

"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."

"With thy verses thou hast reared a monument to thyself already, not seven, but thrice seven, times greater than the pyramid of Cheops," said Petronius.

"But with my song?" inquired Nero.

"Ah! if men could only build for thee a statue, like that of Memnon, to call with thy voice at sunrise! For all ages to come the seas adjoining Egypt would swarm with ships in which crowds from the three parts of the world would be lost in listening to thy song."

"Alas! who can do that?" said Nero.

"But thou canst give command to cut out of basalt thyself driving a quadriga."

"True! I will do that!"

"Thou wilt bestow a gift on humanity."

"In Egypt I will marry the Moon, who is now a widow, and I shall be a god really."

"And thou wilt give us stars for wives; we will make a new constellation, which will be called the constellation of Nero. But do thou marry Vitellius to the Nile, so that he may beget hippopotamuses. Give the desert to Tigellinus, he will be king of the jackals."

"And what dost thou predestine to me?" inquired Vatinius.

"Apis bless thee! Thou didst arrange such splendid games in Beneventum that I cannot wish thee ill. Make a pair of boots for the sphinx, whose paws must grow numb during night-dews; after that thou wilt make sandals for the Colossi which form the alleys before the temples. Each one will find there a fitting occupation. Domitius Afer, for example, will be treasurer, since he is known for his honesty. I am glad, Cæsar, when thou art dreaming of Egypt, and I am saddened because thou hast deferred thy plan of a journey."

"Thy mortal eyes saw nothing, for the deity becomes invisible to whomever it wishes," said Nero. "Know that when I was in the temple of Vesta she herself stood near me, and whispered in my ear, 'Defer the journey.' That happened so unexpectedly that I was terrified, though for such an evident care of the gods for me I should be thankful."

"We were all terrified," said Tigellinus, "and the vestal Rubria fainted."

"Rubria!" said Nero; "what a snowy neck she has!"

"But she blushed at sight of the divine Cæsar —"

"True! I noticed that myself. That is wonderful. There

is something divine in every vestal, and Rubria is very beautiful."

"Tell me," said he, after a moment's meditation, "why people fear Vesta more than other gods. What does this mean? Though I am the chief priest, fear seized me to-day. I remember only that I was falling back, and should have dropped to the ground had not some one supported me. Who was it?"

"I," answered Vinicius.

"Oh, thou 'stern Mars'! Why wert thou not in Beneventum? They told me that thou wert ill, and indeed thy face is changed. But I heard that Croton wished to kill thee? Is that true?"

"It is, and he broke my arm; but I defended myself."

"With a broken arm?"

"A certain barbarian helped me; he was stronger than Croton."

Nero looked at him with astonishment. "Stronger than Croton? Art thou jesting? Croton was the strongest of men, but now here is Syphax from Ethiopia."

"I tell thee, Cæsar, what I saw with my own eyes."

"Where is that pearl? Has he not become king of Nemi?"

"I cannot tell, Cæsar. I lost sight of him."

"Thou knowest not even of what people he is?"

"I had a broken arm, and could not inquire for him."

"Seek him, and find him for me."

"I will occupy myself with that," said Tigellinus.

But Nero spoke further to Vinicius: "I thank thee for having supported me; I might have broken my head by a fall. On a time thou wert a good companion, but campaigning and service with Corbulo have made thee wild in some way; I see thee rarely."

"How is that maiden too narrow in the hips, with whom thou wert in love," asked he after a while, "and whom I took from Aulus for thee?"

Vinicius was confused, but Petronius came to his aid at that moment.

"I will lay a wager, lord," said he, "that he has forgotten. Dost thou see his confusion? Ask him how many of them there were since that time, and I will not give assurance of his power to answer. The Vinicii are good soldiers, but still better gamecocks. They need whole flocks. Punish him for that, lord, by not inviting him to the feast which

Tigellinus promises to arrange in thy honor on the pond of Agrippa."

"I will not do that. I trust, Tigellinus, that flocks of beauty will not be lacking there."

"Could the Graces be absent where Amor will be present?" answered Tigellinus.

"Weariness tortures me," said Nero. "I have remained in Rome at the will of the goddess, but I cannot endure the city. I will go to Antium. I am stifled in these narrow streets, amid these tumble-down houses, amid these alleys. Foul air flies even here to my house and my gardens. Oh, if an earthquake would destroy Rome, if some angry god would level it to the earth! I would show how a city should be built, which is the head of the world and my capital."

"Cæsar," answered Tigellinus, "thou sayest, 'If some angry god would destroy the city,' — is it so?"

"It is! What then?"

"But art thou not a god?"

Nero waved his hand with an expression of weariness, and said, —

"We shall see thy work on the pond of Agrippa. Afterward I go to Antium. Ye are all little, hence do not understand that I need immense things."

