

CHAPTER LI.

THE cry, "Christians to the lions!" was heard increasingly in every part of the city. At first not only did no one doubt that they were the real authors of the catastrophe, but no one wished to doubt, since their punishment was to be a splendid amusement for the populace. Still the opinion spread that the catastrophe would not have assumed such dreadful proportions but for the anger of the gods; for this reason "piacula," or purifying sacrifices, were commanded in the temples. By advice of the Sibylline books, the Senate ordained solemnities and public prayer to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina. Matrons made offerings to Juno; a whole procession of them went to the seashore to take water and sprinkle with it the statue of the goddess. Married women prepared feasts to the gods and night watches. All Rome purified itself from sin, made offerings, and placated the Immortals. Meanwhile new broad streets were opened among the ruins. In one place and another foundations were laid for magnificent houses, palaces, and temples. But first of all they built with unheard-of haste an enormous wooden amphitheatre in which Christians were to die. Immediately after that consultation in the house of Tiberius, orders went to consuls to furnish wild beasts. Tigellinus emptied the vivaria of all Italian cities, not excepting the smaller ones. In Africa, at his command, gigantic hunts were organized, in which the entire local population was forced to take part. Elephants and tigers were brought in from Asia, crocodiles and hippopotamuses from the Nile, lions from the Atlas, wolves and bears from the Pyrenees, savage hounds from Hibernia, Molossian dogs from Epirus, bisons and the gigantic wild aurochs from Germany. Because of the number of prisoners, the games were to surpass in greatness anything seen up to that time. Cæsar wished to drown all memory of the fire in blood, and make Rome drunk with it; hence never had there been a greater promise of bloodshed.

The willing people helped guards and pretorians in hunting Christians. That was no difficult labor for whole groups of them camped with the other population in the midst of

the gardens, and confessed their faith openly. When surrounded, they knelt, and while singing hymns let themselves be borne away without resistance. But their patience only increased the anger of the populace, who, not understanding its origin, considered it as rage and persistence in crime. A madness seized the persecutors. It happened that the mob wrested Christians from pretorians, and tore them to pieces; women were dragged to prison by the hair; children's heads were dashed against stones. Thousands of people rushed, howling, night and day through the streets. Victims were sought in ruins, in chimneys, in cellars. Before the prison bacchanalian feasts and dances were celebrated at fires, around casks of wine. In the evening was heard with delight bellowing which was like thunder, and which sounded throughout the city. The prisons were overflowing with thousands of people; every day the mob and pretorians drove in new victims. Pity had died out. It seemed that people had forgotten to speak, and in their wild frenzy remembered one shout alone: "To the lions with Christians!" Wonderfully hot days came, and nights more stifling than ever before; the very air seemed filled with blood, crime, and madness.

And that surpassing measure of cruelty was answered by an equal measure of desire for martyrdom, — the confessors of Christ went to death willingly, or even sought death till they were restrained by the stern commands of superiors. By the injunction of these superiors they began to assemble only outside the city, in excavations near the Appian Way, and in vineyards belonging to patrician Christians, of whom none had been imprisoned so far. It was known perfectly on the Palatine that to the confessors of Christ belonged Flavius, Domitilla, Pomponia Græcina, Cornelius Pudens, and Vinicius. Cæsar himself, however, feared that the mob would not believe that such people had burned Rome, and since it was important beyond everything to convince the mob, punishment and vengeance were deferred till later days. Others were of the opinion, but erroneously, that those patricians were saved by the influence of Acte. Petronius, after parting with Vinicius, turned to Acte, it is true, to gain assistance for Lygia; but she could offer him only tears, for she lived in oblivion and suffering, and was endured only in so far as she hid herself from Poppæa and Cæsar.

But she had visited Lygia in prison, she had carried her

clothing and food, and above all had saved her from injury on the part of the prison-guards, who, moreover, were bribed already.

Petronius, unable to forget that had it not been for him and his plan of taking Lygia from the house of Aulus, probably she would not be in prison at that moment, and, besides, wishing to win the game against Tigellinus, spared neither time nor efforts. In the course of a few days he saw Seneca, Domitius Afer, Crispinilla, and Diodorus, through whom he wished to reach Poppæa; he saw Terpnos, and the beautiful Pythagoras, and finally Aliturus and Paris, to whom Cæsar usually refused nothing. With the help of Chrysothemis, then mistress of Vatinius, he tried to gain even his aid, not sparing in this case and in others promises and money.

