

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE city burned on. The Circus Maximus had fallen in ruins. Entire streets and alleys in parts which began to burn first were falling in turn. After every fall pillars of flame rose for a time to the very sky. The wind had changed, and blew now with mighty force from the sea, bearing toward the Cælian, the Esquiline, and the Viminal rivers of flame, brands, and cinders. Still the authorities provided for rescue. At command of Tigellinus, who had hastened from Antium the third day before, houses on the Esquiline were torn down so that the fire, reaching empty spaces, died of itself. That was, however, undertaken solely to save a remnant of the city; to save that which was burning was not to be thought of. There was need also to guard against further results of the ruin. Incalculable wealth had perished in Rome; all the property of its citizens had vanished; hundreds of thousands of people were wandering in utter want outside the walls. Hunger had begun to pinch this through the second day, for the immense stores of provisions in the city had burned with it. In the universal disorder and in the destruction of authority no one had thought of furnishing new supplies. Only after the arrival of Tigellinus were proper orders sent to Ostia; but meanwhile the people had grown more threatening.

The house at Aqua Appia, in which Tigellinus lodged for the moment, was surrounded by crowds of women, who from morning till late at night cried, "Bread and a roof!" Vainly did pretorians, brought from the great camp between the Via Salaria and the Nomentana, strive to maintain order of some kind. Here and there they were met by open, armed resistance. In places weaponless crowds pointed to the burning city, and shouted, "Kill us in view of that fire!" They abused Cæsar, the Augustians, the pretorians; excitement rose every moment, so that Tigellinus, looking at night on the thousands of fires around the city, said to himself that those were fires in hostile camps.

Besides flour, as much baked bread as possible was brought at his command, not only from Ostia, but from all towns and neighboring villages. When the first instalment came at

night to the Emporium, the people broke the chief gate toward the Aventine, seized all supplies in the twinkling of an eye, and caused terrible disturbance. In the light of the conflagration they fought for loaves, and trampled many of them into the earth. Flour from torn bags whitened like snow the whole space from the granary to the arches of Drusus and Germanicus. The uproar continued till soldiers seized the building and dispersed the crowd with arrows and missiles.

Never since the invasion by the Gauls under Brennus had Rome beheld such disaster. People in despair compared the two conflagrations. But in the time of Brennus the Capitol remained. Now the Capitol was encircled by a dreadful wreath of flame. The marbles, it is true, were not blazing; but at night, when the wind swept the flames aside for a moment, rows of columns in the lofty sanctuary of Jove were visible, red as glowing coals. In the days of Brennus, moreover, Rome had a disciplined integral people, attached to the city and its altars; but now crowds of a many-tongued populace roamed nomad-like around the walls of burning Rome, — people composed for the greater part of slaves and freedmen, excited, disorderly, and ready, under the pressure of want, to turn against authority and the city.

But the very immensity of the fire, which terrified every heart, disarmed the crowd in a certain measure. After fire might come famine and disease; and to complete the misfortune the terrible heat of July had appeared. It was impossible to breathe air inflamed both by fire and the sun. Night brought no relief, on the contrary it presented a hell. During daylight an awful and ominous spectacle met the eye. In the centre a giant city on heights was turned into a roaring volcano; round about as far as the Alban Hills was one boundless camp, formed of sheds, tents, huts, vehicles, bales, packs, stands, fires, all covered with smoke and dust, lighted by sunrays reddened by passing through smoke, — everything filled with roars, shouts, threats, hatred and terror, a monstrous swarm of men, women, and children. Mingled with Quirites were Greeks, shaggy men from the North with blue eyes, Africans, and Asiatics; among citizens were slaves, freedmen, gladiators, merchants, mechanics, servants, and soldiers, — a real sea of people, flowing around the island of fire.

Various reports moved this sea as wind does a real one. These reports were favorable and unfavorable. People told

of immense supplies of wheat and clothing to be brought to the Emporium and distributed gratis. It was said, too, that provinces in Asia and Africa would be stripped of their wealth at Cæsar's command, and the treasures thus gained be given to the inhabitants of Rome, so that each man might build his own dwelling. But it was noised about also that water in the aqueducts had been poisoned; that Nero intended to annihilate the city, destroy the inhabitants to the last person, then move to Greece or to Egypt, and rule the world from a new place. Each report ran with lightning speed, and each found belief among the rabble, causing outbursts of hope, anger, terror, or rage. Finally a kind of fever mastered those nomadic thousands. The belief of Christians that the end of the world by fire was at hand, spread even among adherents of the gods, and extended daily. People fell into torpor or madness. In clouds lighted by the burning, gods were seen gazing down on the ruin; hands were stretched toward those gods then to implore pity or send them curses.

