

CHAPTER XXIII.

A **PIERCING** pain roused Vinicius. At the first moment he could not understand where he was, nor what was happening. He felt a roaring in his head, and his eyes were covered as if with mist. Gradually, however, his consciousness returned, and at last he beheld through that mist three persons bending over him. Two he recognized: one was Ursus, the other the old man whom he had thrust aside when carrying off Lygia. The third, an utter stranger, was holding his left arm, and feeling it from the elbow upward as far as the shoulder-blade. This caused so terrible a pain that Vinicius, thinking it a kind of revenge which they were taking, said through his set teeth, "Kill me!" But they paid no apparent heed to his words, just as though they heard them not, or considered them the usual groans of suffering. Ursus, with his anxious and also threatening face of a barbarian, held a bundle of white cloth torn in long strips. The old man spoke to the person who was pressing the arm of Vinicius, —

"Glaucus, art thou certain that the wound in the head is not mortal?"

"Yes, worthy Crispus," answered Glaucus. "While serving in the fleet as a slave, and afterward while living at Naples, I cured many wounds, and with the pay which came to me from that occupation I freed myself and my relatives at last. The wound in the head is slight. When this one [here he pointed to Ursus with his head] took the girl from the young man, he pushed him against the wall; the young man while falling put out his arm, evidently to save himself; he broke and disjoined it, but by so doing saved his head and his life."

"Thou hast had more than one of the brotherhood in thy care," added Crispus, "and hast the repute of a skilful physician; therefore I sent Ursus to bring thee."

"Ursus, who on the road confessed that yesterday he was ready to kill me!"

"He confessed his intention earlier to me than to thee; but I, who know thee and thy love for Christ, explained to

him that the traitor is not thou, but the unknown, who tried to persuade him to murder."

"That was an evil spirit, but I took him for an angel," said Ursus, with a sigh.

"Some other time thou wilt tell me, but now we must think of this wounded man." Thus speaking, he began to set the arm. Though Crispus sprinkled water on his face, Vinicius fainted repeatedly from suffering; that was, however, a fortunate circumstance, since he did not feel the pain of putting his arm into joint, nor of setting it. Glaucus fixed the limb between two strips of wood, which he bound quickly and firmly, so as to keep the arm motionless. When the operation was over, Vinicius recovered consciousness again and saw Lygia above him. She stood there at the bed holding a brass basin with water, in which from time to time Glaucus dipped a sponge and moistened the head of his patient.

Vinicius gazed and could not believe his eyes. What he saw seemed a dream, or the pleasant vision brought by fever, and only after a long time could he whisper, —

"Lygia!"

The basin trembled in her hand at that sound, but she turned on him eyes full of sadness.

"Peace be with thee!" answered she, in a low voice.

She stood there with extended arms, her face full of pity and sorrow. But he gazed, as if to fill his sight with her, so that after his lids were closed the picture might remain under them. He looked at her face, paler and smaller than it had been, at the tresses of dark hair, at the poor dress of a laboring woman; he looked so intently that her snowy forehead began to grow rose-colored under the influence of his look. And first he thought that he would love her always; and second, that that paleness of hers and that poverty were his work, — that it was he who had driven her from a house where she was loved, and surrounded with plenty and comfort, and thrust her into that squalid room, and clothed her in that poor robe of dark wool.

He would have arrayed her in the costliest brocade, in all the jewels of the earth; hence astonishment, alarm, and pity seized him, and sorrow so great that he would have fallen at her feet had he been able to move.

"Lygia," said he, "thou didst not permit my death."

"May God return health to thee," she answered, with sweetness.

For Vinicius, who had a feeling both of those wrongs

which he had inflicted on her formerly, and those which he had wished to inflict on her recently, there was a real balsam in Lygia's words. He forgot at the moment that through her mouth Christian teaching might speak; he felt only that a beloved woman was speaking, and that in her answer there was a special tenderness, a goodness simply preterhuman, which shook him to the depth of his soul. As just before he had grown weak from pain, so now he grew weak from emotion. A certain faintness came on him, at once immense and agreeable. He felt as if falling into some abyss, but he felt that to fall was pleasant, and that he was happy. He thought at that moment of weakness that a divinity was standing above him.

Meanwhile Glaucus had finished washing the wound in his head, and had applied a healing ointment. Ursus took the brass basin from Lygia's hands; she brought a cup of water and wine which stood ready on the table, and put it to the wounded man's lips. Vinicius drank eagerly, and felt great relief. After the operation the pain had almost passed; the wound and contusion began to grow firm; perfect consciousness returned to him.

"Give me another drink," said he.

Lygia took the empty cup to the next room; meanwhile Crispus, after a few words with Glaucus, approached the bed saying,—

"God has not permitted thee, Vinicius, to accomplish an evil deed, and has preserved thee in life so that thou shouldst come to thy mind. He, before whom man is but dust, delivered thee defenceless into our hands; but Christ, in whom we believe, commanded us to love even our enemies. Therefore we have dressed thy wounds, and, as Lygia has said, we will implore God to restore thy health, but we cannot watch over thee longer. Be in peace, then, and think whether it beseems thee to continue thy pursuit of Lygia. Thou hast deprived her of guardians, and us of a roof, though we return thee good for evil."

