

DION AND THE SYBILS

By Miles Gerald Keon

A CLASSIC CHRISTIAN NOVEL.

The beautiful ladies, Agrippina Julia and Agrippina Marcella, had left in the castle some elegant fixtures and even movables (including certain pictures and the statues on the roof), which they gave at a nominal price to Germanicus's favorite staff-officer. Claudius (in whose stead Paulus had ridden Tiberius's untamed horse) had by this time been wedded to little Benigna, and the incoming proprietors of the neighboring property easily prevailed on the newly-married couple to live with them; the husband as a sort of steward, who should oversee all the outdoor slaves and could, when Paulus wished, act ably as his secretary too; and the wife as the housekeeper, with supreme authority over all the indoor servants.

Crispus and Crispina often found time (and made it) to stroll over the fields for a visit to the castle; and for a loving talk with the lord and the ladies whom they deemed without their parallels upon earth. Moreover, Agatha had persuaded Josiah Maccabaeus and Esther not to leave them just when their far wanderings, wild adventures and dreadful trials had come to so happy a term. Esther had conceived a tender affection for the beautiful damsel whom she had been largely instrumental in saving from so dire a fate, and delivering out of so appalling a captivity, while Agatha returned this feeling with enthusiasm. She spared no eloquence, then, to persuade Maccabaeus and his lovely daughter to postpone their return to Syria—till when? Here it was that Paulus appeared in a new character, that of a more consummate orator than Dionysius himself. He stated that he had formed so sublime an estimate of Josiah's ancestors that he could not be happy till he was able to read the Book of Maccabees in Hebrew; and he urged arguments so touching that Josiah (who really had far more urgent reasons for quitting Eleazar than for immediately returning to Jerusalem) consented to stay until he had instructed Paulus in the language of the Patriarchs and the Prophets. In this course of study, Paulus gradually discovered that Esther taught him more effectually than her father knew how. But what learnt he from the sweet mouth and wondrous Eastern eyes of the noble maiden who had saved his sister? He really learned Hebrew; and as it was the exploits of her own glorious ancestors which she was expounding to one who could well appreciate them, the sympathy and enthusiasm which they shared together knit their hearts into a bond, a natural and complete union. The Lady Aglais, as she contemplated a youth and a maiden whose spirits were not unworthy of each other thus occupied, saw far beyond, as she imagined, what either of those students dreamt of anticipating; and saw it with satisfaction.

Philip, the old freedman of the family, was installed at Liridium, as it was called, in a capacity not unlike that of the seneschal of subsequent ages. Melena, the slave, received her freedom, but would not practically take it; and she remained the special personal servant of the Lady Aglais. Paulus pressed Thellus to give up the army (for which Paulus would get him permission), and settle near them with his daughter Prudentia, in a little cottage which stood about two miles down the river, surrounded by rhododendrons, oleanders, and myrtles, and which, being part of Paulus's new property, he earnestly begged Thellus to accept as a gift.

"But," said Thellus, after thanking him, "you have not quitted the army yet yourself; and why should I? Germanicus vows, I am told, that he will never rest till he has found the bones of Varus and his legions, and given them their solemn burial. I mean to be at the funeral and so must you."

"Well, if we come back safe," persisted Paulus, "you will settle near us in that cottage with your daughter, and eat fresh fish of your own catching for breakfast."

And so it was agreed. But for a while there were no more wars, and during the lull many visitors came to Liridium. Among them, poor Longinus never came; he had been foolish enough to fall in love with Agatha, and deeming his love hopeless, avoided the family altogether. Dionysius had been persuaded to give up his pretty miniature mansion in Rome, and pass altogether under the roof of his beloved friends (who, indeed, owed the place to him) the remainder of his sojourn in Italy; for to Athens he had resolved to return, and—nescius

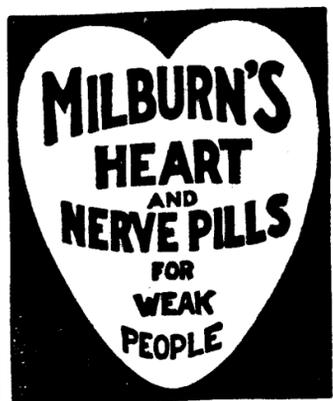
futuri—in Athens to live and die. Another person who during the lull between German wars, frequently came now to Liridium, was the accomplished Velleius Paterculus. Esther assured Agatha that she knew why Paterculus appeared so frequently and made himself so agreeable—although so handsome a man, of so fine a position, with manner so distinguished, and a reputation so considerable, and who, besides, talked so well, could hardly be otherwise. But in telling Agatha that she knew why he came so often, Esther adopted a certain demureness, a certain significance, which was meant, in an innocent and loving sense, to tease as well as to please—and did. Agatha's repudiation of even the possibility of what was thus lawlessly hinted was one day overwhelmingly refuted by Velleius Paterculus himself, who, truth to tell, had been making love to the young lady assiduously, and who, on the day in question, after being roundly accused by her of having contrived her deliverance from Tiberius and from the Calpurnian House, asked her to be his wife with her mother's and brother's consent. As it happened that the invitation thus proffered was the first that Agatha Aemiliana ever received, and as she was very young and inexperienced, she behaved most absurdly in her own estimation, but charmingly in his. She burst into tears; and when he timidly and gently inquired whether he had hurt her feelings or offended her, declared that he had never done anything of the sort. The witty suitor then remarked, gravely smiling, that she had addressed an inquiry to him which only a husband could answer, but the answer to which he would be most happy to give his wife. But Aglais objected that as her son would frequently be away from her with the army, if her daughter were taken away at the same time she would be on a sudden left desolate; and, while consenting to the marriage, begged that it might be postponed for a time. To this Paterculus submitted, and Agatha joyfully agreed.

(To be Continued.)

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