

the whole city with roaring. There was something so indescribably gloomy and terrible in those roars that Lygia, whose bright and calm visions of the future were scattered, listened with a straitened heart and with wonderful fear and sadness.

But Vinicius encircled her with his arm, and said, —

“Fear not, dear one. The games are at hand, and all the vivaria are crowded.”

Then both entered the house of Linus, accompanied by the thunder of lions, growing louder and louder.

CHAPTER XL.

IN Antium, meanwhile, Petronius gained new victories almost daily over courtiers vying with him for the favor of Cæsar. The influence of Tigellinus had fallen completely. In Rome, when there was occasion to set aside men who seemed dangerous, to plunder their property or to settle political cases, to give spectacles astounding by their luxury and bad taste, or finally to satisfy the monstrous whims of Cæsar, Tigellinus, as adroit, as he was ready for anything, became indispensable. But in Antium, among palaces reflected in the azure of the sea, Cæsar led a Hellenic existence. From morning till evening Nero and his attendants read verses, discoursed on their structure and finish, were delighted with happy turns of expression, were occupied with music, the theatre, — in a word, exclusively with that which Grecian genius had invented, and with which it had beautified life. Under these conditions Petronius, incomparably more refined than Tigellinus and the other courtiers, — witty, eloquent, full of subtile feelings and tastes, — obtained pre-eminence of necessity. Cæsar sought his society, took his opinion, asked for advice when he composed, and showed a more lively friendship than at any other time whatever. It seemed to courtiers that his influence had won a supreme triumph at last, that friendship between him and Cæsar had entered on a period of certainty which would last for years. Even those who had shown dislike previously to the exquisite Epicurean, began now to crowd around him and vie for his favor. More than one was even sincerely glad in his soul that preponderance had come to a man who knew really what to think of a given person, who received with a sceptical smile the flattery of his enemies of yesterday, but who, either through indolence or culture, was not vengeful, and did not use his power to the detriment or destruction of others. There were moments when he might have destroyed even Tigellinus, but he preferred to ridicule him, and expose his vulgarity and want of refinement. In Rome the Senate drew breath, for no death sentence had been issued for a month and a half. It is true that in Antium and the city people told wonders of the refinement which the profligacy of Cæsar

and his favorite had reached, but every one preferred a refined Cæsar to one brutalized in the hands of Tigellinus. Tigellinus himself lost his head, and hesitated whether or not to yield as conquered, for Cæsar had said repeatedly that in all Rome and in his court there were only two spirits capable of understanding each other, two real Hellenes, — he and Petronius.

The amazing dexterity of Petronius confirmed people in the conviction that his influence would outlive every other. They did not see how Cæsar could dispense with him, — with whom could he converse touching poetry, music, and comparative excellence; in whose eyes could he look to learn whether his creation was indeed perfect? Petronius, with his habitual indifference, seemed to attach no importance to his position. As usual, he was remiss, slothful, sceptical, and witty. He produced on people frequently the impression of a man who made light of them, of himself, of Cæsar, of the whole world. At moments he ventured to criticise Cæsar to his face, and when others judged that he was going too far, or simply preparing his own ruin, he was able to turn the criticism suddenly in such a way that it came out to his profit; he roused amazement in those present, and the conviction that there was no position from which he could not issue in triumph.

About a week after the return of Vinicius from Rome, Cæsar read in a small circle an extract from his *Troyad*; when he had finished and the shouts of rapture had ended, Petronius, interrogated by a glance from Cæsar, replied, —

“Common verses, fit for the fire.”

The hearts of those present stopped beating from terror. Since the years of his childhood Nero had never heard such a sentence from any man. The face of Tigellinus was radiant with delight. But Vinicius grew pale, thinking that Petronius, who thus far had never been drunk, was drunk this time.

Nero, however, inquired in a honeyed voice, in which more or less deeply wounded vanity was quivering, —

“What defect dost thou find in them?”

“Do not believe them,” said Petronius, attacking him, and pointing to those present; “they understand nothing. Thou hast asked what defect there is in thy verses. If thou desire truth, I will tell thee. Thy verses would be worthy of Virgil, of Ovid, even of Homer, but they are not worthy of thee. Thou art not free to write such. The conflagration described by thee does not blaze enough; thy fire is not hot

enough. Listen not to Lucan's flatteries. Had he written those verses, I should acknowledge him a genius, but thy case is different. And knowest thou why? Thou art greater than they. From him who is gifted of the gods as thou art, more is demanded. But thou art slothful, — thou wouldst rather sleep after dinner than sit to wrinkles. Thou canst create a work such as the world has not heard of to this day; hence I tell thee to thy eyes, write better!”

And he said this carelessly, as if bantering and also chiding; but Cæsar's eyes were mist-covered from delight.

“The gods have given me a little talent,” said he, “but they have given me something greater, — a true judge and friend, the only man able to speak the truth to my eyes.”

Then he stretched his fat hand, grown over with reddish hair, to a golden candelabrum plundered from Delphi, to burn the verses. But Petronius seized them before the flame touched the paper.

“No, no!” said he; “even thus they belong to mankind. Leave them to me.”

“In such case let me send them to thee in a cylinder of my own invention,” answered Nero, embracing Petronius.