Meanwhile soldiers, aided by a certain number of inhabitants, continued to tear down houses on the Esquiline and the Cælian, as also in the Trans-Tiber; these divisions were saved therefore in considerable part. But in the city itself were destroyed incalculable treasures accumulated through centuries of conquest; priceless works of art, splendid temples, the most precious monuments of Rome's past, and Rome's glory. They foresaw that of all Rome there would remain barely a few parts on the edges, and that hundreds of thousands of people would be without a roof. Some spread reports that the soldiers were tearing down houses not to stop the fire, but to prevent any part of the city from being saved. Tigellinus sent courier after courier to Antium, imploring Cæsar in each letter to come and calm the despairing people with his presence. But Nero moved only when fire had seized the "domus transitoria," and he hurried so as not to miss the moment in which the conflagration should be at its highest.

Meanwhile fire had reached the Via Nomentana, but turned from it at once with a change of wind toward the Via Lata and the Tiber. It surrounded the Capitol, spread along the Forum Boarium, destroyed everything which it had spared before, and approached the Palatine a second time.

Tigellinus, assembling all the pretorian forces, despatched courier after courier to Cæsar with an announcement that he

would lose nothing of the grandeur of the spectacle, for the fire had increased.

But Nero, who was on the road, wished to come at night, so as to sate himself all the better with a view of the perishing capital. Therefore he halted, in the neighborhood of Aqua Albana, and, summoning to his tent the tragedian Aliturus, decided with his aid on posture, look, and expression; learned fitting gestures, disputing with the actor stubbornly whether at the words "O sacred city, which seemed more enduring than Ida," he was to raise both hands, or, holding in one the forminga, drop it by his side, and raise only the other. This question seemed to him then more important than all others. Starting at last about nightfall, he took counsel of Petronius also whether to the lines describing the catastrophe he might add a few magnificent blasphemies against the gods, and whether, considered from the standpoint of art, they would not have rushed spontaneously from the mouth of a man in such a position, a man who was losing his birthplace.

At length he approached the walls about midnight with his numerous court, composed of whole detachments of nobles, senators, knights, freedmen, slaves, women, and children. Sixteen thousand pretorians, arranged in line of battle along the road, guarded the peace and safety of his entrance, and held the excited populace at a proper distance. The people cursed, shouted, and hissed on seeing the retinue, but dared not attack it. In many places, however, applause was given by the rabble, which, owning nothing, had lost nothing in the fire, and which hoped for a more bountiful distribution than usual of wheat, olives, clothing, and money. Finally, shouts, hissing, and applause were drowned in the blare of horns and trumpets, which Tigellinus had caused to be sounded.

Nero, on arriving at the Ostian Gate, halted, and said, "Houseless ruler of a houseless people, where shall I lay my unfortunate head for the night?"

After he had passed the Clivus Delphini, he ascended the Appian aqueduct on steps prepared purposely. After him followed the Augustians and a choir of singers, bearing citharæ, lutes, and other musical instruments.

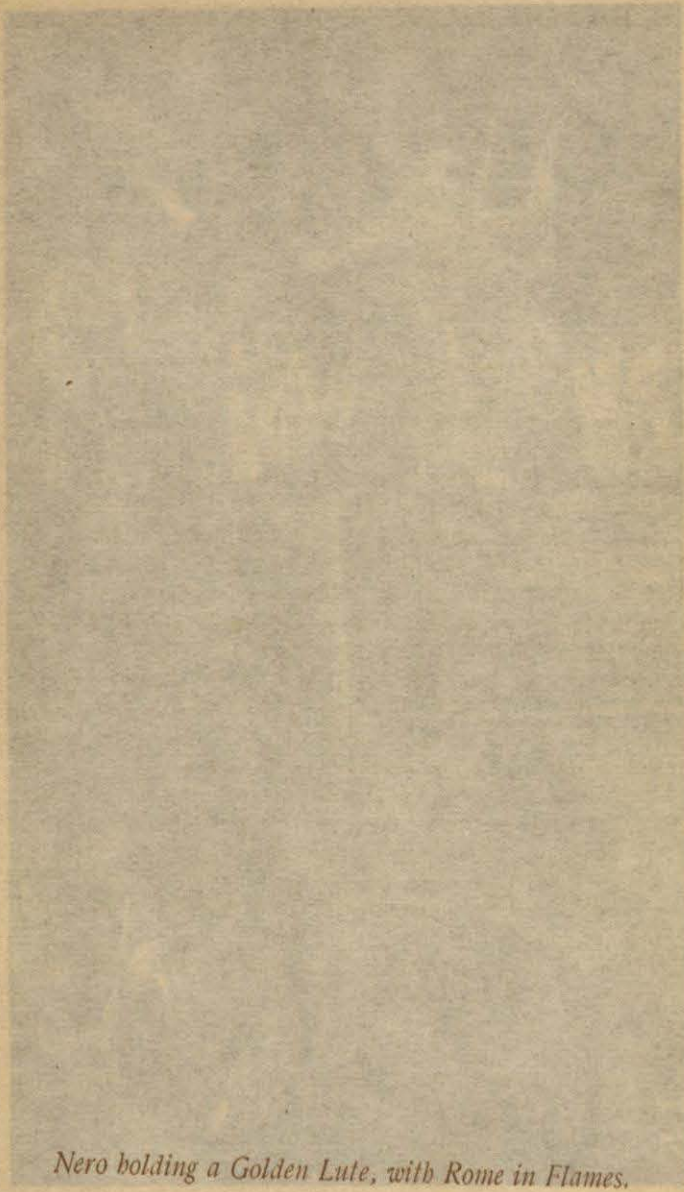
And all held the breath in their breasts, waiting to learn if he would say some great words, which for their own safety they ought to remember. But he stood solemn, silent, in a purple mantle, and a wreath of golden laurels, gazing at the

