

sinner, would turn from this maiden, who is as pure as a lily of the field?"

Lygia nestled up more urgently to the feet of Peter, with sobbing, understanding that she had not sought refuge in vain. The Apostle raised her face, which was covered with tears, and said to her, —

"While the eyes of him whom thou lovest are not open to the light of truth, avoid him, lest he bring thee to sin, but pray for him, and know that there is no sin in thy love. And since it is thy wish to avoid temptation, this will be accounted to thee as a merit. Do not suffer, and do not weep; for I tell thee that the grace of the Redeemer has not deserted thee, and that thy prayers will be heard; after sorrow will come days of gladness."

When he had said this, he placed both hands on her head, and, raising his eyes, blessed her. From his face there shone a goodness beyond that of earth.

The penitent Crispus began humbly to explain himself; "I have sinned against mercy," said he; "but I thought that by admitting to her heart an earthly love she had denied Christ."

"I denied Him thrice," answered Peter, "and still He forgave me, and commanded me to feed His sheep."

"And because," concluded Crispus, "Vinicius is an Augustian."

"Christ softened harder hearts than his," replied Peter.

Then Paul of Tarsus, who had been silent so far, placed his finger on his breast, pointing to himself, and said, —

"I am he who persecuted and hurried servants of Christ to their death; I am he who during the stoning of Stephen kept the garments of those who stoned him; I am he who wished to root out the truth in every part of the inhabited earth, and yet the Lord predestined me to declare it in every land. I have declared it in Judea, in Greece, on the Islands, and in this godless city, where first I resided as a prisoner. And now when Peter, my superior, has summoned me, I enter this house to bend that proud head to the feet of Christ, and cast a grain of seed in that stony field, which the Lord will fertilize, so that it may bring forth a bountiful harvest."

And he rose. To Crispus that diminutive hunchback seemed then that which he was in reality, — a giant, who was to stir the world to its foundations and gather in lands and nations.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PETRONIUS TO VINICIUS:—

"Have pity, carissime; imitate not in thy letters the Lacedemonians or Julius Cæsar! Couldst thou, like Julius, write *Veni, vidi, vici* (I came, I saw, I conquered), I might understand thy brevity. But thy letter means absolutely *Veni, vidi, fugi* (I came, I saw, I fled). Since such a conclusion of the affair is directly opposed to thy nature, since thou art wounded, and since, finally, uncommon things are happening to thee, thy letter needs explanation. I could not believe my eyes when I read that the Lygian giant killed Croton as easily as a Caledonian dog would kill a wolf in the defiles of Hibernia. That man is worth as much gold as he himself weighs, and it depends on him alone to become a favorite of Cæsar. When I return to the city, I must gain a nearer acquaintance with that Lygian, and have a bronze statue of him made for myself. Ahenobarbus will burst from curiosity, when I tell him that it is from nature. Bodies really athletic are becoming rarer in Italy and in Greece; of the Orient no mention need be made; the Germans, though large, have muscles covered with fat, and are greater in bulk than in strength. Learn from the Lygian if he is an exception, or if in his country there are more men like him. Should it happen sometime to thee or me to organize games officially, it would be well to know where to seek for the best bodies.

"But praise to the gods of the Orient and the Occident that thou hast come out of such hands alive. Thou hast escaped, of course, because thou art a patrician, and the son of a consul; but everything which has happened astonishes me in the highest degree, — that cemetery where thou wert among the Christians, they, their treatment of thee, the subsequent flight of Lygia; finally, that peculiar sadness and disquiet which breathes from thy short letter. Explain, for there are many points which I cannot understand; and if thou wish the truth, I will tell thee plainly, that I understand neither the Christians nor thee nor Lygia. Wonder not that I, who care for few things on earth except my own person,

inquire of thee so eagerly. I have contributed to all this affair of thine; hence it is my affair so far. Write soon, for I cannot foresee surely when we may meet. In Bronzebeard's head plans change, as winds do in autumn. At present, while tarrying in Beneventum, he has the wish to go straight-way to Greece, without returning to Rome. Tigellinus, however, advises him to visit the city even for a time, since the people, yearning overmuch for his person (read 'for games and bread') may revolt. So I cannot tell how it will be. Should Achæa overbalance, we may want to see Egypt. I should insist with all my might on thy coming, for I think that in thy state of mind travelling and our amusements would be a medicine, but thou mightst not find us. Consider, then, whether in that case repose in thy Sicilian estates would not be preferable to remaining in Rome. Write me minutely of thyself, and farewell. I add no wish this time, except health; for, by Pollux! I know not what to wish thee."

