

DION AND THE SIBYLS.

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

"Just half a moment for each piece," said Tiberius, "but your left hand seems well able to keep your head. Are you left-handed?"

"No, great Caesar," said Paulus; "I am what my Greek teacher of fence used to call two-handed, dima-chaerus; he tried to make all his pupils so, but my right remains far better than my left."

"Then I should like to see your right thoroughly exercised," said Tiberius.

Paulus heard a sweet voice here say, "As a favor to me do not order the arrest of this brave youth," and turning he beheld the beautiful creature on the litter of ivory and gold plead for him with Tiberius. The large blue eyes, darkening as she supplicated, smote the youth, and he could hardly take away his gaze.

"Young man, go forward with your mother and sister to Formiae, under the charge of Velleius Paterculus, the military tribune whom you see yonder upon the road. Remain in Formiae until I give you leave to quit it. Report your place of residence to the tribune. Go!"

The last word was pronounced harshly. Tiberius made a signal with his hand to Paterculus. Then passed his arm through that of Sejanus, and speaking to him in a low tone, he led the general aside into the fields to a little distance; while—with the exception of two mounted troopers, (each leading a horse), who remained behind, but considerably out of hearing—the praetorian guards, the three litters and the travelling biga, began to move toward Formiae leaving the road to silence, and the evening landscape to peace.

CHAPTER III.

Tiberius, when all had disappeared along the road, suddenly stopped in his walk.

His companion, toward whom he had turned, did the same, and looked at him with an air of expectation.

"I leave all details to you," said the Caesar; "but what has to be done is this—that youth who calls himself Paulus Lepidus Aemilus must be produced as a gladiator either in the circus Maximus or the Statilian Amphitheatre, as the number of victims may dictate. Men of noble birth have been seen ere now upon the sand. We will then make him show against the best swordsmen in the world—against Gauls, Britons, and Cappadocians—what the Greek fence is worth of which he seems a master. The girl, his sister must be carried off, either beforehand or afterward as your skill dictate, and softly and safely lodged at Rome in that storied brick house of Cneius Piso and his precious wife, Plancia, which is not known to be mine (I believe and hope and am given to understand, that it is not known to be theirs neither)."

Tiberius paused, and Sejanus, with an intent look, slightly inclined his head. He was a keen man, a subtle man, but not a very profound man. He observed:

"I have heard something of this Greek widow and of her son and daughter.

"They have (it seems to me as if I had heard this) friends near the person of Augustus, or at least, in the court. I can easily cause the girl to be so carried off that no rumor about the place of her residence will evermore sound among men. But the very mystery of it will sound, and that loudly; and her mother and brother will never cease to pierce the ears of Augustus with their cries. But, before I say a word more, I wish to know two things—first, whether this youth Paulus is to be included in one of those great shows of gladiators which are rendering you, my Ca-

sar, so beloved by the Roman people.

"Am I beloved, think you?" asked Tiberius.

"The master passion of the people is for the shows, and, above all the fights of the amphitheatre," answered Sejanus. "Whoever has, for a hundred years or more obtained the mastery of the world, has thus won the Romans; each succeeding dictator of the globe, from Caius to Marius, and Sulla, and Pompey, and the invincible Caius Julius and Mark Anthony, to our present happy Emperor Augustus, has surpassed his predecessors in the magnificence of these entertainments given to the people, populace, common legionaries, and Praetorians; and in exact proportion also, it is remarkable, has each surpassed his forerunners in permanent power, until that power has at last become nearly absolute, nearly unlimited."

"You say true," replied Tiberius; "and I excel all former examples in the extent, splendor, and novelty of my shows. Augustus has abandoned that department; but even when he was courting the Romans, he never edited like me. People would now smile at the old fashioned meanness of the spectacles which he made acceptable to them. He is breaking very fast in health, too, I fear, my Sejanus."

"He is, I fear, drawing towards his end," replied the commander of the Praetorians.