But all these efforts were fruitless. Seneca, uncertain of the morrow, fell to explaining to him that the Christians, even if they had not burned Rome, should be exterminated, for the good of the city, — in a word, he justified the coming slaughter for political reasons. Terpnos and Diodorus took the money, and did nothing in return for it. Vatinius reported to Cæsar that they had been trying to bribe him. Aliturus alone, who at first was hostile to the Christians, took pity on them then, and made bold to mention to Cæsar the imprisoned maiden, and to implore in her behalf. He obtained nothing, however, but the answer, —

“Dost thou think that I have a soul inferior to that of Brutus, who spared not his own sons for the good of Rome?”

When this answer was repeated to Petronius, he said, —

“Since Nero has compared himself to Brutus, there is no salvation.”

But he was sorry for Vinicius, and dread seized him lest he might attempt his own life. “Now,” thought the arbiter, “he is upheld by the efforts which he makes to save her, by the sight of her, and by his own suffering; but when all means fail and the last ray of hope is quenched, by Castor! he will not survive, he will throw himself on his sword.” Petronius understood better how to die thus than to love and suffer like Vinicius.

Meanwhile Vinicius did all that he could think of to save Lygia. He visited Augustians; and he, once so proud, now begged their assistance. Through Vitellius he offered Tigellinus all his Sicilian estates, and whatever else the man might ask; but Tigellinus, not wishing apparently to offend the Augusta, refused. To go to Cæsar himself, embrace his

knees and implore, would lead to nothing. Vinicius wished, it is true, to do this; but Petronius, hearing of his purpose, inquired, —

“But should he refuse thee, or answer with a jest or a shameless threat, what wouldst thou do?”

At this the young tribune's features contracted with pain and rage, and from his fixed jaws a gritting sound was heard.

“Yes,” said Petronius, “I advise thee against this, because thou wouldst close all paths of rescue.”

Vinicius restrained himself, and passing his palm over his forehead, which was covered with cold sweat, replied, —

“No, no! I am a Christian.”

“But thou wilt forget this, as thou didst a moment ago. Thou hast the right to ruin thyself, but not her. Remember what the daughter of Sejanus passed through before death.”

Speaking thus he was not altogether sincere, since he was concerned more for Vinicius than for Lygia. Still he knew that in no way could he restrain him from a dangerous step as well as by telling him that he would bring inexorable destruction on Lygia. Moreover he was right; for on the Palatine they had counted on the visit of the young tribune, and had taken needful precautions.

But the suffering of Vinicius surpassed human endurance. From the moment that Lygia was imprisoned and the glory of coming martyrdom had fallen on her, not only did he love her a hundred times more, but he began simply to give her in his soul almost religious honor, as he would a superhuman being. And now, at the thought that he must lose this being both loved and holy, that besides death torments might be inflicted on her more terrible than death itself, the blood stiffened in his veins. His soul was turned into one groan, his thoughts were confused. At times it seemed to him that his skull was filled with living fire, which would either burn or burst it. He ceased to understand what was happening; he ceased to understand why Christ, the Merciful, the Divine, did not come with aid to His adherents; why the dingy walls of the Palatine did not sink through the earth, and with them Nero, the Augustians, the pretorian camp, and all that city of crime. He thought that it could not and should not be otherwise; and all that his eyes saw, and because of which his heart was breaking, was a dream. But the roaring of wild beasts informed him that it was reality; the

sound of the axes beneath which rose the arena told him that it was reality; the howling of the people and the over-filled prisons confirmed this. Then his faith in Christ was alarmed; and that alarm was a new torture, the most dreadful of all, perhaps.

"Remember what the daughter of Sejanus endured before death," said Petronius to him, meanwhile.

CHAPTER LII.

AND everything had failed. Vinicius lowered himself to the degree that he sought support from freedmen and slaves, both those of Cæsar and Poppæa; he overpaid their empty promises, he won their good will with rich gifts. He found the first husband of Poppæa, Rufius Crispinus, and obtained from him a letter. He gave a villa in Antium to Rufius, her son by the first marriage; but thereby he merely angered Cæsar, who hated his step-son. By a special courier he sent a letter to Poppæa's second husband, Otho, in Spain. He sacrificed his property and himself, until he saw at last that he was simply the plaything of people; that if he had pretended that the imprisonment of Lygia concerned him little, he would have freed her sooner.

