

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

refuge, and who in hand-to-hand battle had to meet the raging multitude in many places. Vinicius had seen captured cities, but never had his eyes beheld a spectacle in which despair, tears, pain, groans, wild delight, madness, rage, and license were mingled together in such immeasurable chaos. Above this heaving, mad human multitude roared the fire, surging up to the hill-tops of the greatest city on earth, sending into the whirling throng its fiery breath, and covering it with smoke, through which it was impossible to see the blue sky. The young tribune with supreme effort, and exposing his life every moment, forced his way at last to the Appian Gate; but there he saw that he could not reach the city through the division of the Porta Capena, not merely because of the throng, but also because of the terrible heat from which the whole atmosphere was quivering inside the gate. Besides, the bridge at the Porta Trigenia, opposite the temple of the Bona Dea, did not exist yet, hence whoso wished to go beyond the Tiber had to push through to the Pons Sublicius, that is, to pass around the Aventine through a part of the city covered now with one sea of flame. That was an impossibility. Vinicius understood that he must return toward Ustrinum, turn from the Appian Way, cross the river below the city, and go to the Via Portuensis, which led straight to the Trans-Tiber. That was not easy because of the increasing disorder on the Appian Way. He must open a passage for himself there, even with the sword. Vinicius had no weapons; he had left Antium just as the news of the fire had reached him in Cæsar's villa. At the fountain of Mercury, however, he saw a centurion who was known to him. This man, at the head of a few tens of soldiers, was defending the precinct of the temple; he commanded him to follow. Recognizing a tribune and an Augustian, the centurion did not dare to disobey the order.

Vinicius took command of the detachment himself, and, forgetting for that moment the teaching of Paul touching love for one's neighbor, he pressed and cut the throng in front with a haste that was fatal to many who could not push aside in season. He and his men were followed by curses and a shower of stones; but to these he gave no heed, caring only to reach freer spaces at the earliest. Still he advanced with the greatest effort. People who had encamped would not move, and heaped loud curses on Cæsar and the pretorians. The throng assumed in places a threatening aspect. Vinicius heard voices accusing Nero of burning the city. He

and Poppæa were threatened with death. Shouts of "Sanio," "Histrio" (buffoon, actor), "Matricide!" were heard round about. Some shouted to drag him to the Tiber; others that Rome had shown patience enough. It was clear that were a leader found, these threats could be changed into open rebellion which might break out any moment. Meanwhile the rage and despair of the crowd turned against the pretorians, who for another reason could not make their way out of the crowd: the road was blocked by piles of goods, borne from the fire previously, boxes, barrels of provisions, furniture the most costly, vessels, infants' cradles, beds, carts, hand-packs. Here and there they fought hand to hand; but the pretorians conquered the weaponless multitude easily. After they had ridden with difficulty across the Viæ Latina, Numitia, Ardea, Lavinia, and Ostia, and passed around villas, gardens, cemeteries, and temples, Vinicius reached at last a village called Vicus Alexandri, beyond which he crossed the Tiber. There was more open space at this spot, and less smoke. From fugitives, of whom there was no lack even there, he learned that only certain alleys of the Trans-Tiber were burning, but that surely nothing could resist the fury of the conflagration, since people were spreading the fire purposely, and permitted no one to quench it, declaring that they acted at command. The young tribune had not the least doubt then that Cæsar had given command to burn Rome; and the vengeance which people demanded seemed to him just and proper. What more could Mithridates or any of Rome's most inveterate enemies have done? The measure had been exceeded; his madness had grown to be too enormous, and the existence of people too difficult because of him. Vinicius believed that Nero's hour had struck, that those ruins into which the city was falling should and must overwhelm the monstrous buffoon together with all those crimes of his. Should a man be found of courage sufficient to stand at the head of the despairing people, that might happen in a few hours. Here vengeful and daring thoughts began to fly through his head. But if he should do that? The house of Vinicius, which till recent times counted a whole series of consuls, was known throughout Rome. The crowds needed only a name. Once, when four hundred slaves of the prefect Pedanius Secundus were sentenced, Rome reached the verge of rebellion and civil war. What would happen to-day in view of a dreadful calamity surpassing almost everything which Rome had undergone in the course of eight centuries? Whoso calls the Quirites to

arms, thought Vinicius, will overthrow Nero undoubtedly, and clothe himself in purple. And why should he not do this? He was firmer, more active, younger than other Augustians. True, Nero commanded thirty legions stationed on the borders of the Empire; but would not those legions and their leaders rise up at news of the burning of Rome and its temples? And in that case Vinicius might become Cæsar. It was even whispered among the Augustians that a soothsayer had predicted the purple to Otho. In what way was he inferior to Otho? Perhaps Christ Himself would assist him with His divine power; maybe that inspiration was His? "Oh, would that it were!" exclaimed Vinicius, in spirit. He would take vengeance on Nero for the danger of Lygia and his own fear; he would begin the reign of truth and justice, he would extend Christ's religion from the Euphrates to the misty shores of Britain; he would array Lygia in the purple, and make her mistress of the world.

