

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

purposely, did it weaken. But the piles of burning cinders gave such strong light yet that people would not believe that the end of the catastrophe had come. In fact the fire burst forth with fresh force on the seventh night in the buildings of Tigellinus, but had short duration for lack of fuel. Burnt houses, however, fell here and there, and threw up towers of flame and pillars of sparks. But the glowing ruins began to grow black on the surface. After sunset the heavens ceased to gleam with bloody light, and only after dark did blue tongues quiver above the extended black waste, tongues which rose from piles of cinders.

Of the fourteen divisions of Rome there remained only four, including the Trans-Tiber. Flames had consumed all the others. When at last the piles of cinders had been turned into ashes, an immense space was visible from the Tiber to the Esquiline, gray, gloomy, dead. In this space stood rows of chimneys, like columns over graves in a cemetery. Among these columns gloomy crowds of people moved about in the daytime, some seeking for precious objects, others for the bones of those dear to them. In the night dogs howled above the ashes and ruins of former dwellings.

All the bounty and aid shown by Cæsar to the populace did not restrain evil speech and indignation. Only the herd of robbers, criminals, and homeless ruffians, who could eat, drink, and rob enough, were contented. People who had lost all their property and their nearest relatives were not won over by the opening of gardens, the distribution of bread, or the promise of games and gifts. The catastrophe had been too great and unparalleled. Others, in whom was hidden yet some spark of love for the city and their birth-place, were brought to despair by news that the old name "Roma" was to vanish, and that from the ashes of the capital Cæsar would erect a new city called Neropolis. A flood of hatred rose and swelled every day, despite the flatteries of the Augustians and the calumnies of Tigellinus. Nero, more sensitive than any former Cæsar to the favor of the populace, thought with alarm that in the sullen and mortal struggle which he was waging with patricians in the Senate, he might lack support. The Augustians themselves were not less alarmed, for any morning might bring them destruction. Tigellinus thought of summoning certain legions from Asia Minor. Vatinius, who laughed even when slapped on the face, lost his humor; Vitellius lost his appetite.

Others were taking counsel among themselves how to avert the danger, for it was no secret that were an outburst to carry off Cæsar, not one of the Augustians would escape, except, perhaps, Petronius. To their influence were ascribed the madneses of Nero, to their suggestions all the crimes which he committed. Hatred for them almost surpassed that for Nero. Hence some began to make efforts to rid themselves of responsibility for the burning of the city. But to free themselves they must clear Cæsar also from suspicion, or no one would believe that they had not caused the catastrophe. Tigellinus took counsel on this subject with Domitius Afer, and even with Seneca, though he hated him. Poppæa, who understood that the ruin of Nero would be her own sentence, took the opinion of her confidants and of Hebrew priests, for it had been admitted for years that she held the faith of Jehovah. Nero found his own methods, which, frequently terrible, were more frequently foolish, and fell now into terror, now into childish delight, but above all he complained.

On a time a long and fruitless consultation was held in the house of Tiberius, which had survived the fire. Petronius thought it best to leave troubles, go to Greece, thence to Egypt and Asia Minor. The journey had been planned long before; why defer it, when in Rome were sadness and danger?

Cæsar accepted the counsel with eagerness; but Seneca, when he had thought awhile, said,—

"It is easy to go, but it would be more difficult to return."

"By Heracles!" replied Petronius, "we may return at the head of Asiatic legions."

"This will I do!" exclaimed Nero.

But Tigellinus opposed. He could discover nothing himself, and if the arbiter's idea had come to his own head he would beyond doubt have declared it the saving one; but with him the question was that Petronius might not be a second time the only man who in difficult moments could rescue all and every one.

"Hear me, divinity," said he, "this advice is destructive! Before thou art at Ostia a civil war will break out; who knows but one of the surviving collateral descendants of the divine Augustus will declare himself Cæsar, and what shall we do if the legions take his side?"

"We shall try," answered Nero, "that there be no de-

scendants of Augustus. There are not many now; hence it is easy to rid ourselves of them."

"It is possible to do so, but is it a question of them alone? No longer ago than yesterday my people heard in the crowd that a man like Thræsea should be Cæsar."

Nero bit his lips. After a while he raised his eyes and said: "Insatiable and thankless. They have grain enough, and they have coal on which to bake cakes; what more do they want?"

"Vengeance!" replied Tigellinus.

Silence followed. Cæsar rose on a sudden, extended his hand, and began to declaim, —

"Hearts call for vengeance, and vengeance wants a victim." Then, forgetting everything, he said, with radiant face: "Give me the tablet and stilus to write this line. Never could Lucan have composed the like. Have ye noticed that I found it in a twinkling?"

"O incomparable!" exclaimed a number of voices.

Nero wrote down the line, and said, —

"Yes, vengeance wants a victim." Then he cast a glance on those around him. "But if we spread the report that Vatinius gave command to burn the city, and devote him to the anger of the people?"

"O divinity! Who am I?" exclaimed Vatinius.

"True! One more important than thou is demanded. Is it Vitellius?"

Vitellius grew pale, but began to laugh.

"My fat," answered he, "might start the fire again."

But Nero had something else on his mind; in his soul he was looking for a victim who might really satisfy the people's anger, and he found him.

"Tigellinus," said he after a while, "it was thou who didst burn Rome!"

A shiver ran through those present. They understood that Cæsar had ceased to jest this time, and that a moment had come which was pregnant with events.

The face of Tigellinus was wrinkled, like the lips of a dog about to bite.

"I burnt Rome at thy command!" said he.

And the two glared at each other like a pair of devils. Such silence followed that the buzzing of flies was heard as they flew through the atrium.

"Tigellinus," said Nero, "dost thou love me?"

"Thou knowest, lord."

"Sacrifice thyself for me."

"O divine Cæsar," answered Tigellinus, "why present the sweet cup which I may not raise to my lips? The people are muttering and rising; dost thou wish the pretorians also to rise?"

A feeling of terror pressed the hearts of those present. Tigellinus was pretorian prefect, and his words had the direct meaning of a threat. Nero himself understood this, and his face became pallid.