Petronius saw this, too. Meanwhile day followed day. The amphitheatre was finished. The "tesseræ" were distributed, — that is, tickets of entrance, to the ludus matutinus (morning games). But this time the morning games, because of the unheard-of number of victims, were to continue for days, weeks, and months. It was not known where to put Christians. The prisons were crammed, and fever was raging in them. The puticuli — common pits in which slaves were kept — began to be overfilled. There was fear that diseases might spread over the whole city; hence, haste.

All these reports struck the ears of Vinicius, extinguishing in him the last hope. While there was yet time, he might delude himself with the belief that he could do something, but now there was no time. The spectacles must begin. Lygia might find herself any day in a cuniculum of the circus, whence the only exit was to the arena. Vinicius, not knowing whither fate and the cruelty of superior force might throw her, visited all the circuses, bribed guards and beast-keepers, laying before them plans which they could not execute. In time he saw that he was working for this only, — to make death less terrible to her; and just then he felt that instead of brains he had glowing coals in his head.

For the rest he had no thought of surviving her, and determined to perish at the same time. But he feared lest pain might burn his life out before the dreadful hour came. His

friends and Petronius thought also that any day might open the kingdom of shadows before him. His face was black, and resembled those waxen masks kept in *lararia*. In his features astonishment had grown frigid, as if he had no understanding of what had happened and what might happen. When any one spoke to him, he raised his hands to his face mechanically, and, pressing his temples, looked at the speaker with an inquiring and astonished gaze. He passed whole nights with Ursus at Lygia's door in the prison; if she commanded him to go away and rest, he returned to Petronius, and walked in the atrium till morning. The slaves found him frequently kneeling with upraised hands or lying with his face to the earth. He prayed to Christ, for Christ was his last hope. Everything had failed him. Only a miracle could save Lygia; hence he beat the stone flags with his forehead and prayed for the miracle.

But he knew enough yet to understand that Peter's prayers were more important than his own. Peter had promised him Lygia, Peter had baptized him, Peter had performed miracles, let him give aid and rescue.

And a certain night he went to seek the Apostle. The Christians, of whom not many remained, had concealed him now carefully even from other brethren, lest any of the weaker in spirit might betray him wittingly or unwittingly. Vinicius, amid the general confusion and disaster, occupied also in efforts to get Lygia out of prison, had lost sight of Peter, he had barely seen him once from the time of his own baptism till the beginning of the persecution. But betaking himself to that quarryman in whose hut he was baptized, he learned that there would be a meeting outside the *Porta Salaria* in a vineyard which belonged to Cornelius Pudens. The quarryman offered to guide him, and declared that he would find Peter there. They started about dusk, and, passing beyond the wall, through hollows overgrown with reeds, reached the vineyard in a wild and lonely place. The meeting was held in a wine-shed. As Vinicius drew near, the murmur of prayer reached his ears. On entering he saw by dim lamplight a few tens of kneeling figures sunk in prayer. They were saying a kind of litany; a chorus of voices, male and female, repeated every moment, "Christ have mercy on us." In those voices, deep, piercing sadness and sorrow were heard.

Peter was present. He was kneeling in front of the others, before a wooden cross nailed to the wall of the shed, and was praying. From a distance Vinicius recognized his white hair

and his upraised hands. The first thought of the young patrician was to pass through the assembly, cast himself at the Apostle's feet, and cry, "Save!" but whether it was the solemnity of the prayer, or because weakness bent the knees under Vinicius, he began to repeat while he groaned and clasped his hands: "Christ have mercy!" Had he been conscious, he would have understood that his was not the only prayer in which there was a groan; that he was not the only one who had brought with him his pain, alarm, and grief. There was not in that assembly one soul which had not lost persons dear to the heart; and when the most zealous and courageous confessors were in prison already, when with every moment new tidings were borne about of insults and tortures inflicted on them in the prisons, when the greatness of the calamity exceeded every imagination, when only that handful remained, there was not one heart there which was not terrified in its faith, which did not ask doubtfully, Where is Christ? and why does He let evil be mightier than God? Meanwhile they implored Him despairingly for mercy, since in each soul there still smouldered a spark of hope that He would come, hurl Nero into the abyss, and rule the world. They looked yet toward the sky; they listened yet; they prayed yet with trembling. Vinicius, too, in proportion as they repeated, "Christ have mercy on us!" was seized by such an ecstasy as formerly in the quarryman's hut. Now from the depths they call on Him in the profoundness of their sorrow, now Peter calls on Him; so any moment the heavens may be rent, the earth tremble to its foundations, and He appear in infinite glory, with stars at His feet, merciful, but awful. He will raise up the faithful, and command the abysses to swallow the persecutors.