But these thoughts which had burst forth in his head like a bunch of sparks from a blazing house, died away like sparks. First of all was the need to save Lygia. He looked now on the catastrophe from near by; hence fear seized him again, and before that sea of flame and smoke, before the touch of dreadful reality, that confidence with which he believed that Peter would rescue Lygia, died in his heart altogether. Despair seized him a second time when he had come out on the Via Portuensis, which led directly to the Trans-Tiber. He did not recover till he came to the gate, where people repeated what fugitives had said before, that the greater part of that division of the city was not seized by the flames yet, but that fire had crossed the river in a number of places.

Still the Trans-Tiber was full of smoke, and crowds of fugitives made it more difficult to reach the interior of the place, since people, having more time there, had saved greater quantities of goods. The main street itself was in many parts filled completely, and around the Naumachia Augusta great heaps were piled up. Narrow alleys, in which smoke had collected more densely, were simply impassable. The inhabitants were fleeing in thousands. On the way Vinicius saw wonderful sights. More than once two rivers of people, flowing in opposite directions, met in a narrow passage, stopped each other, men fought hand to hand, struck and trampled one another. Families lost one another in the uproar; mothers called on their children despairingly. The young tribune's hair stood on end at thought

of what must happen nearer the fire. Amid shouts and howls it was difficult to inquire about anything or understand what was said. At times new columns of smoke from beyond the river rolled toward them, smoke black and so heavy that it moved near the ground, hiding houses, people, and every object, just as night does. But the wind caused by the conflagration blew it away again, and then Vinicius pushed forward farther toward the alley in which stood the house of Linus. The fervor of a July day, increased by the heat of the burning parts of the city, became unendurable. Smoke pained the eyes; breath failed in men's breasts. Even the inhabitants who, hoping that the fire would not cross the river, had remained in their houses so far, began to leave them; and the throng increased hourly. The pretorians accompanying Vinicius remained in the rear. In the crush some one wounded his horse with a hammer; the beast threw up its bloody head, reared, and refused obedience. The crowd recognized in Vinicius an Augustian by his rich tunic, and at once cries were raised round about: "Death to Nero and his incendiaries!" This was a moment of terrible danger; hundreds of hands were stretched toward Vinicius; but his frightened horse bore him away, trampling people as he went, and the next moment a new wave of black smoke rolled in and filled the street with darkness. Vinicius, seeing that he could not ride past, sprang to the earth and rushed forward on foot, slipping along walls, and at times waiting till the fleeing multitude passed him. He said to himself in spirit that these were vain efforts. Lygia might not be in the city; she might have saved herself by flight. It was easier to find a pin on the seashore than her in that crowd and chaos. Still he wished to reach the house of Linus, even at the cost of his own life. At times he stopped and rubbed his eyes. Tearing off the edge of his tunic, he covered his nose and mouth with it, and ran on. As he approached the river, the heat increased terribly. Vinicius, knowing that the fire had begun at the Circus Maximus, thought at first that that heat came from its cinders and from the Forum Boarium and the Velabrum, which, situated near by, must be also in flames. But the heat was growing unendurable. One old man on crutches and fleeing, the last whom Vinicius noticed, cried: "Go not near the bridge of Cestius! The whole island is on fire!" It was, indeed, impossible to be deceived any longer. At the turn toward the Vicus Judæorum, on which stood the

house of Linus, the young tribune saw flames amid clouds of smoke. Not only the island was burning, but the Trans-Tiber, or at least the other end of the street on which Lygia dwelt.

Vinicius remembered that the house of Linus was surrounded by a garden; between the garden and the Tiber was an unoccupied field of no great size. This thought consoled him. The fire might stop at the vacant place. In that hope he ran forward, though every breeze brought not only smoke, but sparks in thousands, which might raise a fire at the other end of the alley and cut off his return.

At last he saw through the smoky curtain the cypresses in Linus's garden. The houses beyond the unoccupied field were burning already like piles of fuel, but Linus's little "insula" stood untouched yet. Vinicius glanced heavenward with thankfulness, and sprang toward the house though the very air began to burn him. The door was closed, but he pushed it open and rushed in.

There was not a living soul in the garden, and the house seemed quite empty. "Perhaps they have fainted from smoke and heat," thought Vinicius. He began to call, — "Lygia! Lygia!"

Silence answered him. Nothing could be heard in the stillness there save the roar of the distant fire.

"Lygia!"

Suddenly his ear was struck by that gloomy sound which he had heard before in that garden. Evidently the vivarium near the temple of Esculapius, on the neighboring island, had caught fire. In this vivarium every kind of wild beast, and among others lions, began to roar from affright. A shiver ran through Vinicius from foot to head. Now, a second time, at a moment when his whole being was concentrated in Lygia, these terrible voices answered, as a herald of misfortune, as a marvellous prophecy of an ominous future.