Vinicius, on receiving this letter, felt at first no desire to reply. He had a kind of feeling that it was not worth while to reply, that an answer would benefit no one in any way, that it would explain nothing. Discontent, and a feeling of the vanity of life, possessed him. He thought, moreover, that Petronius would not comprehend him in any case, and that something had happened which would remove them from each other. He could not come to an agreement with himself, even. When he returned from the Trans-Tiber to his splendid "insula," he was exhausted, and found for the first days a certain satisfaction in rest and in the comfort and abundance about him. That satisfaction lasted but a short time, however. He felt soon that he was living in vanity; that all which so far had formed the interest of his life either had ceased to exist for him or had shrunk to proportions barely perceptible. He had a feeling as if those ties which hitherto had connected him with life had been cut in his soul, and that no new ones had been formed. At the thought that he might go to Beneventum and thence to Achæa, to swim in a life of luxury and wild excess, he had a feeling of emptiness. "To what end? What shall I gain from it?" These were the first questions which passed through his head. And for the first time in life, also, he thought that if he went, the conversation of Petronius, his wit, his quickness, his exquisite outlining of thought, and his choice of apt phrases for every idea might annoy him.

But solitude, too, had begun to annoy him. All his acquaintances were with Cæsar in Beneventum; so he had to stay at home alone, with a head full of thoughts, and a heart full of feelings which he could not analyze. He had moments, however, in which he judged that if he could converse with some one about everything that took place in him, perhaps he might be able to grasp it all somehow, bring it to order, and estimate it better. Under the influence of this hope, and after some days of hesitation, he decided to answer Petronius; and, though not certain that he would send the answer, he wrote it in the following words:—

"It is thy wish that I write more minutely, agreed then; whether I shall be able to do it more clearly, I cannot tell, for there are many knots which I know not myself how to loosen. I described to thee my stay among the Christians, and their treatment of enemies, among whom they had a right to count both me and Chilo; finally, of the kindness with which they nursed me, and of the disappearance of Lygia. No, my dear friend, I was not spared because of being the son of a consul. Such considerations do not exist for them, since they forgave even Chilo, though I urged them to bury him in the garden. Those are people such as the world has not seen hitherto, and their teaching is of a kind that the world has not heard up to this time. I can say nothing else, and he errs who measures them with our measure. I tell thee that, if I had been lying with a broken arm in my own house, and if my own people, even my own family, had nursed me, I should have had more comforts, of course, but I should not have received half the care which I found among them.

"Know this, too, that Lygia is like the others. Had she been my sister or my wife, she could not have nursed me more tenderly. Delight filled my heart more than once, for I judged that love alone could inspire the like tenderness. More than once I saw love in her look, in her face; and, wilt thou believe me? among those simple people then in that poor chamber, which was at once a *culina* and a *triclinium*, I felt happier than ever before. No; she was not indifferent to me — and to-day even I cannot think that she was. Still that same Lygia left Miriam's dwelling in secret because of me. I sit now whole days with my head on my hands, and think, Why did she do so? Have I written thee that I volunteered to restore her to Aulus? True, she declared that to

be impossible at present, because Aulus and Pomponia had gone to Sicily, and because news of her return going from house to house, through slaves, would reach the Palatine, and Cæsar might take her from Aulus again. But she knew that I would not pursue her longer; that I had left the way of violence; that, unable to cease loving her or to live without her, I would bring her into my house through a wreathed door, and seat her on a sacred skin at my hearth. Still she fled! Why? Nothing was threatening her. Did she not love me, she might have rejected me. The day before her flight, I made the acquaintance of a wonderful man, a certain Paul of Tarsus, who spoke to me of Christ and His teachings, and spoke with such power that every word of his, without his willing it, turns all the foundations of our society into ashes. That same man visited me after her flight, and said: 'If God open thy eyes to the light, and take the beam from them as He took it from mine, thou wilt feel that she acted properly; and then, perhaps, thou wilt find her.' And now I am breaking my head over these words, as if I had heard them from the mouth of the Pythoness at Delphi. I seem to understand something. Though they love people, the Christians are enemies of our life, our gods, and our crimes; hence she fled from me, as from a man who belongs to our society, and with whom she would have to share a life counted criminal by Christians. Thou wilt say that since she might reject me, she had no need to withdraw. But if she loved me? In that case she desired to flee from love. At the very thought of this I wish to send slaves into every alley in Rome, and command them to cry throughout the houses, 'Return, Lygia!' But I cease to understand why she fled. I should not have stopped her from believing in her Christ, and would myself have reared an altar to Him in the atrium. What harm could one more god do me? Why might I not believe in Him, — I who do not believe overmuch in the old gods? I know with full certainty that the Christians do not lie, and they say that He rose from the dead. A man cannot rise from the dead. That Paul of Tarsus, who is a Roman citizen, but who, as a Jew, knows the old Hebrew writings, told me that the coming of Christ was promised by prophets for whole thousands of years. All these are uncommon things, but does not the uncommon surround us on every side? People have not ceased talking yet of Apollonius of Tyana. Paul's statement that there is one God, not a whole assembly of