"Do ye wish to leave me?" inquired Vinicius.

"We wish to leave this house, in which prosecution by the prefect of the city may reach us. Thy companion was killed; thou, who art powerful among thy own people, art wounded. This did not happen through our fault, but the anger of the law might fall on us."

"Have no fear of prosecution," replied Vinicius; "I will protect you."

Crispus did not like to tell him that with them it was not only a question of the prefect and the police, but of him; they wished to secure Lygia from his further pursuit.

"Lord," said he, "thy right arm is well. Here are tablets and a stilus; write to thy servants to bring a litter this evening and bear thee to thy own house, where thou wilt have more comfort than in our poverty. We dwell here with a poor widow, who will return soon with her son, and this youth will take thy letter; as to us, we must all find another hiding-place."

Vinicius grew pale, for he understood that they wished to separate him from Lygia, and that if he lost her now he might never see her in life again. He knew indeed that things of great import had come between him and her, in virtue of which, if he wished to possess her, he must seek some new methods which he had not had time yet to think over. He understood too that whatever he might tell these people, though he should swear that he would return Lygia to Pomponia Græcina, they would not believe him, and were justified in refusing belief. Moreover, he might have done that before. Instead of hunting for Lygia, he might have gone to Pomponia and sworn to her that he renounced pursuit, and in that case Pomponia herself would have found Lygia and brought her home. No; he felt that such promises would not restrain them, and no solemn oath would be received, the more since, not being a Christian, he could swear only by the immortal gods, in whom he did not himself believe greatly, and whom they considered evil spirits.

He desired desperately to influence Lygia and her guardians in some way, but for that there was need of time. For him it was all-important to see her, to look at her for a few days even. As every fragment of a plank or an oar seems salvation to a drowning man, so to him it seemed that during those few days he might say something to bring him nearer to her, that he might think out something, that something favorable might happen. Hence he collected his thoughts and said,—

"Listen to me, Christians. Yesterday I was with you in Ostrianum, and I heard your teaching; but though I did not know it, your deeds have convinced me that you are honest and good people. Tell that widow who occupies this house to stay in it, stay in it yourselves, and let me stay. Let this man [here he turned to Glaucus], who is a physician, or at least understands the care of wounds, tell whether it is pos

sible to carry me from here to-day. I am sick, I have a broken arm, which must remain immovable for a few days even; therefore I declare to you that I will not leave this house unless you bear me hence by force!"

Here he stopped, for breath failed in his breast, and Crispus said, —

"We will use no force against thee, lord; we will only take away our own heads."

At this the young man, unused to resistance, frowned and said, —

"Permit me to recover breath;" and after a time he began again to speak, —

"Of Croton, whom Ursus killed, no one will inquire. He had to go to-day to Beneventum, whither he was summoned by Vatinius, therefore all will think that he has gone there. When I entered this house in company with Croton, no one saw us except a Greek who was with us in Ostrianum. I will indicate to you his lodgings; bring that man to me. On him I will enjoin silence; he is paid by me. I will send a letter to my own house stating that I too went to Beneventum. If the Greek has informed the prefect already, I will declare that I myself killed Croton, and that it was he who broke my arm. I will do this, by my father's shade and by my mother's! Ye may remain in safety here; not a hair will fall from the head of one of you. Bring hither, and bring in haste, the Greek whose name is Chilo Chilonides!"

"Then Glaucus will remain with thee," said Crispus, "and the widow will nurse thee."

"Consider, old man, what I say," said Vinicius, who frowned still more. "I owe thee gratitude, and thou seemest good and honest; but thou dost not tell me what thou hast in the bottom of thy soul. Thou art afraid lest I summon my slaves and command them to take Lygia. Is this true?"

"It is," said Crispus, with sternness.

"Then remember this, I shall speak before all to Chilo, and write a letter home that I have gone to Beneventum. I shall have no messengers hereafter but you. Remember this, and do not irritate me longer."

Here he was indignant, and his face was contorted with anger. Afterward he began to speak excitedly, —

"Hast thou thought that I would deny that I wish to stay here to see her? A fool would have divined that, even had I denied it. But I will not try to take her by force

any longer. I will tell thee more: if she will not stay here, I will tear the bandages with this sound hand from my arm, will take neither food nor drink; let my death fall on thee and thy brethren. Why hast thou nursed me? Why hast thou not commanded to kill me?"

He grew pale from weakness and anger.

Lygia, who had heard all from the other room and who was certain that Vinicius would do what he promised, was terrified. She would not have him die for anything. Wounded and defenceless, he roused in her compassion, not fear. Living from the time of her flight among people in continual religious enthusiasm, thinking only of sacrifices, offerings, and boundless charity, she had grown so excited herself through that new inspiration, that for her it took the place of house, family, lost happiness, and made her one of those Christian maidens who, later on, changed the former soul of the world. Vinicius had been too important in her fate, had been thrust too much on her, to let her forget him. She had thought of him whole days, and more than once had begged God for the moment in which, following the inspiration of religion, she might return good for his evil, mercy for his persecution, break him, win him to Christ, save him. And now it seemed to her that precisely that moment had come, and that her prayers had been heard.