"As to your question, concerning this youth," resumed Tiberius, "my object is partly to add a novel and curious feature to the fight—this strange sword-play. Yet why should he not afterward be included in some great slaughter-match, three or four thousand a side, care being taken that he should be finished? We might first pit him fairly against six or a dozen antagonists in succession. If he conquer them all, it will be unprecedentedly amusing; the people will be in ecstasies, and then the victor can be made to disappear in the general conflict. I shall thus have the undisturbed management of his sister's education."

Grave as a statue, Sejanus replied:

"He is a proud youth, an equestrian, a patrician, son of an eminent warrior, nephew of one who once shared in the government of the whole globe. Well, not being a slave, if he found himself in the arena by virtue of having been violently seized and trepanned, I firmly believe that, either before, or after fighting, he would make a speech, appealing to the justice of the emperor and the sympathy of the people, not to say anything about the soldiers. The plan you propose, my Caesar seems like furnishing him with an immense audience, and a gigantic tribunal, before which to tell that pathetic story about his father and the battle of Philippi, and those family estates which are now in the possession of the two beautiful ladies whose litters have just preceded us on the road to Formiae."

Tiberius smiled, as with his head bowed down, he looked at the speaker, and thus he continued stooping, looking, and smiling for a moment or two, after which he said:

"The Tuscans are subtle, and you are the subtlest of Tuscans; what is best?"

Sejanus said: "Let the girl first be carried away; let the mother and brother break their hearts for her; then let the Lanista Thellus, who is not known to be one of your men, but is supposed to hire out his gladiators on his own account, invite the youth to join the familia or company, and when Paulus refuses, as he will refuse, let Thellus say that he knows money would not bribe Paulus, but that he has seen Paulus's sister; that he can guide him to her, if

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Paulus consents to fight in the next great forthcoming shows. And in short, in order to make all this more specious, let Thellus have formed the acquaintance of the half-Greek family, mother, sister, brother, before the girl is abducted, in order that Paulus may think he speaks the truth when afterwards saying that he has seen the sister and knows her, and can guide Paulus to where she is detained. If this plan be adopted, Paulus will fight in the arena of his own accord, and will make no speeches, no disturbance, but will disappear forever in a decorous and delicate manner."

"You are a man of immense merit, my Sejanus," replied the personage in gore-colored purple, "and I will some day reward you more than I can do while merely the Caesar of an Augustus—whom may the Gods protect! The mother perhaps we can let alone, or she could be put on board a corsair as an offering to some God to procure me good fortune in other things. We shall see. Meanwhile, execute all the rest with as little delay as the order and propriety of the several matters, one before the other, will allow, and report to me punctually at every step."

Backing to one of the troopers, who approached with a spare horse Tiberius now mounted. The soldier immediately withdrew again, and Tiberius said to the Praetorian commander "Be upon your guard with Paterculus: he is doubtless devoted to me, but is a squeamish man; clever, indeed, too. Still, there are clever fools, my Sejanus."

Then waving his hand he rode slowly away, but came to a halt at a distance of twenty paces, and turned his horse's head round. Sejanus strode quickly toward his master.

"You know, of course that the Germans, encouraged by the slaughter of Varus and his legions are swarming over the Julian Alps into the north-east of Italy from Illyricum. How many legions are there available to meet them?"

"We have within reach, at this moment, twelve," said Sejanus, "besides my Praetorians."

"Half the present forces of the whole empire," replied the other. "Germanicus is to drive back the Barbarians. He will become more popular than ever with the troops generally. But the Praetorians do not care for him, I suppose?"

"Even the Praetorians revere him," answered Sejanus.

"Why, how so? They have so little to do with him?"

"They know a soldier," began Sejanus.

"And am I not a soldier?" interrupted his master.

"They love you too, my Caesar, and dearly."

"Peace! Tell me exactly, what think the Praetorians of Germanicus?"

"They foolishly think that, since the day when Caius Julius was murdered, no such soldier—"

"Enough! Foolishly, say you! Remember my instructions. Vale!" And Tiberius galloped north, his face ablaze with a brick-red flush deeper than ordinary.

(To be continued.)

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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.

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