them, seems sound to me. Perhaps Seneca is of this opinion, and before him many others. Christ lived, gave Himself to be crucified for the salvation of the world, and rose from the dead. All this is perfectly certain. I do not see, therefore, a reason why I should insist on an opposite opinion, or why I should not rear to Him an altar, if I am ready to rear one to Serapis, for instance. It would not be difficult for me even to renounce other gods, for no reasoning mind believes in them at present. But it seems that all this is not enough yet for the Christians. It is not enough to honor Christ, one must also live according to His teachings; and here thou art on the shore of a sea which they command thee to wade through.

"If I promised to do so, they themselves would feel that the promise was an empty sound of words. Paul told me so openly. Thou knowest how I love Lygia, and knowest that there is nothing that I would not do for her. Still, even at her wish, I cannot raise Soracte or Vesuvius on my shoulders, or place Thrasymene Lake on the palm of my hand, or from black make my eyes blue, like those of the Lygians. If she so desired, I could have the wish, but the change does not lie in my power. I am not a philosopher, but also I am not so dull as I have seemed, perhaps, more than once to thee. I will state now the following: I know not how the Christians order their own lives, but I know that where their religion begins, Roman rule ends, Rome itself ends, our mode of life ends, the distinction between conquered and conqueror, between rich and poor, lord and slave, ends, government ends, Cæsar ends, law and all the order of the world ends; and in place of these appears Christ, with a certain mercy not existent hitherto, and kindness, opposed to human and our Roman instincts. It is true that Lygia is more to me than all Rome and its lordship; and I would let society vanish could I have her in my house. But that is another thing. Agreement in words does not satisfy the Christians; a man must feel that their teaching is truth, and not have aught else in his soul. But that, the gods are my witnesses, is beyond me. Dost understand what that means? There is something in my nature which shudders at this religion; and were my lips to glorify it, were I to conform to its precepts, my soul and my reason would say that I do so through love for Lygia, and that apart from her there is to me nothing on earth more repulsive. And, a strange thing, Paul of Tarsus understands this, and so does that old theurgist Peter,

who in spite of all his simplicity and low origin is the highest among them, and was the disciple of Christ. And dost thou know what they are doing? They are praying for me, and calling down something which they call grace; but nothing descends on me, save disquiet, and a greater yearning for Lygia.

"I have written thee that she went away secretly; but when going she left me a cross which she put together from twigs of boxwood. When I woke up, I found it near my bed. I have it now in the lararium, and I approach it yet, I cannot tell why, as if there were something divine in it, — that is, with awe and reverence. I love it because her hand bound it, and I hate it because it divides us. At times it seems to me that there are enchantments of some kind in all this affair, and that the theurgus, Peter, though he declares himself to be a simple shepherd, is greater than Apollonius, and all who preceded him, and that he has involved us all — Lygia, Pomponia, and me — with them.

"Thou hast written that in my previous letter disquiet and sadness are visible. Sadness there must be, for I have lost her again, and there is disquiet because something has changed in me. I tell thee sincerely, that nothing is more repugnant to my nature than that religion, and still I cannot recognize myself since I met Lygia. Is it enchantment, or love? Circe changed people's bodies by touching them, but my soul has been changed. No one but Lygia could have done that, or rather Lygia through that wonderful religion which she professes. When I returned to my house from the Christians, no one was waiting for me. The slaves thought that I was in Beneventum, and would not return soon; hence there was disorder in the house. I found the slaves drunk, and a feast, which they were giving themselves, in my triclinium. They had more thought of seeing death than me, and would have been less terrified by it. Thou knowest with what a firm hand I hold my house; all to the last one dropped on their knees, and some fainted from terror. But dost thou know how I acted? At the first moment I wished to call for rods and hot iron, but immediately a kind of shame seized me, and, wilt thou lend belief? a species of pity for those wretched people. Among them are old slaves whom my grandfather, Marcus Vinicius, brought from the Rhine in the time of Augustus. I shut myself up alone in the library, and there came stranger thoughts still to my head; namely, that after what I had