At that moment Epaphroditus, Cæsar's freedman, entered, announcing that the divine Augusta wished to see Tigellinus, as there were people in her apartments whom the prefect ought to hear.

Tigellinus bowed to Cæsar, and went out with a face calm and contemptuous. Now, when they had wished to strike him, he had shown his teeth; he had made them understand who he was, and, knowing Nero's cowardice, he was confident that that ruler of the world would never dare to raise a hand against him.

Nero sat in silence for a moment; then, seeing that those present expected some answer, he said, —

"I have reared a serpent in my bosom."

Petronius shrugged his shoulders, as if to say that it was not difficult to pluck the head from such a serpent.

"What wilt thou say? Speak, advise!" exclaimed Nero, noticing this motion. "I trust in thee alone, for thou hast more sense than all of them, and thou lovest me."

Petronius had the following on his lips: "Make me pretorian prefect, I will deliver Tigellinus to the people, and pacify the city in a day." But his innate slothfulness prevailed. To be prefect meant to bear on his shoulders Cæsar's person and also thousands of public affairs. And why should he perform that labor? Was it not better to read poetry in his splendid library, look at vases and statues, or hold to his breast the divine body of Eunice, twining her golden hair through his fingers, and inclining his lips to her coral mouth? Hence he said, —

"I advise the journey to Achæa."

"Ah!" answered Nero, "I looked for something more from thee. The Senate hates me. If I depart, who will guarantee that it will not revolt and proclaim some one else Cæsar? The people have been faithful to me so far, but now they will follow the Senate. By Hades! if that Senate and that people had one head! —"

"Permit me to say, O divinity, that if thou desire to save Rome, there is need to save even a few Romans," remarked Petronius, with a smile.

"What care I for Rome and Romans?" complained Nero. "I should be obeyed in Achæa. Here only treason surrounds me. All desert me, and ye are making ready for treason. I know it, I know it. Ye do not even imagine what future ages will say of you if ye desert such an artist as I am."

Here he tapped his forehead on a sudden, and cried, —

"True! Amid these cares even I forget who I am."

Then he turned to Petronius with a radiant face.

"Petronius," said he, "the people murmur; but if I take my lute and go to the Campus Martius, if I sing that song to them which I sang during the conflagration, dost thou not think that I will move them, as Orpheus moved wild beasts?"

To this Tullius Senecio, who was impatient to return to his slave women brought in from Antium, and who had been impatient a long time, replied, —

"Beyond doubt, O Cæsar, if they permit thee to begin."

"Let us go to Hellas!" cried Nero, with disgust.

But at that moment Poppæa appeared, and with her Tigellinus. The eyes of those present turned to him unconsciously, for never had triumphator ascended the Capitol with pride such as his when he stood before Cæsar. He began to speak slowly and with emphasis, in tones through which the bite of iron, as it were, was heard, —

"Listen, O Cæsar, for I can say: I have found! The people want vengeance, — they want not one victim, but hundreds, thousands. Hast heard, lord, who Christos was, — he who was crucified by Pontius Pilate? And knowest thou who the Christians are? Have I not told thee of their crimes and foul ceremonies, of their predictions that fire would cause the end of the world? People hate and suspect them. No one has seen them in a temple at any time, for they consider our gods evil spirits; they are not in the Stadium, for they despise horse races. Never have the hands of a Christian done thee honor with plaudits. Never has one of them recognized thee as god. They are enemies of the human race, of the city, and of thee. The people murmur against thee; but thou hast given me no command to burn Rome, and I did not burn it. The people want vengeance; let them have it. The people want blood and games; let them have

them. The people suspect thee; let their suspicion turn in another direction."

Nero listened with amazement at first; but as Tigellinus proceeded, his actor's face changed, and assumed in succession expressions of anger, sorrow, sympathy, indignation. Suddenly he rose, and, casting off the toga, which dropped at his feet, he raised both hands and stood silent for a time. At last he said, in the tones of a tragedian, —

"O Zeus, Apollo, Here, Athene, Persephone, and all ye immortals! why did ye not come to aid us? What has this hapless city done to those cruel wretches that they burnt it so inhumanly?"

"They are enemies of mankind and of thee," said Poppæa.

"Do justice!" cried others. "Punish the incendiaries! The gods themselves call for vengeance!"

Nero sat down, dropped his head to his breast, and was silent a second time, as if stunned by the wickedness of which he had heard. But after a while he shook his hands, and said, —

"What punishments, what tortures befit such a crime? But the gods will inspire me, and, aided by the powers of Tartarus, I will give my poor people such a spectacle that they will remember me for ages with gratitude."

The forehead of Petronius was covered with a sudden cloud. He thought of the danger hanging over Lygia and over Vinicius, whom he loved, and over all those people whose religion he rejected, but of whose innocence he was certain. He thought also that one of those bloody orgies would begin which his eyes, those of an æsthetic man, could not suffer. But above all he thought: "I must save Vinicius, who will go mad if that maiden perishes;" and this consideration outweighed every other, for Petronius understood well that he was beginning a game far more perilous than any in his life. He began, however, to speak freely and carelessly, as his wont was when criticising or ridiculing plans of Cæsar and the Augustians that were not sufficiently æsthetic, —

"Ye have found victims! That is true. Ye may send them to the arena, or array them in 'painful tunics.' That is true also. But hear me! Ye have authority, ye have pretorians, ye have power; then be sincere, at least, when no one is listening! Deceive the people, but deceive not one another. Give the Christians to the populace, condemn them to any tortures ye like; but have courage to say to yourselves that it was not they who burnt Rome. Phy!