raging might of the flames. When Terpnos gave him a golden lute, he raised his eyes to the sky, filled with the conflagration, as if he were waiting for inspiration.

The people pointed at him from afar as he stood in the bloody gleam. In the distance fiery serpents were hissing. The ancient and most sacred edifices were in flames: the temple of Hercules, reared by Evander, was burning; the temple of Jupiter Stator was burning, the temple of Luna, built by Servius Tullius, the house of Numa Pompilius, the sanctuary of Vesta with the penates of the Roman people; through waving flames the Capitol appeared at intervals; the past and the spirit of Rome was burning. But he, Cæsar, was there with a lute in his hand and a theatrical expression on his face, not thinking of his perishing country, but of his posture and the prophetic words with which he might describe best the greatness of the catastrophe, rouse most admiration, and receive the warmest plaudits. He detested that city, he detested its inhabitants, he loved only his own songs and verses; hence he rejoiced in heart that at last he saw a tragedy like that which he was writing. The verse-maker was happy, the declaimer felt inspired, the seeker for emotions was delighted at the awful sight, and thought with rapture that even the destruction of Troy was as nothing if compared with the destruction of that giant city. What more could he desire? There was world-ruling Rome in flames, and he, standing on the arches of the aqueduct with a golden lute, conspicuous, purple, admired, magnificent, poetic. Down below, somewhere in the darkness, the people are muttering and storming. But let them mutter! Ages will pass, thousands of years will go by, but mankind will remember and glorify the poet, who in that night sang the fall and the burning of Troy. What was Homer compared with him? What Apollo himself with his hollowed-out lute?

Here he raised his hands and, striking the strings, pronounced the words of Priam.

“O nest of my fathers, O dear cradle!” His voice in the open air, with the roar of the conflagration, and the distant murmur of crowding thousands, seemed marvellously weak, uncertain, and low, and the sound of the accompaniment like the buzzing of insects. But senators, dignitaries, and Augustians, assembled on the aqueduct, bowed their heads and listened in silent rapture. He sang long, and his motive was ever sadder. At moments, when he stopped to catch breath, the chorus of singers repeated the last verse; then Nero cast



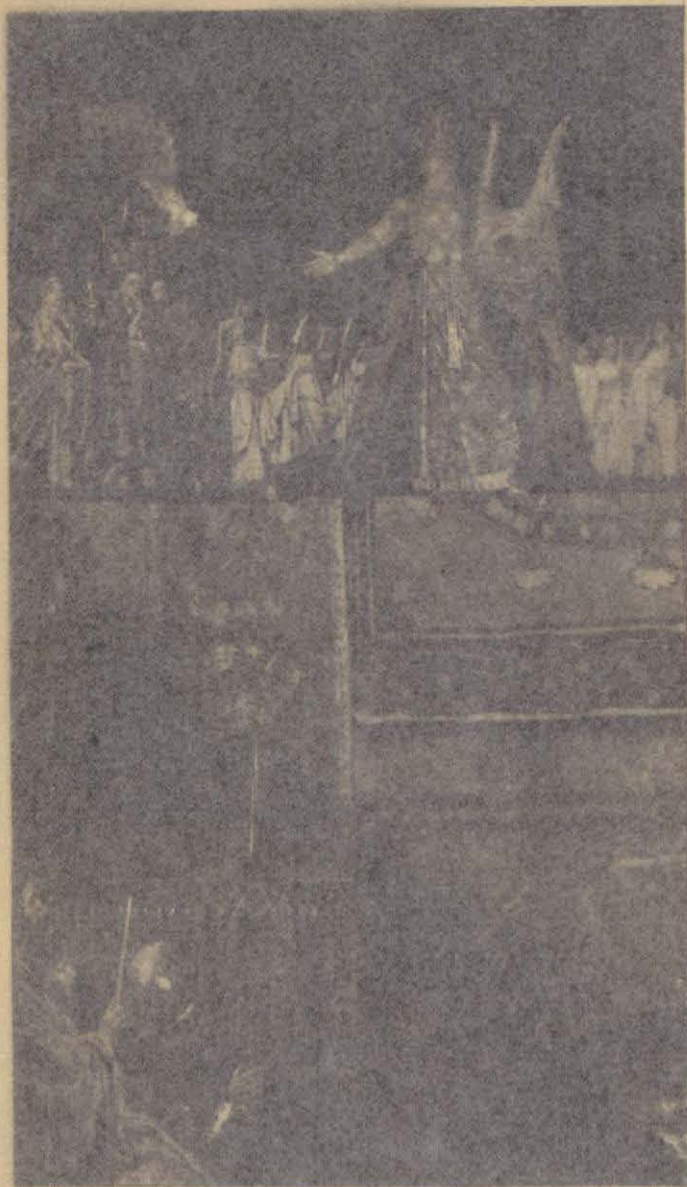
Nero holding a Golden Lute, with Rome in Flames.