heard and seen among the Christians, it did not become me to act with slaves as I had acted hitherto — that they too were people. For a number of days they moved about in mortal terror, in the belief that I was delaying so as to invent punishment the more cruel; but I did not punish, and did not punish because I was not able. Summoning them on the third day, I said, 'I forgive you; strive then with earnest service to correct your fault!' They fell on their knees, covering their faces with tears, stretching forth their hands with groans, and called me lord and father; but I — with shame do I write this — was equally moved. It seemed to me that at that moment I was looking at the sweet face of Lygia, and her eyes filled with tears, thanking me for that act. And, *proh pudor!* I felt that my lids too were moist. Dost know what I will confess to thee? This, — that I cannot do without her, that it is ill for me alone, that I am simply unhappy, and that my sadness is greater than thou wilt admit. But, as to my slaves, one thing arrested my attention. The forgiveness which they received not only did not make them insolent, not only did not weaken discipline, but never had fear roused them to such ready service as has gratitude. Not only do they serve, but they seem to vie with one another to divine my wishes. I mention this to thee because, when, the day before I left the Christians, I told Paul that society would fall apart because of his religion, as a cask without hoops, he answered, 'Love is a stronger hoop than fear.' And now I see that in certain cases his opinion may be right. I have verified it also with references to clients, who, learning of my return, hurried to salute me. Thou knowest that I have never been penurious with them; but my father acted haughtily with clients on principle, and taught me to treat them in like manner. But when I saw their worn mantles and hungry faces, I had a feeling something like compassion. I gave command to bring them food, and conversed besides with them, — called some by name, some I asked about their wives and children, — and again in the eyes before me I saw tears; again it seemed to me that Lygia saw what I was doing, that she praised and was delighted. Is my mind beginning to wander, or is love confusing my feelings? I cannot tell. But this I do know: I have a continual feeling that she is looking at me from a distance, and I am afraid to do aught that might trouble or offend her.

"So it is, Caius! but they have changed my soul, and

sometimes I feel well for that reason. At times again I am tormented with the thought, for I fear that my manhood and energy are taken from me; that, perhaps, I am useless, not only for counsel, for judgment, for feasts, but for war even. These are undoubted enchantments! And to such a degree am I changed that I tell thee this, too, which came to my head when I lay wounded: that if Lygia were like Nigidia, Poppæa, Crispinilla, and our divorced women, if she were as vile, as pitiless, and as cheap as they, I should not love her as I do at present. But since I love her for that which divides us, thou wilt divine what a chaos is rising in my soul, in what darkness I live, how it is that I cannot see certain roads before me, and how far I am from knowing what to begin. If life may be compared to a spring, in my spring disquiet flows instead of water. I live through the hope that I shall see her, perhaps, and sometimes it seems to me that I shall see her surely. But what will happen to me in a year or two years, I know not, and cannot divine. I shall not leave Rome. I could not endure the society of the Augustians; and besides, the one solace in my sadness and disquiet is the thought that I am near Lygia, that through Glaucus the physician, who promised to visit me, or through Paul of Tarsus, I can learn something of her at times. No; I would not leave Rome, even were ye to offer me the government of Egypt. Know also, that I have ordered the sculptor to make a stone monument for Gulo, whom I slew in anger. Too late did it come to my mind that he had carried me in his arms, and was the first to teach me how to put an arrow on a bow. I know not why it was that a recollection of him rose in me which was sorrow and reproach. If what I write astonish thee, I reply that it astonishes me no less, but I write pure truth. — Farewell."

CHAPTER XXIX.

VINICIUS received no answer to this letter. Petronius did not write, thinking evidently that Cæsar might command a return to Rome any day. In fact, news of it was spread in the city, and roused great delight in the hearts of the rabble, eager for games with gifts of grain and olives, great supplies of which had been accumulated in Ostia. Helius, Nero's freedman, announced at last the return in the Senate. But Nero, having embarked with his court on ships at Misenum, returned slowly, disembarking at coast towns for rest, or exhibitions in theatres. He remained between ten and twenty days in Minturna, and even thought to return to Naples and wait there for spring, which was earlier than usual, and warm. During all this time Vinicius lived shut up in his house, thinking of Lygia, and all those new things which occupied his soul, and brought to it ideas and feelings foreign to it thus far. He saw, from time to time, only Glaucus the physician, every one of whose visits delighted him, for he could converse with the man about Lygia. Glaucus knew not, it is true, where she had found refuge, but he gave assurance that the elders were protecting her with watchful care. Once too, when moved by the sadness of Vinicius, he told him that Peter had blamed Crispus for reproaching Lygia with her love. The young patrician, hearing this, grew pale from emotion. He had thought more than once that Lygia was not indifferent to him, but he fell into frequent doubt and uncertainty. Now for the first time he heard the confirmation of his desires and hopes from strange lips, and, besides, those of a Christian. At the first moment of gratitude he wished to run to Peter. When he learned, however, that he was not in the city, but teaching in the neighborhood, he implored Glaucus to accompany him thither, promising to make liberal gifts to the poor community. It seemed to him, too, that if Lygia loved him, all obstacles were thereby set aside, as he was ready at any moment to honor Christ. Glaucus, though he urged him persistently to receive baptism, would not venture to assure him that he would gain Lygia at once, and said that it was necessary to desire the religion for its own sake, through love of Christ, not for other

objects. "One must have a Christian soul, too," said he. And Vinicius, though every obstacle angered him, had begun to understand that Glaucus, as a Christian, said what he ought to say. He had not become clearly conscious that one of the deepest changes in his nature was this, — that formerly he had measured people and things only by his own selfishness, but now he was accustoming himself gradually to the thought that other eyes might see differently, other hearts feel differently, and that justice did not mean always the same as personal profit.