“True; thou art right,” said he, after a while. “My conflagration of Troy does not blaze enough; my fire is not hot enough. But I thought it sufficient to equal Homer. A certain timidity and low estimate of my power have fettered me always. Thou hast opened my eyes. But knowest why it is, as thou sayest? When a sculptor makes the statue of a god, he seeks a model; but never have I had a model. I never have seen a burning city; hence there is a lack of truth in my description.”

“Then I will say that only a great artist understands this.”

Nero grew thoughtful, and after a while he said, —

“Answer one question, Petronius. Dost thou regret the burning of Troy?”

“Do I regret? By the lame consort of Venus, not in the least! And I will tell thee the reason. Troy would not have been consumed if Prometheus had not given fire to man, and the Greeks made war on Priam. Æschylus would not have written his *Prometheus* had there been no fire, just as Homer would not have written the *Iliad* had there been no Trojan war. I think it better to have Prometheus and the *Iliad* than a small and shabby city, which was unclean, I think, and wretched, and in which at best there would be

now some procurator annoying thee through quarrels with the local areopagus."

"That is what we call speaking with sound reason," said Nero. "For art and poetry it is permitted, and it is right, to sacrifice everything. Happy were the Achæans who furnished Homer with the substance of the Iliad, and happy Priam who beheld the ruin of his birthplace. As to me, I have never seen a burning city."

A time of silence followed, which was broken at last by Tigellinus, —

"But I have said to thee, Cæsar, already, command and I will burn Antium; or dost thou know what? If thou art sorry for these villas and palaces, give command to burn the ships in Ostia; or I will build a wooden city on the Alban Hills, into which thou shalt hurl the fire thyself. Dost thou wish?"

"Am I to gaze on the burning of wooden sheds?" asked Nero, casting a look of contempt on him. "Thy mind has grown utterly barren, Tigellinus. And I see, besides, that thou dost set no great value on my talent or my Troyad, since thou judgest that any sacrifice would be too great for it."

Tigellinus was confused; but Nero, as if wishing to change the conversation, added after a while, —

"Summer is passing. Oh, what a stench there must be in that Rome now! And still we must return for the summer games."

"When thou dismissest the Augustians, O Cæsar, permit me to remain with thee a moment," said Tigellinus.

An hour later Vinicius, returning with Petronius from Cæsar's villa, said, —

"I was a trifle alarmed for thee. I judged that while drunk thou hadst ruined thyself beyond redemption. Remember that thou art playing with death."

"That is my arena," answered Petronius, carelessly; "and the feeling that I am the best gladiator in it amuses me. See how it ended. My influence has increased this evening. He will send me his verses in a cylinder which — dost wish to lay a wager? — will be immensely rich and in immensely bad taste. I shall command my physician to keep physic in it. I did this for another reason, — because Tigellinus, seeing how such things succeed, will wish surely to imitate me, and I imagine what will happen. The moment he starts a witticism, it will be as if a bear of the Pyrenees

were rope-walking. I shall laugh like Democritus. If I wished I could destroy Tigellinus perhaps, and become pretorian prefect in his place, and have Ahenobarbus himself in my hands. But I am indolent; I prefer my present life and even Cæsar's verses to trouble."

"What dexterity to be able to turn even blame into flattery! But are those verses really so bad? I am no judge in those matters."

"The verses are not worse than others. Lucan has more talent in one finger, but in Bronzebeard too there is something. He has, above all, an immense love for poetry and music. In two days we are to be with him to hear the music of his hymn to Aphrodite, which he will finish to-day or to-morrow. We shall be in a small circle, — only I, thou, Tullius Senecio, and young Nerva. But as to what I said touching Nero's verses, that I use them after feasting as Vitellius does flamingo feathers, is not true. At times they are eloquent. Hecuba's words are touching. She complains of the pangs of birth, and Nero was able to find happy expressions, — for this reason, perhaps, that he gives birth to every verse in torment. At times I am sorry for him. By Pollux, what a marvellous mixture! The fifth stave was lacking in Caligula, but still he never did such strange things."

"Who can foresee to what the madness of Ahenobarbus will go?" asked Vinicius.

"No man whatever. Such things may happen yet that the hair will stand on men's heads for whole centuries at thought of them. But it is that precisely which interests me; and though I am bored more than once, like Jupiter Ammon in the desert, I believe that under another Cæsar I should be bored a hundred times more. Paul, thy little Jew, is eloquent, — that I accord to him; and if people like him proclaim that religion, our gods must defend themselves seriously, lest in time they be led away captive. It is true that if Cæsar, for example, were a Christian, all would feel safer. But thy prophet of Tarsus, in applying proofs to me, did not think, seest thou, that for me this uncertainty becomes the charm of life. Whoso does not play at dice will not lose property, but still people play at dice. There is in that a certain delight and destruction of the present. I have known sons of knights and senators to become gladiators of their own will. I play with life, thou sayest, and that is true, but I play because it pleases me; while Christian virtues would

bore me in a day, as do the discourses of Seneca. Because of this, Paul's eloquence is exerted in vain. He should understand that people like me will never accept his religion. With thy disposition thou mightst either hate the name Christian, or become a Christian immediately. I recognize, while yawning, the truth of what they say. We are mad. We are hastening to the precipice, something unknown is coming toward us out of the future, something is breaking beneath us, something is dying around us, — agreed! But we shall succeed in dying; meanwhile we have no wish to burden life, and serve death before it takes us. Life exists for itself alone, not for death."