Ye call me 'arbiter elegantiarum;' hence I declare to you that I cannot endure wretched comedies! Phy! how all this reminds me of the theatrical booths near the Porta Asinaria, in which actors play the parts of gods and kings to amuse the suburban rabble, and when the play is over wash down onions with sour wine, or get blows of clubs! Be gods and kings in reality; for I say that ye can permit yourselves the position! As to thee, O Cæsar, thou hast threatened us with the sentence of coming ages; but think, those ages will utter judgment concerning thee also. By the divine Clio! Nero, ruler of the world, Nero, a god, burnt Rome, because he was as powerful on earth as Zeus on Olympus, — Nero the poet loved poetry so much that he sacrificed to it his country! From the beginning of the world no one did the like, no one ventured on the like. I beseech thee in the name of the double-crowned Libethrides, renounce not such glory, for songs of thee will sound to the end of ages! What will Priam be when compared with thee; what Agamemnon; what Achilles; what the gods themselves? We need not say that the burning of Rome was good, but it was colossal and uncommon. I tell thee, besides, that the people will raise no hand against thee! It is not true that they will. Have courage; guard thyself against acts unworthy of thee, — for this alone threatens thee, that future ages may say, 'Nero burned Rome; but as a timid Cæsar and a timid poet he denied the great deed out of fear, and cast the blame of it on the innocent!'

The arbiter's words produced the usual deep impression on Nero; but Petronius was not deceived as to this, — that what he had said was a desperate means which in a fortunate event might save the Christians, it is true, but might still more easily destroy himself. He had not hesitated, however, for it was a question at once of Vinicius whom he loved, and of hazard with which he amused himself. "The dice are thrown," said he to himself, "and we shall see how far fear for his own life outweighs in the monkey his love of glory."

And in his soul he had no doubt that fear would outweigh. Meanwhile silence fell after his words. Poppæa and all present were looking at Nero's eyes as at a rainbow. He began to raise his lips, drawing them to his very nostrils, as was his custom when he knew not what to do; at last disgust and trouble were evident on his features.

"Lord," cried Tigellinus, on noting this, "permit me to go; for when people wish to expose thy person to destruc-

tion, and call thee, besides, a cowardly Cæsar, a cowardly poet, an incendiary, and a comedian, my ears cannot suffer such expressions!"

"I have lost," thought Petronius. But turning to Tigellinus, he measured him with a glance in which was that contempt for a ruffian which is felt by a great lord who is an exquisite.

"Tigellinus," said he, "it was thou whom I called a comedian; for thou art one at this very moment."

"Is it because I will not listen to thy insults?"

"It is because thou art feigning boundless love for Cæsar, — thou who a short while since wert threatening him with pretorians, which we all understood as did he!"

Tigellinus, who had not thought Petronius sufficiently daring to throw dice such as those on the table, turned pale, lost his head, and was speechless. This was, however, the last victory of the arbiter over his rival, for that moment Poppæa said, —

"Lord, how permit that such a thought should even pass through the head of any one, and all the more that any one should venture to express it aloud in thy presence!"

"Punish the insolent!" exclaimed Vitellius.

Nero raised his lips again to his nostrils, and, turning his near-sighted, glassy eyes on Petronius, said, —

"Is this the way thou payest me for the friendship which I had for thee?"

"If I am mistaken, show me my error," said Petronius; "but know that I speak that which love for thee dictates."

"Punish the insolent!" repeated Vitellius.

"Punish!" called a number of voices.

In the atrium there was a murmur and a movement, for people began to withdraw from Petronius. Even Tullius Senecio, his constant companion at the court, pushed away, as did young Nerva, who had shown him hitherto the greatest friendship. After a while Petronius was alone on the left side of the atrium, with a smile on his lips; and gathering with his hands the folds of his toga, he waited yet for what Cæsar would say or do.

"Ye wish me to punish him," said Cæsar; "but he is my friend and comrade. Though he has wounded my heart, let him know that for friends this heart has naught but forgiveness."

"I have lost, and am ruined," thought Petronius.

Meanwhile Cæsar rose, and the consultation was ended.

CHAPTER XLIX.

PETRONIUS went home. Nero and Tigellinus went to Poppæa's atrium, where they were expected by people with whom the prefect had spoken already.

There were two Trans-Tiber rabbis in long solemn robes and mitred, a young copyist, their assistant, together with Chilo. At sight of Cæsar the priests grew pale from emotion, and, raising their hands an arm's length, bent their heads to his hands.

"Be greeted, O ruler of the earth, guardian of the chosen people, and Cæsar, lion among men, whose reign is like sunlight, like the cedar of Lebanon, like a spring, like a palm, like the balsam of Jericho."

"Do ye refuse to call me god?" inquired Nero.

The priests grew still paler. The chief one spoke again, —

"Thy words, O lord, are as sweet as a cluster of grapes, as a ripe fig, — for Jehovah filled thy heart with goodness! Thy father's predecessor, Cæsar Caius, was stern; still our envoys did not call him god, preferring death itself to violation of the law."

"And did not Caligula give command to throw them to the lions?"

"No, lord; Cæsar Caius feared Jehovah's anger."

And they raised their heads, for the name of the powerful Jehovah gave them courage; confident in his might, they looked into Nero's eyes with more boldness.

"Do ye accuse the Christians of burning Rome?" inquired Cæsar.

"We, lord, accuse them of this alone, — that they are enemies of the law, of the human race, of Rome, and of thee; that long since they have threatened the city and the world with fire! The rest will be told thee by this man, whose lips are unstained by a lie, for in his mother's veins flowed the blood of the chosen people."

Nero turned to Chilo: "Who art thou?"

"One who honors thee, O Cyrus; and, besides, a poor Stoic —"

"I hate the Stoics," said Nero. "I hate Thræsea; I hate Musonius and Cornutus. Their speech is repulsive to me; their contempt for art, their voluntary squalor and filth."

"O lord, thy master Seneca has one thousand tables of citrus wood. At thy wish I will have twice as many. I am a Stoic from necessity. Dress my stoicism, O Radiant One, in a garland of roses, put a pitcher of wine before it; it will sing Anacreon in such strains as to deafen every Epicurean."

Nero, who was pleased by the title "Radiant," smiled and said, —

"Thou dost please me."

"This man is worth his weight in gold!" cried Tigellinus.

"Put thy liberality with my weight," answered Chilo, "or the wind will blow my reward away."

"He would not outweigh Vitellius," put in Cæsar.

"Eheu! Silver-bowed, my wit is not of lead."

"I see that thy faith does not hinder thee from calling me a god."

"O Immortal! My faith is in thee; the Christians blaspheme against that faith, and I hate them."

"What dost thou know of the Christians?"

"Wilt thou permit me to weep, O divinity?"

"No," answered Nero; "weeping annoys me."

