

DION AND THE SIBYLS.

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

CHAPTER IV.

Sejanus, when left alone motioned to the two troopers. He who had brought Tiberius his horse rode furiously after the Caesar; the other attended the general, who slowly mounted his own steed, and, pursuing the same direction began to trot leisurely toward Formiae. The sun had gone down; the short twilight had passed away; clouds had gathered, and the moon, not having yet risen, the night was very black. In a few seconds Sejanus slackened his horse's pace from a trot to a walk and the orderly, as his military attendant would in modern times be called, nearly rode against him in the dark. The man made some natural excuse, and fell back again about thirty paces.

"At present," he muttered, when again alone "Tiberius, though a Caesar, needs me; Germanicus is Caesar too, and may become emperor. If Germanicus wished it, right or wrong—if per fas et nefas—he would win. He has much of Caius Julius and his defect of over-trustfulness; but none of his many vices. I doubt if he will ever be emperor; he is too Athenian, and also too honorable, too disinterested. Somehow I feel too, as if he were going to be assassinated; he believes readily in men. Tiberius has smaller abilities, worse qualities, and better chances. He will rule the world, and Aelius Sejanus will rule him."

As Sejanus said these things to himself in an indistinct murmur, of which none could have heard the precise words, a voice at his elbow astonished him. Said the voice,

"How far is it, illustrious general to Formiae?"

The Praetorian chief turned with a start, and saw that the speaker was a mounted traveller attended by two servants, also on horseback but there was so little light that he could not distinguish the stranger's features, nor more of his dress and appointments than that they were not, as it seemed, Italian.

"About five thousand paces," he answered. "However, there is no inn at Formiae. Some eight hundred paces from here is a good wayside tavern, (mansio). But you call me general, for I wear the dress. You do not however, know me."

"Not know the distinguished chief of the Praetorians? Not know the happy and unhappy, the fortunate and unfortunate Sejanus?"

"Happy and unhappy," echoed the latter, "fortunate and unfortunate! What means this jargon? You could use that language on every mortal. What you say you unsay."

While thus replying he endeavored to discern the dim features of his new companion.

"Think you so?" said the man. "Then pray, would it be the same if I were to say for example, unhappy and happy, unfortunate and fortunate?"

"Yes."

"Alas! no."

"What!" said Sejanus. "The happiness is present, the good fortune is present, but the misfortune and unhappiness are to come. Is this your meaning?"

"As I always say what I mean," rejoined the other, "so I never explain what I say."

"Then at least," observed Sejanus, with great haughtiness of tone and manner, "you will be good enough to say who you are. As the Praetor Peregrinus, especially charged to look after foreigners, I demand your name. Remember friend, that six legions, as well as twenty thousand soldiers obey Sejanus."

"I am the God Hermes," replied the other, riding suddenly ahead, followed by both his attendants.

The movement was so unexpected that the figure of the stranger had become almost indistinguishable in the obscurity before Sejanus

urged his fleet Numidian steed forward at a bound in pursuit.

"Take care," said a voice in his front, "that your horse does not throw you, impious man!"

At the same time, the Praetorian leader heard something roll upon the paved road, and immediately a vivid flash blazed under his horse's eyes, and a sharp report followed. Nearly thrown indeed, he was, as the voice had warned him. When he had recovered his balance and quieted the startled beast he was riding, he halted to listen; but the only sound he could now hear was that of the mounted trooper trotting after him along the Appian Way. He waited for this man to come up, and inquired what he had observed in the three strangers who had previously passed him on the road.

"No stranger," said the man "had passed him, he had seen no one."

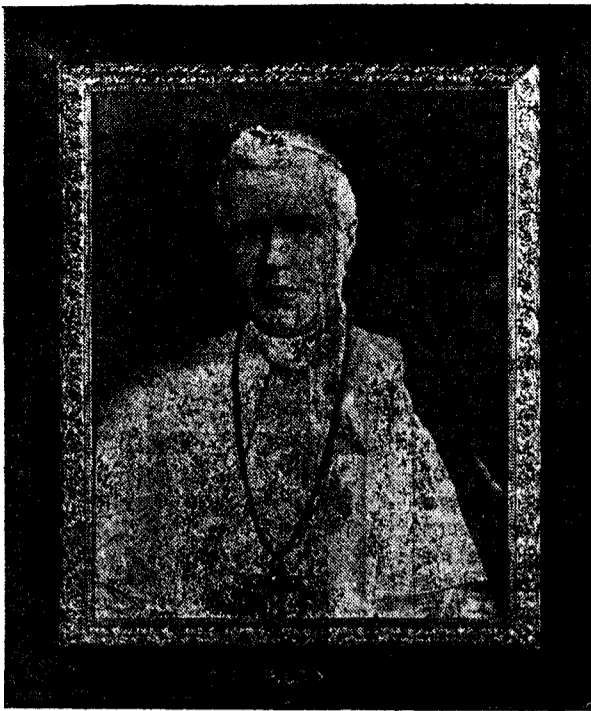
Then Sejanus remembered what he had not at the moment adverted to, that neither when first accosted by the stranger, nor afterward while this person with his two attendants rode by his side, nor finally when they all galloped forward and were lost in the darkness, had any clatter of hoofs been audible.

He resumed his journey in silent thought, and soon arrived, without further adventure, at the large and famous post-house, standing in those days four or five miles south of Formiae.

CHAPTER V.

The post-house, or mansio, to which allusion has been made, situated about four or five miles south of Formiae, on the Appian Road, was a large, rambling, two-storied brick house, capable of accommodating a vast number of travellers. It was not, therefore, merely one of the relay-houses where the Imperial couriers as well as all who could produce a special warrant for the purpose, from a consul, or a praetor, or even a quaestor, were allowed to obtain a change of horses; still less was it one of the low canal-town taverns, whose keepers Horace abused; but it was a regular country inn, where man and beast found shelter for the apparently infinitesimal charge of one "as," (or not quite a penny) and good cheer at proportionately moderate cost. It was well supplied from its own farm-yards, olive-groves, orchards, vineyards, pastures, and tilled fields, with vegetables, beef, mutton, poultry, geese, ducks, attagens, and other meats; eggs, wine, butter, cheese, milk, honey, bread, and fruit; a delicious plate of fish occasionally, an equally delicious array of quail, produced upon table in a state aromatic and frothy with their own fat juices.

This excellent and celebrated house of entertainment for belated or wayworn travellers, as well as for all who desired a change from the monotony of their usual life, was kept by a remarkably worthy old couple, formerly slaves, a freedman and a freedwoman of the illustrious Aemilian family. The reader will have noticed that the youth whom it is necessary, we suppose, to acknowledge in the capacity of our hero, has been called Paulus Aemilius Lepidus; that his father had borne the same style; and likewise that his father's brother, the former sovereign magistrate or triumvir in the second and great triumvirate, was named Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. In all these names that of Aemilius occurs; and Aemilius was the noblest of the patronymics which once this great family boasted. Now, theirs had been the house in which Crispus and Crispina, the good inn-keeper and his wife, at present free and prosperous, had been boy and girl slaves. The wife indeed, had been nurse to a son of Marcus Lepidus, the triumvir. (To be continued.)



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