"But I pity thee, Petronius."

"Do not pity me more than I pity myself. Formerly thou wert glad among us; while campaigning in Armenia, thou wert longing for Rome."

"And now I am longing for Rome."

"True; for thou art in love with a Christian vestal, who sits in the Trans-Tiber. I neither wonder at this, nor do I blame thee. I wonder more, that in spite of a religion described by thee as a sea of happiness, and in spite of a love which is soon to be crowned, sadness has not left thy face. Pomponia Græcina is eternally pensive; from the time of thy becoming a Christian thou hast ceased to laugh. Do not try to persuade me that this religion is cheerful. Thou hast returned from Rome sadder than ever. If Christians love in this way, by the bright curls of Bacchus! I shall not imitate them!"

"That is another thing," answered Vinicius. "I swear to thee, not by the curls of Bacchus, but by the soul of my father, that never in times past have I experienced even a foretaste of such happiness as I breathe to-day. But I yearn greatly; and what is stranger, when I am far from Lygia, I think that danger is threatening her. I know not what danger, nor whence it may come; but I feel it, as one feels a coming tempest."

"In two days I will try to obtain for thee permission to leave Antium, for as long a time as may please thee. Poppæa is somewhat more quiet; and, as far as I know, no danger from her threatens thee or Lygia."

"This very day she asked me what I was doing in Rome, though my departure was secret."

"Perhaps she gave command to set spies on thee. Now, however, even she must count with me."

"Paul told me," said Vinicius, "that God forewarns sometimes, but does not permit us to believe in omens; hence I guard myself against this belief, but I cannot ward it off. I will tell thee what happened, so as to cast the weight from my heart. Lygia and I were sitting side by side on a night as calm as this, and planning our future. I cannot tell thee how happy and calm we were. All at once lions began to roar. That is common in Rome, but since then I have no rest. It seems to me that in that roaring there was a threat, an announcement as it were of misfortune. Thou knowest that I am not frightened easily; that night, however, something happened which filled all the darkness with terror. It came so strangely and unexpectedly that I have those sounds in my ears yet, and unbroken fear in my heart, as if Lygia were asking my protection from something dreadful, — even from those same lions. I am in torture. Obtain for me permission to leave Antium, or I shall go without it. I cannot remain. I repeat to thee, I cannot!"

"Sons of consuls or their wives are not given to lions yet in the arenas," said Petronius, laughing. "Any other death may meet thee but that. Who knows, besides, that they were lions? German bisons roar with no less gentleness than lions. As to me, I ridicule omens and fates. Last night was warm and I saw stars falling like rain. Many a man has an evil foreboding at such a sight; but I thought, 'If among these is my star too, I shall not lack society at least!'" Then he was silent, but added after a moment's thought, —

"If your Christ has risen from the dead, He may perhaps protect you both from death."

"He may," answered Vinicius, looking at the heavens filled with stars.

CHAPTER XLI.

NERO played and sang, in honor of the "Lady of Cyprus," a hymn the verses and music of which were composed by himself. That day he was in voice, and felt that his music really captivated those present. That feeling added such power to the sounds produced and roused his own soul so much that he seemed inspired. At last he grew pale from genuine emotion. This was surely the first time that he had no desire to hear praises from others. He sat for a time with his hands on the cithara and with bowed head; then, rising suddenly, he said, —

"I am tired and need air. Meanwhile ye will tune the citharæ."

He covered his throat then with a silk kerchief.

"Ye will go with me," said he, turning to Petronius and Vinicius, who were sitting in a corner of the hall. "Give me thy arm, Vinicius, for strength fails me; Petronius will talk to me of music."

They went out on the terrace, which was paved with alabaster and sprinkled with saffron.

"Here one can breathe more freely," said Nero. "My soul is moved and sad, though I see that with what I have sung to thee on trial just now I may appear in public, and my triumph will be such as no Roman has ever achieved."

"Thou mayst appear here, in Rome, in Achæa. I admire thee with my whole heart and mind, divinity," answered Petronius.

"I know. Thou art too slothful to force thyself to flattery, and thou art as sincere as Tullius Senecio, but thou hast more knowledge than he. Tell me, what is thy judgment on music?"

"When I listen to poetry, when I look at a quadriga directed by thee in the Circus, when I look at a beautiful statue, temple, or picture, I feel that I comprehend perfectly what I see, that my enthusiasm takes in all that these can give. But when I listen to music, especially thy music, new delights and beauties open before me every instant. I pursue them, I try to seize them; but before I can take them to myself, new and newer ones flow in, just like waves

of the sea, which roll on from infinity. Hence I tell thee that music is like the sea. We stand on one shore and gaze at remoteness, but we cannot see the other shore."

"Ah, what deep knowledge thou hast!" said Nero; and they walked on for a moment, only the slight sound of the saffron leaves under their feet being heard.

"Thou hast expressed my idea," said Nero at last; "hence I say now, as ever, in all Rome thou art the only man able to understand me. Thus it is, my judgment of music is the same as thine. When I play and sing, I see things which I did not know as existing in my dominions or in the world. I am Cæsar, and the world is mine. I can do everything. But music opens new kingdoms to me, new mountains, new seas, new delights unknown before. Most frequently I cannot name them or grasp them; I only feel them. I feel the gods, I see Olympus. Some kind of breeze from beyond the earth blows in on me; I behold, as in a mist, certain immeasurable greatnesses, but calm and bright as sunshine. The whole Spheros plays around me; and I declare to thee" (here Nero's voice quivered with genuine wonder) "that I, Cæsar and god, feel at such times as diminutive as dust. Wilt thou believe this?"

