him as God; but, if the Pharisees could show the body on the third day, or could even account for it, that belief would die."

"Clearly," answered Paulus, "the disciples expected to see him again on and after the third day, waiting for his word to be fulfilled."

"Now, Paulus," pursued Aglais, "suppose this expectation of theirs not fulfilled; suppose that not one of those waiting for his word was conscious of any reason for believing it to have been realized—"

Paulus interrupted his mother.

"There is only one possible way in which they could be induced to believe it realized—namely that he should be seen again alive."

"Quite so," she resumed. "But suppose that not one of those who expected to see him again has thus seen him. How then would they feel on this Wednesday morning?"

"They would feel that the expectation, which he had solemnly and publicly authorized them to depend upon was idle and vain; they would not and could not by any possibility feel that they had, in this great particular, reason to believe his word to have been kept. They would be discouraged to the very last degree. They would, of course, hide themselves. I would do so myself, and I believe I am no coward. In short they would feel a reason to hope in his protection, or to expect that his other and still mightier promises concerning their own future life eternal would by him be realized. They would not incur any inconvenience, or brave any danger, or take any trouble, or risk any loss—"

It was Aglais's turn to interrupt. "Now, is this their attitude?" she inquired.

"The reverse, the opposite, the contradictory of their attitude."

The lady continued in a low tone:

"If expecting, upon his own assurance, that some among them should see him," she asked, "not one of them had seen him, would they, at this moment, have any motive for bringing upon themselves the tortures, insults, shame and death which he underwent, and all this in order to induce others to believe apparitions and a resurrection which in their own hearts they did not themselves believe, and for believing which they were, moreover, conscious that they possessed no ground no reason, no pretext?"

A sweet, ringing, vibrant voice at their side here said:

"And in order by deliberate, circumstantial lying, of an awful and blasphemous kind, to please the God of truth; and to compensate themselves by his protection above, in a future life, for the present and immediate destruction which they are incurring among the Pharisees and the men of power here below."

Looking round, they beheld Esther of the Maccabees.

(To be Continued.)

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