Then he closed his eyes, giving to understand in that way that he needed rest. In fact, the Augustians were beginning to depart. Petronius went out with Vinicius, and said to him, —

"Thou art invited, then, to share in the amusement. Bronzebeard has renounced the journey, but he will be madder than ever; he has fixed himself in the city as in his own house. Try thou, too, to find in these madnesses amusement and forgetfulness. Well! we have conquered the world, and have a right to amuse ourselves. Thou, Marcus, art a very comely fellow, and to that I ascribe in part the weakness which I have for thee. By the Ephesian Diana! if thou couldst see thy joined brows, and thy face in which the ancient blood of the Quirites is evident! Others near thee looked like freedmen. True! were it not for that mad religion, Lygia would be in thy house to-day. Attempt once more to prove to me that they are not enemies of life and mankind. They have acted well toward thee, hence thou mayst be grateful to them; but in thy place I should detest that religion, and seek pleasure where I could find it. Thou

art a comely fellow, I repeat, and Rome is swarming with divorced women."

"I wonder only that all this does not torture thee yet?"

"Who has told thee that it does not? It tortures me this long time, but I am not of thy years. Besides, I have other attachments which are lacking thee. I love books, thou hast no love for them; I love poetry, which annoys thee; I love pottery, gems, a multitude of things, at which thou dost not look; I have a pain in my loins, which thou hast not; and, finally, I have found Eunice, but thou hast found nothing similar. For me, it is pleasant in my house, among masterpieces; of thee I can never make a man of æsthetic feeling. I know that in life I shall never find anything beyond what I have found; thou thyself knowest not that thou art hoping yet continually, and seeking. If death were to visit thee, with all thy courage and sadness, thou wouldst die with astonishment that it was necessary to leave the world; but I should accept death as a necessity, with the conviction that there is no fruit in the world which I have not tasted. I do not hurry, neither shall I loiter; I shall try merely to be joyful to the end. There are cheerful sceptics in the world. For me, the Stoics are fools; but stoicism tempers men, at least, while thy Christians bring sadness into the world, which in life is the same as rain in nature. Dost thou know what I have learned? That during the festivities which Tigellinus will arrange at the pond of Agrippa, there will be lupanaria, and in them women from the first houses of Rome. Will there be not even one sufficiently beautiful to console thee? There will be maidens, too, appearing in society for the first time — as nymphs. Such is our Roman Cæsardom! The air is mild already; the midday breeze will warm the water and not bring pimples on naked bodies. And thou, Narcissus, know this, that there will not be one to refuse thee, — not one, even though she be a vestal virgin."

Vinicius began to strike his head with his palm, like a man occupied eternally with one thought.

"I should need luck to find such a one."

"And who did this for thee, if not the Christians? But people whose standard is a cross cannot be different. Listen to me: Greece was beautiful, and created wisdom; we created power; and what, to thy thinking, can this teaching create? If thou know, explain; for, by Pollux! I cannot divine it."

"Thou art afraid, it seems, lest I become a Christian," said Vinicius, shrugging his shoulders.

"I am afraid that thou hast spoiled life for thyself. If thou canst not be a Grecian, be a Roman; possess and enjoy. Our madneses have a certain sense, for there is in them a kind of thought of our own. I despise Bronzebeard, because he is a Greek buffoon. If he held himself a Roman, I should recognize that he was right in permitting himself madness. Promise me that if thou find some Christian on returning home, thou wilt show thy tongue to him. If he be Glaucus the physician, he will not wonder. — Till we meet on the pond of Agrippa."

CHAPTER XXXI.

PRETORIANS surrounded the groves on the banks of the pond of Agrippa, lest over-numerous throngs of spectators might annoy Cæsar and his guests; though it was said that everything in Rome distinguished for wealth, beauty, or intellect was present at that feast, which had no equal in the history of the city. Tigellinus wished to recompense Cæsar for the deferred journey to Achæa, to surpass all who had ever feasted Nero, and prove that no man could entertain as he could. With this object in view, while with Cæsar in Naples, and later in Beneventum, he had made preparations and sent orders to bring from remotest regions of the earth beasts, birds, rare fish, and plants, not omitting vessels and cloths, which were to enhance the splendor of the feast. The revenues of whole provinces went to satisfy mad projects; but the powerful favorite had no need to hesitate. His influence grew daily. Tigellinus was not dearer than others to Nero yet, perhaps, but he was becoming more and more indispensable. Petronius surpassed him infinitely in polish, intellect, wit; in conversation he knew better how to amuse Cæsar: but to his misfortune he surpassed in conversation Cæsar himself, hence he roused his jealousy; moreover he could not be an obedient instrument in everything, and Cæsar feared his opinion when there were questions in matters of taste. But before Tigellinus, Nero never felt any restraint. The very title, *Arbiter Elegantiarum*, which had been given to Petronius, annoyed Nero's vanity, for who had the right to bear that title but himself? Tigellinus had sense enough to know his own deficiencies; and seeing that he could not compete with Petronius, Lucan, or others distinguished by birth, talents, or learning, he resolved to extinguish them by the suppleness of his services, and above all by such a magnificence that the imagination of Nero himself would be struck by it. He had arranged to give the feast on a gigantic raft, framed of gilded timbers. The borders of this raft were decked with splendid shells found in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, shells brilliant with the colors of pearls and the rainbow. The banks of the pond were covered with groups of palm, with groves of lotus,