"Thou art triply right, for eyes that have seen thee should be free of tears forever. O lord, defend me against my enemies."

"Speak of the Christians," said Poppæa, with a shade of impatience.

"It will be at thy command, O Isis," answered Chilo.

"From youth I devoted myself to philosophy, and sought truth. I sought it among the ancient divine sages, in the Academy at Athens, and in the Serapeum at Alexandria. When I heard of the Christians, I judged that they formed some new school in which I could find certain kernels of truth; and to my misfortune I made their acquaintance. The first Christian whom evil fate brought near me was one Glaucus, a physician of Naples. From him I learned in time that they worship a certain Chrestos, who promised to exterminate all people and destroy every city on earth, but to spare them if they helped him to exterminate the children of Deucalion. For this reason, O lady, they hate men, and poison fountains; for this reason in their assemblies they shower curses on Rome, and on all temples in which our gods are honored. Chrestos was crucified; but he promised that when Rome was destroyed by fire, he would come again and give Christians dominion over the world."

"People will understand now why Rome was destroyed," interrupted Tigellinus.

"Many understand that already, O lord, for I go about in the gardens, I go to the Campus Martius, and teach. But if ye listen to the end, ye will know my reasons for vengeance. Glaucus the physician did not reveal to me at first that their religion taught hatred. On the contrary, he told me that Chrestos was a good divinity, that the basis of their religion was love. My sensitive heart could not resist such a truth; hence I took to loving Glaucus, I trusted him, I shared every morsel of bread with him, every copper coin, and dost thou know, lady, how he repaid me? On the road from Naples to Rome he thrust a knife into my body, and my wife, the beautiful and youthful Berenice, he sold to a slave-merchant. If Sophocles knew my history — but what do I say? One better than Sophocles is listening."

"Poor man!" said Poppæa.

"Whoso has seen the face of Aphrodite is not poor, lady; and I see it at this moment. But then I sought consolation in philosophy. When I came to Rome, I tried to meet Christian elders to obtain justice against Glaucus. I thought that they would force him to yield up my wife. I became acquainted with their chief priest; I became acquainted with another, named Paul, who was in prison in this city, but was liberated afterward; I became acquainted with the son of Zebedee, with Linus and Clitus and many others. I know where they lived before the fire, I know where they meet. I can point out one excavation in the Vatican Hill and a cemetery beyond the Nomentan Gate, where they celebrate their shameless ceremonies. I saw the Apostle Peter. I saw how Glaucus killed children, so that the Apostle might have something to sprinkle on the heads of those present; and I saw Lygia, the foster-child of Pomponia Græcina, who boasted that though unable to bring the blood of an infant, she brought the death of an infant, for she bewitched the little Augusta, thy daughter, O Cyrus, and thine, O Isis!"

"Dost hear, Cæsar?" asked Poppæa.

"Can that be!" exclaimed Nero.

"I could forgive wrongs done myself," continued Chilo, "but when I heard of yours, I wanted to stab her. Unfortunately I was stopped by the noble Vinicius, who loves her."

"Vinicius? But did she not flee from him?"

"She fled, but he made search for her; he could not exist without her. For wretched pay I helped him in the search,

and it was I who pointed out to him the house in which she lived among the Christians in the Trans-Tiber. We went there together, and with us thy wrestler Croton, whom the noble Vinicius hired to protect him. But Ursus, Lygia's slave, crushed Croton. That is a man of dreadful strength, O Lord, who can break a bull's neck as easily as another might a poppy stalk. Aulus and Pomponia loved him because of that."

"By Hercules," said Nero, "the mortal who crushed Croton deserves a statue in the Forum. But, old man, thou art mistaken or art inventing, for Vinicius killed Croton with a knife."

"That is how people calumniate the gods. O lord, I myself saw Croton's ribs breaking in the arms of Ursus, who rushed then on Vinicius and would have killed him but for Lygia. Vinicius was ill for a long time after that; but they nursed him in the hope that through love he would become a Christian. In fact, he did become a Christian."

"Vinicius?"

"Yes."

"And, perhaps, Petronius too?" inquired Tigellinus, hurriedly.

Chilo squirmed, rubbed his hands, and said, —

"I admire thy penetration, O lord. He may have become one! He may very well have become one."

"Now I understand why he defended the Christians."

Nero laughed: "Petronius a Christian! Petronius an enemy of life and luxury! Be not foolish; do not ask me to believe that, since I am ready not to believe anything."

"But the noble Vinicius became a Christian, lord. I swear by that radiance which comes from thee that I speak the truth, and that nothing pierces me with such disgust as lying. Pomponia Græcina is a Christian, little Aulus is a Christian, Lygia is a Christian, and so is Vinicius. I served him faithfully, and in return, at the desire of Glaucus the physician, he gave command to flog me, though I am old and was sick and hungry. And I have sworn by Hades that I will not forget that for him. O lord, avenge my wrongs on them, and I will deliver to thee Peter the Apostle and Linus and Clitus and Glaucus and Crispus, the highest ones, and Lygia and Ursus. I will point out hundreds of them to you, thousands; I will indicate their houses of prayer, the cemeteries, — all thy prisons will not hold them! Without me ye could not find them. In misfortunes I have sought consolation; hitherto in philosophy alone, now I will find it in favors

that will descend on me. I am old, and have not known life; let me begin."

"It is thy wish to be a Stoic before a full plate," said Nero.

"Whoso renders service to thee will fill it by that same."

"Thou art not mistaken, O philosopher."

But Poppæa did not forget her enemies. Her fancy for Vinicius was, indeed, rather a momentary whim, which had risen under the influence of jealousy, anger, and wounded vanity. Still the coolness of the young patrician touched her deeply, and filled her heart with a stubborn feeling of offence. This alone, that he had dared to prefer another, seemed to her a crime calling for vengeance. As to Lygia, she hated her from the first moment, when the beauty of that northern lily alarmed her. Petronius, who spoke of the too narrow hips of the girl, might talk what he pleased into Cæsar, but not into the Augusta. Poppæa the critic understood at one cast of the eye that in all Rome Lygia alone could rival and even surpass her. Thenceforth she vowed her ruin.

"Lord," said she, "avenge our child."