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The people pointed at him from afar as he stood in the bloody gleam. In the distance fiery serpents were hissing. The ancient and most sacred edifices were in flames: the temple of Hercules, reared by Evander, was burning; the temple of Jupiter Stator was burning, the temple of Luas, built by Servius Tullius, the house of Numa Pompilius, the sanctuary of Vesta with the penates of the Roman people; through waving flames the Capitol appeared at intervals; the past and the spirit of Rome was burning. But he, Caesar, was there with a lute in his hand and a theatrical expression on his face, not thinking of his perishing country, but of his posture and the prophetic words with which he might describe best the greatness of the catastrophe, rouse most admiration, and receive the warmest plaudits. He detested that city, he detested its inhabitants, he loved only his own songs and verses; hence he rejoiced in heart that at last he saw a tragedy like that which he was writing. The verse-maker was happy, the declaimer felt inspired, the seeker for emotions was delighted at this awful sight, and thought with rapture that even the destruction of Troy was as nothing if compared with the destruction of that giant city. What more could he desire? There was world-ruling Rome in flames, and he, standing on the arches of the aqueduct with a golden lute, conspicuous, purple, admired, magnificent, poetic. Down below, somewhere in the darkness, the people are muttering and storming. But let them mutter! Ages will pass, thousands of years will go by, but mankind will remember and glorify the poet, who in that night sang the fall and the burning of Troy. What was Homer compared with him? What Apollo himself with his hollowed-out lute?

Here he raised his hands and, striking the strings, pronounced the words of Priam.

"O nest of my fathers, O dear cradle!" His voice in the open air, with the roar of the conflagration, and the distant murmur of wailing thousands, seemed marvellously weak, uncertain, and low, and the sound of the accompaniment like the buzzing of insects. But senators, dignitaries, and Augustians, assembled in the Forum, listened in silent rapture. He sang Troy, and his motive was ever sadder. At moments, when he stopped to catch breath, the chorus of singers repeated the last verse; then Nero cast



rising might of the flames. When Virgil's gaze first galled
his eye, he raised his eyes to the sky, filled with the verdant
God, as if he were waiting for inspiration.

The people pointed at him from afar as he stood in the
bloody plain. In the distance fiery serpents were hissing.
The acedon and most sacred edifices were in flames: the
temple of Hercules, reared by Erastus, was burning; the
temple of Juno's Sister was burning; the temple of Luna,
built by Servius Tullius, the house of Venus Postulica, the
sanctuary of Vesta with the penates of the Roman people,
through warring flames the Capitol appeared as intervals; the
last and the spirit of Rome was burning. - But no, Caesar,
was there with a halo in his head and a theatrical expression
on his face, not thinking of his perishing country, but of his
posture and the prophetic words with which he might describe
it, of the greatness of his catastrophe, some exclamation,
and receive the warmest plaudits. He detested that city, he
detested its inhabitants, he loved only his own songs and
verses; hence he rejoiced in heart that at last he saw a tragedy
like that which he was writing. The yoke-maker was happy,
the declaimer felt inspired, the worker for emotions was de-
lighted at the awful sight, and thought with rapture that even
the destruction of Troy was as nothing if compared with the
destruction of that giant city. - What more could he desire?
There was world-ruing Rome in flames, and he, standing on
the arches of the aqueduct with a golden halo, conspicuous,
purple, adorned, magnificent, poetic. Down below, some-
where in the darkness, the people are melting and storming.
But let them suffer! Ages will pass, thousands of years
will go by, but mankind will remember and glorify the poet
who in that night saw the fall and the burning of Troy.
What was Homer compared with him? What Apollo himself
was he compared with him?

Thus he raised his hands and, striking the strings, per-
formed the signs of prayer.