and blooming roses. In the midst of these were hidden fountains of perfumed water, statues of gods and goddesses, and gold or silver cages filled with birds of various colors. In the centre of the raft rose an immense tent, or rather, not to hide the feasters, only the roof of a tent, made of Syrian purple, resting on silver columns; under it were gleaming, like suns, tables prepared for the guests, loaded with Alexandrian glass, crystal, and vessels simply beyond price, — the plunder of Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor. The raft, which because of plants accumulated on it had the appearance of an island and a garden, was joined by cords of gold and purple to boats shaped like fish, swans, mews, and flamingoes, in which sat at painted oars naked rowers of both sexes, with forms and features of marvellous beauty, their hair dressed in Oriental fashion, or gathered in golden nets. When Nero arrived at the main raft with Poppæa and the Augustians, and sat beneath the purple tent-roof, the oars struck the water, the boats moved, the golden cords stretched, and the raft with the feast and the guests began to move and describe circles on the pond. Other boats surrounded it, and other smaller rafts, filled with women playing on citharæ and harps, women whose rosy bodies on the blue background of the sky and the water and in the reflections from golden instruments seemed to absorb that blue and those reflections, and to change and bloom like flowers.

From the groves at the banks, from fantastic buildings reared for that day and hidden among thickets, were heard music and song. The neighborhood resounded, the groves resounded; echoes bore around the voices of horns and trumpets. Cæsar himself, with Poppæa on one side of him, and Pythagoras on the other, was amazed; and more especially when among the boats young slave maidens appeared as sirens, and were covered with green network in imitation of scales, he did not spare praises on Tigellinus. But he looked at Petronius from habit, wishing to learn the opinion of the "arbiter," who seemed indifferent for a long time, and only when questioned outright, answered, —

"I judge, lord, that ten thousand naked maidens make less impression than one."

But the "floating feast" pleased Cæsar, for it was something new. Besides, such exquisite dishes were served that the imagination of Apicius would have failed at sight of them, and wines of so many kinds that Otho, who used to serve eighty, would have hidden under water with shame, could he

have witnessed the luxury of that feast. Besides women, the Augustians sat down at the table, among whom Vinicius excelled all with his beauty. Formerly his figure and face indicated too clearly the soldier by profession; now mental suffering and the physical pain through which he had passed had chiselled his features, as if the delicate hand of a master had passed over them. His complexion had lost its former swarthy, but the yellowish gleam of Numidian marble remained on it. His eyes had grown larger and more pensive. His body had retained its former powerful outlines, as if created for armor; but above the body of a legionary was seen the head of a Grecian god, or at least of a refined patrician, at once subtle and splendid. Petronius, in saying that none of the ladies of Cæsar's court would be able or willing to resist Vinicius, spoke like a man of experience. All gazed at him now, not excepting Poppæa, or the vestal virgin Rubria, whom Cæsar wished to see at the feast.

Wines, cooled in mountain snow, soon warmed the hearts and heads of the guests. Boats shaped as grasshoppers or butterflies shot forth from the bushes at the shore every moment. The blue surface of the pond seemed occupied by butterflies. Above the boats here and there flew doves, and other birds from India and Africa, fastened with silver and blue threads or strings. The sun had passed the greater part of the sky, but the day was warm and even hot, though in the beginning of May. The pond heaved from the strokes of oars, which beat the water in time with music; but in the air there was not the least breath of wind; the groves were motionless, as if lost in listening and in gazing at that which was happening on the water. The raft circled continually on the pond, bearing guests who were increasingly drunk and boisterous.

The feast had not run half its course yet, when the order in which all sat at the table was observed no longer. Cæsar gave the example, for, rising himself, he commanded Vinicius, who sat next to Rubria the vestal, to move. Nero occupied the place, and began to whisper something in Rubria's ear. Vinicius found himself next to Poppæa, who extended her arm and begged him to fasten her loosened bracelet. When he did so, with hands trembling somewhat, she cast at him from beneath her long lashes a glance as it were of modesty, and shook her golden head as if in resistance.

Meanwhile the sun, growing larger, ruddier, sank slowly

behind the tops of the grove; the guests were for the greater part thoroughly intoxicated. The raft circled now nearer the shore, on which, among bunches of trees and flowers, were seen groups of people, disguised as fauns or satyrs, playing on flutes, bagpipes, and drums, with groups of maidens representing nymphs, dryads, and hamadryads. Darkness fell at last amid drunken shouts from the tent, shouts raised in honor of Luna. Meanwhile the groves were lighted with a thousand lamps. From the lupanaria on the shores shone swarms of lights; on the terraces appeared new naked groups, formed of the wives and daughters of the first Roman houses. These with voice and unrestrained manner began to lure partners. The raft touched the shore at last. Cæsar and the Augustians vanished in the groves, scattered in lupanaria, in tents hidden in thickets, in grottos artificially arranged among fountains and springs. Madness seized all; no one knew whither Cæsar had gone; no one knew who was a senator, who a knight, who a dancer, who a musician. Satyrs and fauns fell to chasing nymphs with shouting. They struck lamps with thyrses to quench them. Darkness covered certain parts of the grove. Everywhere, however, laughter and shouts were heard, and whispers, and panting breaths. In fact Rome had not seen anything like that before.