"Hasten!" cried Chilo, "hasten! Otherwise Vinicius will hide her. I will point out the house to which she returned after the fire."

"I will give thee ten men, and go this moment," said Tigellinus.

"O lord! thou hast not seen Croton in the arms of Ursus; if thou wilt give fifty men, I will only show the house from a distance. But if ye will not imprison Vinicius, I am lost."

Tigellinus looked at Nero. "Would it not be well, O divinity, to finish at once with the uncle and nephew?"

Nero thought a moment and answered, —

"No, not now. People would not believe us if we tried to persuade them that Petronius, Vinicius, or Pomponia Græcina had fired Rome. Their houses were too beautiful. Their turn will come later; to-day other victims are needed."

"Then, O lord, give me soldiers as a guard," said Chilo.

"See to this, Tigellinus."

"Thou wilt lodge meanwhile with me," said the prefect to Chilo.

Delight beamed from the face of the Greek.

"I will give up all! only hasten! — hasten!" cried he, with a hoarse voice.

CHAPTER L.

ON leaving Cæsar, Petronius had himself borne to his house on the Carinæ, which, being surrounded on three sides by a garden, and having in front the small Cecilian Forum, escaped the fire luckily. For this cause other Augustians, who had lost their houses and in them vast wealth and many works of art, called Petronius fortunate. For years it had been repeated that he was the first-born of Fortune, and Cæsar's growing friendship in recent times seemed to confirm the correctness of this statement.

But that first-born of Fortune might meditate now on the fickleness of his mother, or rather on her likeness to Chronos, who devoured his own children.

"Were my house burnt," said he to himself, "and with it my gems, Etruscan vases, Alexandrian glass, and Corinthian bronze, Nero might indeed have forgotten the offence. By Pollux! And to think that it depended on me alone to be pretorian prefect at this moment. I should proclaim Tigellinus the incendiary, which he is really; I should array him in the 'painful tunic,' and deliver him to the populace, protect the Christians, rebuild Rome. Who knows even if a better epoch would not begin thus for honest people? I ought to have taken the office, simply out of regard for Vinicius. In case of overwork I could have surrendered command to him, and Nero would not have even tried to resist. Then let Vinicius baptize all the pretorians, nay, Cæsar himself; what harm could that be to me? Nero pious, Nero virtuous and merciful, — this would be even an amusing spectacle."

And his carelessness was so great that he began to laugh. But after a time his thoughts turned in another direction. It seemed to him that he was in Antium; that Paul of Tarsus was saying to him, "Ye call us enemies of life, but answer me, Petronius: If Cæsar were a Christian, and acted according to our religion, would not life be safer and more certain?"

And remembering these words, he continued: "By Castor! No matter how many Christians they murder here, Paul will find as many new ones; for he is right, unless the world can

rest on scoundrelism. But who knows that this will not be the case soon? I myself, who have learned not a little, did not learn how to be a great enough scoundrel; hence I shall have to open my veins. But in every case it must have ended thus, and if not thus, in some other way. I am sorry for Eunice and my Myrrhene vase; but Eunice is free, and the vase will go with me. Ahenobarbus will not get it, in any event! I am sorry also for Vinicius. But, though I was bored less of late than before, I am ready. In the world things are beautiful; but people are so vile for the greater part that life is not worth a regret. He who knew how to live should know how to die. Though I belong to the Augustians, I was freer than they supposed." Here he shrugged his shoulders. "They may think that my knees are trembling at this moment, and that terror has raised the hair on my head; but on reaching home, I will take a bath in violet water, my golden-haired herself will anoint me; then after refreshment we will have sung to us that hymn to Apollo composed by Anthemios. I said once to myself that it was not worth while to think of death, for death thinks of us without our assistance. It would be a wonder if there are really Elysian fields, and in them shades of people. Eunice would come in time to me, and we should wander together over asphodel meadows. I should find, too, society better than this. What buffoons, tricksters, a vile herd without taste or polish! Tens of Arbiters *Elegantiarum* could not transform those Trimalchions into decent people. By Persephone! I have had enough!"

And he noted with astonishment that something separated him from those people already. He had known them well earlier, and had known what to think of them; still they seemed to him now as farther away and more deserving of contempt than usual. Indeed, he had had enough of them!

But afterward he began to think over his position. Thanks to his acuteness, he knew that destruction was not threatening him directly. Nero had seized an appropriate occasion to utter a few select, lofty phrases about friendship and forgiveness, thus binding himself for the moment. "He will have to seek pretexts, and before he finds them much time may pass. First of all, he will celebrate the games with Christians," said Petronius to himself; "only then will he think of me, and if that be true, it is not worth while to take trouble or change my course of life. Nearer danger threatens Vinicius!"

And thenceforth he thought only of Vinicius, whom he resolved to rescue. Four sturdy Bithynians bore his litter quickly through ruins, ash-heaps, and stones with which the *Carinæ* was filled yet; but he commanded them to run swiftly so as to be home at the earliest. Vinicius, whose "insula" had been burned, was living with him, and was at home, fortunately.

"Hast seen Lygia to-day?" were the first words of Petronius.

"I have just come from her."

"Hear what I tell thee, and lose no time in questions. It has been decided this morning at *Cæsar's* to lay the blame of burning Rome on the Christians. Persecutions and tortures threaten them. Pursuit may begin any instant. Take Lygia and flee at once beyond the Alps even, or to Africa. And hasten, for the *Palatine* is nearer the *Trans-Tiber* than is this place."

Vinicius was, indeed, too much of a soldier to lose time in useless queries. He listened with frowning brows, and a face intent and terrible, but fearless. Evidently the first feeling of his nature in presence of peril was a wish to defend and give battle.

"I go," said he.

"One word more. Take a purse of gold, take weapons, and a handful of thy Christians. In case of need, rescue her!"

Vinicius was in the door of the atrium already.

"Send me news by a slave!" cried Petronius.