"O Muse, be witness, O that my lyre!" His voice in the
open air, the noise of the conflagration, and the distant
murmur of youthful voices, seemed unworldly weak,
unworldly, but the lyre of the accompaniment like
the beating of hoarse, the hoarse, the hoarse, and Augu-
stinus, resembled the lyre of the poet, and his motive was
not in that night saw the fall and the burning of Troy,
and his motive was
ever accident. If he were to be allowed to catch breath,
the chorus of singers would sing the first verse; then Nero sang



the tragic "syrma"¹ from his shoulder with a gesture learned from Aliturus, struck the lute, and sang on. When at last he had finished the lines composed, he improvised, seeking grandiose comparisons in the spectacle unfolded before him. His face began to change. He was not moved, it is true, by the destruction of his country's capital; but he was delighted and moved with the pathos of his own words to such a degree that his eyes filled with tears on a sudden. At last he dropped the lute to his feet with a clatter, and, wrapping himself in the "syrma," stood as if petrified, like one of those statues of Niobe which ornamented the courtyard of the Palatine.

Soon a storm of applause broke the silence. But in the distance this was answered by the howling of multitudes. No one doubted then that Cæsar had given command to burn the city, so as to afford himself a spectacle and sing a song at it. Nero, when he heard that cry from hundreds of thousands, turned to the Augustians with the sad, resigned smile of a man who is suffering from injustice.

"See," said he, "how the Quirites value poetry and me."

"Scoundrels!" answered Vatinius. "Command the pretorians, lord, to fall on them."

Nero turned to Tigellinus, —

"Can I count on the loyalty of the soldiers?"

"Yes, divinity," answered the prefect.

But Petronius shrugged his shoulders, and said, —

"On their loyalty, yes, but not on their numbers. Remain meanwhile where thou art, for here it is safest; but there is need to pacify the people."

Seneca was of this opinion also, as was Licinus the consul. Meanwhile the excitement below was increasing. The people were arming with stones, tent-poles, sticks from the wagons, planks, and various pieces of iron. After a while some of the pretorian leaders came, declaring that the cohorts, pressed by the multitude, kept the line of battle with extreme difficulty, and, being without orders to attack, they knew not what to do.

"O gods," said Nero, "what a night!" On one side a fire, on the other a raging sea of people. And he fell to seeking expressions the most splendid to describe the danger of the moment, but, seeing around him alarmed looks and pale faces, he was frightened, with the others.

¹ A robe with train, worn especially by tragic actors.

"Give me my dark mantle with a hood!" cried he; "must it come really to battle?"

"Lord," said Tigellinus, in an uncertain voice, "I have done what I could, but danger is threatening. Speak, O lord, to the people, and make them promises."

"Shall Cæsar speak to the rabble? Let another do that in my name. Who will undertake it?"

"I!" answered Petronius, calmly.

"Go, my friend; thou art most faithful to me in every necessity. Go, and spare no promises."

Petronius turned to the retinue with a careless, sarcastic expression, —

"Senators here present, also Piso, Nerva, and Senecio, follow me."

Then he descended the aqueduct slowly. Those whom he had summoned followed, not without hesitation, but with a certain confidence which his calmness had given them. Petronius, halting at the foot of the arches, gave command to bring him a white horse, and, mounting, rode on, at the head of the cavalcade, between the deep ranks of pretorians, to the black, howling multitude; he was unarmed, having only a slender ivory cane which he carried habitually.

When he had ridden up, he pushed his horse into the throng. All around, visible in the light of the burning, were upraised hands, armed with every manner of weapon, inflamed eyes, sweating faces, bellowing and foaming lips. A mad sea of people surrounded him and his attendants; round about was a sea of heads, moving, roaring, dreadful.

The outbursts increased and became an unearthly roar; poles, forks, and even swords were brandished above Petronius; grasping hands were stretched toward his horse's reins and toward him, but he rode farther; cool, indifferent, contemptuous. At moments he struck the most insolent heads with his cane, as if clearing a road for himself in an ordinary crowd; and that confidence of his, that calmness, amazed the raging rabble. They recognized him at length, and numerous voices began to shout, —

"Petronius! Arbitrator of the Eminent! Petronius! Petronius!" was heard on all sides. And as that name was repeated, the faces about became less terrible, the uproar less savage: for that exquisite patrician, though he had never striven for the favor of the populace, was still their favorite. He passed for a humane and magnanimous man; and his popularity had increased, especially since the affair of Pedanius

Secundus, when he spoke in favor of mitigating the cruel sentence condemning all the slaves of that prefect to death. The slaves more especially loved him thenceforward with that unbounded love which the oppressed or unfortunate are accustomed to give those who show them even small sympathy. Besides, in that moment was added curiosity as to what Cæsar's envoy would say, for no one doubted that Cæsar had sent him.

He removed his white toga, bordered with scarlet, raised it in the air, and waved it above his head, in sign that he wished to speak.

"Silence! Silence!" cried the people on all sides.