He wished often to see Paul of Tarsus, whose discourse made him curious and disturbed him. He arranged in his mind arguments to overthrow his teaching, he resisted him in thought; still he wished to see him and to hear him. Paul, however, had gone to Aricium, and, since the visits of Glaucus had become rarer, Vinicius was in perfect solitude. He began again to run through back streets adjoining the Subura, and narrow lanes of the Trans-Tiber, in the hope that even from a distance he might see Lygia. When even that hope failed him, weariness and impatience began to rise in his heart. At last the time came when his former nature was felt again mightily, like that onrush of a wave to the shore from which it had receded. It seemed to him that he had been a fool to no purpose, that he had stuffed his head with things which brought sadness, that he ought to accept from life what it gives. He resolved to forget Lygia, or at least to seek pleasure and the use of things aside from her. He felt that this trial, however, was the last, and he threw himself into it with all the blind energy of impulse peculiar to him. Life itself seemed to urge him to this course.

The city, torpid and depopulated by winter, began to revive with hope of the near coming of Cæsar. A solemn reception was in waiting for him. Meanwhile spring was there; the snow on the Alban Hills had vanished under the breath of winds from Africa. Grass-plots in the gardens were covered with violets. The Forums and the Campus Martius were filled with people warmed by a sun of growing heat. Along the Appian Way, the usual place for drives outside the city, a movement of richly ornamented chariots had begun. Excursions were made to the Alban Hills. Youthful women, under pretext of worshipping Juno in Lanuvium, or Diana in Aricia, left home to seek adventures, society, meetings, and pleasure beyond the city. Here Vinicius saw one day among

lordly chariots the splendid car of Chrysothemis, preceded by two Molossian dogs; it was surrounded by a crowd of young men and by old Senators, whose position detained them in the city. Chrysothemis, driving four Corsican ponies herself, scattered smiles round about, and light strokes of a golden whip; but when she saw Vinicius she reined in her horses, took him into her car, and then to a feast at her house, which lasted all night. At that feast Vinicius drank so much that he did not remember when they took him home; he recollected, however, that when Chrysothemis mentioned Lygia he was offended, and, being drunk, emptied a goblet of Falernian on her head. When he thought of this in soberness, he was angrier still. But a day later Chrysothemis, forgetting evidently the injury, visited him at his house, and took him to the Appian Way a second time. Then she supped at his house, and confessed that not only Petronius, but his lute-player, had grown tedious to her long since, and that her heart was free now. They appeared together for a week, but the relation did not promise permanence. After the Falernian incident, however, Lygia's name was never mentioned, but Vinicius could not free himself from thoughts of her. He had the feeling always that her eyes were looking at his face, and that feeling filled him, as it were, with fear. He suffered, and could not escape the thought that he was saddening Lygia, or the regret which that thought roused in him. After the first scene of jealousy which Chrysothemis made because of two Syrian damsels whom he purchased, he let her go in rude fashion. He did not cease at once from pleasure and license, it is true, but he followed them out of spite, as it were, toward Lygia. At last he saw that the thought of her did not leave him for an instant; that she was the one cause of his evil activity as well as his good; and that really nothing in the world occupied him except her. Disgust, and then weariness, mastered him. Pleasure had grown loathsome, and left mere reproaches. It seemed to him that he was wretched, and this last feeling filled him with measureless astonishment, for formerly he recognized as good everything which pleased him. Finally, he lost freedom, self-confidence, and fell into perfect torpidity, from which even the news of Cæsar's coming could not rouse him. Nothing touched him, and he did not visit Petronius till the latter sent an invitation and his litter.

On seeing his uncle, though greeted with gladness, he

replied to his questions unwillingly; but his feelings and thoughts, repressed for a long time, burst forth at last, and flowed from his mouth in a torrent of words. Once more he told in detail the history of his search for Lygia, his life among the Christians, everything which he had heard and seen there, everything which had passed through his head and heart; and finally he complained that he had fallen into a chaos, in which were lost composure and the gift of distinguishing and judging. Nothing, he said, attracted him, nothing was pleasing; he did not know what to hold to, nor how to act. He was ready both to honor and persecute Christ; he understood the loftiness of His teaching, but he felt also an irresistible repugnance to it. He understood that, even should he possess Lygia, he would not possess her completely, for he would have to share her with Christ. Finally, he was living as if not living, — without hope, without a morrow, without belief in happiness; around him was darkness in which he was groping for an exit, and could not find it.