Vinicius was not drunk, as he had been at the feast in Nero's palace, when Lygia was present; but he was roused and intoxicated by the sight of everything done round about, and at last the fever of pleasure seized him. Rushing into the forest, he ran, with others, examining who of the dryads seemed most beautiful. New flocks of these raced around him every moment with shouts and with songs; these flocks were pursued by fauns, satyrs, senators, knights, and by sounds of music. Seeing at last a band of maidens led by one arrayed as Diana, he sprang to it, intending to examine the goddess more closely. All at once the heart sank in his bosom, for he thought that in that goddess, with the moon on her forehead, he recognized Lygia.

They encircled him with a mad whirl, and, wishing evidently to incline him to follow, rushed away the next moment like a herd of deer. But he stood on the spot with beating heart, breathless; for though he saw that the Diana was not Lygia, and that at close sight she was not even like her, the too powerful impression deprived him of strength. Straightway he was seized by such yearning as he had never felt be-

fore, and love for Lygia rushed to his breast in a new, immense wave. Never had she seemed so dear, pure, and beloved as in that forest of madness and frenzied excess. A moment before, he himself wished to drink of that cup, and share in that shameless letting loose of the senses; now disgust and repugnance possessed him. He felt that infamy was stifling him; that his breast needed air and the stars which were hidden by the thickets of that dreadful grove. He determined to flee; but barely had he moved when before him stood some veiled figure, which placed its hands on his shoulders and whispered, flooding his face with burning breath, —

“I love thee! Come! no one will see us, hasten!”

Vinicius was roused, as if from a dream.

“Who art thou?”

But she leaned her breast on him and insisted, —

“Hurry! See how lonely it is here, and I love thee! Come!”

“Who art thou?” repeated Vinicius.

“Guess!”

As she said this, she pressed her lips to his through the veil, drawing toward her his head at the same time, till at last breath failed the woman and she tore her face from him.

“Night of love! night of madness!” said she, catching the air quickly. “To-day is free! Thou hast me!”

But that kiss burned Vinicius; it filled him with disquiet. His soul and heart were elsewhere; in the whole world nothing existed for him except Lygia. So, pushing back the veiled figure, he said, —

“Whoever thou be, I love another, I do not wish thee.”

“Remove the veil,” said she, lowering her head toward him.

At that moment the leaves of the nearest myrtle began to rustle; the veiled woman vanished like a dream vision, but from a distance her laugh was heard, strange in some way, and ominous.

Petronius stood before Vinicius.

“I have heard and seen,” said he.

“Let us go from this place,” replied Vinicius.

And they went. They passed the lupanaria gleaming with light, the grove, the line of mounted pretorians, and found the litters.

“I will go with thee,” said Petronius.

They sat down together. On the road both were silent, and only in the atrium of Vinicius's house did Petronius ask, —

“Dost thou know who that was?”

“Was it Rubria?” asked Vinicius, repulsed at the very thought that Rubria was a vestal.

“No.”

“Who then?”

Petronius lowered his voice.

“The fire of Vesta was defiled, for Rubria was with Cæsar. But with thee was speaking” — and he finished in a still lower voice, “the divine Augusta.”

A moment of silence followed.

“Cæsar,” said Petronius, “was unable to hide from Poppea his desire for Rubria; therefore she wished, perhaps, to avenge herself. But I hindered you both. Hadst thou recognized the Augusta and refused her, thou wouldst have been ruined beyond rescue, — thou, Lygia, and I, perhaps.”

“I have enough of Rome, Cæsar, feasts, the Augusta, Tigellinus, and all of you!” burst out Vinicius. “I am stifling. I cannot live thus; I cannot. Dost understand me?”

“Vinicius, thou art losing sense, judgment, moderation.”

“I love only her in this world.”

“What of that?”

“This, that I wish no other love. I have no wish for your life, your feasts, your shamelessness, your crimes!”

“What is taking place in thee? Art thou a Christian?”

The young man seized his head with both hands, and repeated, as if in despair, —

“Not yet! not yet!”

CHAPTER XXXII.