When left alone, he began to walk by the columns which adorned the atrium, thinking of what had happened. He knew that Lygia and Linus had returned after the fire to the former house, which, like the greater part of the *Trans-Tiber*, had been saved; and that was an unfavorable circumstance, for otherwise it would have been difficult to find them among throngs of people. Petronius hoped, however, that as things were, no one in the *Palatine* knew where they lived, and therefore in every case Vinicius would anticipate the pretorians. It occurred to him also that Tigellinus, wishing to seize at one attempt as many Christians as possible, would extend his net over all Rome. "If they send no more than ten people after her," thought he, "that giant Lygian will break their bones and what will it be if Vinicius comes with assistance?" Thinking of this he was consoled. True, armed resistance to the pretorians was almost the same as war with *Cæsar*. Petronius knew also that if Vinicius hid

from the vengeance of Nero, that vengeance might fall on himself; but he cared little. On the contrary, he rejoiced at the thought of crossing Nero's plans and those of Tigellinus, and determined to spare in the matter neither men nor money. Since in Antium Paul of Tarsus had converted most of his slaves, he, while defending Christians, might count on their zeal and devotion.

The entrance of Eunice interrupted his thoughts. At sight of her all his cares and troubles vanished without a trace. He forgot Cæsar, the disfavor into which he had fallen, the degraded Augustians, the persecution threatening the Christians, Vinicius, Lygia, and looked only at her with the eyes of an æsthetic man enamoured of marvellous forms, and of a lover for whom love breathes from those forms. She, in a transparent violet robe called "Coa vestis," through which her maiden-like form appeared, was really as beautiful as a goddess. Feeling herself admired meanwhile, and loving him with all her soul, ever eager for his fondling, she blushed with delight as if she had been an innocent maiden.

"What wilt thou say to me, Charis?" asked Petronius, stretching his hands to her.

She, inclining her golden head to him, answered, —

"Anthemios has come with his choristers, and asks if 't is thy wish to hear him."

"Let him stay; he will sing to us during dinner the hymn to Apollo. By the groves of Paphos! when I see thee in that Coan gauze, I think that Aphrodite has veiled herself with a piece of the sky, and is standing before me."

"O lord!"

"Come hither, Eunice, embrace me with thy arms, and give thy lips to me. Dost thou love me?"

"I should not have loved Zeus more."

Then she pressed her lips to his, while quivering in his arms from happiness. After a while Petronius asked, —

"But if we should have to separate?"

Eunice looked at him with fear in her eyes.

"How is that, lord?"

"Fear not; I ask, for who knows but I may have to set out on a long journey?"

"Take me with thee —"

Petronius changed the conversation quickly, and said, —

"Tell me, are there asphodels on the grass plot in the garden?"

"The cypresses and the grass plots are yellow from the fire, the leaves have fallen from the myrtles, and the whole garden seems dead."

"All Rome seems dead, and soon it will be a real graveyard. Dost thou know that an edict against the Christians is to be issued, and a persecution will begin during which thousands will perish?"

"Why punish the Christians, lord? They are good and peaceful."

"For that very reason."

"Let us go to the sea. Thy beautiful eyes do not like to see blood."

"Well, but meanwhile I must bathe. Come to the elæothesium to anoint my arms. By the girdle of Kypri! never hast thou seemed to me so beautiful. I will give command to make a bath for thee in the form of a shell; thou wilt be like a costly pearl in it. Come, Golden-haired!"

He went out, and an hour later both, in garlands of roses and with misty eyes, were resting before a table covered with a service of gold. They were served by boys dressed as Cupids, they drank wine from ivy-wreathed goblets, and heard the hymn to Apollo sung to the sound of harps, under direction of Anthemios. What cared they if around the villa chimneys pointed up from the ruins of houses, and gusts of wind swept the ashes of burnt Rome in every direction? They were happy thinking only of love, which had made their lives like a divine dream. But before the hymn was finished a slave, the chief of the atrium, entered the hall.

"Lord," said he, in a voice quivering with alarm, "a centurion with a detachment of pretorians is standing before the gate, and, at command of Cæsar, wishes to see thee."

The song and the sound of lutes ceased. Alarm was roused in all present; for Cæsar, in communications with friends, did not employ pretorians usually, and their arrival at such times foreboded no good. Petronius alone showed not the slightest emotion, but said, like a man annoyed by continual visits, —

"They might let me dine in peace." Then turning to the chief of the atrium, he said, "Let him enter."

The slave disappeared behind the curtain; a moment later heavy steps were heard, and an acquaintance of Petronius appeared, the centurion Aper, armed, and with an iron helmet on his head.

"Noble lord," said he, "here is a letter from Cæsar."

Petronius extended his white hand lazily, took the tablet, and, casting his eye over it, gave it, in all calmness to Eunice.

"He will read a new book of the Troyad this evening, and invites me to come."

"I have only the order to deliver the letter," said the centurion.

"Yes, there will be no answer. But, centurion, thou mightst rest a while with us and empty a goblet of wine?"

"Thanks to thee, noble lord. A goblet of wine I will drink to thy health willingly; but rest I may not, for I am on duty."

"Why was the letter given to thee, and not sent by a slave?"

"I know not, lord. Perhaps because I was sent in this direction on other duty."

"I know, against the Christians?"

"Yes, lord."

"Is it long since the pursuit was begun?"

"Some divisions were sent to the Trans-Tiber before mid-day." When he had said this, the centurion shook a little wine from the goblet in honor of Mars; then he emptied it, and said, —

"May the gods grant thee, lord, what thou desirest."

"Take the goblet too," said Petronius.

Then he gave a sign to Anthemios to finish the hymn to Apollo.

"Bronzebeard is beginning to play with me and Vinicius," thought he, when the harps sounded anew. "I divine his plan! He wanted to terrify me by sending the invitation through a centurion. They will ask the centurion in the evening how I received him. No, no! thou wilt not amuse thyself overmuch, cruel and wicked prophet. I know that thou wilt not forget the offence, I know that my destruction will not fail; but if thou think that I shall look into thy eyes imploringly, that thou wilt see fear and humility on my face, thou art mistaken."

"Cæsar writes, lord," said Eunice, "'Come if thou hast the wish; wilt thou go?'"

"I am in excellent health, and can listen even to his verses," answered Petronius; "hence I shall go, all the more since Vinicius cannot go."