But this was a brief impression, for the thunder of the flames, more terrible yet than the roaring of wild beasts, commanded him to think of something else. Lygia did not answer his calls; but she might be in a faint or stifled in that threatened building. Vinicius sprang to the interior. The little atrium was empty, and dark with smoke. Feeling for the door which led to the sleeping-rooms, he saw the gleaming flame of a small lamp, and approaching it saw the lararium in which was a cross instead of lares. Under the

cross a taper was burning. Through the head of the young catechumen, the thought passed with lightning speed that that cross sent him the taper with which he could find Lygia; hence he took the taper and searched for the sleeping-rooms. He found one, pushed aside the curtains, and, holding the taper, looked around.

There was no one there, either. Vinicius was sure that he had found Lygia's sleeping-room, for her clothing was on nails in the wall, and on the bed lay a capitiu, or close garment worn by women next the body. Vinicius seized that, pressed it to his lips, and taking it on his arm went farther. The house was small, so that he examined every room, and even the cellar quickly. Nowhere could he find a living soul. It was evident that Lygia, Linus, and Ursus, with other inhabitants of that part, must have sought safety in flight.

"I must seek them among the crowd beyond the gates of the city," thought Vinicius.

He was not astonished greatly at not meeting them on the Via Portuensis, for they might have left the Trans-Tiber through the opposite side along the Vatican Hill. In every case they were safe from fire at least. A stone fell from his breast. He saw, it is true, the terrible danger with which the flight was connected, but he was comforted at thought of the preterhuman strength of Ursus. "I must flee now," said he, "and reach the gardens of Agrippina through the gardens of Domitius, where I shall find them. The smoke is not so terrible there, since the wind blows from the Sabine Hill."

The hour had come now in which he must think of his own safety, for the river of fire was flowing nearer and nearer from the direction of the island, and rolls of smoke covered the alley almost completely. The taper, which had lighted him in the house, was quenched from the current of air. Vinicius rushed to the street, and ran at full speed toward the Via Portuensis, whence he had come; the fire seemed to pursue him with burning breath, now surrounding him with fresh clouds of smoke, now covering him with sparks, which fell on his hair, neck, and clothing. The tunic began to smoulder on him in places; he cared not, but ran forward lest he might be stifled from smoke. He had the taste of soot and burning in his mouth; his throat and lungs were as if on fire. The blood rushed to his head, and at moments all things, even the smoke itself, seemed red to him. Then

he thought: "This is living fire! Better cast myself on the ground and perish." The running tortured him more and more. His head, neck, and shoulders were streaming with sweat, which scalded like boiling water. Had it not been for Lygia's name, repeated by him in thought, had it not been for her capitium, which he wound across his mouth, he would have fallen. Some moments later he failed to recognize the street along which he ran. Consciousness was leaving him gradually; he remembered only that he must flee, for in the open field beyond waited Lygia, whom Peter had promised him. And all at once he was seized by a certain wonderful conviction, half feverish, like a vision before death, that he must see her, marry her, and then die.

But he ran on as if drunk, staggering from one side of the street to the other. Meanwhile something changed in that monstrous conflagration which had embraced the giant city. Everything which till then had only glimmered, burst forth visibly into one sea of flame; the wind had ceased to bring smoke. That smoke which had collected in the streets was borne away by a mad whirl of heated air. That whirl drove with it millions of sparks, so that Vinicius was running in a fiery cloud as it were. But he was able to see before him all the better, and in a moment, almost when he was ready to fall, he saw the end of the street. That sight gave him fresh strength. Passing the corner, he found himself in a street which led to the Via Portuensis and the Codetan Field. The sparks ceased to drive him. He understood that if he could run to the Via Portuensis he was safe, even were he to faint on it.

At the end of the street he saw again a cloud, as it seemed, which stopped the exit. "If that is smoke," thought he, "I cannot pass." He ran with the remnant of his strength. On the way he threw off his tunic, which, on fire from the sparks, was burning him like the shirt of Nessus, having only Lygia's capitium around his head and before his mouth. When he had run farther, he saw that what he had taken for smoke was dust, from which rose a multitude of cries and voices.

"The rabble are plundering houses," thought Vinicius. But he ran toward the voices. In every case people were there; they might assist him. In this hope he shouted for aid with all his might before he reached them. But this was his last effort. It grew redder still in his eyes, breath failed his lungs, strength failed his bones; he fell.

They heard him, however, or rather saw him. Two men ran with gourds full of water. Vinicius, who had fallen from exhaustion but had not lost consciousness, seized a gourd with both hands, and emptied one-half of it.

"Thanks," said he; "place me on my feet, I can walk on alone."

The other laborer poured water on his head; the two not only placed him on his feet, but raised him from the ground, and carried him to the others, who surrounded him and asked if he had suffered seriously. This tenderness astonished Vinicius.

"People, who are ye?" asked he.

"We are breaking down houses, so that the fire may not reach the Via Portuensis," answered one of the laborers.

"Ye came to my aid when I had fallen. Thanks to you."

"We are not permitted to refuse aid," answered a number of voices.

Vinicius, who from early morning had seen brutal crowds, slaying and robbing, looked with more attention on the faces around him, and said, —

"May Christ reward you."

"Praise to His name!" exclaimed a whole chorus of voices.

"Linus?" inquired Vinicius.

