

"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, —

"I know what obstacles exist, but I love her as my own eyes; and though I am not a Christian yet, I am neither your enemy nor Christ's. I wish to be sincere, so that you may trust me. At this moment it is a question of life with me, still I tell you the truth. Another might say, Baptize me; I say, Enlighten me. I believe that Christ rose from the dead, for people say so who love the truth, and who saw Him after death. I believe, for I have seen myself, that your religion produces virtue, justice, and mercy,—not crime, which is laid to your charge. I have not known your religion much so far. A little from you, a little from your works, a little from Lygia, a little from conversations with you. Still I repeat that it has made some change in me. Formerly I held my servants with an iron hand; I cannot do so now. I knew no pity; I know it now. I was fond of pleasure; the other night I fled from the pond of Agrippa, for the breath was taken from me through disgust. Formerly I believed in superior force; now I have abandoned it. Know ye that I do not recognize myself. I am disgusted by feasts, wine, singing, citharæ, garlands, the court of Cæsar, naked bodies, and every crime. When I think that Lygia is like snow in the mountains, I love her the more; and when I think that she is what she is through your religion, I love and desire that religion. But since I understand it not, since I know not whether I shall be able to live according to it, nor whether my nature can endure it, I am in uncertainty and suffering, as if I were in prison."

Here his brows met in wrinkle of pain, and a flush appeared on his cheeks; after that he spoke on with growing haste and greater emotion,—

"As ye see, I am tortured from love and uncertainty. Men tell me that in your religion there is no place for life, or human joy, or happiness, or law, or order, or authority, or Roman dominion. Is this true? Men tell me that ye are madmen; but tell me yourselves what ye bring. Is it a sin to love, a sin to feel joy, a sin to want happiness? Are ye enemies of life? Must a Christian be wretched? Must I renounce Lygia? What is truth in your view? Your deeds and words are like transparent water, but what is under that water? Ye see that I am sincere. Scatter the darkness. Men say this to me also: Greece created beauty and wisdom, Rome created power; but they—what do they bring? Tell, then, what ye bring. If there is brightness beyond your doors, open them."

"We bring love," said Peter.

And Paul of Tarsus added,—

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass."

But the heart of the old Apostle was stirred by that soul in suffering, which, like a bird in a cage, was struggling toward air and the sun; hence, stretching his hand to Vinicius, he said,—

"Whoso knocketh, to him will be opened. The favor and grace of God is upon thee; for this reason I bless thee, thy soul and thy love, in the name of the Redeemer of mankind."

Vinicius, who had spoken with enthusiasm already, sprang toward Peter on hearing this blessing, and an uncommon thing happened. That descendant of Quirites, who till recently had not recognized humanity in a foreigner, seized the hand of the old Galilean, and pressed it in gratitude to his lips.

Peter was pleased; for he understood that his sowing had fallen on an additional field, that his fishing-net had gathered in a new soul.

Those present, not less pleased by that evident expression of honor for the Apostle of God, exclaimed in one voice,—

"Praise to the Lord in the highest!"

Vinicius rose with a radiant face, and began,—

"I see that happiness may dwell among you, for I feel happy, and I think that ye can convince me of other things in the same way. But I will add that this cannot happen in Rome. Cæsar is going to Antium, and I must go with him, for I have the order. Ye know that not to obey is death. But if I have found favor in your eyes, go with me to teach your truth. It will be safer for you than for me. Even in that great throng of people, ye can announce your truth in the very court of Cæsar. They say that Acte is a Christian; and there are Christians among pretorians even, for I myself have seen soldiers kneeling before thee, Peter, at the Nomentan gate. In Antium I have a villa where we shall assemble to hear your teaching, at the side of Nero. Glaucus told me that ye are ready to go to the end of the earth for one soul; so do for me what ye have done for those for whose sake ye have come from Judea,—do it, and desert not my soul."

