

DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

Says Paulus in a low voice to Dion, "You have high credit with the emperor, illustrious Athenian; and surely if you were to tell him the whole case, he would interfere to check the cruelty of this man, this Tiberius."

"What, Augustus do this for a slave?" replied Dion mournfully. "The emperor would not, and by the laws could not, interfere with Vedius Pollio, or any private knight, in the treatment or government of his slaves, who are deemed to be the absolute property property of their respective lords; what chance, then, that he should meddle, or, if he meddled, that he should successfully meddle, with Tiberius Caesar on behalf of an offending mance? And this too for the sake, remember, of a low-born girl? Women are accounted void of deathless souls, my friend, even by some who suspect that men may be immortal. By astuteness, by beauty, not beautifully employed, and, above all, by the effect of habit, imperceptible as a plant in its growth, stealthy as the prehensile ivy, some few individual women, and Julia, Augustus's daughter, have acquired great accidental power. But to lay down the principle that the slightest trouble should be taken for these slaves, would in this Roman world raise a symphony of derision as musical as the cry of the Thesalian hounds when their game is afoot."

Paulus, buried in thought, stole a look full of pity toward the further end of the apartment. "Slaves, women, laws, gladiators," he muttered, "and brute power prevalent as a god. Every day, noble Athenian, I learn something which fills me with hatred and scorn for the system amid which we are living." He then told Dion the story of Thellus and Alba; he next laid before him the exact circumstances of Benigna and Claudius; relating what had occurred that very morning, and by no means omitting the strange and wonder-fraught conversation at the door of the palace, after which he added:

"I declare to you solemnly—but then I am no more than an un-instructed youth, having neither your natural gifts nor your acquired knowledge—I never heard anything more enchanting, more exalted, more consoling, and to my poor mind more reasonable, or more probable, than that some god is quickly to come down from heaven and reform and control this abominable world. Why do I say probable? Because it would be godlike to do it. I would ask nothing better, therefore, than to be allowed to join you and go with you all over the world; searching and well weighing whatever evidences and signs may be accessible to man's righteously discontented and justly wrathful industry in such a task; and I would be in your company when you explored and decided whether this sublime dream, this noble, generous, compensating hope, this grand and surely divine tradition, be a truth, or, as me! ah me! nothing but a vain poem of the future—a beautiful promise never to be realized, the specious mockery of some cruel muse."

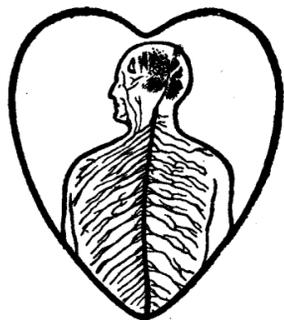
Dion's blue eyes kindled and burned, but he remained silent.

"In the meantime, listen further," added Paulus. "What would the divine being who is thus expected, were he in this room, deem of this transaction before our eyes? You have heard the steward's account of the horse Sejanus; you have heard Claudius's allusion to Vedius Pollio's lampreys. Now, you are a wise, witty, and eloquent person, and you can correct me if I say wrong—in what is the man whom the horse Sejanus, for instance, throws and tears to pieces better than the horse? In what is the man whom the lampreys are better than the man, if mere power be a thing more to be esteemed and honored than what is right, and just, and honorable, and estimable; for the lampreys and the horse possess the greater might, most indubitably, in the

cases mentioned. The elephant is stronger than we, the hound is swifter, the raven lives much longer. Either the mere power to do a thing deserves my esteem more than any other object or consideration, and therefore whoever can trample down his fellowmen, and gratify all his brutal instincts at the expense of their lives, their safety, their happiness, their reasonable free-will, is more estimable than he who is just, truthful, kind, generous, and noble—either, I say, the man who is strong against his fellows is more good than he who is good—and the words justice, right, gentleness, humanity, honor, keeping faith in promises, pity for poor little women who are oppressed and brutally used, virtue, and such noises made by my tongue against my palate, express nothing which can be understood, nothing in which any mind can find any meaning—either, I again say, the lampreys and the Sejan horse

(To be continued.)

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