PETRONIUS went home shrugging his shoulders and greatly dissatisfied. It was evident to him that he and Vinicius had ceased to understand each other, that their souls had separated entirely. Once Petronius had immense influence over the young soldier. He had been for him a model in everything, and frequently a few ironical words of his sufficed to restrain Vinicius or urge him to something. At present there remained nothing of that; such was the change that Petronius did not try his former methods, feeling that his wit and irony would slip without effect along the new principles which love and contact with the uncomprehended society of Christians had put in the soul of Vinicius. The veteran sceptic understood that he had lost the key to that soul. This knowledge filled him with dissatisfaction and even with fear, which was heightened by the events of that night. “If on the part of the Augusta it is not a passing whim but a more enduring desire,” thought Petronius, “one of two things will happen, — either Vinicius will not resist her, and he may be ruined by any accident, or, what is like him to-day, he will resist, and in that event he will be ruined certainly, and perhaps I with him, even because I am his relative, and because the Augusta, having included a whole family in her hatred, will throw the weight of her influence on the side of Tigellinus. In this way and that it is bad.” Petronius was a man of courage and felt no dread of death; but since he hoped nothing from it, he had no wish to invite it. After long meditation, he decided at last that it would be better and safer to send Vinicius from Rome on a journey. Ah! but if in addition he could give him Lygia for the road, he would do so with pleasure. But he hoped that it would not be too difficult to persuade him to the journey without her. He would spread a report on the Palatine then of Vinicius's illness, and remove danger as well from his nephew as himself. The Augusta did not know whether she was recognized by Vinicius; she might suppose that she was not, hence her vanity had not suffered much so far. But it might be different in the future, and it was necessary to avoid peril. Petronius wished to gain time, above all; for

he understood that once Cæsar set out for Achæa, Tigellinus, who comprehended nothing in the domain of art, would descend to the second place and lose his influence. In Greece Petronius was sure of victory over every opponent.

Meanwhile he determined to watch over Vinicius, and urge him to the journey. For a number of days he was ever thinking over this, that if he obtained an edict from Cæsar expelling the Christians from Rome, Lygia would leave it with the other confessors of Christ, and after her Vinicius too. Then there would be no need to persuade him. The thing itself was possible. In fact it was not so long since, when the Jews began disturbances out of hatred to the Christians, Claudius, unable to distinguish one from the other, expelled the Jews. Why should not Nero expel the Christians? There would be more room in Rome without them. After that "floating feast" Petronius saw Nero daily, both on the Palatine and in other houses. To suggest such an idea was easy, for Nero never opposed suggestions which brought harm or ruin to any one. After mature decision Petronius framed a whole plan for himself. He would prepare a feast in his own house, and at this feast persuade Cæsar to issue an edict. He had even a hope, which was not barren, that Cæsar would confide the execution of the edict to him. He would send out Lygia with all the consideration proper to the mistress of Vinicius to Baia, for instance, and let them love and amuse themselves there with Christianity as much as they liked.

Meanwhile he visited Vinicius frequently, first, because he could not, despite all his Roman selfishness, rid himself of attachment to the young tribune, and second, because he wished to persuade him to the journey. Vinicius feigned sickness, and did not show himself on the Palatine, where new plans appeared every day. At last Petronius heard from Cæsar's own lips that three days from then he would go to Antium without fail. Next morning he went straightway to inform Vinicius, who showed him a list of persons invited to Antium, which list one of Cæsar's freedmen had brought him that morning.

"My name is on it; so is thine," said he. "Thou wilt find the same at thy house on returning."

"Were I not among the invited," replied Petronius, "it would mean that I must die; I do not expect that to happen before the journey to Achæa. I shall be too useful to Nero. Barely have we come to Rome," said he, on looking at the

list, "when we must leave again, and drag over the road to Antium. But we must go, for this is not merely an invitation, it is a command as well."

"And if some one would not obey?"

"He would be invited in another style to go on a journey notably longer, — one from which people do not return. What a pity that thou hast not obeyed my counsel and left Rome in season! Now thou must go to Antium."

"I must go to Antium. See in what times we live and what vile slaves we are!"

"Hast thou noticed that only to-day?"

"No. But thou hast explained to me that Christian teaching is an enemy of life, since it shackles it. But can their shackles be stronger than those which we carry? Thou hast said, 'Greece created wisdom and beauty, and Rome power.' Where is our power?"

"Call Chilo and talk with him. I have no desire to-day to philosophize. By Hercules! I did not create these times, and I do not answer for them. Let us speak of Antium. Know that great danger is awaiting thee, and it would be better, perhaps, to measure strength with that Ursus who choked Croton than to go there, but still thou canst not refuse."

Vinicius waved his hand carelessly, and said, —

"Danger! We are all wandering in the shadow of death, and every moment some head sinks in its darkness."

"Am I to enumerate all who had a little sense, and therefore, in spite of the times of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, lived eighty and ninety years? Let even such a man as Domitius Afer serve thee as an example. He has grown old quietly, though all his life he has been a criminal and a villain."

"Perhaps for that very reason!" answered Vinicius.

Then he began to glance over the list and read: "Tigellinus, Vatinius, Sextus Africanus, Aquilinus Regulus, Suilius Nerulinus, Eprius Marcellus, and so on! What an assembly of ruffians and scoundrels! And to say that they govern the world! Would it not become them better to exhibit an Egyptian or Syrian divinity through villages, jingle sistra, and earn their bread by telling fortunes or dancing?"