"I will. Only great artists have power to feel small in the presence of art."

"This is a night of sincerity; hence I open my soul to thee as to a friend, and I will say more: dost thou consider that I am blind or deprived of reason? Dost thou think that I am ignorant of this, that people in Rome write insults on the walls against me, call me a matricide, a wife-murderer, hold me a monster and a tyrant, because Tigellinus obtained a few sentences of death against my enemies? Yes, my dear, they hold me a monster, and I know it. They have talked cruelty on me to that degree that at times I put the question to myself, 'Am I not cruel?' But they do not understand this, that a man's deeds may be cruel at times while he himself is not cruel. Ah, no one will believe, and perhaps even thou, my dear, wilt not believe, that at moments when music caresses my soul I feel as kind as a child in the cradle. I swear by those stars which shine above us, that I speak the pure truth to thee. People do not know how much goodness lies in this heart, and what treasures I see in it when music opens the door to them."

Petronius, who had not the least doubt that Nero was speaking sincerely at that moment, and that music might

bring out various more noble inclinations of his soul, which were overwhelmed by mountains of egotism, profligacy, and crime, said, —

“Men should know thee as nearly as I do; Rome has never been able to appreciate thee.”

Cæsar leaned more heavily on Vinicius's arm, as if he were bending under the weight of injustice, and answered, —

“Tigellinus has told me that in the Senate they whisper into one another's ears that Diodorus and Terpnos play on the cithara better than I. They refuse me even that! But tell me, thou who art truthful always, do they play better, or as well?”

“By no means. Thy touch is finer, and has greater power. In thee the artist is evident, in them the expert. The man who hears their music first understands better what thou art.”

“If that be true, let them live. They will never imagine what a service thou hast rendered them in this moment. For that matter, if I had condemned those two, I should have had to take others in place of them.”

“And people would say, besides, that out of love for music thou destroyest music in thy dominions. Never kill art for art's sake, O divinity.”

“How different thou art from Tigellinus!” answered Nero. “But seest thou, I am an artist in everything; and since music opens for me spaces the existence of which I had not divined, regions which I do not possess, delight and happiness which I do not know, I cannot live a common life. Music tells me that the uncommon exists, so I seek it with all the power of dominion which the gods have placed in my hands. At times it seems to me that to reach those Olympian worlds I must do something which no man has done hitherto, — I must surpass the stature of man in good or evil. I know that people declare me mad. But I am not mad, I am only seeking. And if I am going mad, it is out of disgust and impatience that I cannot find. I am seeking! Dost understand me? And therefore I wish to be greater than man, for only in that way can I be the greatest as an artist.”

Here he lowered his voice so that Vinicius could not hear him, and, putting his mouth to the ear of Petronius, he whispered, —

“Dost know that I condemned my mother and wife to death mainly because I wished to lay at the gate of an

unknown world the greatest sacrifice that man could put there? I thought that afterward something would happen, that doors would be opened beyond which I should see something unknown. Let it be wonderful or awful, surpassing human conception, if only great and uncommon. But that sacrifice was not sufficient. To open the empyrean doors it is evident that something greater is needed, and let it be given as the Fates desire.”

“What dost thou intend to do?”

“Thou shalt see sooner than thou thinkest. Meanwhile be assured that there are two Neros, — one such as people know, the other an artist, whom thou alone knowest, and if he slays as does death, or is in frenzy like Bacchus, it is only because the flatness and misery of common life stifle him; and I should like to destroy them, though I had to use fire or iron. Oh, how flat this world will be when I am gone from it! No man has suspected yet, not thou even, what an artist I am. But precisely because of this I suffer, and sincerely do I tell thee that the soul in me is as gloomy as those cypresses which stand dark there in front of us. It is grievous for a man to bear at once the weight of supreme power and the highest talents.”

“I sympathize with thee, O Cæsar; and with me earth and sea, not counting Vinicius, who deifies thee in his soul.”

“He, too, has always been dear to me,” said Cæsar, “though he serves Mars, not the Muses.”

“He serves Aphrodite first of all,” answered Petronius. And suddenly he determined to settle the affair of his nephew at a blow, and at the same time to eliminate every danger which might threaten him. “He is in love, as was Troilus with Cressida. Permit him, lord, to visit Rome, for he is dying on my hands. Dost thou know that that Lygian hostage whom thou gavest him has been found, and Vinicius, when leaving for Antium, left her in care of a certain Linus? I did not mention this to thee, for thou wert composing thy hymn, and that was more important than all besides. Vinicius wanted her as a mistress; but when she turned out to be as virtuous as Lucretia, he fell in love with her virtue, and now his desire is to marry her. She is a king's daughter, hence she will cause him no detriment; but he is a real soldier: he sighs and withers and groans, but he is waiting for the permission of his Emperor.”

“The Emperor does not choose wives for his soldiers. What good is my permission to Vinicius?”

"I have told thee, O lord, that he deifies thee."