She approached Crispus therefore with a face as if inspired, and addressed him as though some other voice spoke through her, —

"Let him stay among us, Crispus, and we will stay with him till Christ gives him health."

The old presbyter, accustomed to seek in all things the inspiration of God, beholding her exaltation, thought at once that perhaps a higher power was speaking through her, and, fearing in his heart, he bent his gray head, saying, —

"Let it be as thou sayest."

On Vinicius, who the whole time had not taken his eyes from her, this ready obedience of Crispus produced a wonderful and pervading impression. It seemed to him that among the Christians Lygia was a kind of sibyl or priestess whom they surrounded with obedience and honor; and he yielded himself also to that honor. To the love which he felt was joined now a certain awe, in presence of which love itself became something almost insolent. He could not familiarize himself, however, with the thought that their

relations had changed: that now not she was dependent on his will, but he on hers; that he was lying there sick and broken; that he had ceased to be an attacking, a conquering force; that he was like a defenceless child in her care. For his proud and commanding nature such relations with any other person would have been humiliating; now, however, not only did he not feel humiliated, but he was thankful to her as to his sovereign. In him those were feelings unheard-of, feelings which he could not have entertained the day before, and which would have amazed him even on that day had he been able to analyze them clearly. But he did not inquire at the moment why it was so, just as if the position had been perfectly natural; he merely felt happy because he remained there.

And he wished to thank her with gratefulness, and still with a kind of feeling unknown to him in such a degree that he knew not what to call it, for it was simply submission. His previous excitement had so exhausted him that he could not speak, and he thanked her only with his eyes, which were gleaming from delight because he remained near her, and would be able to see her — to-morrow, next day, perhaps a long time. That delight was diminished only by the dread that he might lose what he had gained. So great was this dread that when Lygia gave him water a second time, and the wish seized him to take her hand, he feared to do so. He feared! — he, that Vinicius who at Cæsar's feast had kissed her lips in spite of her! he, that Vinicius who after her flight had promised himself to drag her by the hair to the cubiculum, or give command to flog her!

CHAPTER XXIV.

BUT he began also to fear that some outside force might disturb his delight. Chilo might give notice of his disappearance to the prefect of the city, or to his freedmen at home; and in such an event an invasion of the house by the city guards was likely. Through his head flew the thought, it is true, that in that event he might give command to seize Lygia and shut her up in his house, but he felt that he ought not to do so, and he was not capable of acting thus. He was tyrannical, insolent, and corrupt enough, if need be he was inexorable, but he was not Tigellinus or Nero. Military life had left in him a certain feeling of justice, and religion, and a conscience to understand that such a deed would be monstrously mean. He would have been capable, perhaps, of committing such a deed during an access of anger and while in possession of his strength, but at that moment he was filled with tenderness, and was sick. The only question for Vinicius at that time was that no one should stand between him and Lygia.

He noticed, too, with astonishment, that from the moment when Lygia had taken his part, neither she herself nor Crispus asked from him any assurances, just as if they felt confident that, in case of need, some superhuman power would defend them. The young tribune, in whose head the distinction between things possible and impossible had grown involved and faint since the discourse of the Apostle in Ostrianum, was also not too far from supposing that that might take place. But considering things more soberly, he remembered what he had said of the Greek, and asked again that Chilo be brought to him.

Crispus agreed, and they decided to send Ursus. Vinicius, who in recent days, before his visit to Ostrianum, had sent slaves frequently to Chilo, though without result, indicated his lodgings accurately to the Lygian; then writing a few words on the tablet, he said, turning to Crispus, —

“I give a tablet, for this man is suspicious and cunning. Frequently when summoned by me, he gave directions to answer my people that he was not at home; he did so always when he had no good news for me, and feared my anger.”

"If I find him, I will bring him, willing or unwilling," said Ursus. Then, taking his mantle, he went out hurriedly.

To find any one in Rome was not easy, even with the most accurate directions; but in those cases the instinct of a hunter aided Ursus, and also his great knowledge of the city. After a certain time, therefore, he found himself at Chilo's lodgings.

He did not recognize Chilo, however. He had seen him but once in his life before, and moreover, in the night. Besides, that lofty and confident old man who had persuaded him to murder Glaucus was so unlike the Greek, bent double from terror, that no one could suppose the two to be one person. Chilo, noticing that Ursus looked at him as a perfect stranger, recovered from his first fear. The sight of the tablet, with the writing of Vinicius, calmed him still more. At least the suspicion that he would take him into an ambush purposely did not trouble him. He thought, besides, that the Christians had not killed Vinicius, evidently because they had not dared to raise hands on so noted a person.

"And then Vinicius will protect me in case of need," thought he; "of course he does not send to deliver me to death."

Summoning some courage, therefore, he said: "My good man, has not my friend the noble Vinicius sent a litter? My feet are swollen; I cannot walk so far."

"He has not," answered Ursus; "we shall go on foot."

"But if I refuse?"

"Do not, for thou wilt have to go."

"And I will go, but of my own will. No one could force me, for I am a free man, and a friend of the prefect of the city. As a sage, I have also means to overcome others, and I know how to turn people into trees and wild beasts. But I will go, I will go! I will only put on a mantle somewhat warmer, and a hood, lest the slaves of that quarter might recognize me; they would stop me every moment to kiss my hands."