Hearing this, they began to take counsel, thinking with

delight of the victory of their religion, and of the significance for the pagan world which the conversion of an Augustian, and a descendant of one of the oldest Roman families, would have. They were ready, indeed, to wander to the end of the earth for one human soul, and since the death of the Master they had, in fact, done nothing else; hence a negative answer did not even come to their minds. Peter was at that moment the pastor of a whole multitude, hence he could not go; but Paul of Tarsus, who had been in Aricium and Fregellæ not long before, and who was preparing for a long journey to the East to visit churches there and freshen them with a new spirit of zeal, consented to accompany the young tribune to Antium. It was easy to find a ship there going to Grecian waters.

Vinicius, though sad because Peter, to whom he owed so much, could not visit Antium, thanked him with gratitude, and then turned to the old Apostle with his last request, —

“Knowing Lygia’s dwelling,” said he, “I might have gone to her and asked, as is proper, whether she would take me as husband should my soul become Christian, but I prefer to ask thee, O Apostle! Permit me to see her, or take me thyself to her. I know not how long I shall be in Antium; and remember that near Cæsar no one is sure of to-morrow. Petronius himself told me that I should not be altogether safe there. Let me see her before I go; let me delight my eyes with her; and let me ask her if she will forget my evil and return good.”

Peter smiled kindly and said, —

“But who could refuse thee a proper joy, my son?”

Vinicius stooped again to Peter’s hands, for he could not in any way restrain his overflowing heart. The Apostle took him by the temples and said, —

“Have no fear of Cæsar, for I tell thee that a hair will not fall from thy head.”

He sent Miriam for Lygia, telling her not to say who was with them, so as to give the maiden more delight.

It was not far; so after a short time those in the chamber saw among the myrtles of the garden Miriam leading Lygia by the hand.

Vinicius wished to run forth to meet her; but at sight of that beloved form happiness took his strength, and he stood with beating heart, breathless, barely able to keep his feet, a hundred times more excited than when for the first time in life he heard the Parthian arrows whizzing round his head.

She ran in, unsuspecting; but at sight of him she halted as if fixed to the earth. Her face flushed, and then became very pale; she looked with astonished and frightened eyes on those present.

But round about she saw clear glances, full of kindness. The Apostle Peter approached her and asked, —

“Lygia, dost thou love him as ever?”

A moment of silence followed. Her lips began to quiver like those of a child who is preparing to cry, who feels that it is guilty, but sees that it must confess the guilt.

“Answer,” said the Apostle.

Then, with humility, obedience, and fear in her voice, she whispered, kneeling at the knees of Peter, —

“I do.”

In one moment Vinicius knelt at her side. Peter placed his hands on their heads, and said, —

“Love each other in the Lord and to His glory, for there is no sin in your love.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHILE walking with Lygia through the garden, Vinicius described briefly, in words from the depth of his heart, that which a short time before he had confessed to the Apostles, — that is, the alarm of his soul, the changes which had taken place in him, and, finally, that immense yearning which had veiled life from him, beginning with the hour when he left Miriam's dwelling. He confessed to Lygia that he had tried to forget her, but was not able. He thought whole days and nights of her. That little cross of boxwood twigs which she had left reminded him of her, — that cross, which he had placed in the lararium and revered involuntarily as something divine. And he yearned more and more every moment, for love was stronger than he, and had seized his soul altogether, even when he was at the house of Aulus. The Parcae weave the thread of life for others; but love, yearning, and melancholy had woven it for him. His acts had been evil, but they had their origin in love. He had loved her when she was in the house of Aulus, when she was on the Palatine, when he saw her in Ostrianum listening to Peter's words, when he went with Croton to carry her away, when she watched at his bedside, and when she deserted him. Then came Chilo, who discovered her dwelling, and advised him to seize her a second time; but he chose to punish Chilo, and go to the Apostles to ask for truth and for her. And blessed be that moment in which such a thought came to his head, for now he is at her side, and she will not flee from him, as the last time she fled from the house of Miriam.

"I did not flee from thee," said Lygia.

"Then why didst thou go?"

