

DION AND THE SIBYLS.

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

CHAPTER IX—Continued.

"Ah! they are gone," murmured Agatha; "they do not like you to gaze so at them."

"It is but a Roman," returned Plancina, "looking at barbarians. They always shrink in that curious manner. And why this Greek lunacy?" muttered she; "and why this Attic mania?"

"Attic, what?" asked the half-Greek girl.

"Nothing, my dear," replied Plancina; "only you are not Greek, you know; your father's race and the name you bear settle that question; your very mother is now, and has long since become, a Roman citizen; you must always prefer Rome to Greece; never forget that rule; or you and yours will perish."

Agatha opened wide the ingenuous young eyes, and seemed to be more seriously alarmed.

Plancina smoothed her pale brows, which had been frowning; and continued with a stern smile,

"I am only giving you a friend's warning. Your mother and brother have a suit to urge at court. There exists a pestilent Greek faction which are all doomed to destruction; tell your mother that you must all beware of being mixed up with them, and you will escape their perdition. A Greek, like your mother, with something to ask, is peculiarly liable to make the mistake of seeking Greek friends. If she do, she is utterly lost, however powerful may seem the prince who patronizes the accursed cabal."

Agatha shrank and trembled, murmuring like an echo Plancina's last adjective—*exitiabilis*.

"Do not stare at me so, my little dear," continued Plancina. "There is the Prince Germanicus. Only for him—everybody knows it, and everybody says it; the thing is no secret—Piso, my husband, would be now prefect of Syria; and like Crispus Sallust, when I was a little girl, would have recovered ten times the fortune out of which he has been cheated at dice. I am called a rash, violent, and an untamable woman. The moment, however, that any body gives you any information about court parties and political factions, everything I am saying will be mentioned. I do not hide my disgust. Foreign barbarians of all sorts swarm; they creep through postern doors; they privately influence all the destinies of that world of which Romans have the name publicly of being masters. We are trodden under the feet of Greeks, Jews, and Chaldeans; the first beat us by genius, by eloquence, and artistic skill, by general intellectual force and subtlety; the second by superstition inspired obstinacy, by incredible and unspeakable importunity, by steadfastness in sordid servility, by sorcery, divination, necromancy, and delusion; not all delusion, I grant you; for I myself have seen the demons of Thrasylus, the Babylonish Greek."

"What!" cried Agatha, "seen demons? And what does a Babylonish Greek mean?"

"A Greek initiated in the Babylonish mysteries."

"And who is Thrasylus?"

"A magician."

"What is that?"

"A man who calls demons and spirits of the air, as you would call your pet birds, and they come to him."

"May the unknown God love me!" cried Agatha, shuddering.

"What are the demons like?"

"Not like our sculptures, believe me," answered Plancina. "I dare not tell you; I have seen what no words can say."

She paused, shrugged her shoulders, and then added,

"Some forms were like the human, with red fire in the veins instead of blood, and white fire in the bones instead of marrow; eyes they possessed that had no comfort in them. They had the air of being utterly without interest in any

thing, only that their eyes were filled with fear; yet it seemed to me with knowledge, too: unspeakable fear, immense knowledge; wells and pools they appeared, full of fear and knowledge. When they glanced upon you, there were pale rays of hatred strangely combined with an expression of indifference, fear, knowledge, and hatred. If you looked at the eyes, when they looked not at you, you saw nothing but an expression of fear and knowledge; but when they did look at you, you saw fear, knowledge, and hatred too. All these facts mocked without smiling, and scoffed without enjoyment. Something, I thought, was dripping down the wan cheeks, and there was a look of fixed surprise long ago, of long-past astonishment—the trace left, and the feeling gone. The emotion of boundless amazement had once been there; the signs of it were left all over the countenance, but, if I may so speak, petrified—an indelible scar, an ineffaceable vestige. The character of the countenance was that of a dead astonishment—the astonishment was dead; it was no longer an active sentiment. It had been some boundless wonder; the greatest which that creature had ever experienced, and the event which had caused it had apparently been the most serious which that being had ever known."

"What a truly tremendous description!" exclaimed Agatha.

The other made no reply; and before any further conversation could occur between them, a young man, in the dark-brown habiliments of a slave, entered the garden from the inn, and after a hasty glance in various directions, approached the bower. His features were very good; he was well made, of a pleasing address, and had a look of uncommon intelligence. He possessed, in a small degree, and a humble way, that undefinable air of elegance which mental culture sheds over the countenance; but with this advantage he betrayed certain symptoms of awkwardness and timidity. Standing at a little distance from the door of the arbor, he made a low bow to Plancina, and said he was the bearer of some commands.

