

# DION AND THE SIBYLS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

"You have touched it with the point of a needle," cried Paulus.

"It is good advice," added Chaeris, "in substance." But we had better not leave "wheel-marks through the fields." Let us ourselves carry the corn-bags, as well as the provisions, into the dell. Let the wagon, the weight of which will be enormously lightened after the coin is removed, proceed forward. The horses can then bear it swiftly; and all the ten soldiers can have a conveyance, two on horseback, eight in the wagon; the two lame horses can be led by the mounted men; all six beasts will thus be preserved for future use. I don't like, when in war, losing an ass, or even the ear of an ass, that I can save."

"Nevertheless," returned Paulus, "we must not separate the conveyance too far from what it has to convey. Yours be the task of obliterating the wheel-marks, not all the way to the dell, but near the road, I may be able to bring back soldiers, yet not to bring another wagon. Therefore we will forthwith carry Longinus's plan into effect. It is impossible to say how soon it might be too late."

Without calling to the soldiers, who were a hundred yards off in their rear, and were enjoying their supper, Paulus tied his horse's head to a tree, and, with the vigorous help of his three companions, soon saw removed into the dingle, to which Longinus led the way, the wagon and the whole of the treasure concealed in the tightly-strapped cornbags.

At the brink of the hollow, Paulus had unharnessed the horses, and led them back to the road. He now summoned the ten legionaries, told them to ride in turn, four at a time, for some miles, leading the lame horses. They were then to tether the animals where there was good grass, some fifty yards from the roadside, and continue their own march on foot to Cortona, and there they were to wait until they heard from him again.

They set forth obediently at a good round pace. But Paulus, on his mighty steed, which was now fed and refreshed, was to follow and to pass them, and was to be the first messenger of the emergency. Nevertheless, he could not yet move nor tear himself away. He looked in the direction of the dell, where all was quiet and nothing visible. He looked forward, where he saw his men fast disappearing in the uncertain starlight. He looked back, where he could hear and see nothing but the dim landscape, nothing but physical nature. At last, with a deep breath, he poised himself well upon the back of Sejanus, shook the reins over the brute's powerful neck, and departed. The horse, as if he understood the long and heavy strain that was to be put upon his resources, seemed to exercise a sort of economy, and, without bounding into the full fury of his speed, settled down into a long and steady stride which soon carried him abreast of the legionaries. Paulus here drew reins, and said:

"You can tether the horses hereabouts, and leave them to graze. Then come on at a good pace, my men; there may be pursuers behind. I ride forward on purpose to bring help back. Halt at Cortona; apply at the Quaestor for your lodgings and subsistence, and on my return from Ferrara, I will pick you up."

And he went forward at an easy canter, with the dark waters of Thrasymene upon his left hand. Cortona was considerably to the left of the straight line as the crow flies; but, taking this direction, he calculated upon striking the Apennine chain, where there was an easy pass, familiar to him since early boyhood from the military lectures of his father, who used to point out to the child upon a diagram the exact spot, beyond Fiesole and near Pistoia, where Hannibal had led his army across those mountains. He therefore held on, within Etruria, passed through Florence, where but few persons were yet out of bed; left Fiesole on his right, and reached Pistoia a little after noon. He had spared his charger; and he performed the eighty miles from a point somewhat below Lake Thrasymene in about seven hours. Here he halted to give both himself and his least refreshments and some two hours rest. He then passed the mountains, and rode off to the north-east, by Claterna and Bologna, along the road to Ferrara.

## Chapter IV.

No sooner was the protection of her son Paulus's presence removed than the Lady Aglais determined to avail herself of the cordial hospitality and opportune retreat which had been proffered to her and to Agatha by their aged kinsman, Marcus Lepidus Aemilius, who was now living in such systematic obscurity, although his energy had once stridden abreast of gigantic enterprises, and had shared, with two rivals only, the dominion of the world.

Aglais, with the aid of Crispus and Crispina, took her plans to escape notice, and to leave no trace of her destination when she should have departed from the inn. Yet, in spite of the astuteness of the Greek lady and the prudence of her allies, events proved that both an enemy and a friend respectively had been playing a far deeper game against her and in defence of her.

The distinguished soldier and still extant author, who, as the reader will remember, secured the wanderers a reception in Crispus's inn the night of their arrival, had once afterward called upon them. During that visit Aglais could not fail to be struck by something unusually ardent (for so self-possessed and courtly a person as Velleius Paterculus) in the tone of his inquiries after Agatha's health and spirits.