She raised her iris-colored eyes to him, and, bending her blushing face, said, —

"Thou knowest —"

Vinicius was silent for a moment from excess of happiness, and began again to speak, as his eyes were opened gradually to this, — that she was different utterly from Roman women, and resembled Pomponia alone. Besides, he could not explain this to her clearly, for he could not de-

fine his feeling, — that beauty of a new kind altogether was coming to the world in her, such beauty as had not been in it thus far; beauty which is not merely a statue, but a spirit. He told her something, however, which filled her with delight, — that he loved her just because she had fled from him, and that she would be sacred to him at his hearth. Then, seizing her hand, he could not continue; he merely gazed on her with rapture as on his life's happiness which he had won, and repeated her name, as if to assure himself that he had found her and was near her.

"Oh, Lygia, Lygia!"

At last he inquired what had taken place in her mind, and she confessed that she had loved him while in the house of Aulus, and that if he had taken her back to them from the Palatine she would have told them of her love and tried to soften their anger against him.

"I swear to thee," said Vinicius, "that it had not even risen in my mind to take thee from Aulus. Petronius will tell thee sometime that I told him then how I loved and wished to marry thee. 'Let her anoint my door with wolf fat, and let her sit at my hearth,' said I to him. But he ridiculed me, and gave Cæsar the idea of demanding thee as a hostage and giving thee to me. How often in my sorrow have I cursed him; but perhaps fate ordained thus, for otherwise I should not have known the Christians, and should not have understood thee."

"Believe me, Marcus," replied Lygia, "it was Christ who led thee to Himself by design."

Vinicius raised his head with a certain astonishment.

"True," answered he, with animation. "Everything fixed itself so marvellously that in seeking thee I met the Christians. In Ostrianum I listened to the Apostle with wonder, for I had never heard such words. And there thou didst pray for me?"

"I did," answered Lygia.

They passed near the summer-house covered with thick ivy, and approached the place where Ursus, after stifling Croton, threw himself upon Vinicius.

"Here," said the young man, "I should have perished but for thee."

"Do not mention that," answered Lygia, "and do not speak of it to Ursus."

"Could I be revenged on him for defending thee? Had he been a slave, I should have given him freedom straightway."

"Had he been a slave, Aulus would have freed him long ago."

"Dost thou remember," asked Vinicius, "that I wished to take thee back to Aulus, but the answer was, that Cæsar might hear of it and take revenge on Aulus and Pomponia? Think of this: thou mayst see them now as often as thou wishest."

"How, Marcus?"

"I say 'now,' and I think that thou wilt be able to see them without danger, when thou art mine. For should Cæsar hear of this, and ask what I did with the hostage whom he gave me, I should say 'I married her, and she visits the house of Aulus with my consent.' He will not remain long in Antium, for he wishes to go to Achæa; and even should he remain, I shall not need to see him daily. When Paul of Tarsus teaches me your faith, I will receive baptism at once, I will come here, gain the friendship of Aulus and Pomponia, who will return to the city by that time, and there will be no further hindrance, I will seat thee at my hearth. Oh, carissima! carissima!"

And he stretched forth his hand, as if taking Heaven as witness of his love; and Lygia, raising her clear eyes to him, said, —

"And then I shall say, 'Wherever thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia.'"

"No, Lygia," cried Vinicius, "I swear to thee that never has woman been so honored in the house of her husband as thou shalt be in mine."

For a time they walked on in silence, without being able to take in with their breasts their happiness, in love with each other, like two deities, and as beautiful as if spring had given them to the world with the flowers.

They halted at last under the cypress growing near the entrance of the house. Lygia leaned against his breast, and Vinicius began to entreat again with a trembling voice, —

"Tell Ursus to go to the house of Aulus for thy furniture and playthings of childhood."

But she, blushing like a rose or like the dawn, answered, —

"Custom commands otherwise."

"I know that. The pronuba¹ usually brings them behind

¹ The matron who accompanies the bride and explains to her the duties of a wife.

the bride, but do this for me. I will take them to my villa in Antium, and they will remind me of thee."

Here he placed his hands together and repeated, like a child who is begging for something, —

"It will be some days before Pomponia returns; so do this, diva, do this, carissima."