But he could not finish the question or hear the answer, for he fainted from emotion and over-exertion. He recovered only in the Codetan Field in a garden, surrounded by a number of men and women. The first words which he uttered were, —

"Where is Linus?"

For a while there was no answer; then some voice, known to Vinicius, said all at once, —

"He went out by the Nomentan Gate to Ostrianum two days ago. Peace be with thee, O king of Persia!"

Vinicius rose to a sitting posture, and saw Chilo before him.

"Thy house is burned surely, O lord," said the Greek, "for the Carinæ is in flames; but thou wilt be always as rich as Midas. Oh, what a misfortune! The Christians, O son of Serapis, have predicted this long time that fire would destroy the city. But Linus, with the daughter of Jove, is in Ostrianum. Oh, what a misfortune for the city!"

Vinicius became weak again.

"Hast thou seen them?" he inquired.

"I saw them, O lord. May Christ and all the gods be thanked that I am able to pay for thy benefactions with good news. But, O Cyrus, I shall pay thee still more, I swear by this burning Rome."

It was evening, but in the garden one could see as in daylight, for the conflagration had increased. It seemed that not single parts of the city were burning, but the whole city through the length and the breadth of it. The sky was red as far as the eye could see it, and that night in the world was a red night.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LIGHT from the burning city filled the sky as far as human eye could reach. The moon rose large and full from behind the mountains, and inflamed at once by the glare took on the color of heated brass. It seemed to look with amazement on the world-ruling city which was perishing. In the rose-colored abysses of heaven rose-colored stars were glittering; but in distinction from usual nights the earth was brighter than the heavens. Rome, like a giant pile, illuminated the whole Campania. In the bloody light were seen distant mountains, towns, villas, temples, monuments, and the aqueducts stretching toward the city from all the adjacent hills; on the aqueducts were swarms of people, who had gathered there for safety or to gaze at the burning.

Meanwhile the dreadful element was embracing new divisions of the city. It was impossible to doubt that criminal hands were spreading the fire, since new conflagrations were breaking out all the time in places remote from the principal fire. From the heights on which Rome was founded the flames flowed like waves of the sea into the valleys densely occupied by houses, — houses of five and six stories, full of shops, booths, movable wooden amphitheatres, built to accommodate various spectacles; and finally storehouses of wood, olives, grain, nuts, pine cones, the kernels of which nourished the more needy population, and clothing, which through Cæsar's favor was distributed from time to time among the rabble huddled into narrow alleys. In those places the fire, finding abundance of inflammable materials, became almost a series of explosions, and took possession of whole streets with unheard-of rapidity. People encamping outside the city, or standing on the aqueducts knew from the color of the flame what was burning. The furious power of the wind carried forth from the fiery gulf thousands and millions of burning shells of walnuts and almonds, which, shooting suddenly into the sky, like countless flocks of bright butterflies, burst with a crackling, or, driven by the wind, fell in other parts of the city, on aqueducts, and fields beyond Rome. All thought of rescue seemed out of place; confusion increased every moment, for on one side the population

of the city was fleeing through every gate to places outside; on the other the fire had lured in thousands of people from the neighborhood, such as dwellers in small towns, peasants, and half-wild shepherds of the Campania, brought in by hope of plunder. The shout, "Rome is perishing!" did not leave the lips of the crowd; the ruin of the city seemed at that time to end every rule, and loosen all bonds which hitherto had joined people in a single integrity. The mob, in which slaves were more numerous, cared nothing for the lordship of Rome. Destruction of the city could only free them; hence here and there they assumed a threatening attitude. Violence and robbery were extending. It seemed that only the spectacle of the perishing city arrested attention, and restrained for the moment an outburst of slaughter, which would begin as soon as the city was turned into ruins. Hundreds of thousands of slaves, forgetting that Rome, besides temples and walls, possessed some tens of legions in all parts of the world, appeared merely waiting for a watchword and a leader. People began to mention the name of Spartacus; but Spartacus was not alive. Meanwhile citizens assembled, and armed themselves each with what he could. The most monstrous reports were current at all the gates. Some declared that Vulcan, commanded by Jupiter, was destroying the city with fire from beneath the earth; others that Vesta was taking vengeance for Rubria. People with these convictions did not care to save anything, but, besieging the temples, implored mercy of the gods. It was repeated most generally, however, that Cæsar had given command to burn Rome, so as to free himself from odors which rose from the Subura, and build a new city under the name of Neronia. Rage seized the populace at thought of this; and if, as Vinicius believed, a leader had taken advantage of that outburst of hatred, Nero's hour would have struck whole years before it did.

It was said also that Cæsar had gone mad, that he would command pretorians and gladiators to fall upon the people and make a general slaughter. Others swore by the gods that wild beasts had been let out of all the vivaria at Bronzebeard's command. Men had seen on the streets lions with burning manes, and mad elephants and bisons, trampling down people in crowds. There was even some truth in this; for in certain places elephants, at sight of the approaching fire, had burst the vivaria, and, gaining their freedom, rushed away from the fire in wild fright, destroying everything before them like a tempest. Public report estimated at tens of

thousands the number of persons who had perished in the conflagration. In truth a great number had perished. There were people who, losing all their property, or those dearest their hearts, threw themselves willingly into the flames, from despair. Others were suffocated by smoke. In the middle of the city, between the Capitol, on one side, and the Quirinal, the Viminal, and the Esquiline on the other, as also between the Palatine and the Cælian Hill, where the streets were most densely occupied, the fire began in so many places at once that whole crowds of people, while fleeing in one direction, struck unexpectedly on a new wall of fire in front of them, and died a dreadful death in a deluge of flame.

