

DION AND THE SIBYLS.

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

"By your leave, illustrious sir," interposed the inn-keeper, rather nervously, "it is scarcely the custom, is it, to drop guests at Crispus's door, without first asking Crispus has he room for them? The expected visit of the divine Augustus to the neighboring palace of the most excellent and valiant Mamurra, in Formiae, has choked and strangled this poor house. There is no place where the multitude of guests can lodge in the town, so they come hither, as to a spot at a convenient distance. Troops of players, troops of gladiators, troops of fortune-tellers, troops of geese, pigs, beeves, attagens, alive and dead, night and day, for the last week, with mighty personages from a distance, make the road noisy, I assure you, even after my house is full. I believe they would wish me to put up the very oxen intended for sacrifice."

"Have you no chambers whatever vacant?" asked Velleius.

"I did not say that, most excellent sir; vacant is one thing, disengaged is another, I have received an express letter from Brundisium, to say that a certain queen out of the East, with her son and her train, are coming to pay their homage to the emperor; and here we have already the servants of that Jew king, as they say, one king Alexander, who wants his cause to be heard and his title settled by Augustus himself, and I am obliged to listen to loud outcries that he too, must have apartments."

At this moment the travelling carriage carrying poor Agatha and her mother had been drawn nearly opposite to the porch but a little in rear of the tribune, so as not to intercept his conversation with the inn-keeper. Paterculus threw a quick glance at the beautiful pallid face of the girl, and the anxious and frightened look of her mother.

"By what you tell me, worthy Crispus," he replied, "you are so far from having your justly celebrated house full, that you are keeping two sets of apartments still vacant, in expectation, first, of some queen from the east, with her son and train, and secondly of this Jewish king, one Alexander. Worthy Libertinus, the fair damsel whom you see so pale, is sick, and has just swooned away from sheer fatigue. Will you turn such a daughter in such health, with her noble mother from your door? A queen can take care of herself, it seems to me. But what will become of these excellent Roman ladies, (your own countrywomen), if you now bid them begone from your threshold? You have assured me that they can obtain no shelter at all in Formiae. Look at the child! She seems likely to faint again. Are you to let this daughter of a Roman knight die in the fields, in order that you may have room for a barbarian queen? You have a daughter of your own, I am told."

"Die!" groaned the innkeeper. "all this did not come into my mind, most illustrious tribune and quaestor. Come, little lady, let me help you down. This lady and her daughter, sir, shall have the queen's own apartment—may all the gods destroy me otherwise! Here, Crispina."

Velleius Paterculus smiled, and having whispered some order to a centurion, who remained behind in watch for Sejanus, the tribune waved his hand, crying out vale to whom it might concern, and rode forward with the praetorians at a much smarter pace than they had come.

CHAPTER VII.

Meanwhile, the innkeeper's wife, Crispina, had appeared, and had led Aglais and her daughter through the group in the porch into the house, and pass-

ing by a little zothecula, behind the curtain of which they heard the sound of flutes, as the carvers carved, and many voices, loud and low, denoting the apartment called dieta or public room of the inn, they soon arrived at the compluvium, an open space or small court, in the middle of which was a cistern, and in the middle of the cistern, a splashing fountain. The cistern was railed by a circular wooden balustrade, against which some creeping plants grew. This cistern was supplied from the sky; for the whole space or court in which it lay was open and unroofed. Between the circular wooden balustrade and the walls of the house was, on every side a large quadrangular walk, lightly gravelled, and flashing back under the lantern which Crispina carried, an almost metallic glint and sparkle. Of course this walk presented its quadrangular form on the outer edge, next the house only; the inside, next the cistern, was rounded away. This quadrangular walk was at one spot diminished in width by a staircase in the open air, (but under an awning), which led up to the second story of the large brick building. Around the whole compluvium, or court, the four inner faces of the inn, which had four colored lights in sconces against the walls, were marked at irregular intervals by windows, some of which were mere holes with trap-doors (in every case open at present); others, lattice work, like what, many centuries later, obtained the name of arabesque-work, having a curtain inside that could be drawn or undrawn. Others again with perforated slides, others stretched with linen which oil had rendered diaphanous; others fitted with thin scraped horn; one only, a tolerably large window, with some kind of mineral panes more translucent than transparent—a lapis lamnata specularis.