Vinicius covered his face with both hands, and bowed to the earth. Immediately silence was around him, as if fear had stopped further breathing on the lips of all present. And it seemed to him that something must happen surely, that a moment of miracle would follow. He felt certain that when he rose and opened his eyes he would see a light from which mortal eyes would be blinded, and hear a voice from which hearts would grow faint.

But the silence was unbroken. It was interrupted at last by the sobbing of women. Vinicius rose and looked forward with dazed eyes. In the shed, instead of glories not of earth, shone the faint gleam of lanterns, and rays of the moon, entering through an opening in the roof, filled the

place with silvery light. The people kneeling around Vini-
cius raised their tearful eyes toward the cross in silence;
here and there sobbing was heard, and from outside came the
warning whistles of watchmen. Meanwhile Peter rose, and,
turning to the assembly, said, —

“Children, raise your hearts to the Redeemer and offer
Him your tears.”

After that he was silent.

All at once was heard the voice of a woman, full of sor-
rowful complaint and pain, —

“I am a widow; I had one son who supported me. Give
him back, O Lord!”

Silence followed again. Peter was standing before the
kneeling audience, old, full of care. In that moment he
seemed to them decrepitude and weakness personified.
With that a second voice began to complain, —

“Executioners insulted my daughter, and Christ permitted
them!”

Then a third, —

“I alone have remained to my children, and when I am
taken who will give them bread and water?”

Then a fourth, —

“Linus, spared at first, they have taken now and put to
torture, O Lord!”

Then a fifth, —

“When we return to our houses, pretorians will seize us.
We know not where to hide.”

“Woe to us! Who will protect us?”

And thus in that silence of the night complaint after com-
plaint was heard. The old fisherman closed his eyes and
shook his white head over that human pain and fear. New
silence followed; the watchman merely gave out low whistles
beyond the shed.

Vinicius sprang up again, so as to break through the crowd
to the Apostle and demand salvation; but on a sudden he
saw before him, as it were, a precipice, the sight of which
took strength from his feet. What if the Apostle were to
confess his own weakness, affirm that the Roman Cæsar was
stronger than Christ the Nazarene? And at that thought
terror raised the hair on his head, for he felt that in such
a case not only the remnant of his hope would fall into that
abyss, but with it he himself, and all through which he had
life, and there would remain only night and death, resem-
bling a shoreless sea.

Meanwhile Peter began to speak in a voice so low at first
that it was barely possible to hear him, —

“My children, on Golgotha I saw them nail God to the
cross. I heard the hammers, and I saw them raise the cross
on high, so that the rabble might gaze at the death of the
Son of Man. I saw them open His side, and I saw Him die.
When returning from the cross, I cried in pain, as ye are
crying, ‘Woe! woe! O Lord, Thou art God! Why hast
Thou permitted this? Why hast Thou died, and why hast
Thou tormented the hearts of us who believed that Thy
kingdom would come?’

“But He, our Lord and God, rose from the dead the
third day, and was among us till He entered His kingdom in
great glory.

“And we, seeing our little faith, became strong in heart,
and from that time we are sowing His grain.”

Here, turning toward the place whence the first complaint
came, he began in a voice now stronger, —

“Why do ye complain? God gave Himself to torture and
death, and ye wish Him to shield you from the same.
People of little faith, have ye received His teaching? Has
He promised you nothing but life? He comes to you and
says, ‘Follow in my path.’ He raises you to Himself, and ye
catch at this earth with your hands, crying, ‘Lord, save us!’
I am dust before God, but before you I am His apostle and
vicegerent. I speak to you in the name of Christ. Not
death is before you, but life; not tortures, but endless
delights; not tears and groans, but singing; not bondage,
but rule! I, God’s apostle, say this: O widow, thy son will
not die; he will be born into glory, into eternal life, and
thou wilt rejoin him! To thee, O father, whose innocent
daughter was defiled by executioners, I promise that thou
shalt find her whiter than the lilies of Hebron! To you,
mothers, whom they are tearing away from your orphans;
to you who lose fathers; to you who complain; to you who
will see the death of loved ones; to you the careworn, the un-
fortunate, the timid; to you who must die, — in the name of
Christ I declare that ye will wake as if from sleep to a happy
waking, as if from night to the light of God. In the name
of Christ, let the beam fall from your eyes, and let your
hearts be inflamed.”