In terror, in distraction, and bewilderment, people knew not where to flee. The streets were obstructed with goods, and in many narrow places were simply closed. Those who took refuge in those markets and squares of the city, where the Flavian Amphitheatre stood afterward, near the temple of the Earth, near the Portico of Silvia, and higher up, at the temples of Juno and Lucinia, between the Clivus Virbius and the old Esquiline Gate, perished from heat, surrounded by a sea of fire. In places not reached by the flames were found afterward hundreds of bodies burned to a crisp, though here and there unfortunates tore up flat stones and half buried themselves in defence against the heat. Hardly a family inhabiting the centre of the city survived in full; hence along the walls, at the gates, on all roads were heard howls of despairing women, calling on the dear names of those who had perished in the throng or the fire.

And so, while some were imploring the gods, others blasphemed them because of this awful catastrophe. Old men were seen coming from the temple of Jupiter Liberator, stretching forth their hands, and crying, "If thou be a liberator, save thy altars and the city!" But despair turned mainly against the old Roman gods, who, in the minds of the populace, were bound to watch over the city more carefully than others. They had proved themselves powerless; hence were insulted. On the other hand it happened on the Via Asinaria that when a company of Egyptian priests appeared conducting a statue of Isis, which they had saved from the temple near the Porta Cælimontana, a crowd of people rushed among the priests, attached themselves to the chariot, which they drew to the Appian Gate, and seizing the statue placed it in the temple of Mars, overwhelming the priests of that deity who dared to resist them. In other

places people invoked Serapis, Baal, or Jehovah, whose adherents, swarming out of the alleys in the neighborhood of the Subura and the Trans-Tiber, filled with shouts and uproar the fields near the walls. In their cries were heard tones as if of triumph; when, therefore, some of the citizens joined the chorus and glorified "the Lord of the World," others, indignant at this glad shouting, strove to repress it by violence. Here and there hymns were heard, sung by men in the bloom of life, by old men, by women and children, — hymns wonderful and solemn, whose meaning they understood not, but in which were repeated from moment to moment the words, "Behold the Judge cometh in the day of wrath and disaster." Thus this deluge of restless and sleepless people encircled the burning city, like a tempest-driven sea.

But neither despair nor blasphemy nor hymn helped in any way. The destruction seemed as irresistible, perfect, and pitiless as Predestination itself. Around Pompey's Amphitheatre stores of hemp caught fire, and ropes used in circuses, arenas, and every kind of machine at the games, and with them the adjoining buildings containing barrels of pitch with which ropes were smeared. In a few hours all that part of the city, beyond which lay the Campus Martius, was so lighted by bright yellow flames that for a time it seemed to the spectators, only half conscious from terror, that in the general ruin the order of night and day had been lost, and that they were looking at sunshine. But later a monstrous bloody gleam extinguished all other colors of flame. From the sea of fire shot up to the heated sky gigantic fountains, and pillars of flame spreading at their summits into fiery branches and feathers; then the wind bore them away, turned them into golden threads, into hair, into sparks, and swept them on over the Campania toward the Alban Hills. The night became brighter; the air itself seemed penetrated, not only with light, but with flame. The Tiber flowed on as living fire. The hapless city was turned into one pandemonium. The conflagration seized more and more space, took hills by storm, flooded level places, drowned valleys, raged, roared, and thundered.

CHAPTER XLV.

MACRINUS, a weaver, to whose house Vinicius was carried, washed him, and gave him clothing and food. When the young tribune had recovered his strength altogether, he declared that he would search further for Linus that very night. Macrinus, who was a Christian, confirmed Chilo's report, that Linus, with Clement the chief priest, had gone to Ostrianum, where Peter was to baptize a whole company of confessors of the new faith. In that division of the city it was known to Christians that Linus had confided the care of his house two days before to a certain Gaius. For Vinicius this was a proof that neither Lygia nor Ursus had remained in the house, and that they also must have gone to Ostrianum.

This thought gave him great comfort. Linus was an old man, for whom it would be difficult to walk daily to the distant Nomentan Gate, and back to the Trans-Tiber; hence it was likely that he lodged those few days with some co-religionist beyond the walls, and with him also Lygia and Ursus. Thus they escaped the fire, which in general had not reached the other slope of the Esquiline. Vinicius saw in all this a dispensation of Christ, whose care he felt above him, and his heart was filled more than ever with love; he swore in his soul to pay with his whole life for those clear marks of favor.

