

DION AND THE SIBYLS.

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

Paulus, at whom the hostess had frequently looked wistfully, now remarked that they all felt much gratitude for the kindness they were receiving, and never could forget it. Crispina, who was going out at the moment, did not reply, but lingered with her hand upon the door; the other hand she passed once across her eyes.

Then the Greek lady observed.

"Good hostess, these are the apartments you intended for some barbarian queen, I believe?"

"Yes, my lady, for Queen Berenice, daughter-in-law of King Herod, the Idumæan, called Herod the Great, with her son Herod Agrippa a wild youth, I understand, about eighteen years old, and her daughter Herodius."

"I heard the tribune quaestor, who commands the praetorians, plead for us with your husband," continued Aglais; "and I suppose that the quaestor's generous eloquence is the cause of our being received into your house at all. But this does not account for your extraordinary kindness to us. We expected to be barely tolerated as inconvenient and unwelcome guests, who kept better customers away."

"Inconvenient and unwelcome," said Crispina, who seemed ready to cry, as, looking around the little group, her glance rested again upon Paulus.

"Whereas," resumed Aglais, "you treat my dear children as if you were their mother. Why are we so fortunate as to find these feelings in a stranger?"

"Honored lady," said she, "the reason is, that I once was the nurse of a youth whom I loved as if he were my own child; and it seemed to me as if I saw my brave beautiful, affectionate nursing again when I saw your son; but so long a time had passed, I nearly fell with fright and astonishment."

Agatha went to the bust of Tiberius, lifted it, and, pointing to the marble image, said in a low, tender voice,

"You nursed him?"

A little cry of dismay escaped the lips of our hostess.

"No one ever thought of looking beneath," said she. "My daughter and I arrange and dust the room. I must remove my poor boy's image. He is indeed forgotten by most people now; but it might harm us, and, alas! alas! could not help him, if this silent face that never smiles at me, any more, were to be discovered. Do not speak of this to anybody, I beg of you, good lady, and my pretty one. 'You' will not?" added she, smiling, but with tears in her eyes as she looked at Paulus. "I feel as though I had reared you."

They said they would take care not to allude to the subject, at all except among themselves, and then Agatha remarked:

"You speak in sorrow of the youth whom you nursed. Is he then dead?"

"Eheu! lady, he is dead nearly twenty years; but he was just about your son's age when they put him to death."

"Put him to death? Why was he put to death, and by whom?" asked Aglais.

"Hush! Maecenas and the emperor ordered it to be done. Oh! do take care. The whole world swarms with spies, and you may be sure an inn is not free from them. Things have been more quiet of late years. When I was young I felt as if my head was but glued to my shoulders, and would fall off every day. As for Crispus, did I not make him cautious how he spake?"

"But your foster-son?"

"Ah poor boy! Poor young knight! He was mad about the ancient Roman liberties; a great student, always reading Tully."

"Was that his crime?" demanded Aglais.

The hostess wiped her eyes with the sleeve of her stola manicata, and said, in a tone little above a whisper, looking round timidly, and closing the door fast.

"Why, Augustus came suddenly one day into a triclinium where he caught a nephew of his trying to hide under a cushion some book which he had been reading. Augustus took the book, and found that it was one of Tully's. The nephew thought he was lost, remembering that it was Augustus who had given up Cicero to Mark Anthony to be murdered. There the emperor stood, fastened to the page, and continued reading and reading till at last he heaved a great breath and, rolling up the book on its roller, laid it softly down and said, 'A great mind, a very great mind, my nephew;' and so he left the room."

"Then it was not your foster-son's admiration of Cicero that caused his death?"

"My foster-son was not Augustus's nephew, you see; but eh! how different a case!—the nephew of a former rival of Augustus. Nor used the emperor's nephew to talk as my poor child would talk. My foster-son used to say that for Augustus to have given up Tully, his friend and benefactor, to be murdered by Mark Anthony, in order that he, Augustus, might be allowed to murder somebody else, and then to discover that neither he nor the human race could enjoy justice, nor see peace, nor have safety, till this very same Anthony should be himself destroyed, was not a pretty tale. Cicero had sided against, and had resisted Julius Caesar; yet Julius had given back his life to a man of whom Rome and the civilized world were proud. The same Tully had sided with, not against Augustus, and had been the making of him; yet the life which a noble enemy had spared and left shining like a star, a base friend stole, and suffered to be quenched; and this for the sake of mankind, had to be very soon himself destroyed. This was not a nice tale, my poor Paulus used to say."