When he had said this, he raised his hand as if command-
ing, and they felt new blood in their veins, and also a quiver
in their bones; for before them was standing, not a decrepit

and careworn old man, but a potentate, who took their souls and raised them from dust and terror.

"Amen!" called a number of voices.

From the Apostle's eyes came a light ever increasing, power issued from him, majesty issued from him, and holiness. Heads bent before him, and he, when the "Amen" ceased, continued:—

"Ye sow in tears to reap in joy. Why fear ye the power of evil? Above the earth, above Rome, above the walls of cities is the Lord, who has taken His dwelling within you. The stones will be wet from tears, the sand steeped in blood, the valleys will be filled with your bodies, but I say that ye are victorious. The Lord is advancing to the conquest of this city of crime, oppression, and pride, and ye are His legions! He redeemed with His own blood and torture the sins of the world; so He wishes that ye should redeem with torture and blood this nest of injustice. This He announces to you through my lips."

And he opened his arms, and fixed his eyes upward; the hearts almost ceased to beat in their breasts, for they felt that his glance beheld something which their mortal sight could not see.

In fact, his face had changed, and was overspread with serenity; he gazed some time in silence, as if speechless from ecstasy, but after a while they heard his voice,—

"Thou art here, O Lord, and dost show Thy ways to me. True, O Christ! Not in Jerusalem, but in this city of Satan wilt Thou fix Thy capital. Here out of these tears and this blood dost Thou wish to build Thy Church. Here, where Nero rules to-day, Thy eternal kingdom is to stand. Thine, O Lord, O Lord! And Thou commandest these timid ones to form the foundation of Thy holy Zion of their bones, and Thou commandest my spirit to assume rule over it, and over peoples of the earth. And Thou art pouring the fountain of strength on the weak, so that they become strong; and now Thou commandest me to feed Thy sheep from this spot, to the end of ages. Oh, be Thou praised in Thy decrees by which Thou commandest to conquer. Hosanna! Hosanna!"

Those who were timid rose; into those who doubted streams of faith flowed. Some voices cried, "Hosanna!" others, "Pro Christo!" Then silence followed. Bright summer lightning illuminated the interior of the shed, and the pale, excited faces.

Peter, fixed in a vision, prayed a long time yet; but con-

scious at last, he turned his inspired face, full of light, to the assembly, and said,—

"This is how the Lord has overcome doubt in you; so ye will go to victory in His name."

And though he knew that they would conquer, though he knew what would grow out of their tears and blood, still his voice quivered with emotion when he was blessing them with the cross, and he said,—

"Now I bless you, my children, as ye go to torture, to death, to eternity."

They gathered round him and wept. "We are ready," said they; "but do thou, O holy head, guard thyself, for thou art the vicegerent who performs the office of Christ."

And thus speaking, they seized his mantle; he placed his hands on their heads, and blessed each one separately, just as a father does children whom he is sending on a long journey.

And they began at once to go out of the shed, for they were in a hurry, to their houses, and from them to the prisons and arenas. Their thoughts were separated from the earth, their souls had taken flight toward eternity, and they walked on as if in a dream, in ecstasy opposing that force which was in them to the force and the cruelty of the "Beast."

Nereus, the servant of Pudens, took the Apostle and led him by a secret path in the vineyard to his house. But Vinicius followed them in the clear night, and when they reached the cottage of Nereus at last, he threw himself suddenly at the feet of the Apostle.

"What dost thou wish, my son?" asked Peter, recognizing him.

After what he had heard in the vineyard, Vinicius dared not implore him for anything; but, embracing his feet with both hands, he pressed his forehead to them with sobbing, and called for compassion in that dumb manner.

"I know. They took the maiden whom thou lovest. Pray for her."

"Lord," groaned Vinicius, embracing his feet still more firmly,— "Lord, I am a wretched worm; but thou didst know Christ. Implore Him,— take her part."

And from pain he trembled like a leaf; and he beat the earth with his forehead, for, knowing the strength of the Apostle, he knew that he alone could rescue her.

Peter was moved by that pain. He remembered how on a

time Lygia herself, when attacked by Crispus, lay at his feet in like manner imploring pity. He remembered that he had raised her and comforted her; hence now he raised Vinicius.

"My son," said he, "I will pray for her; but do thou remember that I told those doubting ones that God Himself passed through the torment of the cross, and remember that after this life begins another, — an eternal one."