"But Pomponia will do as she likes," answered Lygia, blushing still more deeply at mention of the pronuba.

And again they were silent, for love had begun to stop the breath in their breasts. Lygia stood with shoulders leaning against the cypress, her face whitening in the shadow, like a flower, her eyes drooping, her bosom heaving with more and more life. Vinicius changed in the face, and grew pale. In the silence of the afternoon they only heard the beating of their hearts, and in their mutual ecstasy that cypress, the myrtle bushes, and the ivy of the summer-house became for them a paradise of love. But Miriam appeared in the door, and invited them to the afternoon meal. They sat down then with the Apostles, who gazed at them with pleasure, as on the young generation which after their death would preserve and sow still further the seed of the new faith. Peter broke and blessed bread. There was calm on all faces, and a certain immense happiness seemed to overflow the whole house.

"See," said Paul at last, turning to Vinicius, "are we enemies of life and happiness?"

"I know how that is," answered Vinicius, "for never have I been so happy as among you."

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON the evening of that day Vinicius, while returning home through the Forum, saw at the entrance to the Vicus Tuscus the gilded litter of Petronius, carried by eight stalwart Bithynians, and, stopping it with a sign of his hand, he approached the curtains.

"Thou hast had a pleasant dream, I trust, and a happy one!" cried he, laughing at sight of the slumbering Petronius.

"Oh, is it thou?" said Petronius, waking up. "Yes; I dropped asleep for a moment, as I passed the night at the Palatine. I have come out to buy something to read on the road to Antium. What is the news?"

"Art thou visiting the book-shops?" inquired Vinicius.

"Yes, I do not like to bring disorder into my library, so I am collecting a special supply for the journey. It is likely that some new things of Musonius and Seneca have come out. I am looking also for Persius, and a certain edition of the Eclogues of Vergilius, which I do not possess. Oh, how tired I am; and how my hands ache from covers and rings! For when a man is once in a book-shop curiosity seizes him to look here and there. I was at the shop of Avirnus, and at that of Atractus on the Argiletum, and with the Sozii on Vicus Sandalarius. By Castor! how I want to sleep!"

"Thou wert on the Palatine? Then I would ask thee what is it to be heard there? Or, knowest what?—send home the litter and the tubes with books, and come to my house. We will talk of Antium, and of something else."

"That is well," answered Petronius, coming out of the litter. "Thou must know, besides, that we start for Antium the day after to-morrow."

"Whence should I know that?"

"In what world art thou living? Well, I shall be the first to announce the news to thee. Yes; be ready for the day after to-morrow in the morning. Peas in olive oil have not helped, a cloth around his thick neck has not helped, and Bronzebeard is hoarse. In view of this, delay is not to be mentioned. He curses Rome and its atmosphere, with what the world stands on; he would be glad to level it to the earth or to destroy it with fire, and he longs for the sea at the

earliest. He says that the smells which the wind brings from the narrow streets are driving him into the grave. To-day great sacrifices were offered in all the temples to restore his voice; and woe to Rome, but especially to the Senate, should it not return quickly!"

"Then there would be no reason for his visit to Achæa?"

"But is that the only talent possessed by our divine Cæsar?" asked Petronius, smiling. "He would appear in the Olympic games, as a poet, with his 'Burning of Troy'; as a charioteer, as a musician, as an athlete,—nay, even as a dancer, and would receive in every case all the crowns intended for victors. Dost know why that monkey grew hoarse? Yesterday he wanted to equal our Paris in dancing, and danced for us the adventures of Leda, during which he sweated and caught cold. He was as wet and slippery as an eel freshly taken from water. He changed masks one after another, whirled like a spindle, waved his hands like a drunken sailor, till disgust seized me while looking at that great stomach and those slim legs. Paris taught him during two weeks; but imagine to thyself Ahenobarbus as Leda or as the divine swan. That was a swan!—there is no use in denying it. But he wants to appear before the public in that pantomime,—first in Antium, and then in Rome."

"People are offended already because he sang in public; but to think that a Roman Cæsar will appear as a mime! No; even Rome will not endure that!"