"All the more may he be certain of permission. That is a comely maiden, but too narrow in the hips. The Augusta Poppæa has complained to me that she enchanted our child in the gardens of the Palatine."

"But I told Tigellinus that the gods are not subject to evil charms. Thou rememberest, divinity, his confusion and thy exclamation, 'Habet!'"

"I remember."

Here he turned to Vinicius, —

"Dost thou love her, as Petronius says?"

"I love her, lord," replied Vinicius.

"Then I command thee to set out for Rome to-morrow, and marry her. Appear not again before my eyes without the marriage ring."

"Thanks to thee, lord, from my heart and soul."

"Oh, how pleasant it is to make people happy!" said Nero. "Would that I might do nothing else all my life!"

"Grant us one favor more, O divinity," said Petronius: "declare thy will in this matter before the Augusta. Vinicius would never venture to wed a woman displeasing to the Augusta; thou wilt dissipate her prejudice, O lord, with a word, by declaring that thou hast commanded this marriage."

"I am willing," said Cæsar. "I could refuse nothing to thee or Vinicius."

He turned toward the villa, and they followed. Their hearts were filled with delight over the victory; and Vinicius had to use self-restraint to avoid throwing himself on the neck of Petronius, for it seemed now that all dangers and obstacles were removed.

In the atrium of the villa young Nerva and Tullius Senecio were entertaining the Augusta with conversation. Terpnos and Diodorus were tuning citharæ.

Nero entered, sat in an armchair inlaid with tortoise-shell, whispered something in the ear of a Greek slave near his side, and waited.

The page returned soon with a golden casket. Nero opened it and took out a necklace of great opals.

"These are jewels worthy of this evening," said he.

"The light of Aurora is playing in them," answered Poppæa, convinced that the necklace was for her.

Cæsar, now raising, now lowering the rosy stones, said at last, —

"Vinicius, thou wilt give, from me, this necklace to her

whom I command thee to marry, the youthful daughter of the Lygian king."

Poppæa's glance, filled with anger and sudden amazement, passed from Cæsar to Vinicius. At last it rested on Petronius. But he, leaning carelessly over the arm of the chair, passed his hand along the back of the harp as if to fix its form firmly in his mind.

Vinicius gave thanks for the gift, approached Petronius, and asked, —

"How shall I thank thee for what thou hast done this day for me?"

"Sacrifice a pair of swans to Euterpe," replied Petronius, "praise Cæsar's songs, and laugh at omens. Henceforth the roaring of lions will not disturb thy sleep, I trust, nor that of thy Lygian lily."

"No," said Vinicius; "now I am perfectly at rest."

"May Fortune favor thee! But be careful, for Cæsar is taking his lute again. Hold thy breath, listen, and shed tears."

In fact Cæsar had taken the lute and raised his eyes. In the hall conversation had stopped, and people were as still as if petrified. Terpnos and Diodorus, who had to accompany Cæsar, were on the alert, looking now at each other and now at his lips, waiting for the first tones of the song.

Just then a movement and noise began in the entrance; and after a moment Cæsar's freedman, Phaon, appeared from beyond the curtain. Close behind him was the consul Lecanius.

Nero frowned.

"Pardon, divine Emperor," said Phaon, with panting voice, "there is a conflagration in Rome! The greater part of the city is in flames!"

At this news all sprang from their seats.

"O gods! I shall see a burning city and finish the Troyad," said Nero, setting aside his lute.

Then he turned to the consul, —

"If I go at once, shall I see the fire?"

"Lord," answered Lecanius, as pale as a wall, "the whole city is one sea of flame; smoke is suffocating the inhabitants, and people faint, or cast themselves into the fire from delirium. Rome is perishing, lord."

A moment of silence followed, which was broken by the cry of Vinicius, —

"*Væ misero mihi!*"

And the young man, casting his toga aside, rushed forth in his tunic.

Nero raised his hands and exclaimed, —

"Woe to thee, sacred city of Priam!"

CHAPTER XLII.

VINICIUS had barely time to command a few slaves to follow him; then, springing on his horse, he rushed forth in the deep night along the empty streets toward Laurentum. Through the influence of the dreadful news he had fallen as it were into frenzy and mental distraction. At moments he did not know clearly what was happening in his mind; he had merely the feeling that misfortune was on the horse with him, sitting behind his shoulders, and shouting in his ears, "Rome is burning!" that it was lashing his horse and him, urging them toward the fire. Laying his bare head on the beast's neck, he rushed on, in his single tunic, alone, at random, not looking ahead, and taking no note of obstacles against which he might perchance dash himself.

In silence and in that calm night, the rider and the horse, covered with gleams of the moon, seemed like dream visions. The Idumean stallion, dropping his ears and stretching his neck, shot on like an arrow past the motionless cypresses and the white villas hidden among them. The sound of hoofs on the stone flags roused dogs here and there; these followed the strange vision with their barking; afterward, excited by its suddenness, they fell to howling, and raised their jaws toward the moon. The slaves hastening after Vinicius soon dropped behind, as their horses were greatly inferior. When he had rushed like a storm through sleeping Laurentum, he turned toward Ardea, in which, as in Aricia, Bovillæ, and Ustrinum, he had kept relays of horses from the day of his coming to Antium, so as to pass in the shortest time possible the interval between Rome and him. Remembering these relays, he forced all the strength from his horse.