"I know; I have heard!" answered Vinicius, catching the air with his pale lips; "but thou seest, lord, that I cannot! If blood is required, implore Christ to take mine, — I am a soldier. Let Him double, let Him triple, the torment intended for her, I will suffer it; but let Him spare her. She is a child yet, and He is mightier than Cæsar, I believe, mightier. Thou didst love her thyself; thou didst bless us. She is an innocent child yet."

Again he bowed, and, putting his face to Peter's knees, he repeated, —

"Thou didst know Christ, lord, — thou didst know Him. He will give ear to thee; take her part."

Peter closed his lids, and prayed earnestly. The summer lightning illuminated the sky again. Vinicius, by the light of it, looked at the lips of the Apostle, waiting sentence of life or death from them. In the silence quails were heard calling in the vineyard, and the dull, distant sound of tread-mills near the Via Salaria.

"Vinicius," asked the Apostle at last, "dost thou believe?"

"Would I have come hither if I believed not?" answered Vinicius.

"Then believe to the end, for faith will move mountains. Hence, though thou wert to see that maiden under the sword of the executioner or in the jaws of a lion, believe that Christ can save her. Believe, and pray to Him, and I will pray with thee."

Then, raising his face toward heaven, he said aloud, —

"O merciful Christ, look on this aching heart and console it! O merciful Christ, temper the wind to the fleece of the lamb! O merciful Christ, who didst implore the Father to turn away the bitter cup from Thy mouth, turn it from the mouth of this Thy servant! Amen."

But Vinicius, stretching his hand toward the stars, said, groaning, —

"I am Thine; take me instead of her."

The sky began to grow pale in the east.

CHAPTER LIII.

VINICIUS, on leaving the Apostle, went to the prison with a heart renewed by hope. Somewhere in the depth of his soul, despair and terror were still crying; but he stifled those voices. It seemed to him impossible that the intercession of the vicegerent of God and the power of his prayer should be without effect. He feared to hope; he feared to doubt. "I will believe in His mercy," said he to himself, "even though I saw her in the jaws of a lion." And at this thought, even though the soul quivered in him and cold sweat drenched his temples, he believed. Every throb of his heart was a prayer then. He began to understand that faith would move mountains, for he felt in himself a wonderful strength, which he had not felt earlier. It seemed to him that he could do things which he had not the power to do the day before. At moments he had an impression that the danger had passed. If despair was heard groaning again in his soul, he recalled that night, and that holy gray face raised to heaven in prayer. "No, Christ will not refuse His first disciple and the pastor of His flock! Christ will not refuse him! I will not doubt!" And he ran toward the prison as a herald of good news.

But there an unexpected thing awaited him.

All the pretorian guards taking turn before the Mamertine prison knew him, and generally they raised not the least difficulty; this time, however, the line did not open, but a centurion approached him and said, —

"Pardon, noble tribune, to-day we have a command to admit no one."

"A command?" repeated Vinicius, growing pale.

The soldier looked at him with pity, and answered, —

"Yes, lord, a command of Cæsar. In the prison there are many sick, and perhaps it is feared that visitors might spread infection through the city."

"But hast thou said that the order was for to-day only?"

"The guards change at noon."

Vinicius was silent and uncovered his head, for it seemed to him that the pileolus which he wore was of lead.

Meanwhile the soldier approached him, and said in a low voice, —

“Be at rest, lord, the guard and Ursus are watching over her.” When he had said this, he bent and, in the twinkling of an eye, drew with his long Gallic sword on the flag stone the form of a fish.

Vinicius looked at him quickly.

“And thou art a pretorian?”

“Till I shall be there,” answered the soldier, pointing to the prison.

“And I, too, worship Christ.”

“May His name be praised! I know, lord, I cannot admit thee to the prison, but write a letter, I will give it to the guard.”

“Thanks to thee, brother.”

He pressed the soldier's hand, and went away. The pileolus ceased to weigh like lead. The morning sun rose over the walls of the prison, and with its brightness consolation began to enter his heart again. That Christian soldier was for him a new witness of the power of Christ. After a while he halted, and, fixing his glance on the rosy clouds above the Capitol and the temple of Jupiter Stator, he said, —

“I have not seen her to-day, O Lord, but I believe in Thy mercy.”

At the house he found Petronius, who, making day out of night as usual, had returned not long before. He had succeeded, however, in taking his bath and anointing himself for sleep.