After a while there was silence. Then he straightened himself on the horse and said in a clear, firm voice, —

"Citizens, let those who hear me repeat my words to those who are more distant, and bear yourselves, all of you, like men, not like beasts in the arena."

"We will, we will!"

"Then listen. The city will be rebuilt. The gardens of Lucullus, Mæcenas, Cæsar, and Agrippina will be opened to you. To-morrow will begin the distribution of wheat, wine, and olives, so that every man may be full to the throat. Then Cæsar will have games for you, such as the world has not seen yet; during these games banquets and gifts will be given you. Ye will be richer after the fire than before it."

A murmur answered him which spread from the centre in every direction, as a wave rises on water in which a stone has been cast. Those nearer repeated his words to those more distant. Afterward were heard here and there shouts of anger or applause, which turned at length into one universal call of "Panem et circenses!!!"

Petronius wrapped himself in his toga and listened for a time without moving, resembling in his white garment a marble statue. The uproar increased, drowned the roar of the fire, was answered from every side and from ever-increasing distances. But evidently the envoy had something to add, for he waited. Finally, commanding silence anew, he cried, —

"I promised you panem et circenses; and now give a shout in honor of Cæsar, who feeds and clothes you; then go to sleep, dear populace, for the dawn will begin before long."

He turned his horse then, and, tapping lightly with his cane the heads and faces of those who stood in his way, he

rode slowly to the pretorian ranks. Soon he was under the aqueduct. He found almost a panic above, where they had not understood the shout "Panem et circenses," and supposed it to be a new outburst of rage. They had not even expected that Petronius would save himself; so Nero, when he saw him, ran to the steps, and with face pale from emotion, inquired, —

"Well, what are they doing? Is there a battle?"

Petronius drew air into his lungs, breathed deeply, and answered, —

"By Pollux! they are sweating! and such a stench! Will some one give me an epilimma?—for I am faint." Then he turned to Cæsar.

"I promised them," said he, "wheat, olives, the opening of the gardens, and games. They worship thee anew, and are howling in thy honor. Gods, what a foul odor those plebeians have!"

"I had pretorians ready," cried Tigellinus; "and hadst thou not quieted them, the shouters would have been silenced forever. It is a pity, Cæsar, that thou didst not let me use force."

Petronius looked at him, shrugged his shoulders, and added, —

"The chance is not lost. Thou mayst have to use it to-morrow."

"No, no!" cried Cæsar, "I will give command to open the gardens to them, and distribute wheat. Thanks to thee, Petronius, I will have games; and that song, which I sang to-day, I will sing publicly."

Then he placed his hands on the arbiter's shoulder, was silent a moment, and starting up at last inquired, —

"Tell me sincerely, how did I seem to thee while I was singing?"

"Thou wert worthy of the spectacle, and the spectacle was worthy of thee," said Petronius.

"But let us look at it again," said he, turning to the fire, "and bid farewell to ancient Rome."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE Apostle's words put confidence in the souls of the Christians. The end of the world seemed ever near to them, but they began to think that the day of judgment would not come immediately, that first they would see the end of Nero's reign, which they looked on as the reign of Satan, and the punishment of God for Cæsar's crimes, which were crying for vengeance. Strengthened in heart, they dispersed, after the prayer, to their temporary dwellings, and even to the Trans-Tiber; for news had come that the fire, set there in a number of places, had, with the change of wind, turned back toward the river, and, after devouring what it could here and there, had ceased to extend.

The Apostle, with Vinicius and Chilo, who followed him, left the excavation also. The young tribune did not venture to interrupt his prayers; hence he walked on in silence, merely imploring pity with his eyes, and trembling from alarm. Many approached to kiss Peter's hands, and the hem of his mantle; mothers held out their children to him; some knelt in the dark, long passage, and, holding up tapers, begged a blessing; others, going alongside, sang: so there was no chance for question or answer. Thus it was in the narrow passage. Only when they came out to broader spaces, from which the burning city was in view, did the Apostle bless them three times, and say, turning to Vinicius, —

"Fear not. The hut of the quarryman is near; in it we shall find Linus, and Lygia, with her faithful servant. Christ, who predestined her to thee, has preserved her."

Vinicius tottered, and placed his hand against the cliff. The road from Antium, the events at the wall, the search for Lygia amidst burning houses, sleeplessness, and his terrible alarm had exhausted him; and the news that the dearest person in the world was near by, and that soon he would see her, took the remnant of his strength from him. So great a weakness possessed him on a sudden that he dropped to the Apostle's feet, and, embracing his knees, remained thus, without power to say a word.

"Not to me, not to me, but to Christ," said the Apostle, who warded off thanks and honor.

"What a good God!" said the voice of Chilo from behind, "but what shall I do with the mules that are waiting down here?"

"Rise and come with me," said Peter to the young man. Vinicius rose. By the light of the burning, tears were visible on his face, which was pale from emotion. His lips moved, as if in prayer.