Petronius, during this narrative, looked at his changed face, at his hands, which while speaking he stretched forth in a strange manner, as if actually seeking a road in the darkness, and he fell to thinking. All at once he rose, and, approaching Vinicius, caught with his fingers the hair above his ear.

"Dost know," asked he, "that thou hast gray hairs on thy temple?"

"Perhaps I have," answered Vinicius; "I should not be astonished were all my hair to grow white soon."

Silence followed. Petronius was a man of sense, and more than once he meditated on the soul of man and on life. In general, life, in the society in which they both lived, might be happy or unhappy externally, but internally it was at rest. Just as a thunderbolt or an earthquake might overturn a temple, so might misfortune crush a life. In itself, however, it was composed of simple and harmonious lines, free of complication. But there was something else in the words of Vinicius, and Petronius stood for the first time before a series of spiritual snarls which no one had straightened out hitherto. He was sufficiently a man of reason to feel their importance, but with all his quickness he could not answer the questions put to him. After a long silence, he said at last, —

"These must be enchantments."

"I too have thought so," answered Vinicius; "more than once it seemed to me that we were enchanted, both of us."

"And if thou," said Petronius, "were to go, for example, to the priests of Serapis? Among them, as among priests in general, there are many deceivers, no doubt; but there are others who have reached wonderful secrets."

He said this, however, without conviction and with an uncertain voice, for he himself felt how empty and even ridiculous that counsel must seem on his lips.

Vinicius rubbed his forehead, and said: "Enchantments! I have seen sorcerers who employed unknown and subterranean powers to their personal profit; I have seen those who used them to the harm of their enemies. But these Christians live in poverty, forgive their enemies, preach submission, virtue, and mercy; what profit could they get from enchantments, and why should they use them?"

Petronius was angry that his acuteness could find no reply; not wishing, however, to acknowledge this, he said, so as to offer an answer of some kind, —

"That is a new sect." After a while he added: "By the divine dweller in Paphian groves, how all that injures life! Thou wilt admire the goodness and virtue of those people; but I tell thee that they are bad, for they are enemies of life, as are diseases, and death itself. As things are, we have enough of these enemies; we do not need the Christians in addition. Just count them: diseases, Cæsar, Tigellinus, Cæsar's poetry, cobblers who govern the descendants of ancient Quirites, freedmen who sit in the Senate. By Castor! there is enough of this. That is a destructive and disgusting sect. Hast thou tried to shake thyself out of this sadness, and make some little use of life?"

"I have tried," answered Vinicius.

"Ah, traitor!" said Petronius, laughing; "news spreads quickly through slaves; thou hast seduced from me Chrysothemis!"

Vinicius waved his hand in disgust.

"In every case I thank thee," said Petronius. "I will send her a pair of slippers embroidered with pearls. In my language of a lover that means, 'Walk away.' I owe thee a double gratitude, — first, thou didst not accept Eunice; second, thou hast freed me from Chrysothemis. Listen to me! Thou seest before thee a man who has risen early, bathed, feasted, possessed Chrysothemis, written satires, and even at times interwoven prose with verses, but who has

been as wearied as Cæsar, and often unable to unfetter himself from gloomy thoughts. And dost thou know why that was so? It was because I sought at a distance that which was near. A beautiful woman is worth her weight always in gold; but if she loves in addition, she has simply no price. Such a one thou wilt not buy with the riches of Verres. I say now to myself as follows: I will fill my life with happiness, as a goblet with the foremost wine which the earth has produced, and I will drink till my hand becomes powerless and my lips grow pale. What will come, I care not; and this is my latest philosophy."

"Thou hast proclaimed it always; there is nothing new in it."

"There is substance, which was lacking."

When he had said this, he called Eunice, who entered dressed in white drapery, — the former slave no longer, but as it were a goddess of love and happiness.

Petronius opened his arms to her, and said, —

"Come."

At this she ran up to him, and, sitting on his knee, surrounded his neck with her arms, and placed her head on his breast. Vinicius saw how a reflection of purple began to cover her cheeks, how her eyes melted gradually in mist. They formed a wonderful group of love and happiness. Petronius stretched his hand to a flat vase standing at one side on a table, and, taking a whole handful of violets, covered with them the head, bosom, and robe of Eunice; then he pushed the tunic from her arms, and said, —

"Happy he who, like me, has found love enclosed in such a form! At times it seems to me that we are a pair of gods. Look thyself! Has Praxiteles, or Miron, or Skopas, or Lysias even, created more wonderful lines? Or does there exist in Paros or in Pentelicus such marble as this, — warm, rosy, and full of love? There are people who kiss off the edges of vases, but I prefer to look for pleasure where it may be found really."

