

DION AND THE SIBYLS.

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

Benigna was left behind, and with winning smiles and a flutter of attentions, the young girl now placed the chairs, and began to cackle, as Crispus would have expressed himself, and to entreat the wanderers to take that refreshment of which they stood so much in need. They all had the delicate tact to feel that compliance with the kindness which they had so providentially found was the only way to return it which they at present possessed.

It is historical to add that appetite gave the same advice. Their hunger was as keen as their tact. During supper the mother and son spoke little; but Agatha, both during the repast and for some time afterwards, kept up a brisk conversation with Benigna, for whom the child had taken an inexpressible liking, and from whom she drew, with unconscious adroitness, the fact that she was engaged to be married. That sudden affection of sympathy which knit the soul of David to that of Jonathan seemed to have bound these two together. The landlady's considerate daughter at length advised Agatha to defer further communication until she should have a good night's rest. Paulus seconded the recommendation, and left his mother and sister with their Greek slave Melina and with Benigna, and retired to his own bedroom. The chamber overlooked the "impluvium," or inner court, whence the incessant plash of the fountain was heard soothingly through his lattice-window, the horn slide of which he left open. The bedroom of the ladies, on the other hand, overlooked the garden and bee-hives, to which Crispina had alluded. The sitting apartments, opening into each other, in one of which they had supped, stood between; all these rooms being situated in the projecting west wing, which they entirely filled. Thus closed the day which had carried to their destination the travellers from Thrace.

CHAPTER IX.

Next morning when they met at the jentaculum, or breakfast, there was a marvellous improvement in Agatha's looks. She had been the earliest out of bed; had seen from her window, under a brilliant sunshine, the beautiful landscape unroll itself in the various forms which the landlady had truly though inadequately described, and she then had run down into the garden.

In due time—that is, very soon afterward—she had been chased by the bees, had fled, screaming and laughing, with the hood of her richly drawn completely over the head by way of helmet against the terrible darts of her indignant pursuers, and had been received in the arms of Benigna, who had heard the cry of distress and had flown to the rescue, brandishing a long, reedy brush, like the mosquito brushes of modern times. Rallying in a bower of trellis work covered with ivy, whence a wooden staircase led up to the first floor of the house, by way of a landing or platform, over which rose another bower clad in the same ivy-mantle—facing round, I say, upon her enemy, at the foot of this staircase she had soon ventured once more into the garden, with Benigna, and the two girls, jabbering and cackling much, had gathered a large nosegay of autumnal flowers. With this booty, which Benigna had made so big that Agatha could hardly hold it in her small and elegant hands, the latter damsel had returned to the bower, had seated herself upon a bench, and had begun to sort the flowers in the relative positions which best showed their tints. Here she relied upon gradation, here upon contrast. Her delicate Greek tast in the performance of this task drew exclamations of delight from Benigna. "There!" the innkeeper's daugh-

ter would cry; "how pretty! That is the way! That so, and then that, and that! They look quite different now! Exactly! I never imagined it!"

When Agatha had finished the arrangement to her own satisfaction, an exploit which was nimbly achieved, "Now Benigna," said she, with her pretty foreign accent, "sit down here, just do, and tell me all about everything."

Benigna stared, and Agatha proceeded.

"So you are engaged to become the wife of a very good and handsome youth, who in himself is everything that can be admired, except courageous, I understand you to say. Now, that is not his fault I suppose. How can he help feeling afraid, if he does feel afraid?"

At this moment the voice of Crispina was heard calling her daughter to help in preparing the breakfast, and Benigna, whom Agatha's last words had thrown into some confusion, as the same topic had done the previous evening, made an excuse and ran away with the light of roses vivid in her cheeks.

Agatha remained and looked out upon the garden, and beyond it upon the sweet country, with its varied beauty. She remained listening peacefully and dreamingly to the hum of bees, the twittering of birds, the voices and footsteps in the inn, and inhaling the perfume of the nosegay which she had arranged, and the cool freshness of that pleasant morning hour, when the sun behind her and behind the house was throwing the shadows of buildings, sheds, trees, and cattle in long lines toward the Tyrrhenian sea. While thus calmly resting, admiring and musing, a lady in a dark robe of poil, (gausapa), with a very pallid face and large black eyes, stood suddenly in the doorway of the bower, and blocked out the lovely prospect. The stranger smiled, and holding out a bunch of flowers, said,

"My pretty young lady, I see that the offering I have been culling for you has lost its value. You are rich already. May I sit down in this pleasant shady place a moment to rest?"