"Let us go," said he. But Chilo repeated again: "Lord, what shall I do with the mules that are waiting? Perhaps this worthy prophet prefers riding to walking."

Vinicius did not know himself what to answer; but hearing from Peter that the quarryman's hut was near by, he said, —

"Take the mules to Macrinus."

"Pardon me, lord, if I mention the house in Ameriola. In view of such an awful fire, it is easy to forget a thing so paltry."

"Thou wilt get it."

"O grandson of Numa Pompilius, I have always been sure, but now, when this magnanimous prophet also has heard the promise, I will not remind thee even of this, that thou hast promised me a vineyard. *Pax vobiscum*. I shall find thee, lord. *Pax vobiscum*."

They answered, "And peace with thee."

Then both turned to the right toward the hills. Along the road Vinicius said, —

"Lord, wash me with the water of baptism, so that I may call myself a real confessor of Christ, for I love Him with all the power of my soul. Wash me quickly, for I am ready in heart. And what thou commandest I will do; but tell me, so that I may do it in addition."

"Love men as thy own brothers," answered the Apostle, "for only with love mayst thou serve Him."

"Yes, I understand and feel that. When a child I believed in the Roman gods, though I did not love them. But I so love Him the One God that I would give my life for Him gladly." And he looked toward the sky, repeating with exaltation: "For He is one, for He alone is kind and merciful; hence, let not only this city perish, but the whole world, Him alone will I confess and recognize."

"And He will bless thee and thy house," concluded the Apostle.

Meanwhile they turned into another ravine, at the end of

which a faint light was visible. Peter pointed to it and said, —

"There is the hut of the quarryman who gave us a refuge when, on the way from Ostrianum with the sick Linus, we could not go to the Trans-Tiber."

After a while they arrived. The hut was rather a cave rounded out in an indentation of the hill, and was faced outside with a wall made of reeds. The door was closed, but through an opening, which served for a window, the interior was visible, lighted by a fire. Some dark giant figure rose up to meet them, and inquired, —

"Who are ye?"

"Servants of Christ," answered Peter. "Peace be with thee, Ursus."

Ursus bent to the Apostle's feet; then, recognizing Vinicius, seized his hand by the wrist, and raised it to his lips.

"And thou, lord," said he. "Blessed be the name of the Lamb, for the joy which thou wilt bring to Callina."

He opened the door then, and entered. Linus was lying on a bundle of straw, with an emaciated face and a forehead as yellow as ivory. Near the fire sat Lygia with a string of small fish, intended evidently for supper. Occupied in removing the fish from the string, and thinking that it was Ursus who had entered, she did not raise her eyes. But Vinicius approached, and, pronouncing her name, stretched his hand to her. She sprang up quickly then; a flash of astonishment and delight shot across her face. Without a word, like a child who after days of fear and sorrow had found father or mother, she threw herself into his open arms.

He embraced her, pressed her to his bosom for some time with such ecstasy as if she had been saved by a miracle. Then, withdrawing his arms, he took her temples between his hands, kissed her forehead and her eyes, embraced her again, repeated her name, bent to her knees, to her palms, greeted her, did her homage, honored her. His delight had no bounds; neither had his love and happiness.

At last he told her how he had rushed in from Antium; had searched for her at the walls, in the smoke at the house of Linus; how he had suffered and was terrified; how much he had endured before the Apostle had shown him her retreat.

"But now," said he, "that I have found thee, I will not leave thee near fire and raging crowds. People are slaying one another under the walls, slaves are revolting and plundering. God alone knows what miseries may fall yet on

Rome. But I will save thee and all of you. Oh, my dear, let us go to Antium; we will take a ship there and sail to Sicily. My land is thy land, my houses are thy houses. Listen to me! In Sicily we shall find Aulus. I will give thee back to Pomponia, and take thee from her hands afterward. But, O carissima, have no further fear of me. Christ has not washed me yet, but ask Peter if on the way hither I have not told him my wish to be a real confessor of Christ, and begged him to baptize me, even in this hut of a quarryman. Believe, and let all believe me."

Lygia heard these words with radiant face. The Christians formerly, because of Jewish persecutions, and then because of the fire and disturbance caused by the disaster, lived in fear and uncertainty. A journey to quiet Sicily would put an end to all danger, and open a new epoch of happiness in their lives. If Vinicius had wished to take only Lygia, she would have resisted the temptation surely, as she did not wish to leave Peter and Linus; but Vinicius said to them, "Come with me; my lands are your lands, my houses your houses." At this Lygia inclined to kiss his hand, in sign of obedience, and said, —

"Where thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia."