He began to pass his lips along her shoulders and neck. She was penetrated with a quivering; her eyes now closed, now opened, with an expression of unspeakable delight. Petronius after a while raised her exquisite head, and said, turning to Vinicius, —

"But think now, what are thy gloomy Christians in comparison with this? And if thou understand not the difference, go thy way to them. But this sight will cure thee."

Vinicius distended his nostrils, through which entered the odor of violets, which filled the whole chamber, and he grew pale; for he thought that if he could have passed his lips along Lygia's shoulders in that way, it would have been a kind of sacrilegious delight so great that let the world vanish afterward! But accustomed now to a quick perception of that which took place in him, he noticed that at that moment he was thinking of Lygia, and of her only.

"Eunice," said Petronius, "give command, thou divine one, to prepare garlands for our heads and a meal."

When she had gone out he turned to Vinicius.

"I offered to make her free, but knowest thou what she answered? — 'I would rather be thy slave than Cæsar's wife!' And she would not consent. I freed her then without her knowledge. The pretor favored me by not requiring her presence. But she does not know that she is free, as also she does not know that this house and all my jewels, excepting the gems, will belong to her in case of my death." He rose and walked through the room, and said: "Love changes some more, others less, but it has changed even me. Once I loved the odor of verbenas; but as Eunice prefers violets, I like them now beyond all other flowers, and since spring came we breathe only violets."

Here he stopped before Vinicius and inquired, —

"But as to thee, dost thou keep always to nard?"

"Give me peace!" answered the young man.

"I wished thee to see Eunice, and I mentioned her to thee, because thou, perhaps, art seeking also at a distance that which is near. Maybe for thee too is beating, somewhere in the chambers of thy slaves, a true and simple heart. Apply such a balsam to thy wounds. Thou sayest that Lygia loves thee? Perhaps she does. But what kind of love is that which abdicates? Is not the meaning this, — that there is another force stronger than her love? No, my dear, Lygia is not Eunice."

"All is one torment merely," answered Vinicius. "I saw thee kissing Eunice's shoulders, and I thought then that if Lygia would lay hers bare to me I should not care if the ground opened under us next moment. But at the very thought of such an act a certain dread seized me, as if I had attacked some vestal or wished to defile a divinity. Lygia is not Eunice, but I understand the difference not in thy way. Love has changed thy nostrils, and thou preferrest violets to verbenas; but it has changed my soul: hence, in

spite of my misery and desire, I prefer Lygia to be what she is rather than to be like others."

"In that case no injustice is done thee. But I do not understand the position."

"True, true!" answered Vinicius, feverishly. "We understand each other no longer."

Another moment of silence followed.

"May Hades swallow thy Christians!" exclaimed Petronius. "They have filled thee with disquiet, and destroyed thy sense of life. May Hades devour them! Thou art mistaken in thinking that their religion is good, for good is what gives people happiness, namely, beauty, love, power; but these they call vanity. Thou art mistaken in this, that they are just; for if we pay good for evil, what shall we pay for good? And besides, if we pay the same for one and the other, why are people to be good?"

"No, the pay is not the same; but according to their teaching it begins in a future life, which is without limit."

"I do not enter into that question, for we shall see hereafter if it be possible to see anything without eyes. Meanwhile they are simply incompetents. Ursus strangled Croton because he has limbs of bronze; but these are mopes, and the future cannot belong to mopes."

"For them life begins with death."

"Which is as if one were to say, 'Day begins with night.' Hast thou the intent to carry off Lygia?"

"No, I cannot pay her evil for good, and I swore that I would not."

"Dost thou intend to accept the religion of Christ?"

"I wish to do so, but my nature cannot endure it."

"But wilt thou be able to forget Lygia?"

"No."

"Then travel."

At that moment the slaves announced that the repast was ready; but Petronius, to whom it seemed that he had fallen on a good thought, said, on the way to the triclinium, —

"Thou hast ridden over a part of the world, but only as a soldier hastening to his place of destination, and without halting by the way. Go with us to Achæa. Cæsar has not given up the journey. He will stop everywhere on the way, sing, receive crowns, plunder temples, and return as a triumphator to Italy. That will resemble somewhat a journey of Bacchus and Apollo in one person. Augustians, male and female, a thousand citharæ. By Castor! that will be worth

witnessing, for hitherto the world has not seen anything like it!"