In fact, after the dinner was finished and after the usual walk, he gave himself into the hands of hairdressers and

of slaves who arranged his robes, and an hour later, beautiful as a god, he gave command to take him to the Palatine.

It was late, the evening was warm and calm; the moon shone so brightly that the lampadarii going before the litter put out their torches. On the streets and among the ruius crowds of people were pushing along, drunk with wine, in garlands of ivy and honeysuckle, bearing in their hands branches of myrtle and laurel taken from Cæsar's gardens. Abundance of grain and hopes of great games filled the hearts of all with gladness. Here and there songs were sung magnifying the "divine night" and love; here and there they were dancing by the light of the moon, and the slaves were forced repeatedly to demand space for the litter "of the noble Petronius," and then the crowd pushed apart, shouting in honor of their favorite.

He was thinking of Vinicius, and wondering why he had no news from him. He was an Epicurean and an egotist, but passing time, now with Paul of Tarsus, now with Vinicius, hearing daily of the Christians, he had changed somewhat without his own knowledge. A certain breeze from them had blown on him; this cast new seeds into his soul. Besides his own person others began to occupy him; moreover, he had been always attached to Vinicius, for in childhood he had loved greatly his sister, the mother of Vinicius; at present, therefore, when he had taken part in his affairs, he looked on them with that interest with which he would have looked on some tragedy.

Petronius did not lose hope that Vinicius had anticipated the pretorians and fled with Lygia, or, in the worst case, had rescued her. But he would have preferred to be certain, since he foresaw that he might have to answer various questions for which he would better be prepared.

Stopping before the house of Tiberius, he alighted from the litter, and after a while entered the atrium, filled already with Augustians. Yesterday's friends, though astonished that he was invited, still pushed back; but he moved on among them, beautiful, free, unconcerned, as self-confident as if he himself had the power to distribute favors. Some, seeing him thus, were alarmed in spirit lest they had shown him indifference too early.

Cæsar, however, feigned not to see him, and did not return his obeisance, pretending to be occupied in conversation. But Tigellinus approached and said, —

"Good evening, Arbiter Elegantiarum. Dost thou assert still that it was not the Christians who burnt Rome?"

Petronius shrugged his shoulders, and, clapping Tigellinus on the back as he would a freedman, answered, —

"Thou knowest as well as I what to think of that."

"I do not dare to rival thee in wisdom."

"And thou art right, for when Cæsar reads to us a new book from the Troyad, thou, instead of crying out like a jackdaw, wouldst have to give an opinion that was not pointless."

Tigellinus bit his lips. He was not over-rejoiced that Cæsar had decided to read a new book, for that opened a field in which he could not rival Petronius. In fact, during the reading, Nero, from habit, turned his eyes involuntarily toward Petronius, looking carefully to see what he could read in his face. The latter listened, raised his brows, agreed at times, in places increased his attention as if to be sure that he heard correctly. Then he praised or criticised, demanded corrections or the smoothing of certain verses. Nero himself felt that for others in their exaggerated praises it was simply a question of themselves, that Petronius alone was occupied with poetry for its own sake; that he alone understood it, and that if he praised one could be sure that the verses deserved praise. Gradually therefore he began to discuss with him, to dispute; and when at last Petronius brought the fitness of a certain expression into doubt, he said, —

"Thou wilt see in the last book why I used it."

"Ah," thought Petronius, "then we shall wait for the last book."

More than one hearing this said in spirit: "Woe to me! Petronius with time before him may return to favor and overturn even Tigellinus." And they began again to approach him. But the end of the evening was less fortunate; for Cæsar, at the moment when Petronius was taking leave, inquired suddenly, with blinking eyes and a face at once glad and malicious, —

"But why did not Vinicius come?"

Had Petronius been sure that Vinicius and Lygia were beyond the gates of the city, he would have answered, "With thy permission he has married and gone." But seeing Nero's strange smile, he answered, —

"Thy invitation, divinity, did not find him at home."

"Say to Vinicius that I shall be glad to see him," answered

Nero, "and tell him from me not to neglect the games in which Christians will appear."

These words alarmed Petronius. It seemed to him that they related to Lygia directly. Sitting in his litter, he gave command to bear him home still more quickly than in the morning. That, however, was not easy. Before the house of Tiberius stood a crowd dense and noisy, drunk as before, though not singing and dancing, but, as it were, excited. From afar came certain shouts which Petronius could not understand at once, but which rose and grew till at last they were one savage roar, —

"To the lions with Christians!"

Rich litters of courtiers pushed through the howling rabble. From the depth of burnt streets new crowds rushed forth continually; these, hearing the cry, repeated it. News passed from mouth to mouth that the pursuit had continued from the forenoon, that a multitude of incendiaries were seized; and immediately along the newly cleared and the old streets, through alleys lying among ruins around the Palatine, over all the hills and gardens were heard through the length and breadth of Rome shouts of swelling rage, —

"To the lions with Christians!"

"Herd!" repeated Petronius, with contempt; "a people worthy of Cæsar!" And he began to think that a society resting on superior force, on cruelty of which even barbarians had no conception, on crimes and mad profligacy, could not endure. Rome ruled the world, but was also its ulcer. The odor of a corpse was rising from it. Over its decaying life the shadow of death was descending. More than once this had been mentioned even among the Augustians, but never before had Petronius had a clearer view of this truth that the laurelled chariot on which Rome stood in the form of a triumphator, and which dragged behind a chained herd of nations, was going to the precipice. The life of that world-ruling city seemed to him a kind of mad dance, an orgy, which must end. He saw then that the Christians alone had a new basis of life; but he judged that soon there would not remain a trace of the Christians. And what then?

The mad dance would continue under Nero; and if Nero disappeared, another would be found of the same kind or worse, for with such a people and such patricians there was no reason to find a better leader. There would be a new orgy, and moreover a fouler and a viler one.

But the orgy could not last forever, and there would be need of sleep when it was over, even because of simple exhaustion.

While thinking of this, Petronius felt immensely wearied. Was it worth while to live, and live in uncertainty, with no purpose but to look at such a society? The genius of death was not less beautiful than the genius of sleep, and he also had wings at his shoulders.

The litter stopped before the arbiter's door, which was opened that instant by the watchful keeper.