"My dear friend, Rome will endure anything; the Senate will pass a vote of thanks to the 'Father of his country.' And the rabble will be elated because Cæsar is its buffoon."

"Say thyself, is it possible to be more debased?"

Petronius shrugged his shoulders. "Thou art living by thyself at home, and meditating, now about Lygia, now about Christians, so thou knowest not, perhaps, what happened two days since. Nero married, in public, Pythagoras, who appeared as a bride. That passed the measure of madness, it would seem, would it not? And what wilt thou say? the flamens, who were summoned, came and performed the ceremony with solemnity. I was present. I can endure much; still I thought, I confess, that the gods, if there be any, should give a sign. But Cæsar does not believe in the gods, and he is right."

"So he is in one person chief priest, a god, and an atheist," said Vinicius.

"True," said Petronius, beginning to laugh. "That had not entered my head; but the combination is such as the world has not seen." Then, stopping a moment, he said: "One should add that this chief priest who does not believe in the gods, and this god who reviles the gods, fears them in his character of atheist."

"The proof of this is what happened in the temple of Vesta."

"What a society!"

"As the society is, so is Cæsar. But this will not last long."

Thus conversing, they entered the house of Vinicius, who called for supper joyously; then, turning to Petronius, he said; —

"No, my dear, society must be renewed."

"We shall not renew it," answered Petronius, "even for the reason that in Nero's time man is like a butterfly, — he lives in the sunshine of favor, and at the first cold wind he perishes, even against his will. By the son of Maia! more than once have I given myself this question: By what miracle has such a man as Lucius Saturninus been able to reach the age of ninety-three, to survive Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius? But never mind. Wilt thou permit me to send thy litter for Eunice? My wish to sleep has gone, somehow, and I should like to be joyous. Give command to cithara players to come to the supper, and afterward we will talk of Antium. It is needful to think of it, especially for thee."

Vinicius gave the order to send for Eunice, but declared that he had no thought of breaking his head over the stay in Antium.

"Let those break their heads who cannot live otherwise than in the rays of Cæsar's favor. The world does not end on the Palatine, especially for those who have something else in their hearts and souls."

He said this so carelessly and with such animation and gladness that his whole manner struck Petronius; hence, looking for a time at him, he asked, —

"What is taking place in thee? Thou art to-day as thou wert when wearing the golden bulla on thy neck."

"I am happy," answered Vinicius. "I have invited thee purposely to tell thee so."

"What has happened?"

"Something which I would not give for the Roman Empire."

Then he sat down, and, leaning on the arm of the chair, rested his head on his hand, and asked, —

"Dost remember how we were at the house of Aulus Plautius, and there thou didst see for the first time the god-like maiden called by thee 'the dawn and the spring'? Dost remember that Psyche, that incomparable, that one more beautiful than our maidens and our goddesses?"

Petronius looked at him with astonishment, as if he wished to make sure that his head was right.

"Of whom art thou speaking?" asked he at last. "Evidently I remember Lygia."

"I am her betrothed."

"What!"

But Vinicius sprang up and called his dispensator.

"Let the slaves stand before me to the last soul; quickly!"

"Art thou her betrothed?" repeated Petronius.

But before he recovered from his astonishment the immense atrium was swarming with people. Panting old men ran in, men in the vigor of life, women, boys, and girls. With each moment the atrium was filled more and more; in corridors, called "fauces," voices were heard calling in various languages. Finally, all took their places in rows at the walls and among the columns. Vinicius, standing near the impluvium, turned to Demas, the freedman, and said, —

"Those who have served twenty years in my house are to appear to-morrow before the pretor, where they will receive freedom; those who have not served out the time will receive three pieces of gold and double rations for a week. Send an order to the village prisons to remit punishment, strike the fetters from people's feet, and feed them sufficiently. Know that a happy day has come to me, and I wish rejoicing in the house."

For a moment they stood in silence, as if not-believing their ears; then all hands were raised at once, and all mouths cried, —

"A-a! lord! a-a-a!"

