

DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

And now I come to the strangest particular of all. Paulus felt that this vigorous and beautiful new Adam, fit to be the natural and even supernatural king of the world, was one who never could have laughed, and probably had never smiled. But no smile was so sweet as his gravity. And Paulus remembered another extraordinary and unparalleled circumstance: it was this—those beautiful and benignant eyes were so full of terror that it seemed they could scarcely hold in an equal degree any other expression in them except that which shone therein with what seemed to Paulus, a celestial and divine lustre; I mean first love and next, unconquerable and everlasting and victorious courage. As though there was a work to do which none but he (from the creation to the day of doom) could ever accomplish—a dreadful work, a work unspeakable in shame, and in pain and is horror, and yet a work entirely indispensable, and the most important and real and momentous that had ever been performed. And the subject or hero of this tale, Paulus, wandered how in the same look and eyes, and in a single glance of them, two things so opposite, as ineffable terror and yet God-like, adorable courage could be combined.

But, nevertheless, they were both there; and with this mighty and mysterious mental combination Paulus also saw a sweetness so inexpressibly awful that at once (and as if he had heard words formed within his own heart), the reflection arose within him: "How much more terrible would be the wrath of the lamb than the rage of the lion."

And the figure of this person passed onward, and was hidden from poor Paulus beyond the olive groves. Our hero sat down on a jutting stone half covered with herbage, and fell into a vague and somewhat sorrowful meditation. "Poor Longinus!" said he to himself; "it is really the queerest and most provoking thing in the world, that perhaps the honestest, bravest, simplest, best fellow I ever knew should have fallen in love so much above his own rank. But can't I look at home? I am worse; I have let myself fall in love with a damsel who is prevented by the holy books of her people from marrying a Gentile. What a puzzle this world is! I should like to see poor Longinus once more. How broken-hearted he seemed when we all took wing from the castle on the banks of the Liris. 'Ah!' says he when I met him in Rome afterwards, 'perhaps we shall never meet again.'

"The best thing that could have occurred for him was that marriage of Agatha with Paterculus. But these thoughts are useless; I must fulfil Dionysius's commission, and write to him to say whether I have been able to discover in this mysterious land the presence, the memory, or so much as the expectation of any person whose name corresponds with that spelt out in the acrostic of Erythraea the Sibyl.

A rustle of the olives near him caused him to turn his head, and who of all men in the world should be at his side but Longinus the centurion!

"Why," cried Paulus, "I thought you were at Rome."

"I have just arrived, my tribune," returned the brave man, "with orders to report myself to Pontius Pilate, the Procurator of Judaea, or Governor of Jerusalem. Cornelius, of the Italian band, also a centurion, as you know, my tribune, has been ordered to Caesarea, and is there stationed."

"Well," said Paulus, "I am delighted to meet you again. How is Thellus?"

"Curiously enough," returned Longinus, "he too is here, stationed in Jerusalem. He was tired of too much quiet."

"Good!" exclaimed Paulus. "We must all often see each other, and talk of old days."

After a few more words interchanged, they began to descend Mount Olivet together.

"Did you meet anyone," says Paulus to Longinus, "as you came up the hill?"

"I did," said Longinus very gravely, "but I know not who he is."

They proceeded silently in company till, in the valley of Jehoshaphat, at the bottom of the Mount of Olives, not far from the Golden Gate of the temple, a most beautiful youth, with rich fair locks, worn uncovered (like him whom Paulus had just seen), met them.

"Friends," quoth the stranger, "have you seen the Master coming down from the Hill of Olives."

"I think," said Paulus, after a little reflection, "that I must have seen him whom you mean." And he described the person who had looked at him.

"That is he," said the beautiful youth. "Pray, which way was he going?"

Paulus told him, and the other after thanking him, was moving swiftly away, when Paulus cried after him:

"Stay one moment," said he, "What is the name of him you call the Master?"

"Know you not?" replied the youth with a smile. "Why, you are, I now observe your dress, a Roman. His name is Iesusus."

"What!" cried Paulus. "Then it is a reality. There is some one of that name who has appeared among men, and appeared at this time, and appeared in this land! There is some one of that name in this land! I will this very day, send off a letter to Dionysius at Athens. And pray, fair youth, what is your own name?"

"Ah!" returned the other, "I am nobody; but they call me John. Yet," added he, "I ought not lightly to name such a name, for the greatest and holiest of mere men, now a prisoner of Herod's is likewise called John; I mean John the Baptist, John the Prophet; yea, more than a prophet: 'John the Angel of God.'"

"I am," returned Paulus, "invited to a great entertainment at Herod's palace this evening. Tell me, why is John the Prophet a prisoner at Herod's?"

"Because he went on God's errand to Herod, to rebuke him for his incestuous marriage."

With this the youth went his way, and Paulus and Longinus went theirs.

CHAPTER XXIV.

At the Golden Gate of the Temple courtyard, a Roman Legionary soldier (detailed as a body-servant to the Gen-



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eral Paulus) met him. The soldier was leading a small, wiry Tauric (or really Tartar) horse. Paulus, twisting a lock of the animal's mane in his left hand, and taking up with the little finger thereof the loop of the bridle, sprang into the ephippia. The soldier smiled, as the still handsome and youthful-looking legatus settled himself on the back of his steed.

"Why are you smiling, my man?" quoth Paulus good-humoredly.

"It was like the spring I saw you take years ago at Formiae, when I was

a boy, upon the back of the horse Sejanus, which no man, my general, ever rode save you," replied the soldier.

"Ah!" said Paulus, smiling sadly; "were you there? I fear I am not so agile now. We are all passing away."

"Just as agile still, my general," returned the legionary, in a cordial tone; "but about twice as strong."

"Away! begone!" cried Paulus, laughing; "I am growing old." And shaking the reins, he waved a salute to Longinus, turned his pony round, and rode away again into the valley westward, while the centurion entered the city by the golden gate, and repaired under the walls of the Temple to Fort Antonio, where he was detailed as officer of Pilate's guard that night.

Paulus, meanwhile, rode slowly on his way, between the Kedron Brook and the walls of Jerusalem, till he came to the Pool of Siloam. There he turned south, galloped to a fort which was near, turned back again to his right, or northward, following the valley of Hinnom at a walking pace, looking up at the white and dazzling buildings of Mount Zion.

As he slowly passed them, he speculated which could have been David's palace. He saw Herod's plainly enough. On his right he noticed the aqueduct from Solomon's Pool, and followed its course as far as the Tower of Hippicus northward. There he entered the city by the Gate of Gennath, and followed the valley of the Cheesemongers (or Tyropean hollow) until he came to Ophal.

(To be Continued.)

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