“I have news for thee,” said he. “To-day I was with Tullius Senecio, whom Cæsar also visited. I know not whence it came to the mind of the Augusta to bring little Rufius with her, — perhaps to soften the heart of Cæsar by his beauty. Unfortunately, the child, wearied by drowsiness, fell asleep during the reading, as Vespasian did once; seeing this, Ahenobarbus hurled a goblet at his step-son, and wounded him seriously. Poppæa fainted; all heard how Cæsar said, ‘I have enough of this brood!’ and that, knowest thou, means as much as death.”

“The punishment of God was hanging over the Augusta,” answered Vinicius; “but why dost thou tell me this?”

“I tell thee because the anger of Poppæa pursued thee and Lygia; occupied now by her own misfortune, she may leave her vengeance and be more easily influenced. I will see her this evening and talk with her.”

“Thanks to thee. Thou givest me good news.”

“But do thou bathe and rest. Thy lips are blue, and there is not a shadow of thee left.”

“Is not the time of the first ‘*ludus matutinus*’ announced?” inquired Vinicius.

“In ten days. But they will take other prisons first. The more time that remains to us the better. All is not lost yet.”

But he did not believe this; for he knew perfectly that since to the request of Aliturus, Cæsar had found the splendidly sounding answer in which he compared himself to Brutus, there was no rescue for Lygia. He hid also, through pity, what he had heard at Senecio's, that Cæsar and Tigellinus had decided to select for themselves and their friends the most beautiful Christian maidens, and defile them before the torture; the others were to be given, on the day of the games, to pretorians and beast-keepers.

Knowing that Vinicius would not survive Lygia in any case, he strengthened hope in his heart designedly, first, through sympathy for him; and second, because he wished that if Vinicius had to die, he should die beautiful, — not with a face deformed and black from pain and watching.

“To-day I will speak more or less thus to the Augusta,” said he: “Save Lygia for Vinicius, I will save Rufius for thee.’ And I will think of that seriously. One word spoken to Ahenobarbus at the right moment may save or ruin any one. In the worst case, we will gain time.”

“Thanks to thee,” repeated Vinicius.

“Thou wilt thank me best if thou eat and sleep. By Athene! In the greatest straits Odysseus had sleep and food in mind. Thou hast spent the whole night in prison, of course?”

“No,” answered Vinicius; “I wished to visit the prison to-day, but there is an order to admit no one. Learn, O Petronius, if the order is for to-day alone, or till the day of the games.”

“I will discover this evening, and to-morrow morning will tell thee for what time and why the order was issued. But now, even were Helios to go to Cimmerian regions from sorrow, I shall sleep, and do thou follow my example.”

They separated; but Vinicius went to the library and wrote a letter to Lygia. When he had finished, he took it himself to the Christian centurion, who carried it at once to the

prison. After a while he returned with a greeting from Lygia, and promised to deliver her answer that day.

Vinicius did not wish to return home, but sat on a stone and waited for Lygia's letter. The sun had risen high in the heavens, and crowds of people flowed in, as usual, through the Clivus Argentarius to the Forum. Hucksters called out their wares, soothsayers offered their services to passers-by, citizens walked with deliberate steps toward the rostra to hear orators of the day, or tell the latest news to one another. As the heat increased, crowds of idlers betook themselves to the porticos of the temples, from under which flew from moment to moment, with great rustle of wings, flocks of doves, whose white feathers glistened in the sunlight and in the blue of the sky.

From excess of light and the influence of bustle, heat, and great weariness, the eyes of Vinicius began to close. The monotonous calls of boys playing *mora*, and the measured tread of soldiers, lulled him to sleep. He raised his head still a number of times, and took in the prison with his eyes; then he leaned against a stone, sighed like a child drowsy after long weeping, and dropped asleep.

Soon dreams came. It seemed to him that he was carrying Lygia in his arms at night through a strange vineyard. Before him was Pomponia Græcina lighting the way with a lamp. A voice, as it were of Petronius called from afar to him, "Turn back!" but he did not mind the call, and followed Pomponia till they reached a cottage; at the threshold of the cottage stood Peter. He showed Peter Lygia, and said, "We are coming from the arena, lord, but we cannot wake her; wake her thou." "Christ himself will come to wake her," answered the Apostle.

Then the pictures began to change. Through the dream he saw Nero, and Poppæa holding in her arms little Rufius with bleeding head, which Petronius was washing; and he saw Tigellinus sprinkling ashes on tables covered with costly dishes, and Vitellius devouring those dishes, while a multitude of other Augustians were sitting at the feast. He himself was resting near Lygia; but between the tables walked lions from out whose yellow manes trickled blood. Lygia begged him to take her away, but so terrible a weakness had seized him that he could not even move. Then still greater disorder involved his visions, and finally all fell into perfect darkness.