"Yes, you may, certainly," said Agatha.

"I suppose," resumed the stranger, "that you belong to this house, my little friend? I am a stranger, and merely lodging—"

"We are lodging, too, and strangers," answered Agatha.

"From your accent," continued the other, "I judge you to be Greek."

"Mother is," replied Agatha; "but brother calls himself a Roman knight, and even noble."

"I knew it," cried the lady; "you have it written in your countenance. I, too, am a noble lady; my name is Plancina. Have you ever seen Rome?"

"Never."

"Ah! how you will be enchanted. You must come to see me. I have a house in Rome; such a pretty house, full of such curious things! Ah! when you see Rome, you will hold your breath with wonder and delight. I will make you so happy when you come to see me in my pretty house."

"You are very kind, good lady, I should think," quoth Agatha, looking up from her flowers, and gazing long at the pallid face and the large black eyes; "and if we go to Rome, I and my mother will visit you, perhaps."

"My house is among the willows and beeches of the Viminal Hill," said the lady. "Remember two things—Viminal Hill, with its beeches and its willows, and the Calpurnian House, where the Piso family have lived for generations. My husband, Piso, had very great losses at dice. I am rich enough to spend a fortune every year for half a century, and we have still at our house all the pleasures that can be thought of. What pains I

will take to amuse you! You cannot conceive the splendors, dresses, games, sports, shows, and beauties of Rome; the theatres, the circus, the combats, the great wild beasts of all sorts from all countries, the dances—"

As she pronounced the word "dances," a youthful, male voice was heard at a little distance, saying, "While they change horses here we will stretch our limbs by a stroll in the garden behind the inn. Make haste, worthy innkeeper; order your servants to be brisk."

And almost at the same moment a brilliantly beautiful, dark eastern looking girl, in a Syrian costume, appeared at the entrance of the bower. Behind her came sauntering the youth whose voice had been heard. He was of about Paulus's age, had an olive complexion, was sumptuously dressed, and exhibited a strong family likeness in face to the girl. Last followed a woman in middle life, appareled in costly robes, suited to travel, haughty, languid, and scornful of mien.

Plancina and Agatha looked up and surveyed the new comers. The brilliant damsel remained at the entrance of the bower examining its occupants with a hardy, unabashed glance; whereupon Plancina, after a moment's pause, occasioned by the interruption, resumed and concluded her sentence thus,

"No, you can form no idea of the gayeties of Rome; the games, the shows, the theatres, the glories the pleasures, the jests, the dances."

"But all your good dances come from foreign lands—from the east, indeed," interrupted the damsel, nodding her head repeatedly and sneeringly; "you must admit that."

"Not all our good alone," answered Plancina sternly, noticing that the woman in middle life smiled approvingly at the girl who had obtruded the remark; "not all our good alone, but all. The office of the outside world is to try and amuse Rome."

"And what is Rome's office?" asked the damsel.

"To be amused by them, if she can," answered the Roman.

"Come away, Herodious, said the haughty, languid and scornful-looking woman; and the two strolled down the middle walk of the garden. The youth who had come with them lingered a moment or two behind, standing in the middle of the gravel walk and gazing straight into the bower, while he flitted a sort of horsewhip around the heads of one or two tall flowers which were growing outside along the border of the walk.

Plancina looked steadily at him, and he at her. The lad withdrew after a few moments, without a change of feature.

"What starers," muttered Agatha.

"They have a talent for it, indeed," said Plancina. "A hardy family, putting one thing with another. I think I know who they are. The mother, if she were the mother, called the daughter, if she were the daughter, Herodious. My husband thinks of going to Syria, and indeed Tiberius has offered him the procuratorship of Judea; but he would not condescend to go in any smaller capacity than as prefect of Syria. An acquaintance of ours, young Pontius Pilate, wants to get the procuratorship. The minor office would be a great thing for him. But my husband, Piso of the Calpurnians, cannot stoop to that. I may meet yonder family again."

"Those people are looking back," observed Agatha, who had paid very little attention to her companion's speech.

Plancina rose, and, going to the entrance of the bower, honored the strangers with a steady glance. The scornful-looking foreign woman in sumptuous apparel met it for a moment, and then turned away. Her son and daughter turned away at the same time.

To be Continued.

Hicks—"Look at Sniggs flirting with the girls over there. I thought you said he was a woman hater."

Wicks—"So he is, but the woman he hates is not there."

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"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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