At the back, or west of the inn, an irregular oblong wing extended, which of course could not open upon this court, but had its own means of light and ventilation north and south respectively.

Crispus had followed the group of women, and our friend Paulus had followed Crispus. In the compluvium, the innkeeper took the lantern from his wife, and begged Aglais and Agatha to follow him up the awning-covered staircase. As he began to ascend, it happened that Crispina, looking around, noticed Paulus, who had taken off his broad-rimmed hat, under one of the sconces. No sooner had her eyes rested on him than she started violently, and grasped the balustrade as if she would have fallen but for that support.

"Who are you?" said the woman.

"The brother of that young lady who is ill, and the son of the other lady."

"And you too, must want lodgings?"

"Certainly."

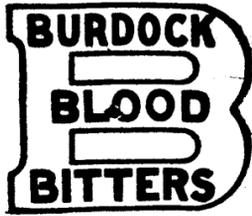
The woman seized his arm with a vehement grip, and gazed at him.

"Are you ill?" said Paulus, "or—out of your mind? Why do you clutch my arm and look at me in that fashion?"

"Too young," said she, rather to herself than to him; "besides, I saw the last act with these eyes. Truly this is wonderful."

Then, like one waking from a dream, she added, "Well, if you want lodgings, you shall have the apartments of this king or pretender—the rooms prepared for the Jew Alexander. Come with me at once." And she unfastened the lamp in the nearest sconce, and led Paulus up the staircase.

Thus the wanderers, Aglais and her daughter, had the queen's room, with their Thracian slave Melana to wait upon them, while the prisoner Paulus had the King's to which Crispina herself ordered



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old Philip, the freedman, to carry his luggage.

A few moments later, the innkeeper, who had returned to the more public parts of the house to attend to his usual duties, met Philip laden with parcels in one of the passages, and asked him what he was doing.

"Carrying young master Paulus's things to his room."

"You can carry," said the innkeeper, "whatever the ladies require to their room, but your young master has no room at all, my man, in this house. And why? For the same reason that will compel you to sleep in one of the lofts over the stables. There is no space for him in the inn. You must make him as comfortable as you can in the hay, just like yourself."

"Humanity is something," muttered Crispus; "but to make a queen one's enemy on that score, without adding a king, where no humane consideration intervenes at all, is enough for a poor innkeeper in a single night. These tetrarchs and rich barbarians can do a poor man an ugly turn. Who knows but he might complain of my house to the emperor, or to one of the consuls or the praetor, or even the quaestor, and presto! every thing is seized, and I am banished to the Tauric Chersonese, or to Tomos in Scythia, to drink mare's milk with the poet Ovid."

"Go on freedman, with your luggage," here said a prepotent voice, "and take it whither you have taken the rest."

"And in the name of all the gods wife," said Crispus, "whither may that be?"

"Go on, freedman," she repeated; and then, taking her husband aside, she spoke to him in a low tone.

"Have you remarked this youth's face," she asked, "and have you any idea who he is?"

"I know not who any of them are," replied Crispus.

Crispus looked, and as he looked his eyes grew bigger; and again he looked until Paulus noticed it, and smiled.

"Do you know me?" says he.

"No, illustrious sir."

"Alas! I am not illustrious, good landlord, (institor), but hungry I am. And I believe we all are, except my poor sister, who is not very strong, and for whom, by and by, I should like to procure the advice of a physician."

"The poor young thing," said Crispus, "is only tired with her journey; it is nothing. She will be well tomorrow. Supper you shall have presently in the ante-chamber of your mother's apartments; and your freedman and the female slave shall be cared for after they have waited upon you."

"All this is easy and shall be seen to forthwith," added Crispus; "but the doctor for your dear sister, per omnes deos, where shall we find him?"

"Understand," said Paulus, "my sister is not in immediate danger, such as would justify calling in any empiric at once rather than nobody. She has been ailing for some time, and it is of no use to send for the first common stupid practitioner that may be in the way. Is there not some famous doctor procurable in Italy?"

To be Continued.

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One of the pictures is called

"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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