But all the more did he hurry to Ostrianum. He would find Lygia, find Linus and Peter; he would take them to a distance, to some of his lands, even to Sicily. Let Rome burn; in a few days it would be a mere heap of ashes. Why remain in the face of disaster and a mad rabble? In his lands troops of obedient slaves would protect them, they would be surrounded by the calm of the country, and live in peace under Christ's wings blessed by Peter. Oh, if he could find them!

That was no easy thing. Vinicius remembered the difficulty with which he had passed from the Appian Way to the Trans-Tiber, and how he must circle around to reach the Via Portuensis. He resolved, therefore, to go around the city this time in the opposite direction. Going by the Via

Triumphatoris, it was possible to reach the Æmilian bridge by going along the river, thence passing the Pincian Hill, all the Campus Martius, outside the gardens of Pompey, Lucullus, and Sallust, to make a push forward to the Via Nomentana. That was the shortest way; but Macrinus and Chilo advised him not to take it. The fire had not touched that part of the city, it is true; but all the market squares and streets might be packed densely with people and their goods. Chilo advised him to go through the Ager Vaticanus to the Porta Flaminia, cross the river at that point, and push on outside the walls beyond the gardens of Acilius to the Porta Salaria. Vinicius, after a moment's hesitation, took this advice.

Macrinus had to remain in care of his house; but he provided two mules, which would serve Lygia also in a further journey. He wished to give a slave, too; but Vinicius refused, judging that the first detachment of pretorians he met on the road would pass under his orders.

Soon he and Chilo moved on through the Pagus Janiculensis to the Triumphal Way. There were vehicles there, too, in open places; but they pushed between them with less difficulty, as the inhabitants had fled for the greater part by the Via Portuensis toward the sea. Beyond the Septimian Gate they rode between the river and the splendid gardens of Domitius; the mighty cypresses were red from the conflagration, as if from evening sunshine. The road became freer; at times they had to struggle merely with the current of incoming rustics. Vinicius urged his mule forward as much as was possible; but Chilo, riding closely in the rear, talked to himself almost the whole way.

"Well, we have left the fire behind, and now it is heating our shoulders. Never yet has there been so much light on this road in the night-time. O Zeus! if thou wilt not send torrents of rain on that fire, thou hast no love for Rome, surely. The power of man will not quench those flames. Such a city, — a city which Greece and the whole world was serving! And now the first Greek who comes along may roast beans in its ashes. Who could have looked for this? And now there will be no longer a Rome, nor Roman rulers. Whoso wants to walk on the ashes, when they grow cold, and whistle over them, may whistle without danger. O gods! to whistle over such a world-ruling city! What Greek, or even barbarian, could have hoped for this? And still one may whistle; for a heap of ashes, whether left after a shep-

herd's fire or a burnt city, is mere ashes, which the wind will blow away sooner or later."

Thus talking, he turned from moment to moment toward the conflagration, and looked at the waves of flame with a face filled at once with delight and malice.

"It will perish! It will perish!" continued he, "and will never be on earth again. Whither will the world send its wheat now, its olives, and its money? Who will squeeze gold and tears from it? Marble does not burn, but it crumbles in fire. The Capitol will turn into dust, and the Palatine into dust. O Zeus! Rome was like a shepherd, and other nations like sheep. When the shepherd was hungry, he slaughtered a sheep, ate the flesh, and to thee, O father of the gods, he made an offering of the skin. Who, O Cloud-compeller, will do the slaughtering now, and into whose hand wilt thou put the shepherd's whip? For Rome is burning, O father, as truly as if thou hadst fired it with thy thunderbolt."

"Hurry!" urged Vinicius; "what art thou doing there?"

"I am weeping over Rome, lord, — Jove's city!"

For a time they rode on in silence, listening to the roar of the burning, and the sound of birds' wings. Doves, a multitude of which had their nests about villas and in small towns of the Campania, and also every kind of field-bird from near the sea and the surrounding mountains, mistaking evidently the gleam of the conflagration for sunlight, were flying, whole flocks of them, blindly into the fire. Vinicius broke the silence first, —

"Where wert thou when the fire burst out?"

"I was going to my friend Euricius, lord, who kept a shop near the Circus Maximus, and I was just meditating on the teaching of Christ, when men began to shout: 'Fire!' People gathered around the Circus for safety, and through curiosity; but when the flames seized the whole Circus, and began to appear in other places also, each had to think of his own safety."

"Didst thou see people throwing torches into houses?"

"What have I not seen, O grandson of Æneas! I saw people making a way for themselves through the crowd with swords; I have seen battles, the entrails of people trampled on the pavement. Ah, if thou hadst seen that, thou wouldst have thought that barbarians had captured the city, and were putting it to the sword. People round about cried that the end of the world had come. Some lost their heads altogether,

and, forgetting to flee, waited stupidly till the flames seized them. Some fell into bewilderment, others howled in despair; I saw some also who howled from delight. O lord, there are many bad people in the world who know not how to value the benefactions of your mild rule, and those just laws in virtue of which ye take from all what they have and give it to yourselves. People will not be reconciled to the will of God!"