"Or exhibiting learned monkeys, calculating dogs, or a flute-playing ass," added Petronius. "That is true, but let us speak of something more important. Summon thy atten-

tion and listen. I have said on the Palatine that thou art ill, unable to leave the house; still thy name is on the list, which proves that some one does not credit my stories and has seen to this purposely. Nero cares nothing for the matter, since for him thou art a soldier, who has no conception of poetry or music, and with whom at the very highest he can talk only about races in the circus. So Poppæa must have seen to putting down thy name, which means that her desire for thee was not a passing whim, and that she wants to win thee."

"She is a daring Augusta."

"Indeed she is daring, for she may ruin herself beyond redemption. May Venus inspire her, however, with another love as soon as possible; but since she desires thee thou must observe the very greatest caution. She has begun to weary Bronzebeard already; he prefers Rubria now, or Pythagoras, but, through consideration of self, he would wreak the most horrible vengeance on us."

"In the grove I knew not that she was speaking to me; but thou wert listening. I said that I loved another, and did not wish her. Thou knowest that."

"I implore thee, by all the infernal gods, lose not the remnant of reason which the Christians have left in thee. How is it possible to hesitate, having a choice between probable and certain destruction? Have I not said already that if thou hadst wounded the Augusta's vanity, there would have been no rescue for thee? By Hades! if life has grown hateful to thee, better open thy veins at once, or cast thyself on a sword, for shouldst thou offend Poppæa, a less easy death may meet thee. It was easier once to converse with thee. What concerns thee specially? Would this affair cause thee loss, or hinder thee from loving thy Lygia? Remember, besides, that Poppæa saw her on the Palatine. It will not be difficult for her to guess why thou art rejecting such lofty favor, and she will get Lygia even from under the earth. Thou wilt ruin not only thyself, but Lygia too. Dost understand?"

Vinicius listened as if thinking of something else, and at last he said, —

"I must see her."

"Who? Lygia?"

"Lygia."

"Dost thou know where she is?"

"No."

"Then thou wilt begin anew to search for her in old cemeteries and beyond the Tiber?"

"I know not, but I must see her."

"Well, though she is a Christian, it may turn out that she has more judgment than thou; and it will certainly, unless she wishes thy ruin."

Vinicius shrugged his shoulders. "She saved me from the hands of Ursus."

"Then hurry, for Bronzebeard will not postpone his departure. Sentences of death may be issued in Antium also."

But Vinicius did not hear. One thought alone occupied him, an interview with Lygia; hence he began to think over methods.

Meanwhile something intervened which might set aside every difficulty. Chilo came to his house unexpectedly.

He entered wretched and worn, with signs of hunger on his face and in rags; but the servants, who had the former command to admit him at all hours of the day or night, did not dare to detain him, so he went straight to the atrium, and standing before Vinicius said, —

"May the gods give thee immortality, and share with thee dominion over the world."

Vinicius at the first moment wished to give the order to throw him out of doors; but the thought came to him that the Greek perhaps knew something of Lygia, and curiosity overcame his disgust.

"Is that thou?" asked he. "What has happened to thee?"

"Evil, O son of Jove," answered Chilo. "Real virtue is a ware for which no one inquires now, and a genuine sage must be glad of this even, that once in five days he has something with which to buy from the butcher a sheep's head, to gnaw in a garret, washing it down with his tears. Ah, lord! What thou didst give me I paid Atractus for books, and afterward I was robbed and ruined. The slave who was to write down my wisdom fled, taking the remnant of what thy generosity bestowed on me. I am in misery, but I thought to myself: To whom can I go, if not to thee, O Serapis, whom I love and deify, for whom I have exposed my life?"

"Why hast thou come, and what dost thou bring?"

"I come for aid, O Baal, and I bring my misery, my tears, my love, and finally the information which through love for

thee I have collected. Thou rememberest, lord, I told thee once how I had given a slave of the divine Petronius one thread from the girdle of the Paphian Venus? I know now that it helped her, and thou, O descendant of the Sun, who knowest what is happening in that house, knowest also what Eunice is there. I have another such thread. I have preserved it for thee, lord."

Here he stopped, on noticing the anger which was gathering on the brows of Vinicius, and said quickly, so as to anticipate the outburst, —

"I know where the divine Lygia is living; I will show thee the street and the house."

Vinicius repressed the emotion with which that news filled him, and said, —

"Where is she?"

"With Linus, the elder priest of the Christians. She is there with Ursus, who goes as before to the miller, a namesake of thy dispensator Demas. Yes, Demas! Ursus works in the night; so if thou surround the house at night, thou wilt not find him. Linus is old, and besides him there are only two aged women in the house."

"Whence dost thou know all this?"