Now, the evening before the intended departure of the ladies to Marcus's castle, Crispina entered their sitting-room, and brought a request from the military tribune in question that they would favor him with a short interview. Crispina was ordered to show him the way to their apartments; and in a few minutes he entered, holding his military casque in his left hand, and bowing low. The door being closed, Velleius having taken a seat, and a few courteous inquiries of the usual sort having been interchanged, he said:

"So you would leave us to-morrow?" They were very much surprised. He smiled, and continued:

"You have good cause to change your residence; and if you could reach the ex-triumvir's castle at Monte Circello, without the positive certainty existing that you had taken refuge there, the place has riding resources which would, I think, frustrate any direct search after you or after your lovely daughter. Once, during the civil wars, your brother-in-law, Marcus Lepidus, successfully eluded pursuit in the same immense edifice. It is the work of a Greek architect, and is a masterpiece of structural ingenuity. The whole building, at the time to which I allude, was methodically searched; an account was rendered of every cubic foot within it, under it, and around it, but the triumph was not discovered, and, when times had mended, he negotiated for his own permanent immunity and security. If you were once within those walls, while any doubt remained whether you had fled," I should feel no further anxiety for you, lady, or for this fair damsel." And he bowed gravely to Agatha.

After musing a little, Agatha said: "You fill me with astonishment, and make me acquainted with new alarms. Why should we not reach Circello? And why should not that home shelter us? What, too, have we done?"

"You cannot," replied Paterculus slowly, "mistake the only end I have in view, if I am forced to alarm you. I am ready to do much, and believe me, to hazard not a little, for your safety at Monte Circello at all, had I left you to execute your plans. You would have been waylaid."

"Waylaid!" she said, white with terror. "We will not stir. I will send for my son."

"Alas!" said Paterculus, "it will not be safe for you to stay in this inn two days longer. I have come to submit to you the only plan which I have been able to devise. You must not reject it."

She tried in vain to utter something, and could only gaze in speechless dismay at her visitor. The gentleness of his words and the consummate quietude of his bearing, as he immediately endeavored to reassure her, produced the desired effect, and at the same time drew the hearts of both the mother and daughter with an irresist-

ible and natural feeling of gratitude and even tenderness toward one whom they regarded as their sole present champion amid vague dangers, and nameless enemies, and undefined horrors.

Instinctively the two poor women rose together, and, approaching Velleius, sat down near him.

"My time," said he, with a scarcely audible sigh, "runs fast away. Listen to such a letter as your kinsman at Circello might write to you." And he drew forth from a fold in his tunic the draft of a letter, and read as follows:

"M. Lep. Aemilius to his sister Aglais, greeting: I rejoice that you see the force of my reasoning, and that you will adopt the advice conveyed to you in my last communication. The vessel which I have hired to take you to Spain, where you can live in tranquillity, will hover off the coast near Caietæ in about a fortnight. I will, on the seventh day from this, send you a person who shall conduct you by Fondi to Caietæ, and take you to the ship in a small boat, when all shall be ready to receive you on board. Farewell."

Having read this, Paterculus paused. The ladies remained silent in sheer astonishment.

"But," said Aglais, at last, "there is no time left, if we are not safe here, to get my kinsman to write this letter."

"He need not write any letter," said Paterculus. "You observe in what I have just read an allusion to a supposed previous letter, which, nevertheless, he has not written. If you will merely consent to be guided by me, I will cause such a letter as the one of which you have now heard the draft to be intercepted on the way from the farmer-triumvir to you. It will straightway be laid before a certain personage. That personage will see, or imagine he sees, that the triumph of the triumvir is to change for an early flight to Spain your plan of a retreat or refuge in his castle. The personage to whom the letter will be carried will moreover notice that your change of measures has been produced by a former letter of Lepidus's, not intercepted, and therefore that the present seizure of communications has been made too late to prevent the relinquishment of your original design. He will, therefore, neither lay any ambush for you on the way to Circello, nor suspect that you have gone thither. If at the same time you disappear hence, he will await you at Caietæ, watching the coast and the vessel, while you will be safe in the triumph's castle."

"But the person of whom you speak will find that there is no vessel hovering on the coast," replied the lady, "and will again question whether we have gone."

