

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

her to believe that Christ could give her to him, even in the Circus; that the great Apostle was imploring Him to do so, and that the hour of liberation was near. The converted centurion was to bear this letter to her on the morrow.

But when Vinicius came to the prison next morning, the centurion left the rank, approached him first, and said, —

“Listen to me, lord. Christ, who enlightened thee, has shown thee favor. Last night Cæsar’s freedman and those of the prefect came to select Christian maidens for disgrace; they inquired for thy betrothed, but our Lord sent her a fever, of which prisoners are dying in the Tullianum, and they left her. Last evening she was unconscious, and blessed be the name of the Redeemer, for the sickness which has saved her from shame may save her from death.”

Vinicius placed his hand on the soldier’s shoulder to guard himself from falling; but the other continued, —

“Thank the mercy of the Lord! They took and tortured Linus, but, seeing that he was dying, they surrendered him. They may give her now to thee, and Christ will give back health to her.”

The young tribune stood some time with drooping head; then raised it and said in a whisper, —

“True, centurion. Christ, who saved her from shame, will save her from death.” And sitting at the wall of the prison till evening, he returned home to send people for Linus and have him taken to one of his suburban villas.

But when Petronius had heard everything, he determined to act also. He had visited the Augusta; now he went to her a second time. He found her at the bed of little Rufius. The child with broken head was struggling in a fever; his mother, with despair and terror in her heart, was trying to save him, thinking, however, that if she did save him it might be only to perish soon by a more dreadful death.

Occupied exclusively with her own suffering, she would not even hear of Vinicius and Lygia; but Petronius terrified her.

“Thou hast offended,” said he to her, “a new, unknown divinity. Thou, Augusta, art a worshipper, it seems, of the Hebrew Jehovah; but the Christians maintain that Chrestos is his son. Reflect, then, if the anger of the father is not pursuing thee. Who knows but it is their vengeance which has struck thee? Who knows but the life of Rufius depends on this, — how thou wilt act?”

“What dost thou wish me to do?” asked Poppæa, with terror.

“Mollify the offended deities.”

“How?”

“Lygia is sick; influence Cæsar or Tigellinus to give her to Vinicius.”

“Dost thou think that I can do that?” asked she, in despair.

“Thou canst do something else. If Lygia recovers, she must die. Go thou to the temple of Vesta, and ask the *virgo magna* to happen near the Tullianum at the moment when they are leading prisoners out to death, and give command to free that maiden. The chief vestal will not refuse thee.”

“But if Lygia dies of the fever?”

“The Christians say that Christ is vengeful, but just; maybe thou wilt soften Him by thy wish alone.”

“Let Him give me some sign that will heal Rufius.”

Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

“I have not come as His envoy; O divinity, I merely say to thee, Be on better terms with all the gods, Roman and foreign.”

“I will go!” said Poppæa, with a broken voice.

Petronius drew a deep breath. “At last I have done something,” thought he, and returning to Vinicius he said to him, —

“Implore thy God that Lygia die not of the fever, for should she survive, the chief vestal will give command to free her. The Augusta herself will ask her to do so.”

“Christ will free her,” said Vinicius, looking at him with eyes in which fever was glittering.

Poppæa, who for the recovery of Rufius was willing to burn hecatombs to all the gods of the world, went that same evening through the Forum to the vestals, leaving care over the sick child to her faithful nurse, Silvia, by whom she herself had been reared.

But on the Palatine sentence had been issued against the child already; for barely had Poppæa’s litter vanished behind the great gate when two freedmen entered the chamber in which her son was resting. One of these threw himself on old Silvia and gagged her; the other, seizing a bronze statue of the Sphinx, stunned the old woman with the first blow.

Then they approached Rufius. The little boy, tormented

with fever and insensible, not knowing what was passing around him, smiled at them, and blinked with his beautiful eyes, as if trying to recognize the men. Stripping from the nurse her girdle, they put it around his neck and pulled it. The child called once for his mother, and died easily. Then they wound him in a sheet, and sitting on horses which were waiting, hurried to Ostia, where they threw the body into the sea.