Then confused that she had spoken words which by Roman custom were repeated only at marriage, she blushed deeply, and stood in the light of the fire, with drooping head, in doubt lest he might take them ill of her. But in his face boundless homage alone was depicted. He turned then to Peter, and continued, —

"Rome is burning at command of Cæsar. In Antium he complained that he had never seen a great fire. And if he has not hesitated at such a crime, think what may happen yet. Who knows that he may not bring in troops, and command a slaughter? Who knows what proscriptions may come; who knows whether after the fire, civil war, murder, and famine may not come? Hide yourselves, therefore, and let us hide Lygia. There ye can wait till the storm passes, and when it is over return to sow your grain anew."

Outside, from the direction of the Vatican Field, as if to confirm his fears, distant cries were heard full of rage and terror. At that moment the quarryman entered, the master of the hut, and, shutting the door hastily, he cried, —

"People are killing one another near the Circus of Nero. Slaves and gladiators have attacked the citizens."

"Do ye hear?" said Vinicius.

"The measure is full," said the Apostle; "and disasters will come, like a boundless sea." Then he turned, and, pointing to Lygia, said, "Take the maiden, whom God has predestined to thee, and save her, and let Linus, who is sick, and Ursus go with you."

But Vinicius, who had come to love the Apostle with all the power of his impetuous soul, exclaimed: "I swear, my teacher, that I will not leave thee here to destruction."

"The Lord bless thee for thy wish," answered Peter; "but hast thou not heard that Christ repeated thrice on the lake to me, 'Feed my lambs'?"

Vinicius was silent.

"If thou, to whom no one has confided care over me, sayest that thou wilt not leave me to destruction, how canst thou wish me to leave my flock in the day of disaster? When there was a storm on the lake, and we were terrified in heart, He did not desert us; why should I, a servant, not follow my Master's example?"

Then Linus raised his emaciated face and inquired, —

"O vicegerent of the Lord, why should I not follow thy example?"

Vinicius began to pass his hand over his head, as if struggling with himself or fighting with his thoughts; then, seizing Lygia by the hand, he said, in a voice in which the energy of a Roman soldier was quivering, —

"Hear me, Peter, Linus, and thou, Lygia! I spoke as my human reason dictated; but ye have another reason, which regards, not your own danger, but the commands of the Redeemer. True, I did not understand this, and I erred, for the beam is not taken from my eyes yet, and the former nature is heard in me. But since I love Christ, and wish to be His servant, though it is a question for me of something more than my own life, I kneel here before thee, and swear that I will accomplish the command of love, and will not leave my brethren in the day of trouble."

Then he knelt, and enthusiasm possessed him; raising his hands and eyes, he cried: "Do I understand Thee, O Christ? Am I worthy of Thee?"

His hands trembled; his eyes glistened with tears; his body trembled with faith and love. Peter took an earthen vessel with water, and, bringing it near him, said with solemnity, —

"Behold, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen."

Then a religious ecstasy seized all present. They thought that some light from beyond this world had filled the hut, that they heard some superhuman music, that the cliffs had opened above their heads, that choirs of angels were floating down from heaven, and far up there they saw a cross, and pierced hands blessing them.

Meanwhile the shouts of fighting were heard outside, and the roar of flames in the burning city.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CAMPS of people were disposed in the lordly gardens of Cæsar, formerly gardens of Domitius and Agrippina; they were disposed also on the Campus Martius, in the gardens of Pompey, Sallust, and Mæcenas, in porticos, tennis-courts, splendid summer-houses, and buildings erected for wild beasts. Peacocks, flamingoes, swans, ostriches, gazelles, African antelopes, and deer, which had served as ornaments to those gardens, went under the knives of the rabble. Provisions began to come in now from Ostia so abundantly that one might walk, as on a bridge, over ships, boats, and barges from one bank of the Tiber to the other. Wheat was sold at the unheard-of low price of three sestertia, and was given gratis to the indigent. Immense supplies of wine, olives, and chestnuts were brought to the city; sheep and cattle were driven in every day from the mountains. Wretches who before the fire had been hiding in alleys of the Subura, and were perishing of hunger in ordinary times, had a more pleasant life now. The danger of famine was averted completely, but it was more difficult to suppress robbery, murder, and abuses. A nomadic life insured impunity to thieves; the more easily since they proclaimed themselves admirers of Cæsar, and were unsparing of plaudits wherever he appeared. Moreover, when, by the pressure of events, the authorities were in abeyance, and there was a lack of armed force to quell insolence in a city inhabited by the dregs of contemporary mankind, deeds were done which passed human imagination. Every night there were battles and murders; every night boys and women were snatched away. At the Porta Mugionis, where there was a halting-place for herds driven in from the Campania, it came to engagements in which people perished by hundreds. Every morning the banks of the Tiber were covered with drowned bodies, which no one collected; these decayed quickly because of heat heightened by fire, and filled the air with foul odors. Sickness broke out on the camping-grounds, and the more timorous foresaw a great pestilence.

But the city burned on unceasingly. Only on the sixth day, when the fire reached empty spaces on the Esquiline, where an enormous number of houses had been demolished