He put on a new mantle then, and let down a broad Gallic hood, lest Ursus might recognize his features on coming into clearer light.

"Where wilt thou take me?" asked he on the road.

"To the Trans-Tiber."

"I am not long in Rome, and I have never been there, but there too, of course, live men who love virtue."

But Ursus, who was a simple man, and had heard Vinicius say that the Greek had been with him in Ostrianum, and had seen him with Croton enter the house in which Lygia lived, stopped for a moment and said, —

"Speak no untruth, old man, for to-day thou wert with Vinicius in Ostrianum and under our gate."

"Ah!" said Chilo, "then is your house in the Trans-Tiber? I have not been long in Rome, and know not how the different parts are named. That is true, friend; I was under the gate, and implored Vinicius in the name of virtue not to enter. I was in Ostrianum, and dost thou know why? I am working for a certain time over the conversion of Vinicius, and wished him to hear the chief of the Apostles. May the light penetrate his soul and thine! But thou art a Christian, and wishest truth to overcome falsehood."

"That is true," answered Ursus, with humility.

Courage returned to Chilo completely.

"Vinicius is a powerful lord," said he, "and a friend of Cæsar. He listens often yet to the whisperings of the evil spirit; but if even a hair should fall from his head, Cæsar would take vengeance on all the Christians."

"A higher power is protecting us."

"Surely, surely! But what do ye intend to do with Vinicius?" inquired Chilo, with fresh alarm.

"I know not. Christ commands mercy."

"Thou hast answered excellently. Think of this always, or thou wilt fry in hell like a sausage in a frying-pan."

Ursus sighed, and Chilo thought that he could always do what he liked with that man, who was terrible at the moment of his first outburst. So, wishing to know what happened at the seizing of Lygia, he asked further, in the voice of a stern judge, —

"How did ye treat Croton? Speak, and do not prevaricate."

Ursus sighed a second time. "Vinicius will tell thee."

"That means that thou didst stab him with a knife, or kill him with a club."

"I was without arms."

The Greek could not resist amazement at the superhuman strength of the barbarian.

"May Pluto — that is to say, may Christ pardon thee!"

They went on for some time in silence; then Chilo said:

"I will not betray thee; but have a care of the watches."

"I fear Christ, not the watches."

"And that is proper. There is no more grievous crime than murder. I will pray for thee; but I know not if even my prayer can be effective, unless thou make a vow never to touch any one in life with a finger."

"As it is, I have not killed purposely," answered Ursus.

But Chilo, who desired to secure himself in every case, did not cease to condemn murder, and urge Ursus to make the vow. He inquired also about Vinicius; but the Lygian answered his inquiries unwillingly, repeating that from Vinicius himself he would hear what he needed. Speaking in this way, they passed at last the long road which separated the lodgings of the Greek from the Trans-Tiber, and found themselves before the house. Chilo's heart began to beat again unquietly. From dread it seemed to him that Ursus was beginning to look at him with a kind of greedy expression.

"It is small consolation to me," said he to himself, "if he kills me unwillingly. I prefer in every case that paralysis should strike him, and with him all the Lygians, — which do thou effect, O Zeus, if thou art able."

Thus meditating, he wrapped himself more closely in his Gallic mantle, repeating that he feared the cold. Finally, when they had passed the entrance and the first court, and found themselves in the corridor leading to the garden of the little house, he halted suddenly and said, —

"Let me draw breath, or I shall not be able to speak with Vinicius and give him saving advice."

He halted; for though he said to himself that no danger threatened, still his legs trembled under him at the thought that he was among those mysterious people whom he had seen in Ostrianum.

Meanwhile a hymn came to their ears from the little house.

"What is that?" inquired Chilo.

"Thou sayest that thou art a Christian, and knowest not that among us it is the custom after every meal to glorify our Saviour with singing," answered Ursus. "Miriam and her son must have returned, and perhaps the Apostle is with them, for he visits the widow and Crispus every day."

"Conduct me directly to Vinicius."

"Vinicius is in the same room with all, for that is the only large one; the others are very small chambers, to which we go only to sleep. Come in; thou wilt rest there."

They entered. It was rather dark in the room; the evening was cloudy and cold, the flames of a few candles did not dispel the darkness altogether. Vinicius divined rather than

recognized Chilo in the hooded man. Chilo, seeing the bed in the corner of the room, and on it Vinicius, moved toward him directly, not looking at the others, as if with the conviction that it would be safest near him.

"Oh, lord, why didst thou not listen to my counsels?" exclaimed he, putting his hands together.

"Silence!" said Vinicius, "and listen!"

Here he looked sharply into Chilo's eyes, and spoke slowly with emphasis, as if wishing the Greek to understand every word of his as a command, and to keep it forever in memory.

"Croton threw himself on me to kill and rob me, dost understand? I killed him then, and these people dressed the wounds which I received in the struggle."