Poppæa, not finding the *virgo magna*, who with other vestals was at the house of Vatinius, returned soon to the Palatine. Seeing the empty bed and the cold body of Silvia, she fainted, and when they restored her she began to scream; her wild cries were heard all that night and the day following.

But Cæsar commanded her to appear at a feast on the third day; so, arraying herself in an amethyst-colored tunic, she came and sat with stony face, golden-haired, silent, wonderful, and as ominous as an angel of death.

CHAPTER LV.

BEFORE the Flavii had reared the Colosseum, amphitheatres in Rome were built of wood mainly; for that reason nearly all of them had burned during the fire. But Nero, for the celebration of the promised games, had given command to build several, and among them a gigantic one, for which they began, immediately after the fire was extinguished, to bring by sea and the Tiber great trunks of trees cut on the slopes of Atlas; for the games were to surpass all previous ones in splendor and the number of victims.

Large spaces were given therefore for people and for animals. Thousands of mechanics worked at the structure night and day. They built and ornamented without rest. Wonders were told concerning pillars inlaid with bronze, amber, ivory, mother of pearl, and transmarine tortoise-shells. Canals filled with ice-cold water from the mountains and running along the seats were to keep an agreeable coolness in the building, even during the greatest heat. A gigantic purple velarium gave shelter from the rays of the sun. Among the rows of seats were disposed vessels for the burning of Arabian perfumes; above them were fixed instruments to sprinkle the spectators with dew of saffron and verbena. The renowned builders Severus and Celer put forth all their skill to construct an amphitheatre at once incomparable and fitted for such a number of the curious as none of those known before had been able to accommodate.

Hence, the day when the *ludus matutinus* was to begin, throngs of the populace were awaiting from daylight the opening of the gates, listening with delight to the roars of lions, the hoarse growls of panthers, and the howls of dogs. The beasts had not been fed for two days, but pieces of bloody flesh had been pushed before them to rouse their rage and hunger all the more. At times such a storm of wild voices was raised that people standing before the Circus could not converse, and the most sensitive grew pale from fear.

With the rising of the sun were intoned in the enclosure of the Circus hymns resonant but calm. The people heard

these with amazement, and said one to another, "The Christians! the Christians!" In fact, many detachments of Christians had been brought to the amphitheatre that night, and not from one place, as planned at first, but a few from each prison. It was known in the crowd that the spectacles would continue through weeks and months, but they doubted that it would be possible to finish in a single day those Christians who had been intended for that one occasion. The voices of men, women, and children singing the morning hymn were so numerous that spectators of experience asserted that even if one or two hundred persons were sent out at once, the beasts would grow tired, become sated, and not tear all to pieces before evening. Others declared that an excessive number of victims in the arena would divert attention, and not give a chance to enjoy the spectacle properly.

As the moment drew near for opening the vomitoria, or passages which led to the interior, people grew animated and joyous; they discussed and disputed about various things touching the spectacle. Parties were formed praising the greater efficiency of lions or tigers in tearing. Here and there bets were made. Others however talked about gladiators who were to appear in the arena earlier than the Christians; and again there were parties, some in favor of Samnites, others of Gauls, others of Mirmillons, others of Thracians, others of the retiarii.

Early in the morning larger or smaller detachments of gladiators began to arrive at the amphitheatre under the lead of masters, called lanistæ. Not wishing to be wearied too soon, they entered unarmed, often entirely naked, often with green boughs in their hands, or crowned with flowers, young, beautiful, in the light of morning, and full of life. Their bodies, shining from olive oil, were strong as if chiselled from marble; they roused to delight people who loved shapely forms. Many were known personally, and from moment to moment were heard: "A greeting, Furnius! A greeting, Leo! A greeting, Maximus! A greeting, Diomed!" Young maidens raised to them eyes full of admiration; they, selecting the maiden most beautiful, answered with jests, as if no care weighed on them, sending kisses, or exclaiming, "Embrace me before death does!" Then they vanished in the gates, through which many of them were never to come forth again.

New arrivals drew away the attention of the throngs.