Vinicius dismissed them with a wave of his hand. Though they desired to thank him and to fall at his feet, they went away hurriedly, filling the house with happiness from cellar to roof.

"To-morrow," said Vinicius, "I will command them to meet again in the garden, and to make such signs on the ground as they choose. Lygia will free those who draw a fish."

Petronius, who never wondered long at anything, had grown indifferent, and asked, —

“A fish, is it? Ah, ha! According to Chilo, that is the sign of a Christian, I remember.” Then he extended his hand to Vinicius, and said: “Happiness is always where a man sees it. May Flora strew flowers under thy feet for long years. I wish thee everything which thou wishest thyself.”

“I thank thee, for I thought that thou wouldst dissuade me, and that, as thou seest, would be time lost.”

“I? Dissuade? By no means. On the contrary, I tell thee that thou art doing well.”

“Ha, traitor!” answered Vinicius, joyfully; “hast forgotten what thou didst tell me once when we were leaving the house of Pomponia Græcina?”

“No,” answered Petronius, with cool blood; “but I have changed my opinion. My dear,” added he after a while, “in Rome everything changes. Husbands change wives, wives change husbands; why should not I change opinions? It lacked little of Nero’s marrying Acte, whom for his sake they represented as the descendant of a kingly line. Well, he would have had an honest wife, and we an honest Augusta. By Proteus and his barren spaces in the sea! I shall change my opinion as often as I find it appropriate or profitable. As to Lygia, her royal descent is more certain than Acte’s. But in Antium be on thy guard against Poppæa, who is revengeful.”

“I do not think of doing so. A hair will not fall from my head in Antium.”

“If thou think to astonish me a second time, thou art mistaken; but whence hast thou that certainty?”

“The Apostle Peter told me so.”

“Ah, the Apostle Peter told thee! Against that there is no argument; permit me, however, to take certain measures of precaution even to this end, that the Apostle Peter may not turn out a false prophet; for, should the Apostle be mistaken, perchance he might lose thy confidence, which certainly will be of use to him in the future.”

“Do what may please thee, but I believe him. And if thou think to turn me against him by repeating his name with irony, thou art mistaken.”

“But one question more. Hast thou become a Christian?”

“Not yet; but Paul of Tarsus will travel with me to ex-

plain the teachings of Christ, and afterward I will receive baptism; for thy statement that they are enemies of life and pleasantness is not true.”

“All the better for thee and Lygia,” answered Petronius; then, shrugging his shoulders, he said, as if to himself, “But it is astonishing how skilled those people are in gaining adherents, and how that sect is extending.”

“Yes,” answered Vinicius, with as much warmth as if he had been baptized already; “there are thousands and tens of thousands of them in Rome, in the cities of Italy, in Greece and Asia. There are Christians among the legions and among the pretorians; they are in the palace of Cæsar itself. Slaves and citizens, poor and rich, plebeian and patrician, confess that faith. Dost thou know that the Corneli are Christians, that Pomponia Græcina is a Christian, that likely Octavia was, and Acte is? Yes, that teaching will embrace the world, and it alone is able to renew it. Do not shrug thy shoulders, for who knows whether in a month or a year thou wilt not receive it thyself?”

“I?” said Petronius. “No, by the son of Leto! I will not receive it; even if the truth and wisdom of gods and men were contained in it. That would require labor, and I have no fondness for labor. Labor demands self-denial, and I will not deny myself anything. With thy nature, which is like fire and boiling water, something like this may happen any time. But I? I have my gems, my cameos, my vases, my Eunice. I do not believe in Olympus, but I arrange it on earth for myself; and I shall flourish till the arrows of the divine archer pierce me, or till Cæsar commands me to open my veins. I love the odor of violets too much, and a comfortable triclinium. I love even our gods, as rhetorical figures, and Achæa, to which I am preparing to go with our fat, thin-legged, incomparable, godlike Cæsar, the august period-compelling Hercules, Nero.”

Then he was joyous at the very supposition that he could accept the teaching of Galilean fishermen, and began to sing in an undertone, —

“I will entwine my bright sword in myrtle,
After the example of Harmodius and Aristogiton.”