Chilo understood in a moment that if Vinicius spoke in this way it must be in virtue of some agreement with the Christians, and in that case he wished people to believe him. He saw this, too, from his face; hence in one moment, without showing doubt or astonishment, he raised his eyes and exclaimed, —

"That was a faith-breaking ruffian! But I warned thee, lord, not to trust him; my teachings bounded from his head as do peas when thrown against a wall. In all Hades there are not torments enough for him. He who cannot be honest must be a rogue; what is more difficult than for a rogue to become honest? But to fall on his benefactor, a lord so magnanimous — O gods!"

Here he remembered that he had represented himself to Ursus on the way as a Christian, and stopped.

"Were it not for the 'sica,' which I brought, he would have slain me," said Vinicius.

"I bless the moment in which I advised thee to take a knife even."

Vinicius turned an inquiring glance on the Greek, and asked, —

"What hast thou done to-day?"

"How? What! have I not told thee, lord, that I made a vow for thy health?"

"Nothing more?"

"I was just preparing to visit thee, when this good man came and said that thou hadst sent for me."

"Here is a tablet. Thou wilt go with it to my house; thou wilt find my freedman and give it to him. It is written on the tablet that I have gone to Beneventum. Thou wilt tell Demas from thyself that I went this morning, sum-

moned by an urgent letter from Petronius." Here he repeated with emphasis: "I have gone to Beneventum, dost understand?"

"Thou hast gone, lord. This morning I took leave of thee at the Porta Capena, and from the time of thy departure such sadness possesses me that if thy magnanimity will not soften it, I shall cry myself to death, like the unhappy wife of Zethos¹ in grief for Itylos."

Vinicius, though sick and accustomed to the Greek's suppleteness, could not repress a smile. He was glad, moreover, that Chilo understood in a flash; hence he said, —

"Therefore I will write that thy tears be wiped away. Give me the candle."

Chilo, now pacified perfectly, rose, and, advancing a few steps toward the chimney, took one of the candles which was burning at the wall. But while he was doing this, the hood slipped from his head, and the light fell directly on his face. Glaucus sprang from his seat and, coming up quickly, stood before him.

"Dost thou not recognize me, Cephas?" asked he. In his voice there was something so terrible that a shiver ran through all present.

Chilo raised the candle, and dropped it to the earth almost the same instant; then he bent nearly double and began to groan, —

"I am not he — I am not he! Mercy!"

Glaucus turned toward the faithful, and said, —

"This is the man who betrayed — who ruined me and my family!"

That history was known to all the Christians and to Vinicius, who had not guessed who that Glaucus was, — for this reason only, that he fainted repeatedly from pain during the dressing of his wound, and had not heard his name. But for Ursus that short moment, with the words of Glaucus, was like a lightning-flash in darkness. Recognizing Chilo, he was at his side with one spring, and, seizing his arm, bent it back, exclaiming, —

"This is the man who persuaded me to kill Glaucus!"

"Mercy!" groaned Chilo. "I will give you — O lord!" exclaimed he, turning his head to Vinicius, "save me! I trusted in thee, take my part. Thy letter — I will deliver it. O lord, lord!"

But Vinicius, who looked with more indifference than any

¹ Aedon turned into a nightingale.

one at what was passing, first because all the affairs of the Greek were more or less known to him, and second because his heart knew not what pity was, said, —

"Bury him in the garden; some one else will take the letter."

It seemed to Chilo that those words were his final sentence. His bones were shaking in the terrible hands of Ursus; his eyes were filled with tears from pain.

"By your God, pity!" cried he; "I am a Christian! *Pax vobiscum!* I am a Christian; and if ye do not believe me, baptize me again, baptize me twice, ten times! Glaucus, that is a mistake! Let me speak, make me a slave! Do not kill me! Have mercy!"

His voice, stifled with pain, was growing weaker and weaker, when the Apostle Peter rose at the table; for a moment his white head shook, drooping toward his breast, and his eyes were closed; but he opened them then, and said amid silence, —

"The Saviour said this to us: 'If thy brother has sinned against thee, chastise him; but if he is repentant, forgive him. And if he has offended seven times in the day against thee, and has turned to thee seven times, saying, 'Have mercy on me!' forgive him.'"

Then came a still deeper silence. Glaucus remained a long time with his hands covering his face; at last he removed them and said, —

"Cephas, may God forgive thy offences, as I forgive them in the name of Christ."

Ursus, letting go the arms of the Greek, added at once:

"May the Saviour be merciful to thee as I forgive thee."

Chilo dropped to the ground, and, supported on it with his hands, turned his head like a wild beast caught in a snare, looking around to see whence death might come. He did not trust his eyes and ears yet, and dared not hope for forgiveness. Consciousness returned to him slowly; his blue lips were still trembling from terror.

"Depart in peace!" said the Apostle, meanwhile.

Chilo rose, but could not speak. He approached the bed of Vinicius, as if seeking protection in it still; for he had not time yet to think that that man, though he had used his services and was still his accomplice, condemned him, while those against whom he had acted forgave. This thought was to come to him later. At present simply aston-

ishment and incredulity were evident in his look. Though he had seen that they forgave him, he wished to bear away his head at the earliest from among these incomprehensible people, whose kindness terrified him almost as much as their cruelty would have terrified. It seemed to him that should he remain longer, something unexpected would happen again; hence, standing above Vinicius, he said with a broken voice, —

“Give the letter, lord, — give the letter!” And snatching the tablet which Vinicius handed him, he made one obeisance to the Christians, another to the sick man, pushed along sidewise by the very wall, and hurried out through the door. In the garden, when darkness surrounded him, fear raised the hair on his head again, for he felt sure that Ursus would rush out and kill him in the night. He would have run with all his might, but his legs would not move; next moment they were perfectly uncontrollable, for Ursus stood near him really.