"Thou rememberest, lord, that the Christians had me in their hands, and spared me. True, Glaucus was mistaken in thinking that I was the cause of his misfortunes; but he believed that I was, poor man, and he believes so yet. Still they spared me. Then be not astonished, lord, that gratitude filled my heart. I am a man of former, of better times. This was my thought: Am *I* to desert friends and benefactors? Would I not have been hard-hearted not to inquire about them, not to learn what was happening to them, how health was serving them, and where they were living? By the Pessinian Cybele! I am not capable of such conduct. At first I was restrained by fear that they might interpret my wishes incorrectly. But the love which I bore them proved greater than my fear, and the ease with which they forgive every injustice lent me special courage. But above all I was thinking of thee, lord. Our last attempt ended in defeat; but can such a son of Fortune be reconciled with defeat? So I prepared victory for thee. The house stands apart. Thou mayst give command to thy slaves to surround it so that not a mouse could escape. My lord, on thee alone it depends to have that magnanimous king's daughter in thy house this very night. But should that happen, remember

that the cause of it is the very poor and hungry son of my father."

The blood rushed to Vinicius's head. Temptation shook all his being again. Yes; that was the method, and this time a certain one. Once he has Lygia in his house, who can take her? Once he makes Lygia his mistress, what will be left to her, unless to remain so forever? And let all religions perish! What will the Christians mean to him then, with their mercy and forbidding faith? Is it not time to shake himself free of all that? Is it not time to live as all live? What will Lygia do later, save to reconcile her fate with the religion which she professes? That, too, is a question of inferior significance. Those are matters devoid of importance. First of all, she will be his, — and his this very day. And it is a question, too, whether that religion will hold out in her soul against the world which is new to her, against luxury, and excitements to which she must yield. All may happen to-day. He needs only to detain Chilo, and give an order at dark. And then delight without end! "What has my life been?" thought Vinicius; "suffering, unsatisfied desire, and an endless propounding of problems without answer." In this way all will be cut short and ended. He recollected, it is true, that he had promised not to raise a hand against her. But by what had he sworn? Not by the gods, for he did not believe in them; not by Christ, for he did not believe in Him yet. Finally, if she feels injured, he will marry her, and thus repair the wrong. Yes; to that he feels bound, for to her he is indebted for life. Here he recalled the day in which with Croton he had attacked her retreat; he remembered the Lygian's fist raised above him, and all that had happened later. He saw her again bent over his couch, dressed in the garb of a slave, beautiful as a divinity, a benefactress kind and glorified. His eyes passed to the lararium unconsciously, and to the little cross which she left him before going. Will he pay for all that by a new attack? Will he drag her by the hair as a slave to his cubiculum? And how will he be able to do so, since he not only desires but loves her, and he loves her specially because she is as she is? All at once he felt that it was not enough for him to have her in the house, it was not enough to seize her in his arms by superior force; he felt that his love needed something more, — her consent, her love, and her soul. Blessed that roof, if she come under it willingly; blessed the

moment, blessed the day, blessed his life. Then the happiness of both will be as inexhaustible as the ocean, as the sun. But to seize her by violence would be to destroy that happiness forever, and at the same time to destroy, and defile that which is most precious and alone beloved in life. Terror seized him now at the very thought of this. He glanced at Chilo, who, while watching him, pushed his hands under his rags and scratched himself uneasily. That instant, disgust unspeakable took possession of Vinicius, and a wish to trample that former assistant of his, as he would a foul worm or venomous serpent. In an instant he knew what to do. But knowing no measure in anything, and following the impulse of his stern Roman nature, he turned toward Chilo and said, —

“I will not do what thou advisest, but, lest thou go without just reward, I will command to give thee three hundred stripes in the domestic prison.”

Chilo grew pale. There was so much cold resolution in the beautiful face of Vinicius that he could not deceive himself for a moment with the hope that the promised reward was no more than a cruel jest.

Hence he threw himself on his knees in one instant, and bending double began to groan in a broken voice, —

“How, O king of Persia? Why?—O pyramid of kindness! Colossus of mercy! For what?—I am old, hungry, unfortunate—I have served thee—dost thou repay in this manner?”

“As thou didst the Christians,” said Vinicius. And he called the dispensator.

But Chilo sprang toward his feet, and, embracing them convulsively, talked, while his face was covered with deathly pallor, —

“O lord, O lord! I am old! Fifty, not three hundred stripes. Fifty are enough! A hundred, not three hundred! Oh, mercy, mercy!”

Vinicius thrust him away with his foot, and gave the order. In the twinkle of an eye two powerful Quadi followed the dispensator, and, seizing Chilo by the remnant of his hair, tied his own rags around his neck and dragged him to the prison.

“In the name of Christ!” called the Greek, at the exit of the corridor.