Beyond Ardea it seemed to him that the sky on the north-east was covered with a rosy reflection. That might be the dawn, for the hour was late, and in July daybreak came early. But Vinicius could not keep down a cry of rage and despair, for it seemed to him that that was the glare of the conflagration. He remembered the consul's words, "The whole city is one sea of flame," and for a while he felt that madness was threatening him really, for he had lost utterly

all hope that he could save Lygia, or even reach the city before it was turned into one heap of ashes. His thoughts were quicker now than the rush of the stallion, they flew on ahead like a flock of birds, black, monstrous, and rousing despair. He knew not, it is true, in what part of the city the fire had begun; but he supposed that the Trans-Tiber division, as it was packed with tenements, timber-yards, storehouses, and wooden sheds serving as slave marts, might have become the first food of the flames.

In Rome fires happened frequently enough; during these fires, as frequently, deeds of violence and robbery were committed, especially in the parts occupied by a needy and half-barbarous population. What might happen, therefore, in a place like the Trans-Tiber, which was the retreat of a rabble collected from all parts of the earth? Here the thought of Ursus with his preterhuman power flashed into Vinicius's head; but what could be done by a man, even were he a Titan, against the destructive force of fire?

The fear of servile rebellion was like a nightmare, which had stifled Rome for whole years. It was said that hundreds of thousands of those people were thinking of the times of Spartacus, and merely waiting for a favorable moment to seize arms against their oppressors and Rome. Now the moment had come! Perhaps war and slaughter were raging in the city together with fire. It was possible even that the pretorians had hurled themselves on the city, and were slaughtering at command of Cæsar.

And that moment the hair rose from terror on his head. He recalled all the conversations about burning cities, which for some time had been repeated at Cæsar's court with wonderful persistence; he recalled Cæsar's complaints that he was forced to describe a burning city without having seen a real fire; his contemptuous answer to Tigellinus, who offered to burn Antium or an artificial wooden city; finally, his complaints against Rome, and the pestilential alleys of the Subura. Yes; Cæsar has commanded the burning of the city! He alone could give such a command, as Tigellinus alone could accomplish it. But if Rome is burning at command of Cæsar, who can be sure that the population will not be slaughtered at his command also? The monster is capable even of such a deed. Conflagration, a servile revolt, and slaughter! What a horrible chaos, what a letting loose of destructive elements and popular frenzy! And in all this is Lygia.

The groans of Vinicius were mingled with the snorting and groans of his horse; the beast, running on a road which rose continually toward Aricia, was using the last of its breath. Who will snatch her from the burning city; who can save her? Here Vinicius, stretching himself entirely on the horse, thrust his fingers into his own hair, ready to gnaw the beast's neck from pain.

At that moment a horseman, rushing also like a whirlwind, but in the opposite direction, toward Antium, shouted as he raced past, "Rome is perishing!" and on he went. To the ears of Vinicius came only one more expression: "Gods!" the rest was drowned by the thunder of hoofs. But that expression sobered him, — "Gods!"

Vinicius raised his head suddenly, and, stretching his arms toward the sky filled with stars, began to pray.

"Not to you do I call whose temples are burning, but to Thee! Thou Thyself hast suffered. Thou alone art merciful! Thou alone hast understood people's pain; Thou didst come to this world to teach pity to mankind; then show it now. If Thou art what Peter and Paul declare, save for me Lygia, take her in Thy arms, bear her out of the flames. Thou hast the power to do that! Give her to me, and I will give Thee my blood. But if Thou art unwilling to do this for me, do it for her. She loves Thee and trusts in Thee. Thou dost promise life and happiness after death, but happiness after death will not pass away, and she does not wish to die yet. Let her live. Take her in Thy arms, bear her out of Rome. Thou canst do so, unless Thou art unwilling."

And he stopped, for he felt that further prayer might turn to a threat; he feared to offend Divinity at the moment when he needed favor and mercy most. He was terrified at the very thought of that, and, so as not to admit to his head a shade even of threat, he began to lash his horse again, especially since the white walls of Aricia, which lay midway to Rome, gleamed up before him in the moonlight.

After a time he rushed at full speed past the temple of Mercury, which stood in a grove before the city. Evidently people knew of the catastrophe, for there was an uncommon movement in front of the temple. While passing, Vinicius saw crowds on the steps and between the columns. These people holding torches were hastening to put themselves under protection of the deity. Moreover the road was not so empty or free as beyond Ardea. Crowds were hurrying, it is true, to the grove by side-paths, but on the main road

were groups which pushed aside hurriedly before the on-rushing horseman. From the town came the sound of voices. Vinicius rode into Aricia like a whirlwind, overturning and trampling a number of persons on the way. He was surrounded by shouts of "Rome is burning!" "Rome is on fire!" "May the gods rescue Rome!"

The horse stumbled, but, reined in by a powerful hand, rose on his haunches before the inn, where Vinicius had another beast in relay. Slaves, as if waiting for the arrival of their master, stood before the inn, and at his command ran one before the other to lead out a fresh horse. Vinicius, seeing a detachment of ten mounted pretorians, going evidently with news from the city to Antium, sprang toward them.

"What part of the city is on fire?" inquired he.

"Who art thou?" asked the decurion.

"Vinicius, a tribune of the army, an Augustian. Answer on thy head!"