"Nor was it; but your Paulus?" cried Aglais. The travellers all held their breath in surprise and suspense.

"Yes."

"What! the youth whom that bust represents, and whom Augustus put to death, was called Paulus?"

"Yes. They said he had engaged in some conspiracy, the foolish dear! But now, lady I've been led bit by bit, into many disclosures, and I beseech you—"

"Fear not," interrupted Aglais, "I cannot but cherish a fellow-feeling with you; for, although I have something to ask of the emperor, it is justice only. I too, look back to experiences which are akin to yours. My son, yonder, whom the marble image of your foster-son so strikingly resembles, bears the same name; Paulus, and the name of his father was that which headed the list of those who the Triumvirate agreed, should die."

"Permit me, now, to ask once more who you are lady?" I know well the names upon that list."

"My husband," replied the Greek widow, "was brother of the triumvir Lepidus."

"The triumvir was our master," answered the landlady; "and alas! it is too true that he, the triumvir, was timid and weak, and his son, about whose image you have asked me, knew not, poor youth, when he so bitterly blamed Augustus for sacrificing Tully to Mark Anthony, that his own father had given up a brother—that brother whom you married—in the same terrible days, and just in the same kind of way."

"Whose bust, then, do you say is this which is so like my son?" asked Aglais.



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"The bust of your son's first cousin, lady. My foster-son's father was your husband's brother."

"No wonder," cried Agatha, "that my brother should be like his own first cousin."

"No," said Aglais; "but it is as surprising as it is fortunate that we should have come to this house and have fallen among kind persons disposed to be friends, like our hostess, her good husband and little Benigna yonder."

"There is nothing which my husband and I would not do," said Crispina, "for the welfare of all belonging to the great Aemilian family, in whose service we both were born and spent our childhood the family which gave us our freedom in youth, and our launch in life as a married couple. As for me, you know now how I must feel when I look upon the face of your son."

A pause ensued, and then Aglais said,

"Your former master, the triumvir, wrote to my husband asking for forgiveness for having consented to let his name appear in the list of the proscribed, and explaining how he got it erased. Therefore, let not that subject trouble you."

"I happen on my side, to know for a fact," answered the hostess, "that the one circumstance to which you refer has been the great remorse of the triumvir's life. The old man still mumbles and maunders, complaining that he never received a reply to that letter. He would die happy if he could, but see you, and learn that all had been forgiven."

Before Aglais had time to make any answer, the landlord appeared carrying a small cadus, or cask, marked in large black letters—

L. CARNIFICIO
S. POMPEIO
COS.

"I thought so!" cried good Crispus. "Women (excuse me, lady, I mean my wife and daughter) will jabber and cackle even when ladies may be tired, and, as I sincerely hope, hungry. Do, Crispina, let me see the ladies and this young knight enjoy their little supper. This Alban wine, my lady, is nearly fifty years old, I do assure you; look at the consul's name on the cask. Benigna, young as she is, might drink ten cyathi of it without hurt. By the by, I have forgotten the measure. Run, Benigna, and fetch a cyathus (a ladle cup) to help out the wine."

"Jabber and cackle," said the hostess. "Crispus, this lady is the widow, and these are the son and daughter of Paulus Aemilius Lepidus."

The landlord, in the full career of his own jabber, was stricken mute for a moment. He gazed at each of our travellers in turn, looking very fixedly at Paulus. At last he said,

"This, then accounts for the wonderful likeness. My lady, I will never take one brass coin from you or yours; not an as, so help me! You must command in this house. Do not think otherwise."

And, apparently to prevent Aglais from answering him, he drew his wife hastily out of the room, and closed the door.

(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.

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"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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