Chilo fell with his face to the earth, and began to groan: “Urban — in Christ’s name” —

But Urban said: “Fear not. The Apostle commanded me to lead thee out beyond the gate, lest thou might go astray in the darkness, and, if strength failed thee, to conduct thee home.”

“What dost thou say?” asked Chilo, raising his face. “What? Thou wilt not kill me?”

“No, I will not; and if I seized thee too roughly and harmed a bone in thee, pardon me.”

“Help me to rise,” said the Greek. “Thou wilt not kill me? Thou wilt not? Take me to the street; I will go farther alone.”

Ursus raised him as he might a feather, and placed him on his feet; then he conducted him through the dark corridor to the second court. From there was a passage to the entrance and the street. In the corridor Chilo repeated again in his soul, “It is all over with me!” Only when he found himself on the street did he recover and say, “I can go on alone.”

“Peace be with thee.”

“And with thee! and with thee! Let me draw breath.” And after Ursus had gone, he breathed with a full breast. He felt his waist and hips, as if to convince himself that he was living, and then moved forward with hurried step.

“But why did they not kill me?” And in spite of all his talk with Euricius about Christian teaching, in spite of his conversation at the river with Urban, and in spite of all that he had heard in Ostrianum, he could find no answer to that question.

CHAPTER XXV.

NEITHER could Vinicius discover the cause of what had happened; and in the bottom of his soul he was almost as much astonished as Chilo. That those people should treat him as they had, and, instead of avenging his attack, dress his wounds carefully, he ascribed partly to the doctrine which they confessed, more to Lygia, and a little, also, to his great significance. But their conduct with Chilo simply went beyond his understanding of man's power of forgiveness. And the question thrust itself into his mind: Why did they not kill the Greek? They might have killed him with impunity. Ursus would have buried him in the garden, or borne him in the dark to the Tiber, which during that period of night-murders, committed by Cæsar himself even, cast up human bodies so frequently in the morning that no one inquired whence they came. To his thinking, the Christians had not only the power, but the right to kill Chilo. True, pity was not entirely a stranger to that world to which the young patrician belonged. The Athenians raised an altar to pity, and opposed for a long time the introduction of gladiatorial combats into Athens. In Rome itself the conquered received pardon sometimes, as, for instance, Calicratus, king of the Britons, who, taken prisoner in the time of Claudius, and provided for by him bountifully, dwelt in the city in freedom. But vengeance for a personal wrong seemed to Vinicius, as to all, proper and justified. The neglect of it was entirely opposed to his spirit. True, he had heard in Ostrianum that one should love even enemies; that, however, he considered as a kind of theory without application in life. And now this passed through his head: that perhaps they had not killed Chilo because the day was among festivals, or was in some period of the moon during which it was not proper for Christians to kill a man. He had heard that there are days among various nations on which it is not permitted to begin war even. But why, in such a case, did they not deliver the Greek up to justice? Why did the Apostle say that if a man offended seven times, it was necessary to forgive him seven times; and why did Glaucus say to Chilo, "May God forgive thee, as I forgive thee"?

Chilo had done him the most terrible wrong that one man could do another. At the very thought of how he would act with a man who killed Lygia, for instance, the heart of Vinicius seethed up, as does water in a caldron; there were no torments which he would not inflict in his vengeance! But Glaucus had forgiven; Ursus, too, had forgiven,—Ursus, who might in fact kill whomever he wished in Rome with perfect impunity, for all he needed was to kill the king of the grove in Nemi, and take his place. Could the gladiator holding that office to which he had succeeded only by killing the previous "king," resist the man whom Croton could not resist? There was only one answer to all these questions: that they refrained from killing him through a goodness so great that the like of it had not been in the world up to that time, and through an unbounded love of man, which commands to forget one's self, one's wrongs, one's happiness and misfortune, and live for others. What reward those people were to receive for this, Vinicius heard in Ostrianum, but he could not understand it. He felt, however, that the earthly life connected with the duty of renouncing everything good and rich for the benefit of others must be wretched. So in what he thought of the Christians at that moment, besides the greatest astonishment, there was pity, and as it were a shade of contempt. It seemed to him that they were sheep which earlier or later must be eaten by wolves; his Roman nature could yield no recognition to people who let themselves be devoured. This one thing struck him, however,—that after Chilo's departure the faces of all were bright with a certain deep joy. The Apostle approached Glaucus, placed his hand on his head, and said,—

"In thee Christ has triumphed."

The other raised his eyes, which were full of hope, and as bright with joy as if some great unexpected happiness had been poured on him. Vinicius, who could understand only joy or delight born of vengeance, looked on him with eyes staring from fever, and somewhat as he would on a madman. He saw, however, and saw not without internal indignation, that Lygia pressed her lips of a queen to the hand of that man, who had the appearance of a slave; and it seemed to him that the order of the world was inverted utterly. Next Ursus told how he had conducted Chilo to the street, and had asked forgiveness for the harm which he might have done his bones; for this the Apostle blessed him

also. Crispus declared that it was a day of great victory. Hearing of this victory, Vinicius lost the thread of his thought altogether.