But he stopped, for the arrival of Eunice was announced. Immediately after her coming supper was served, during which songs were sung by the cithara players; Vinicius told of Chilo’s visit, and also how that visit had given the idea of

going to the Apostles directly, — an idea which came to him while they were flogging Chilo.

At mention of this, Petronius, who began to be drowsy, placed his hand on his forehead, and said, —

“The thought was good, since the object was good. But as to Chilo, I should have given him five pieces of gold; but as it was thy will to flog him, it was better to flog him, for who knows but in time senators will bow to him, as to-day they are bowing to our cobbler-knight, Vatinius. Good-night.”

And, removing his wreath, he, with Eunice, prepared for home. When they had gone, Vinicius went to his library and wrote to Lygia as follows: —

“When thou openest thy beautiful eyes, I wish this letter to say Good-day! to thee. Hence I write now, though I shall see thee to-morrow. Cæsar will go to Antium after to-morrow, — and I, eheu! must go with him. I have told thee already that not to obey would be to risk life — and at present I could not find courage to die. But if thou wish me not to go, write one word, and I will stay. Petronius will turn away danger from me with a speech. To-day, in the hour of my delight, I gave rewards to all my slaves; those who have served in the house twenty years I shall take to the pretor to-morrow and free. Thou, my dear, shouldst praise me, since this act as I think will be in accord with that mild religion of thine; secondly, I do this for thy sake. They are to thank thee for their freedom. I shall tell them so to-morrow, so that they may be grateful to thee and praise thy name. I give myself in bondage to happiness and thee. God grant that I never see liberation. May Antium be cursed, and the journey of Ahenobarbus! Thrice and four times happy am I in not being so wise as Petronius; if I were, I should be forced to go to Greece perhaps. Meanwhile the moment of separation will sweeten my memory of thee. Whenever I can tear myself away, I shall sit on a horse, and rush back to Rome, to gladden my eyes with sight of thee, and my ears with thy voice. When I cannot come I shall send a slave with a letter, and an inquiry about thee. I salute thee, divine one, and embrace thy feet. Be not angry that I call thee divine. If thou forbid, I shall obey, but to-day I cannot call thee otherwise. I congratulate thee on thy future house with my whole soul.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was known in Rome that Cæsar wished to see Ostia on the journey, or rather the largest ship in the world, which had brought wheat recently from Alexandria, and from Ostia to go by the Via Littoralis to Antium. Orders had been given a number of days earlier; hence at the Porta Ostiensis, from early morning, crowds made up of the local rabble and of all nations of the earth had collected to feast their eyes with the sight of Cæsar's retinue, on which the Roman populace could never gaze sufficiently. The road to Antium was neither difficult nor long. In the place itself, which was composed of palaces and villas built and furnished in a lordly manner, it was possible to find everything demanded by comfort, and even the most exquisite luxury of the period. Cæsar had the habit, however, of taking with him on a journey every object in which he found delight, beginning with musical instruments and domestic furniture, and ending with statues and mosaics, which were taken even when he wished to remain on the road merely a short time for rest or recreation. He was accompanied, therefore, on every expedition by whole legions of servants, without reckoning divisions of pretorian guards, and Augustians; of the latter each had a personal retinue of slaves.

Early on the morning of that day herdsmen from the Campania, with sunburnt faces, wearing goat-skins on their legs, drove forth five hundred she-asses through the gates, so that Poppæa on the morrow of her arrival at Antium might have her bath in their milk. The rabble gazed with delight and ridicule at the long ears swaying amid clouds of dust, and listened with pleasure to the whistling of whips and the wild shouts of the herdsmen. After the asses had gone by, crowds of youths rushed forth, swept the road carefully, and covered it with flowers and needles from pine-trees. In the crowds people whispered to each other, with a certain feeling of pride, that the whole road to Antium would be strewn in that way with flowers taken from private gardens round about, or bought at high prices from dealers at the Porta Mugionis. As the morning hours passed, the throng increased every moment. Some had brought their whole