"The fire broke out in the shops near the Circus Maximus. When we were despatched, the centre of the city was on fire."

"And the Trans-Tiber?"

"The fire has not reached the Trans-Tiber yet, but it is seizing new parts every moment with a force which nothing can stop. People are perishing from heat and smoke; all rescue is impossible."

At this moment they brought the fresh horse. The young tribune sprang to his back and rushed on. He was riding now toward Albanum, leaving Alba Longa and its splendid lake on the right. The road from Aricia lay at the foot of the mountain, which hid the horizon completely, and Albanum lying on the other side of it. But Vinicius knew that on reaching the top he should see, not only Bovillæ and Ustrinum, where fresh horses were ready for him, but Rome as well: for beyond Albanum the low level Campania stretched on both sides of the Appian Way, along which only the arches of the aqueducts ran toward the city, and nothing obstructed the view.

"From the top I shall see the flames," said he; and he began to lash his horse anew. But before he had reached the top of the mountain he felt the wind on his face, and with it came the odor of smoke to his nostrils. At the same time the summit of the height was becoming gilded.

"The fire!" thought Vinicius.

The night had paled long since, the dawn had passed into light, and on all the nearer summits golden and rosy gleams were shining, which might come either from burning Rome or the rising daylight. Vinicius touched the summit at last, and then a terrible sight struck his eyes.

The whole lower region was covered with smoke, forming as it were one gigantic cloud lying close to the earth. In this cloud towns, aqueducts, villas, trees, disappeared; but beyond this gray ghastly plain the city was burning on the hills.

The conflagration had not the form of a pillar of fire, as happens when a single building is burning, even when of the greatest size. That was a long belt, rather, shaped like the belt of dawn. Above this belt rose a wave of smoke, in places entirely black, in places looking rose-colored, in places like blood, in places turning in on itself, in some places inflated, in others squeezed and squirming, like a serpent which is unwinding and extending. That monstrous wave seemed at times to cover even the belt of fire, which became then as narrow as a ribbon; but later this ribbon illuminated the smoke from beneath, changing its lower rolls into waves of flame. The two extended from one side of the sky to the other, hiding its lower part, as at times a stretch of forest hides the horizon. The Sabine hills were not visible in the least.

To Vinicius it seemed at the first glance of the eye that not only the city was burning, but the whole world, and that no living being could save itself from that ocean of flame and smoke.

The wind blew with growing strength from the region of the fire, bringing the smell of burnt things and of smoke, which began to hide even nearer objects. Clear daylight had come, and the sun lighted up the summits surrounding the Alban Lake. But the bright golden rays of the morning appeared as it were reddish and sickly through the haze. Vinicius, while descending toward Albanum, entered smoke which was denser, less and less transparent. The town itself was buried in it thoroughly. The alarmed citizens had moved out to the street. It was a terror to think of what might be in Rome, when it was difficult to breathe in Albanum.

Despair seized Vinicius anew, and terror began to raise the hair on his head. But he tried to fortify himself as best he might. "It is impossible," thought he, "that a city

should begin to burn in all places at once. The wind is blowing from the north and bears smoke in this direction only. On the other side there is none. But in every case it will be enough for Ursus to go through the Janiculum gate with Lygia, to save himself and her. It is equally impossible that a whole population should perish, and the world-ruling city be swept from the face of the earth with its inhabitants. Even in captured places, where fire and slaughter rage together, some people survive in all cases; why, then, should Lygia perish of a certainty? On the contrary, God watches over her, He who Himself conquered death." Thus reasoning, he began to pray again, and, yielding to fixed habit, he made great vows to Christ, with promises of gifts and sacrifices. After he had hurried through Albanum, nearly all of whose inhabitants were on roofs and on trees to look at Rome, he grew somewhat calm, and regained his cool blood. He remembered, too, that Lygia was protected not only by Ursus and Linus, but by the Apostle Peter. At the mere remembrance of this, fresh solace entered his heart. For him Peter was an incomprehensible, an almost superhuman being. From the time when he heard him at Ostrianum, a wonderful impression clung to him, touching which he had written to Lygia at the beginning of his stay in Antium, — that every word of the old man was true, or would show its truth hereafter. The nearer acquaintance which during his illness he had formed with the Apostle heightened the impression, which was turned afterward into fixed faith. Since Peter had blessed his love and promised him Lygia, Lygia could not perish in the flames. The city might burn, but no spark from the fire would fall on her garments. Under the influence of a sleepless night, mad riding, and impressions, a wonderful exaltation possessed the young tribune; in this exaltation all things seemed possible: Peter speaks to the flame, opens it with a word, and they pass uninjured through an alley of fire. Moreover, Peter saw future events; hence, beyond doubt, he foresaw the fire, and in that case how could he fail to warn and lead forth the Christians from the city, and among others Lygia, whom he loved, as he might his own child? And a hope, which was strengthening every moment, entered the heart of Vinicius. If they were fleeing from the city, he might find them in Bovillæ, or meet them on the road. The beloved face might appear any moment from out the smoke, which was stretching more widely over all the Campania.