Vinicius was too much occupied with his own thoughts to note the irony quivering in Chilo's words. A shudder of terror seized him at the simple thought that Lygia might be in the midst of that chaos on those terrible streets where people's entrails were trampled on. Hence, though he had asked at least ten times of Chilo touching all which the old man could know, he turned to him once again, —

"But hast thou seen them in Ostrianum with thy own eyes?"

"I saw them, O son of Venus; I saw the maiden, the good Lygian, holy Linus, and the Apostle Peter."

"Before the fire?"

"Before the fire, O Mithra!"

But a doubt rose in the soul of Vinicius whether Chilo was not lying; hence, reining his mule in, he looked threateningly at the old Greek and inquired, —

"What wert thou doing there?"

Chilo was confused. True, it seemed to him, as to many, that with the destruction of Rome would come the end also of Roman dominion. But he was face to face with Vinicius; he remembered that the young soldier had prohibited him, under a terrible threat, from watching the Christians, and especially Linus and Lygia.

"Lord," said he, "why dost thou not believe that I love them? I do. I was in Ostrianum, for I am half a Christian. Pyrrho has taught me to esteem virtue more than philosophy; hence I cleave more and more to virtuous people. And, besides, I am poor; and when thou, O Jove, wert at Antium, I suffered hunger frequently over my books; therefore I sat at the wall of Ostrianum, for the Christians, though poor, distribute more alms than all other inhabitants of Rome taken together."

This reason seemed sufficient to Vinicius, and he inquired less severely, —

"And dost thou not know where Linus is dwelling at this moment?"

"Thou didst punish me sharply on a time for curiosity," replied the Greek.

Vinicius ceased talking and rode on.

"O lord," said Chilo, after a while, "thou wouldst not have found the maiden but for me, and if we find her now, thou wilt not forget the needy sage?"

"Thou wilt receive a house with a vineyard at Ameriola."

"Thanks to thee, O Hercules! With a vineyard? Thanks to thee! Oh, yes, with a vineyard!"

They were passing the Vatican Hill now, which was ruddy from the fire; but beyond the Naumachia they turned to the right, so that when they had passed the Vatican Field they would reach the river, and, crossing it, go to the Flaminian Gate. Suddenly Chilo reined in his mule, and said, —

"A good thought has come to my head, lord!"

"Speak!" answered Vinicius.

"Between the Janiculum and the Vatican Hill, beyond the gardens of Agrippina, are excavations from which stones and sand were taken to build the Circus of Nero. Hear me, lord. Recently the Jews, of whom, as thou knowest, there is a multitude in the Trans-Tiber, have begun to persecute Christians cruelly. Thou hast in mind that in the time of the divine Claudius there were such disturbances that Cæsar was forced to expel them from Rome. Now, when they have returned, and when, thanks to the protection of the Augusta, they feel safe, they annoy Christians more insolently. I know this; I have seen it. No edict against Christians has been issued; but the Jews complain to the prefect of the city that Christians murder infants, worship an ass, and preach a religion not recognized by the Senate; they beat them, and attack their houses of prayer so fiercely that the Christians are forced to hide."

"What dost thou wish to say?" inquired Vinicius.

"This, lord, that synagogues exist openly in the Trans-Tiber; but that Christians, in their wish to avoid persecution, are forced to pray in secret and assemble in ruined sheds outside the city or in sand-pits. Those who dwell in the Trans-Tiber have chosen just that place which was excavated for the building of the Circus and various houses along the Tiber. Now, when the city is perishing, the adherents of Christ are praying. Beyond doubt we shall find a countless number of them in the excavation; so my advice is to go in there along the road."

"But thou hast said that Linus has gone to Ostrianum," cried Vinicius impatiently.

"But thou hast promised me a house with a vineyard at Ameriola," answered Chilo; "for that reason I wish to seek the maiden wherever I hope to find her. They might have returned to the Trans-Tiber after the outbreak of the fire. They might have gone around outside the city, as we are doing at this moment. Linus has a house, perhaps he wished to be nearer his house to see if the fire had seized that part of the city also. If they have returned, I swear to thee, by Persephone, that we shall find them at prayer in the excavation; in the worst event, we shall get tidings of them."

"Thou art right; lead on!" said the tribune.

Chilo, without hesitation, turned to the left toward the hill.

For a while the slope of the hill concealed the conflagration, so that, though the neighboring heights were in the light, the two men were in the shade. When they had passed the Circus, they turned still to the left, and entered a kind of passage completely dark. But in that darkness Vinicius saw swarms of gleaming lanterns.

"They are there," said Chilo. "There will be more of them to-day than ever, for other houses of prayer are burnt or are filled with smoke, as is the whole Trans-Tiber."

"True!" said Vinicius, "I hear singing."

In fact, the voices of people singing reached the hill from the dark opening, and the lanterns vanished in it one after the other. But from side passages new forms appeared continually, so that after some time Vinicius and Chilo found themselves amid a whole assemblage of people.

Chilo slipped from his mule, and, beckoning to a youth who sat near, said to him,—

"I am a priest of Christ and a bishop. Hold the mules for us; thou wilt receive my blessing and forgiveness of sins."

Then, without waiting for an answer, he thrust the reins into his hands, and, in company with Vinicius, joined the advancing throng.