"Commands from whom?" she demanded.

He answered, bowing low again, by merely stating that his name was Claudius.

Plancina instantly rose, and took leave of Agatha, enjoining her not to forget the warnings and counsels she had given. Agatha then saw her hastily reenter the hotel, followed by the handsome slave. Thereupon, buoyantly recovering her spirits, which the presence and the words of this woman had depressed, she ascended the staircase to the landing overhead, where she was joined by her mother from the room within.

Agatha immediately told Aglais everything which had passed between her and Plancina.

"I don't think, my dear child, we shall be likely to trouble her in her nice house among the willows and beeches of the Viminal Hill," said Aglais; and as Paulus now came out upon the landing, a second edition of the narrative was produced for his information.

"Germanicus," said he, "is more like the last of the Romans than in any sense reprehensible or degenerate in his tastes. His love for Greece and his admiration for Athens are an honor to his understanding. They are nothing else. This has nothing to do with preferring barbarians and barbarous influences. My education, *edepol!* has to be completed; but I am educated enough to know that Rome goes for schooling to Greece as much as ever she did. Was not Julius Caesar himself what they call a *Graeculus*? I rather think he was even deeper than Germanicus in Greek lore; but, therefore, all the more fitted for Roman command. The Romans continued to be barbarians long after the Greeks had

become the teachers of the world; and were it not for Greece, they would be barbarians still. As for warning us not to dare to make friends for ourselves of this person or that, or of any who appreciate intellect—for this means to appreciate Greeks—it is like warning us to remain friendless, in order that we may the more easily be crushed. It is the wolf's advice to the sheep, to send away her dogs; but I am more dog than that myself. This pale, beetle-browed lady ought to have enjoined those to be timid who know how. Dare do this! Dare do that! For my part, I am not afraid to do anything that I think right."

His mother pressed Paulus's hand affectionately, and his sister's high spirit, which had cowered under the dreadful conversation of Plancina, shone in her eyes as she smiled at him.

CHAPTER X.

Meanwhile, in the large room within, breakfast had been prepared for the wanderers on a table drawn opposite to and near the open folding-doors of the arbor where they were conversing; and the landlady now summoned them to partake of that repast.

After breakfast, at which Crispina herself waited on them, Agatha asked where Benigna was.

The landlady smiled, and stated that a friend of her daughter's had called, and was doubtless detaining her, but she would go at once and bring the girl.

"On no account," interposed Aglais; "Benigna, I dare say, will unfold to my daughter all about it by and by. Unless you have some pressing business to take you immediately away, will you kindly inform us of the news, if there be any, and let us sit in the arbor while you tell us?"

Accordingly they went into the bower on the landing overlooking the garden, and Crispina told them the news.

In the first place, she told them that the emperor's expected visit to Formiae was delayed on account of the state of his health. It was now thought he would not arrive for two or three days more, whereas he was to have entered Formiae that very morning. Crispina added that it would not surprise her if he did not come for a week yet.

In the second place, Queen Bernice with her son, Herod Agrippa, and her daughter Herodias, who were to have occupied those very apartments, had arrived at the inn, but had now gone forward.

"Mother," said Agatha, "those must have been the persons who, an hour ago, looked into the arbor below this one, when that pale woman was talking to me. The elder called the younger Herodias."

"The same," continued the landlady. "Finding that they cannot be accommodated in my house, young Herod has proposed to proceed with all their train to Formiae, where—royal though they be—they will be nobody's guests; and as there is not a place of public entertainment in that town, and the weather is delightful, he says they will pitch two or three tents, and one splendid pavilion of silk, on the verge of the green space outside of Formiae, where the games are to be held."

"Only fancy!" cried Agatha, clapping her little hands.

Thirdly, Crispina told them, with fifty gossiping details, that the entertainments to be given in honor of the emperor and the opulent knight Mamurra, from whom the town took its name, would be stupendous. Formiae, we may mention, was frequently called *Mamurrarum*, or *urbs mamurrana*, from the colonel or chiliarch Mamurra. This gentleman had devoted his boyhood and youth to the cause of Julius Caesar, and afterward of Augustus in the civil wars; had gained considerable military reputation, and, above all, had amassed enormous wealth.

(To be Continued.)

Lady: "Why don't you go to work? Don't you know that a rolling stone gathers no moss?"

The Tramp: "Madam, not to evade your question at all, but merely to obtain information, may I ask what practical utility moss is to a man in my condition?"

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One of the pictures is called

"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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