

DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

"Old Josiah Maccabaeus is dead," said Aglais. And here mother and son dropped the subject by mutual consent.

The dreadful days, closed by the most awful day the world has known—closed by the ever-memorable and tremendous Friday—came and went. On the Saturday, Paulus met Longinus, who said he had been on Mount Calvary that afternoon, and that he, Longinus, was now and ever henceforth a disciple of him who had been crucified. The Sunday came, and brought with it a prodigious rumor, which instead of dying out, found additional believers every day. The disciples, most of whom had shown themselves as timid as they were known to be ignorant, now seemed transformed into new characters, who loudly affirmed that their Master had risen from the dead by His own power; and that they were ready to face every torment and all terrors calmly in the maintenance of this fact, which they predicted would be received and acknowledged by the whole world. And, indeed, it was no longer a rumor but a truth, attested by the only witnesses who could by possibility know any thing about it, either for or against; and whose earthly interests it would have been to deny it even while they knew it to be true—witnesses, who, if they knew it to be false—and they certainly knew whether it were true or false (this much was granted, and is still granted, by all their opponents)—could have had no motive, either earthly or unearthly, for feigning that they believed it.

So pregnant is this simple reasoning, that a man might ponder it and study it for a whole month, and yet find fresh strength in the considerations which it suggests; not even find a flaw if he made the one month twelve. Paulus's mind was determined, and so was his mother's. The son sought that same beautiful youth whom he had twice seen before; told him the new desire, the new belief, which had made his mother's and his own heart glad; and by him they were baptized as Christians, disciples of Him that had been crucified—by that fair youth, I say, who was to be known for ever among men, as "Saint John, the Evangelist."

"After all, mother," said Paulus, when they were returning together to her dwelling, "it is not so very mysterious; I mean the difficulty about the lowliness of our divine Teacher's chosen place among men. Because, see you, if the builder of those glorious stars and that sublime firmament, were to come at all amongst us, he would be certain to take the lowest and smallest lot, lest we should deem there was any difference as before him. We are all low and small together—the earth itself I am told, being but a sort of Bethlehem among the stars; but anyhow, we are but mites and emmets on a blade of grass in his sight, and had he taken a great relative place amidst us, it might countenance the lie and delusion of our silly pride. That part of it is to me not so mysterious, although I don't wonder at the Jewish notion that their Messiah was to have been a great conquering prince—that is probably what the Antichrist will be. It would suit the blindness of vanity better.

As he spoke the words, they heard a quick foostep behind, and were overtaken by Longinus, who, saying he had just heard of their reception, greeted them with every demonstration of rapturous affection.

"Now pursued he, walking by their side, 'good for evil to Master Paulus's family. Forgive the apparent intrusion, dear general, if I mention that I happen to know the story of your youthful love, as all the world have witnessed your fidelity to an unavailing attachment. But learn from poor Longinus that Esther Maccabaeus is now a disciple; and the Christian maid can wed, under a still holier law, the brave Gentile whom the Jewess was bound to refuse.'"

With this he turned into an alley under the court of the Gentiles and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVI.

One still and sultry evening, the decline of a brooding day in spring, two persons were sitting on the flat roof of a house in Jerusalem. They were the Athenian Lady Aglais and her son, the comparatively youthful Roman General, Paulus—he who has so largely figured, even from his gallant boyhood, in the events and affairs we have been recording.

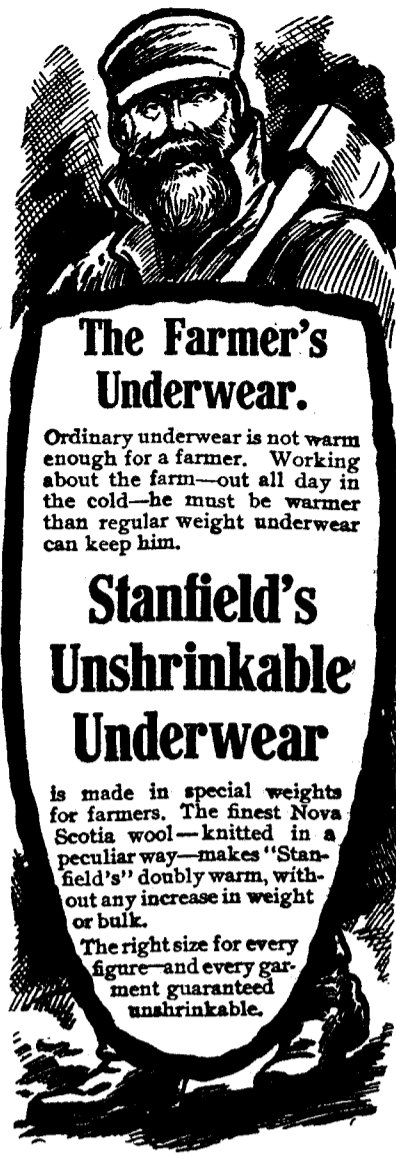
It was the 30th of March, and a Wednesday—the first of all Easter Wednesdays—the first in that new and perpetual calendar by which, throughout the fairest regions of earth, among all enlightened nations and civilized races, till the crash of doom, time was for evermore to be measured.

A servant, carrying a skin-cask slung over his shoulders, was watering the flowers, faint with thirst; and these, arranged in fanciful vases, which made an artificial garden of the housetop, shook their drooping heads under the fresh and grateful shower, and seemed to answer it with smiles of a thousand blooms and rays. As the man stole softly to and fro about the roof, now approaching the lady and her son, now receding, he seemed, in spite of the foreign language in which they spoke, and in spite of the low and hushed tone they observed, to follow with intense

and breathless though stealthy excitement, the tenor of their conversation; while his figure, in the last evening rays cast a long, shifting shadow that streaked with black the yellow flood to its farthest limit, climbed the parapet, broke upon its grail-work of balusters, and then was beheaded, for it flung off its head out of sight into empty space, leaving the calm air unblotted above the stone guard-wall.

An occurrence took place of which (that Wednesday evening) Paulus and his mother were witnesses—an occurrence in dumb show, the significance of which they were destined, only after several years, to learn; yet the incident was so singular, so strange, so impressive—it was such a picture in such a quarter—that when, long subsequently, the explanation came, they seemed to be still actually assisting in person at the scene which, while they beheld it, they had no means of understanding. We are going, in one moment, to relate that occurrence; and we must here request the reader to grant us his full belief and confidence when we remark that, in comparison of his amusement, his profit, and that mental gallery of pictures to be his henceforth (which we try to give to all who honor these pages with a perusal, we feel the sincerest contempt for any mere display of scholarship or learning. For this reason, and this reason alone, and certainly from no scantiness, and still less from any lack of authorities, we shall almost disencumber our narrative of references to the ancient writers and recondite documents (such as Astronomic Formula of Philip Ardaeus) which establish as positive historical facts the more striking of the occurrences still to be mentioned. In one instance the intelligent reader will discern that the most sacred of all evidence supports what we have to record. But if we were to show with what nicety of precision much profane, yet respectable and even venerable, testimony accords with the passage here meant in the Acts of the Apostles, and how abundantly such testimony corroborates and supplements the inspired account, this book would cease to be what it aims at being, and would become a historical treatise of the German criticism school.

(To be Continued.)



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