Here he placed himself on the couch before the table, by the side of Eunice; and when the slaves put a wreath of anemones on his head, he continued, —

"What hast thou seen in Corbulo's service? Nothing. Hast thou seen the Grecian temples thoroughly, as I have, — I who was passing more than two years from the hands of one guide to those of another? Hast thou been in Rhodes to examine the site of the Colossus? Hast thou seen in Panopeus, in Phocis, the clay from which Prometheus shaped man; or in Sparta the eggs laid by Leda; or in Athens the famous Sarmatian armor made of horse-hoofs; or in Eubœa the ship of Agamemnon; or the cup for whose pattern the left breast of Helen served? Hast thou seen Alexandria, Memphis, the Pyramids, the hair which Isis tore from her head in grief for Osiris? Hast thou heard the shout of Memnon? The world is wide; everything does not end at the Trans-Tiber! I will accompany Cæsar, and when he returns I will leave him and go to Cyprus; for it is the wish of this golden-haired goddess of mine that we offer doves together to the divinity in Paphos, and thou must know that whatever she wishes must happen."

"I am thy slave," said Eunice.

He rested his garlanded head on her bosom, and said with a smile, —

"Then I am the slave of a slave. I admire thee, divine one, from feet to head!"

Then he said to Vinicius: "Come with us to Cyprus. But first remember that thou must see Cæsar. It is bad that thou hast not been with him yet; Tigellinus is ready to use this to thy disadvantage. He has no personal hatred for thee, it is true; but he cannot love thee, even because thou art my sister's son. We shall say that thou wert sick. We must think over what thou art to answer should he ask thee about Lygia. It will be best to wave thy hand and say that she was with thee till she wearied thee. He will understand that. Tell him also that sickness kept thee at home; that thy fever was increased by disappointment at not being able to visit Naples and hear his song; that thou wert assisted to health only by the hope of hearing him. Fear no exaggeration. Tigellinus promises to invent, not only something great for Cæsar, but something enormous. I am afraid that he will undermine me; I am afraid too of thy disposition."

"Dost thou know," said Vinicius, "that there are people who have no fear of Cæsar, and who live as calmly as if he were non-existent?"

"I know whom thou hast in mind — the Christians."

"Yes; they alone. But our life, — what is it if not unbroken terror?"

"Do not mention thy Christians. They fear not Cæsar, because he has not even heard of them perhaps; and in every case he knows nothing of them, and they concern him as much as withered leaves. But I tell thee that they are incompetents. Thou feelest this thyself; if thy nature is repugnant to their teaching, it is just because thou feelest their incompetence. Thou art a man of other clay; so trouble not thyself or me with them. We shall be able to live and die, and what more they will be able to do is unknown."

These words struck Vinicius; and when he returned home, he began to think that in truth, perhaps, the goodness and charity of Christians was a proof of their incompetence of soul. It seemed to him that people of strength and temper could not forgive thus. It came to his head that this must be the real cause of the repulsion which his Roman soul felt toward their teaching. "We shall be able to live and die!" said Petronius. As to them, they know only how to forgive, and understand neither true love nor true hatred.

CHAPTER XXX.

CÆSAR, on returning to Rome, was angry because he had returned, and after some days was filled anew with a wish to visit Achæa. He even issued an edict in which he declared that his absence would be short, and that public affairs would not be exposed to detriment because of it. In company with Augustians, among whom was Vinicius, he repaired to the Capitol to make offerings to the gods for an auspicious journey. But on the second day, when he visited the temple of Vesta, an event took place which changed all his projects. Nero feared the gods, though he did not believe in them; he feared especially the mysterious Vesta, who filled him with such awe that at sight of the divinity and the sacred fire his hair rose on a sudden from terror, his teeth chattered, a shiver ran through his limbs, and he dropped into the arms of Vinicius, who happened there behind him. He was borne out of the temple at once, and conveyed to the Palatine, where he recovered soon, but did not leave the bed for that day. He declared, moreover, to the great astonishment of those present, that he deferred his journey, since the divinity had warned him secretly against haste. An hour later it was announced throughout Rome that Cæsar, seeing the gloomy faces of the citizens, and moved by love for them, as a father for his children, would remain to share their lot and their pleasures. The people, rejoiced at this decision, and certain also that they would not miss games and a distribution of wheat, assembled in crowds before the gates of the Palatine, and raised shouts in honor of the divine Cæsar, who interrupted the play at dice with which he was amusing himself with Augustians, and said:

"Yes, there was need to defer the journey. Egypt, and predicted dominion over the Orient, cannot escape me; hence Achæa, too, will not be lost. I will give command to cut through the isthmus of Corinth; I will rear such monuments in Egypt that the pyramids will seem childish toys in comparison; I will have a sphinx built seven times greater than that which is gazing into the desert outside Memphis; but I will command that it have my face. Coming ages will speak only of that monument and of me."