"Has the noble Vinicius returned?" inquired Petronius.

"Yes, lord, a moment ago," replied the slave.

"He has not rescued her," thought Petronius. And casting aside his toga, he ran into the atrium. Vinicius was sitting on a stool; his head bent almost to his knees with his hands on his head; but at the sound of steps he raised his stony face, in which the eyes alone had a feverish brightness.

"Thou wert late?" asked Petronius.

"Yes; they seized her before midday."

A moment of silence followed.

"Hast thou seen her?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"In the Mamertine prison."

Petronius trembled and looked at Vinicius with an inquiring glance. The latter understood.

"No," said he. "She was not thrust down to the Tullianum¹ nor even to the middle prison. I paid the guard to give her his own room. Ursus took his place at the threshold, and is guarding her."

"Why did Ursus not defend her?"

"They sent fifty pretorians, and Linus forbade him."

"But Linus?"

"Linus is dying; therefore they did not seize him."

"What is thy intention?"

"To save her or die with her. I too believe in Christ."

Vinicius spoke with apparent calmness; but there was such despair in his voice that the heart of Petronius quivered from pure pity.

"I understand thee," said he; "but how dost thou think to save her?"

¹ The lowest part of the prison, lying entirely underground, with a single opening in the ceiling. Jugurtha died there of hunger.

"I paid the guards highly, first to shield her from indignity, and second not to hinder her flight."

"When can that happen?"

"They answered that they could not give her to me at once, as they feared responsibility. When the prison will be filled with a multitude of people, and when the tally of prisoners is confused, they will deliver her. But that is a desperate thing! Do thou save her, and me first! Thou art a friend of Cæsar. He himself gave her to me. Go to him and save me!"

Petronius, instead of answering, called a slave, and, commanding him to bring two dark mantles and two swords, turned to Vinicius, —

"On the way I will tell thee," said he. "Meanwhile take the mantle and weapon, and we will go to the prison. There give the guards a hundred thousand sestertia; give them twice and five times more, if they will free Lygia at once. Otherwise it will be too late."

"Let us go," said Vinicius.

After a while both were on the street.

"Now listen to me," said Petronius. "I did not wish to lose time. I am in disfavor, beginning with to-day. My own life is hanging on a hair; hence I can do nothing with Cæsar. Worse than that, I am sure that he would act in opposition to my request. If that were not the case, would I advise thee to flee with Lygia or to rescue her? Besides, if thou escape, Cæsar's wrath will turn on me. To-day he would rather do something at thy request than at mine. Do not count on that, however. Get her out of the prison, and flee! Nothing else is left. If that does not succeed, there will be time for other methods. Meanwhile know that Lygia is in prison, not alone for belief in Christ; Poppæa's anger is pursuing her and thee. Thou hast offended the Augusta by rejecting her, dost remember? She knows that she was rejected for Lygia, whom she hated from the first cast of the eye. Nay, she tried to destroy Lygia before by ascribing the death of her own infant to her witchcraft. The hand of Poppæa is in this. How explain that Lygia was the first to be imprisoned? Who could point out the house of Linus? But I tell thee that she has been followed this long time. I know that I wring thy soul, and take the remnant of thy hope from thee, but I tell thee this purposely, for the reason that if thou free her not before they come at the idea that thou wilt try, ye are both lost."

"Yes; I understand!" muttered Vinicius.

The streets were empty because of the late hour. Their further conversation was interrupted, however, by a drunken gladiator who came toward them. He reeled against Petronius, put one hand on his shoulder, covering his face with a breath filled with wine, and shouted in a hoarse voice, —

"To the lions with Christians!"

"Mirmillon," answered Petronius, quietly, "listen to good counsel; go thy way."

With his other hand the drunken man seized him by the arm, —

"Shout with me, or I'll break thy neck: Christians to the lions!"

But the arbiter's nerves had had enough of those shouts. From the time that he had left the Palatine they had been stifling him like a nightmare, and rending his ears. So when he saw the fist of the giant above him, the measure of his patience was exceeded.

"Friend," said he, "thou hast the smell of wine, and art stopping my way."

Thus speaking, he drove into the man's breast to the hilt the short sword which he had brought from home; then, taking the arm of Vinicius, he continued as if nothing had happened, —

"Cæsar said to-day, 'Tell Vinicius from me to be at the games in which Christians will appear.' Dost understand what that means? They wish to make a spectacle of thy pain. That is a settled affair. Perhaps that is why thou and I are not imprisoned yet. If thou art not able to get her at once — I do not know — Acte might take thy part; but can she effect anything? Thy Sicilian lands, too, might tempt Tigellinus. Make the trial."

"I will give him all that I have," answered Vinicius.

From the Carinæ to the Forum was not very far; hence they arrived soon. The night had begun to pale, and the walls of the castle came out definitely from the shadow.

Suddenly, as they turned toward the Mamertine prison, Petronius stopped, and said, —

"Pretorians! Too late!"

In fact the prison was surrounded by a double rank of soldiers. The morning dawn was silvering their helmets and the points of their javelins.

Vinicius grew as pale as marble. "Let us go on," said he. After a while they halted before the line. Gifted with an

uncommon memory, Petronius knew not only the officers, but nearly all the pretorian soldiers. Soon he saw an acquaintance, a leader of a cohort, and nodded to him.

"But what is this, Niger?" asked he; "are ye commanded to watch the prison?"

"Yes, noble Petronius. The prefect feared lest they might try to rescue the incendiaries."

"Have ye the order to admit no one?" inquired Vinicius.

"We have not; acquaintances will visit the prisoners, and in that way we shall seize more Christians."

"Then let me in," said Vinicius; and pressing Petronius's hand, he said, "See Acte, I will come to learn her answer."

"Come," responded Petronius.

At that moment under the ground and beyond the thick walls was heard singing. The hymn, at first low and muffled, rose more and more. The voices of men, women, and children were mingled in one harmonious chorus. The whole prison began to sound, in the calmness of dawn, like a harp. But those were not voices of sorrow or despair; on the contrary, gladness and triumph were heard in them.

The soldiers looked at one another with amazement. The first golden and rosy gleams of the morning appeared in the sky.