Vinicius was left alone. The order just issued roused and enlivened him. He endeavored to collect his scattered thoughts, and bring them to order. He felt great relief,

and the victory which he had gained over himself filled him with comfort. He thought that he had made some great approach toward Lygia, and that some high reward should be given him. At the first moment it did not even occur to him that he had done a grievous wrong to Chilo, and had him flogged for the very acts for which he had rewarded him previously. He was too much of a Roman yet to be pained by another man's suffering, and to occupy his attention with one wretched Greek. Had he even thought of Chilo's suffering he would have considered that he had acted properly in giving command to punish such a villain. But he was thinking of Lygia, and said to her: I will not pay thee with evil for good; and when thou shalt learn how I acted with him who strove to persuade me to raise hands against thee, thou wilt be grateful. But here he stopped at this thought: Would Lygia praise his treatment of Chilo? The religion which she professes commands forgiveness; nay, the Christians forgave the villain, though they had greater reasons for revenge. Then for the first time was heard in his soul the cry: “In the name of Christ!” He remembered then that Chilo had ransomed himself from the hands of Ursus with such a cry, and he determined to remit the remainder of the punishment.

With that object he was going to summon the dispensator, when that person stood before him, and said, —

“Lord, the old man has fainted, and perhaps he is dead. Am I to command further flogging?”

“Revive him and bring him before me.”

The chief of the atrium vanished behind the curtain, but the revival could not have been easy, for Vinicius waited a long time and was growing impatient, when the slaves brought in Chilo, and disappeared at a signal.

Chilo was as pale as linen, and down his legs threads of blood were flowing to the mosaic pavement of the atrium. He was conscious, however, and, falling on his knees, began to speak, with extended hands, —

“Thanks to thee, lord. Thou art great and merciful.”

“Dog,” said Vinicius, “know that I forgave thee because of that Christ to whom I owe my own life.”

“O lord, I will serve Him and thee.”

“Be silent and listen. Rise! Thou wilt go and show me the house in which Lygia dwells.”

Chilo sprang up; but he was barely on his feet when he grew more deathly pale yet, and said in a failing voice, —

"Lord, I am really hungry — I will go, lord, I will go! but I have not the strength. Command to give me even remnants from the plate of thy dog, and I will go."

Vinicius commanded to give him food, a piece of gold, and a mantle. But Chilo, weakened by stripes and hunger, could not go to take food, though terror raised the hair on his head, lest Vinicius might mistake his weakness for stubbornness and command to flog him anew.

"Only let wine warm me," repeated he, with chattering teeth, "I shall be able to go at once, even to Magna Græcia."

He regained some strength after a time, and they went out.

The way was long, for, like the majority of Christians, Linus dwelt in the Trans-Tiber, and not far from Miriam. At last Chilo showed Vinicius a small house, standing apart, surrounded by a wall covered entirely with ivy, and said, —

"Here it is, lord."

"Well," said Vinicius, "go thy way now, but listen first to what I tell thee. Forget that thou hast served me; forget where Miriam, Peter, and Glaucus dwell; forget also this house, and all Christians. Thou wilt come every month to my house, where Demas, my freedman, will pay thee two pieces of gold. But shouldst thou spy further after Christians, I will have thee flogged, or delivered into the hands of the prefect of the city."

Chilo bowed down, and said, —

"I will forget."

But when Vinicius vanished beyond the corner of the street, he stretched his hands after him, and, threatening with his fists, exclaimed, —

"By Ate and the Furies! I will not forget!"

Then he grew faint again.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VINICIUS went directly to the house in which Miriam lived. Before the gate he met Nazarius, who was confused at sight of him; but greeting the lad cordially, he asked to be conducted to his mother's lodgings.

Besides Miriam, Vinicius found Peter, Glaucus, Crispus, and Paul of Tarsus, who had returned recently from Fregellæ. At sight of the young tribune, astonishment was reflected on all faces; but he said, —

"I greet you in the name of Christ, whom ye honor."

"May His name be glorified forever!" answered they.

"I have seen your virtue and experienced your kindness, hence I come as a friend."

"And we greet thee as a friend," answered Peter. "Sit down, lord, and partake of our refreshment, as a guest."

"I will sit down and share your repast; but first listen to me, thou Peter, and thou Paul of Tarsus, so that ye may know my sincerity. I know where Lygia is. I have returned from before the house of Linus, which is near this dwelling. I have a right to her given me by Cæsar. I have at my houses in the city nearly five hundred slaves. I might surround her hiding-place and seize her; still I have not done so, and will not."

"For this reason the blessing of the Lord will be upon thee, and thy heart will be purified," said Peter.

"I thank thee. But listen to me further: I have not done so, though I am living in suffering and sadness. Before I knew you, I should have taken her undoubtedly, and held her by force; but your virtue and your religion, though I do not profess it, have changed something in my soul, so that I do not venture on violence. I know not myself why this is so, but it is so; hence I come to you, for ye take the place of Lygia's father and mother, and I say to you: Give her to me as wife, and I swear that not only will I not forbid her to confess Christ, but I will begin myself to learn His religion."

He spoke with head erect and decisively; but still he was moved, and his legs trembled beneath his mantle. When silence followed his words, he continued, as if wishing to anticipate an unfavorable answer, —