

# DION AND THE SIBYLS.

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

## CHAPTER II.—Continued.

At this name a deep red flush overspread the brow of Tiberius, and Paulus innocently proceeded.

"Certainly, the noble Agrippa, who was to have been Caesar, had he lived, never would have accepted so unfair a bounty had he known that my father really survived his wounds, but that—despairing of the generosity or rather of the equity of Augustus—he was living a melancholy, exheridated exile, near that very battle-field of Philippi, in Thrace, where he had fought so well and had been left for dead."

"You dare to term the act of Augustus," slowly said the man in the gore-colored purple cloak, "so unfair a bounty, and Augustus himself ungenerous, or rather unjust."

At this terrible rejoinder from such a man, the down-looking person whom we have mentioned passed his right hand to the hilt of the sword which he was carrying for his master and half drew it. Paulus, who for some time had had this person standing at his left, could observe the action without turning his head. He was perfectly aware, moreover, that should the other draw his weapon upon him, the very act of drawing it would itself become a blow, on account of their respective places, whereas to escape it required more distance between them, and to parry it in a regular way would demand quite a different position, besides the needful moment or two for disengaging his own rather long blade. Yet the youth stood completely still; he never even turned his head. However, he just shifted his wide-rimmed hat from his left to his right hand (the hand for the sword) and thereby seemed to be more encumbered, unprepared, and defenceless than before. His left hand, with the back inward, fell also meantime in an easy and natural way upon the emerald haft of the outlandish-looking three edged rapier, which, as he played with it, became loose in the scabbard, and came and went some fraction of an inch.

"I never termed him so," said Paulus. "I said not this of Augustus. I am at this moment on my way to Augustus himself, who is, I am told, to be at Formiae with his court for a week or two. I must, therefore, again ask your leave, mighty officebearer, to continue my journey. I know not so much as who you are."

"I am Tiberius Caesar," said the other, bending upon him those closely-set prominent, bloodshot eyes with no very assuring expression. "I am Tiberius Caesar, and you will be pleased to wait one moment before you continue the journey in question. The accusation against your father was this: that after Philippi he labored for the interest of Sextus, the son of Pompey, and afterward of Mark Anthony in their respective and impious and parricidal struggles; and the answer to this charge (a charge to which witnesses neither were nor are wanting) has always been that it was simply impossible seeing that Paulus Lepidus, your father, perished at Philippi before the alleged treasons had occurred. Wherefore, as your father had done good service, especially in the great battle where he was supposed to have fallen, not only was his innocence declared certain, but, for his memory's sake, Marcus Lepidus, the triumvir, was forgiven. Yet now we learn from you, the son of the accused, that the only defence ever made for him is positively false; that your father, were he still living, would probably merit to be put to death; and that your uncle, at the same time, is stripped of the one protecting circumstance which has preserved his head. I must order your arrest, and that of all your party, in order that

these things may at least be fully investigated."

As this was said, the lady in the litter of ivory and gold contemplated Paulus with that bewitching smile which she was accustomed to bestow upon dying gladiators in the hippodrome; while the other lady gazed at him with a compassionate, forecasting and muse-like look.

"I mean no disrespect to you, sir; but I will," said Paulus, "appeal from Tiberius Caesar to Caesar Augustus; to whom, I again remind you, I am on my way."

No sooner had he uttered the words "I appeal from Tiberius," than, before he could finish the sentence, the malign-faced man on his left with great suddenness drew the sword he was carrying for Cneius Piso, and, availing himself of the first natural sweep of the weapon as it left the scabbard, sought to bring the edge of it backward across the face of Paulus, exclaiming, while he did so, "speak you thus to Caesar?"

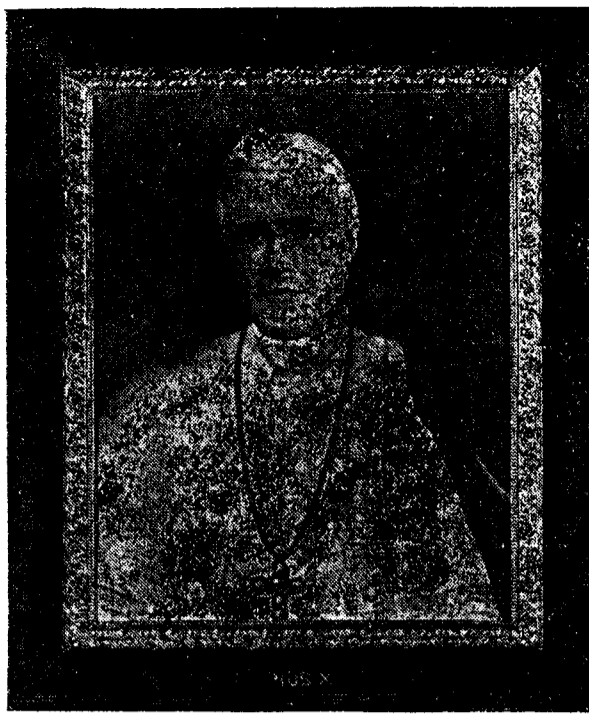
Had this man, who was the future assassin of Drusus, and slave of Cneius Piso, who was the future assassin of Germanicus, succeeded in delivering that well-meant stroke, the sentence which our hero was addressing to Tiberius could never have been said out, but said out, as we see it, it was, and said too, with due propriety of emphasis, although with a singular accompanying delivery. In fact, though not deigning to look round towards this man, Paulus had been vividly aware of his movements, and, swift as was the attack, the defence was truly electrical. Paulus's rapier, the hilt of which, as we have remarked, had been for some time in his left hand leapt from its sheath, and being first held almost perpendicularly for one moment, the point down and the hilt a little higher than his forehead, met the murderous blow at right angles; after which the delicate long blade flashed upward, with graceful ease but irresistible violence, bearing the assassin's weapon backward upon a small, semi-circle, and remaining inside of it, or, in other words, nearer to Lygdus's own body Piso's own sword, which he carried was. It looked like a mere continuation of this dazzling parry, but was, in truth a vigorous deviation from it, which none but a very pliant and powerful wrist could have executed; when the emerald pommel fell like a hammer upon the forehead of Lygdus the slave, whom that disdainful blow stretched at his length upon the ground, motionless and to all appearance dead. As Piso was standing close, the steel guard of the hilt, in passing, tore open his brow and cheek.

The whole occurrence occupied only five or seven seconds, and meanwhile the youth finished his sentence with the words already recorded, "From Tiberius Caesar to Caesar Augustus, to whom I again remind you I am on my way."

An exclamation of astonishment and perhaps other feeling, escaped from Tiberius. Sejanus smiled; the woman with the pale face and black eyes, who sat in the unadorned plate-of-gold palanquin screamed, and the other ladies laughed loudly. Among the Praetorian guards, who from the road were watching with attention the group where they saw their general and Caesar, a long, low, murmur of approbation ran. At this, Tiberius turned and looked steadily and amusingly toward them. Paulus instantly sheathing his weapon, said:

"I ask Caesar's pardon, but there was no time to obtain his permission for what I have just done. My head must have been in two pieces had I waited but one moment."

(To be continued).



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