This seemed to him more likely, since he met increasing numbers of people, who had deserted the city and were going to the Alban Hills; they had escaped the fire, and wished to go beyond the line of smoke. Before he had reached Ustrinum he had to slacken his pace because of the throng. Besides pedestrians with bundles on their backs, he met horses with packs, mules and vehicles laden with effects, and finally litters in which slaves were bearing the wealthier citizens. Ustrinum was so thronged with fugitives from Rome that it was difficult to push through the crowd. On the market square, under temple porticos, and on the streets were swarms of fugitives. Here and there people were erecting tents under which whole families were to find shelter. Others settled down under the naked sky, shouting, calling on the gods, or cursing the fates. In the general terror it was difficult to inquire about anything. People to whom Vinicius applied either did not answer, or with eyes half bewildered from terror answered that the city and the world were perishing. New crowds of men, women, and children arrived from the direction of Rome every moment; these increased the disorder and outcry. Some, gone astray in the throng, sought desperately those whom they had lost; others fought for a camping-place. Half-wild shepherds from the Campania crowded to the town to hear news, or find profit in plunder made easy by the uproar. Here and there crowds of slaves of every nationality, and gladiators fell to robbing houses and villas in the town, and to fighting with the soldiers who appeared in defence of the citizens.

Junius, a senator, whom Vinicius saw at the inn surrounded by a detachment of Batavian slaves, was the first to give more detailed news of the conflagration. The fire had begun at the Circus Maximus, in the part which touches the Palatine and the Cælian Hill, but extended with incomprehensible rapidity and seized the whole centre of the city. Never since the time of Brennus had such an awful catastrophe come upon Rome. "The entire Circus has burnt, as well as the shops and houses surrounding it," said Junius; "the Aventine and Cælian Hills are on fire. The flames surrounding the Palatine have reached the Carinæ."

Here Junius, who possessed on the Carinæ a magnificent "insula," filled with works of art which he loved, seized a handful of foul dust, and, scattering it on his head, began to groan despairingly.

But Vinicius shook him by the shoulder: "My house too

is on the *Carinæ*," said he; "but when everything is perishing, let it perish also."

Then recollecting that at his advice *Lygia* might have gone to the house of *Aulus*, he inquired, —

"But the *Vicus Patricius*?"

"On fire!" replied *Junius*.

"The *Trans-Tiber*?"

Junius looked at him with amazement.

"Never mind the *Trans-Tiber*," said he, pressing his aching temples with his palms.

"The *Trans-Tiber* is more important to me than all other parts of *Rome*," cried *Vinicius*, with vehemence.

"The way is through the *Via Portuensis*, near the *Aventine*; but the heat will stifle thee. The *Trans-Tiber*? I know not. The fire had not reached it; but whether it is not there at this moment the gods alone know." Here *Junius* hesitated a moment, then said in a low voice: "I know that thou wilt not betray me, so I will tell thee that this is no common fire. People were not permitted to save the *Circus*. When houses began to burn in every direction, I myself heard thousands of voices exclaiming, 'Death to those who save!' Certain people ran through the city and hurled burning torches into buildings. On the other hand people are revolting, and crying that the city is burning at command. I can say nothing more. Woe to the city, woe to us all, and to me! The tongue of man cannot tell what is happening there. People are perishing in flames or slaying one another in the throng. This is the end of *Rome*!"

And again he fell to repeating, "Woe! Woe to the city and to us!" *Vinicius* sprang to his horse, and hurried forward along the *Appian Way*. But now it was rather a struggling through the midst of a river of people and vehicles, which was flowing from the city. The city, embraced by a monstrous conflagration, lay before *Vinicius* as a thing on the palm of his hand. From the sea of fire and smoke came a terrible heat, and the uproar of people could not drown the roar and the hissing of flames.

CHAPTER XLIII.

As *Vinicius* approached the walls, he found it easier to reach *Rome* than penetrate to the middle of the city. It was difficult to push along the *Appian Way*, because of the throng of people. Houses, fields, cemeteries, gardens, and temples, lying on both sides of it, were turned into camping places. In the temple of *Mars*, which stood near the *Porta Appia*, the crowd had thrown down the doors, so as to find a refuge within during night-hours. In the cemeteries the larger monuments were seized, and battles fought in defence of them, which were carried to bloodshed. *Ustrinum* with its disorder gave barely a slight foretaste of that which was happening beneath the walls of the capital. All regard for the dignity of law, for family ties, for difference of position, had ceased. Gladiators drunk with wine seized in the *Emporium* gathered in crowds, ran with wild shouts through the neighboring squares, scattering, trampling, and robbing the people. A multitude of barbarians, exposed for sale in the city, escaped from the booths. For them the burning and ruin of *Rome* was at once the end of slavery and the hour of revenge; so that when the permanent inhabitants, who had lost all they owned in the fire, stretched their hands to the gods in despair, calling for rescue, these slaves with howls of delight scattered the crowds, dragged clothing from people's backs, and bore away the younger women. They were joined by slaves serving in the city from of old, wretches who had nothing on their bodies save woollen girdles around their hips, dreadful figures from the alleys, who were hardly ever seen on the streets in the daytime, and whose existence in *Rome* it was difficult to suspect. Men of this wild and unrestrained crowd, Asiatics, Africans, Greeks, Thracians, Germans, Britons, howling in every language of the earth, raged, thinking that the hour had come in which they were free to reward themselves for years of misery and suffering. In the midst of that surging throng of humanity, in the glitter of day and of fire, shone the helmets of pretorians, under whose protection the more peaceable population had taken