But when Lygia gave him a cooling draught again, he held her hand for a moment, and asked, —

“Then must thou also forgive me?”

“We are Christians; it is not permitted us to keep anger in the heart.”

“Lygia,” said he, “whoever thy God is, I honor Him only because He is thine.”

“Thou wilt honor Him in thy heart when thou lovest Him.”

“Only because He is thine,” repeated Vinicius, in a fainter voice; and he closed his eyes, for weakness had mastered him again.

Lygia went out, but returned after a time, and bent over him to learn if he were sleeping. Vinicius, feeling that she was near, opened his eyes and smiled. She placed her hand over them lightly, as if to incline him to slumber. A great sweetness seized him then; but soon he felt more grievously ill than before, and was very ill in reality. Night had come, and with it a more violent fever. He could not sleep, and followed Lygia with his eyes wherever she went.

At times he fell into a kind of doze, in which he saw and heard everything which happened around him, but in which reality was mingled with feverish dreams. It seemed to him that in some old, deserted cemetery stood a temple, in the form of a tower, in which Lygia was priestess. He did not take his eyes from her, but saw her on the summit of the tower, with a lute in her hands, all in the light, like those priestesses who in the night-time sing hymns in honor of the moon, and whom he had seen in the Orient. He himself was climbing up winding steps, with great effort, to bear her away with him. Behind was creeping up Chilo, with teeth chattering from terror, and repeating, “Do not do that, lord; she is a priestess, for whom He will take vengeance.” Vinicius did not know who that He was, but he understood that he himself was going to commit some sacrilege, and he felt a boundless fear also. But when he went to the balustrade surrounding the summit of the tower, the Apostle with his silvery beard stood at Lygia’s side on a sudden, and said: “Do not raise a hand; she belongs to me.” Then he moved forward with her, on a path formed by rays from the moon, as if on a path made to heaven. He stretched his hands toward them, and begged both to take him into their company.

Here he woke, became conscious, and looked before him. The lamp on the tall staff shone more dimly, but still cast a light sufficiently clear. All were sitting in front of the fire warming themselves, for the night was chilly, and the chamber rather cold. Vinicius saw the breath coming as steam from their lips. In the midst of them sat the Apostle; at his knees, on a low footstool, was Lygia; farther on, Glaucus, Crispus, Miriam, and at the edge, on one side Ursus, on the other Miriam’s son Nazarius, a youth with a handsome face, and long, dark hair reaching down to his shoulders.

Lygia listened with eyes raised to the Apostle, and every head was turned toward him, while he told something in an undertone. Vinicius gazed at Peter with a certain superstitious awe, hardly inferior to that terror which he felt during the fever dream. The thought passed through his mind that that dream had touched truth; that the gray-haired man there, freshly come from distant shores, would take Lygia from him really, and take her somewhere away by unknown paths. He felt sure also that the old man was speaking of him, perhaps telling how to separate him from Lygia, for it seemed to him impossible that any one could speak of aught else. Hence, collecting all his presence of mind, he listened to Peter’s words.

But he was mistaken altogether, for the Apostle was speaking of Christ again.

“They live only through that name,” thought Vinicius.

The old man was describing the seizure of Christ. “A company came, and servants of the priest to seize Him. When the Saviour asked whom they were seeking, they answered, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ But when He said to them, ‘I am He,’ they fell on the ground, and dared not raise a hand on Him. Only after the second inquiry did they seize Him.”

Here the Apostle stopped, stretched his hands toward the fire and continued: —

“The night was cold, like this one, but the heart in me was seething; so, drawing a sword to defend Him, I cut an ear from the servant of the high-priest. I would have defended Him more than my own life had He not said to me, ‘Put thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?’ Then they seized and bound Him.”

When he had spoken thus far, Peter placed his palm on his forehead, and was silent, wishing before he went further

to stop the crowd of his recollections. But Ursus, unable to restrain himself, sprang to his feet, trimmed the light on the staff till the sparks scattered in golden rain and the flame shot up with more vigor. Then he sat down, and exclaimed:

“No matter what happened. I—”

He stopped suddenly, for Lygia had put her finger to her lips. But he breathed loudly, and it was clear that a storm was in his soul; and though he was ready at all times to kiss the feet of the Apostle, that act was one he could not accept; if some one in his presence had raised hands on the Redeemer, if he had been with Him on that night—O! splinters would have shot from the soldiers, the servants of the priest, and the officials. Tears came to his eyes at the very thought of this, and because of his sorrow and mental struggle; for on the one hand he thought that he would not only have defended the Redeemer, but would have called Lygians to his aid,—splendid fellows,—and on the other, if he had acted thus he would have disobeyed the Redeemer, and hindered the salvation of man. For this reason he could not keep back his tears.