"Pardon me for contradicting you," said Velleius. "He 'will' find a vessel has been hovering on the coast, and, after receiving a skiff and its passengers on board (two women and one oarsman), that the vessel has vanished seaward. I have myself hired the vessel, distributed the parts, rehearsed the performers, and arranged all the scenes of the little comedy. But you must not go to-morrow, as you had intended, for on the way you would be seized. Give me to-morrow to have the letter intercepted, give me the next day to combine means for your journey. To-night, meanwhile, Crispus, and none other, must carry your luggage himself, parcel by parcel, into a thicket in the wood which skirts the western or seaward road. On the night of the day after to-morrow, you must leave the inn on foot, after people have retired to bed, and you must walk for a mile or more to the large sycamore-tree near the place where Cicero was murdered; Crispina will go with you to the spot through the garden, and then through the fields. Under the tree you will find a 'biga' with two swift horses and a trusty driver; on the roof of the 'biga' your luggage shall have been already strapped."

It would be needless to describe the gratitude of the mother and daughter. The former alluded deprecatingly to the expense which must have been incurred especially in hiring such a vessel as would appear qualified to traverse the sea; but Paterculus checked all further reference to that matter with a peremptory gesture, and, rising, added, in the same low voice in which the conversation had all along been carried on:

"I have alluded to the hiding resources of the Circello Castle. I will not describe the wonderful contrivances of the architect. He was your country-

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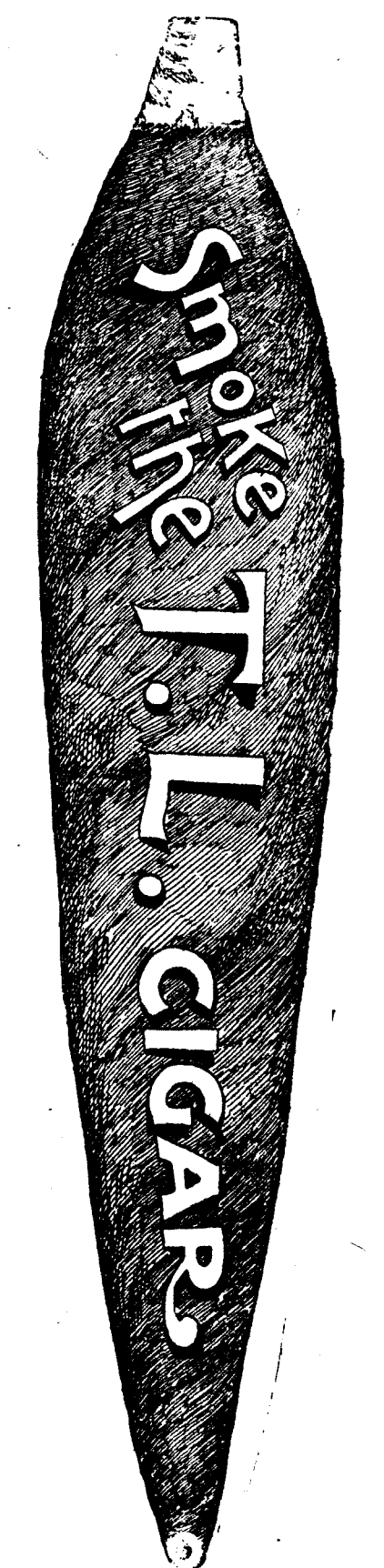
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man—an Athenian Lepidus, you will see; and as you remember—

"Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures,  
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus."

"Well, but," said Aglais, "if you know so much of these lurking-places (latebræ), others doubtless know them too."

"Not so," answered Velleius, with a smile. "I am preparing the history of these times. I note and remember much which every one else dismisses from his mind, if remarked at all. There is one point very important to you: supposing you could have evaded any ambush laid for you to-morrow, and have reached Circello, yet so reached it that it would remain certain you had taken refuge there, then you would not be safe, because, although physically and materially all search of the place for a fugitive would be vain, a moral pressure upon



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Marcus Lepidus might, I apprehend, compel the surrender of his refugees by his own act."

"I understand," said Aglais, and simultaneously Agatha exclaimed "Oh!"

"Fair damsel," said Velleius, "he is not like his nephew, your brother, your dauntless Paulus."

"But," concluded the handsome tribune, "with the measures taken you can banish anxiety, and set yourselves at rest. Think sometimes of me, Farewell."

Before they could answer a word, he had gone.

## Chapter V.

It was a stormy night in early winter, a few weeks afterwards, that Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (still in conversation styled the triumph where not wholly forgotten) had returned with Aglais and Agatha to his favorite sitting-room in the third story, after

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