He was roused from deep sleep at last by the heat of the

sun, and shouts given forth right there around the place where he was sitting. Vinicius rubbed his eyes. The street was swarming with people; but two runners, wearing yellow tunics, pushed aside the throng with long staffs, crying and making room for a splendid litter which was carried by four stalwart Egyptian slaves.

In the litter sat a man in white robes, whose face was not easily seen, for he held close to his eyes a roll of papyrus and was reading something diligently.

"Make way for the noble Augustian!" cried the runners.

But the street was so crowded that the litter had to wait awhile. The Augustian put down his roll of papyrus and bent his head, crying, —

"Push aside those wretches! Make haste!"

Seeing Vinicius suddenly, he drew back his head and raised the papyrus quickly.

Vinicius drew his hand across his forehead, thinking that he was dreaming yet.

In the litter was sitting Chilo.

Meanwhile the runners had opened the way, and the Egyptians were ready to move, when the young tribune, who in one moment understood many things which till then had been incomprehensible, approached the litter.

"A greeting to thee, O Chilo!" said he.

"Young man," answered the Greek, with pride and importance, endeavoring to give his face an expression of calmness which was not in his soul, "be greeted, but detain me not, for I am hastening to my friend, the noble Tigellinus."

Vinicius, grasping the edge of the litter and looking him straight in the eyes, said with a lowered voice, —

"Didst thou betray Lygia?"

"Colossus of Memnon!" cried Chilo, with fear.

But there was no threat in the eyes of Vinicius; hence the old Greek's alarm vanished quickly. He remembered that he was under the protection of Tigellinus and of Cæsar himself, — that is, of a power before which everything trembled, — that he was surrounded by sturdy slaves, and that Vinicius stood before him unarmed, with an emaciated face and body bent by suffering.

At this thought his insolence returned to him. He fixed on Vinicius his eyes, which were surrounded by red lids, and whispered in answer, —

"But thou, when I was dying of hunger, didst give command to flog me."

For a moment both were silent; then the dull voice of Vinicius was heard, —

“I wronged thee, Chilo.”

The Greek raised his head, and, snapping his fingers, which in Rome was a mark of slight and contempt, said so loudly that all could hear him, —

“Friend, if thou hast a petition to present, come to my house on the Esquiline in the morning hour, when I receive guests and clients after my bath.”

And he waved his hand; at that sign the Egyptians raised the litter, and the slaves, dressed in yellow tunics, began to cry as they brandished their staffs, —

“Make way for the litter of the noble Chilo Chilonides! Make way, make way!”

CHAPTER LIV.

LYGIA, in a long letter written hurriedly, took farewell of Vinicius forever. She knew that no one was permitted to enter the prison, and that she could see Vinicius only from the arena. She begged him therefore to discover when the turn of the Mamertine prisoners would come, and to be at the games, for she wished to see him once more in life. No fear was evident in her letter. She wrote that she and the others were longing for the arena, where they would find liberation from imprisonment. She hoped for the coming of Pomponia and Aulus; she entreated that they too be present. Every word of hers showed ecstasy, and that separation from life in which all the prisoners lived, and at the same time an unshaken faith that all promises would be fulfilled beyond the grave.

“Whether Christ,” wrote she, “frees me in this life or after death, He has promised me to thee by the lips of the Apostle; therefore I am thine.” She implored him not to grieve for her, and not to let himself be overcome by suffering. For her death was not a dissolution of marriage. With the confidence of a child she assured Vinicius that immediately after her suffering in the arena she would tell Christ that her betrothed Marcus had remained in Rome, that he was longing for her with his whole heart. And she thought that Christ would permit her soul, perhaps, to return to him for a moment, to tell him that she was living, that she did not remember her torments, and that she was happy. Her whole letter breathed happiness and immense hope. There was only one request in it connected with affairs of earth, — that Vinicius should take her body from the spoliarium and bury it as that of his wife in the tomb in which he himself would rest sometime.

He read this letter with a suffering spirit, but at the same time it seemed to him impossible that Lygia should perish under the claws of wild beasts, and that Christ would not take compassion on her. But just in that were hidden hope and trust. When he returned home, he wrote that he would come every day to the walls of the Tullianum to wait till Christ crushed the walls and restored her. He commanded