After a while Peter took his palm from his forehead, and resumed the narrative. But Vinicius was overpowered by a new feverish, waking dream. What he heard now was in his mind mixed up with what the Apostle had told the night previous in Ostrianum, of that day in which Christ appeared on the shore of the sea of Tiberius. He saw a sheet of water broadly spread out; on it the boat of a fisherman, and in the boat Peter and Lygia. He himself was moving with all his might after that boat, but pain in his broken arm prevented him from reaching it. The wind hurled waves in his eyes, he began to sink, and called with entreating voice for rescue. Lygia knelt down then before the Apostle, who turned his boat, and reached an oar, which Vinicius seized: with their assistance he entered the boat, and fell on the bottom of it.

It seemed to him, then, that he stood up, and saw a multitude of people sailing after them. Waves covered their heads with foam; in the whirl only the hands of a few could be seen; but Peter saved the drowning time after time, and gathered them into his boat, which grew larger, as if by a miracle. Soon crowds filled it, as numerous as those which were collected in Ostrianum, and then still greater crowds. Vinicius wondered how they could find place there, and he was afraid that they would sink to the bottom. But Lygia pacified him by showing him a light on the distant shore

toward which they were sailing. These dream pictures of Vinicius were blended again with descriptions which he had heard in Ostrianum, from the lips of the Apostle, as to how Christ had appeared on the lake once. So that he saw now in that light on the shore a certain form toward which Peter was steering, and as he approached it the weather grew calmer, the water grew smoother, the light became greater. The crowd began to sing sweet hymns; the air was filled with the odor of nard; the play of water formed a rainbow, as if from the bottom of the lake lilies and roses were looking, and at last the boat struck its breast safely against the sand. Lygia took his hand then, and said, “Come, I will lead thee!” and she led him to the light.

Vinicius woke again; but his dreaming ceased slowly, and he did not recover at once the sense of reality. It seemed for a time to him that he was still on the lake, and surrounded by crowds, among which, not knowing the reason himself, he began to look for Petronius, and was astonished not to find him. The bright light from the chimney, at which there was no one at that time, brought him completely to his senses. Olive sticks were burning slowly under the rosy ashes; but the splinters of pine, which evidently had been put there some moments before, shot up a bright flame, and in the light of this, Vinicius saw Lygia, sitting not far from his bedside.

The sight of her touched him to the depth of his soul. He remembered that she had spent the night before in Ostrianum, and had busied herself the whole day in nursing him, and now, when all had gone to rest, she was the only one watching. It was easy to divine that she must be wearied, for while sitting motionless her eyes were closed. Vinicius knew not whether she was sleeping or sunk in thought. He looked at her profile, at her drooping lashes, at her hands lying on her knees; and in his pagan head the idea began to hatch with difficulty that at the side of naked beauty, confident, and proud of Greek and Roman symmetry, there is another in the world, new, immensely pure, in which a soul has its dwelling.

He could not bring himself so far as to call it Christian, but, thinking of Lygia, he could not separate her from the religion which she confessed. He understood, even, that if all the others had gone to rest, and she alone were watching, she whom he had injured, it was because her religion commanded her to watch. But that thought, which filled him

with wonder for the religion, was disagreeable to him. He would rather that Lygia acted thus out of love for him, his face, his eyes, his statuesque form, — in a word for reasons because of which more than once snow-white Grecian and Roman arms had been wound around his neck.

Still he felt all at once, that, were she like other women, something would be lacking in her. He was amazed, and knew not what was happening in him; for he saw that new feelings of some kind were rising in him, new likings, strange to the world in which he had lived hitherto.

She opened her eyes then, and, seeing that Vinicius was gazing at her, she approached him and said, —

“I am with thee.”

“I saw thy soul in a dream,” replied he.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NEXT morning he woke up weak, but with a cool head and free of fever. It seemed to him that a whispered conversation had roused him; but when he opened his eyes, Lygia was not there. Ursus, stooping before the chimney, was raking apart the gray ashes, and seeking live coals beneath them. When he found some, he began to blow, not with his mouth, but as it were with the bellows of a blacksmith. Vinicius, remembering how that man had crushed Croton the day before, examined with attention befitting a lover of the arena his gigantic back, which resembled the back of a Cyclops, and his limbs strong as columns.

“Thanks to Mercury that my neck was not broken by him,” thought Vinicius. “By Pollux! if the other Lygians are like this one, the Danubian legions will have heavy work some time!”

But aloud he said, “Hei, slave!”

Ursus drew his head out of the chimney, and, smiling in a manner almost friendly, said, —

“God give thee a good day, lord, and good health; but I am a free man, not a slave.”

On Vinicius, who wished to question Ursus touching Lygia's birthplace, these words produced a certain pleasant impression; for discourse with a free though a common man was less disagreeable to his Roman and patrician pride, than with a slave, in whom neither law nor custom recognized human nature.

“Then thou dost not belong to Aulus?” asked he.

“No, lord, I serve Callina, as I served her mother, of my own will.”

Here he hid his head again in the chimney, to blow the coals, on which he had placed some wood. When he had finished, he took it out and said, —

“With us there are no slaves.”

“Where is Lygia?” inquired Vinicius.

“She has gone out, and I am to cook food for thee. She watched over thee the whole night.”

“Why didst thou not relieve her?”

“Because she wished to watch, and it is for me to obey.”