They entered the excavation after a while, and pushed on through the dark passage by the dim light of lanterns till they reached a spacious cave, from which stone had been taken evidently, for the walls were formed of fresh fragments.

It was brighter there than in the corridor, for, in addition to tapers and lanterns, torches were burning. By the light of these Vinicius saw a whole throng of kneeling people with upraised hands. He could not see Lygia, the Apostle Peter,

or Linus, but he was surrounded by faces solemn and full of emotion. On some of them expectation or alarm was evident; on some, hope. Light was reflected in the whites of their upraised eyes; perspiration was flowing along their foreheads, pale as chalk; some were singing hymns, others were repeating feverishly the name of Jesus, some were beating their breasts. It was apparent that they expected something uncommon at any moment.

Meanwhile the hymn ceased, and above the assembly, in a niche formed by the removal of an immense stone, appeared Crispus, the acquaintance of Vinicius, with a face as it were half delirious, pale, stern, and fanatical. All eyes were turned to him, as though waiting for words of consolation and hope. After he had blessed the assembly, he began in hurried, almost shouting tones,—

"Bewail your sins, for the hour has come! Behold the Lord has sent down destroying flames on Babylon, on the city of profligacy and crime. The hour of judgment has struck, the hour of wrath and dissolution. The Lord has promised to come, and soon you will see Him. He will not come as the Lamb, who offered His blood for your sins, but as an awful judge, who in His justice will hurl sinners and unbelievers into the pit. Woe to the world, woe to sinners! there will be no mercy for them. I see Thee, O Christ! Stars are falling to the earth in showers, the sun is darkened, the earth opens in yawning gulfs, the dead rise from their graves, but Thou art moving amid the sound of trumpets and legions of angels, amid thunders and lightnings. I see Thee, I hear Thee, O Christ!"

Then he was silent, and, raising his eyes, seemed to gaze into something distant and dreadful. That moment a dull roar was heard in the cave,—once, twice, a tenth time. In the burning city whole streets of partly consumed houses began to fall with a crash. But most Christians took those sounds as a visible sign that the dreadful hour was approaching; belief in the early second coming of Christ and in the end of the world was universal among them, now the destruction of the city had strengthened it. Terror seized the assembly. Many voices repeated, "The day of judgment! Behold, it is coming!" Some covered their faces with their hands, believing that the earth would be shaken to its foundation, that beasts of hell would rush out through its openings and hurl themselves on sinners. Others cried, "Christ have mercy on us!" "Redeemer, be pitiful!" Some con-

fessed their sins aloud; others cast themselves into the arms of friends, so as to have some near heart with them in the hour of dismay.

But there were faces which seemed rapt into heaven, faces with smiles not of earth; these showed no fear. In some places were heard voices; those were of people who in religious excitement had begun to cry out unknown words in strange languages. Some person in a dark corner cried, "Wake thou that sleepest!" Above all rose the shout of Crispus, "Watch ye! watch ye!"

At moments, however, silence came, as if all were holding the breath in their breasts, and waiting for what would come. And then was heard the distant thunder of parts of the city falling into ruins, after which were heard again groans and cries, —

"Renounce earthly riches, for soon there will be no earth beneath your feet! Renounce earthly loves, for the Lord will condemn those who love wife or child more than Him. Woe to the one who loves the creature more than the Creator! Woe to the rich! woe to the luxurious! woe to the dissolute! woe to husband, wife, and child!"

Suddenly a roar louder than any which had preceded shook the quarry. All fell to the earth, stretching their arms in cross form to ward away evil spirits by that figure. Silence followed, in which was heard only panting breath, whispers full of terror, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" and in places the weeping of children. At that moment a certain calm voice spoke above that prostrate multitude, —

"Peace be with you!"

That was the voice of Peter the Apostle, who had entered the cave a moment earlier. At the sound of his voice terror passed at once, as it passes from a flock in which the shepherd has appeared. People rose from the earth; those who were nearer gathered at his knees, as if seeking protection under his wings. He stretched his hands over them and said, —

"Why are ye troubled in heart? Who of you can tell what will happen before the hour cometh? The Lord has punished Babylon with fire; but His mercy will be on those whom baptism has purified, and ye whose sins are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb will die with His name on your lips. Peace be with you!"

After the terrible and merciless words of Crispus, those of Peter fell like a balm on all present. Instead of fear of

God, the love of God took possession of their spirits. Those people found the Christ whom they had learned to love from the Apostle's narratives; hence not a merciless judge, but a mild and patient Lamb, whose mercy surpasses man's wickedness a hundredfold. A feeling of solace possessed the whole assembly; and comfort, with thankfulness to the Apostle, filled their hearts. Voices from various sides began to cry, "We are thy sheep, feed us!" Those nearer said, "Desert us not in the day of disaster!" And they knelt at his knees; seeing which Vinicius approached, seized the edge of Peter's mantle, and, inclining, said, —

"Save me, lord. I have sought her in the smoke of the burning and in the throng of people; nowhere could I find her, but I believe that thou canst restore her."

Peter placed his hand on the tribune's head.

"Have trust," said he, "and come with me."