Behind the gladiators came mastigophori; that is, men armed with scourges, whose office it was to lash and urge forward combatants. Next mules drew, in the direction of the spoliarium, whole rows of vehicles on which were piled wooden coffins. People were diverted at sight of this, inferring from the number of coffins the greatness of the spectacle. Now marched in men who were to kill the wounded; these were dressed so that each resembled Charon or Mercury. Next came those who looked after order in the Circus, and assigned places; after that slaves to bear around food and refreshments; finally, pretorians, whom every Cæsar had always at hand in the amphitheatre.

At last the vomitoria were opened, and crowds rushed to the centre. But such was the number of those assembled that they flowed in and flowed in for hours, till it was a marvel that the Circus could hold such a countless multitude. The roars of wild beasts, catching the exhalations of people, grew louder. While taking their places, the spectators made an uproar like the sea in time of storm.

Finally, the prefect of the city came, surrounded by guards; and after him, in unbroken line, appeared the litters of senators, consuls, pretors, ediles, officials of the government and the palace, of pretorian officers, patricians, and exquisite ladies. Some litters were preceded by lictors bearing maces in bundles of rods; others by crowds of slaves. In the sun gleamed the gilding of the litters, the white and varied colored stuffs, feathers, earrings, jewels, steel of the maces. From the Circus came shouts with which the people greeted great dignitaries. Small divisions of pretorians arrived from time to time.

The priests of various temples came somewhat later; only after them were brought in the sacred virgins of Vesta, preceded by lictors.

To begin the spectacle, they were waiting now only for Cæsar, who, unwilling to expose the people to over-long waiting, and wishing to win them by promptness, came soon, in company with the Augusta and Augustians.

Petronius arrived among the Augustians, having Vinicius in his litter. The latter knew that Lygia was sick and unconscious; but as access to the prison had been forbidden most strictly during the preceding days, and as the former guards had been replaced by new ones who were not permitted to speak with the jailers or even to communicate the least information to those who came to inquire about prison-

ers, he was not even sure that she was not among the victims intended for the first day of spectacles. They might send out even a sick woman for the lions, though she were unconscious. But since the victims were to be sewed up in skins of wild beasts and sent to the arena in crowds, no spectator could be certain that one more or less might not be among them, and no man could recognize any one. The jailers and all the servants of the amphitheatre had been bribed, and a bargain made with the beast-keepers to hide Lygia in some dark corner, and give her at night into the hands of a confidant of Vinicius, who would take her at once to the Alban Hills. Petronius, admitted to the secret, advised Vinicius to go with him openly to the amphitheatre, and after he had entered to disappear in the throng and hurry to the vaults, where, to avoid possible mistake, he was to point out Lygia to the guards personally.

The guards admitted him through a small door by which they came out themselves. One of these, named Cyrus, led him at once to the Christians. On the way he said, —

“I know not, lord, that thou wilt find what thou art seeking. We inquired for a maiden named Lygia, but no one gave us answer; it may be, though, that they do not trust us.”

“Are there many?” asked Vinicius.

“Many, lord, had to wait till to-morrow.”

“Are there sick ones among them?”

“There were none who could not stand.”

Cyrus opened a door and entered as it were an enormous chamber, but low and dark, for the light came in only through grated openings which separated it from the arena. At first Vinicius could see nothing; he heard only the murmur of voices in the room, and the shouts of people in the amphitheatre. But after a time, when his eyes had grown used to the gloom, he saw crowds of strange beings, resembling wolves and bears. Those were Christians sewed up in skins of beasts. Some of them were standing; others were kneeling in prayer. Here and there one might divine by the long hair flowing over the skin that the victim was a woman. Women, looking like wolves, carried in their arms children sewed up in equally shaggy coverings. But from beneath the skins appeared bright faces and eyes which in the darkness gleamed with delight and feverishness. It was evident that the greater number of those people were mastered by one thought, exclusive and beyond the earth, — a thought which

during life made them indifferent to everything which happened around them and which could meet them. Some, when asked by Vinicius about Lygia, looked at him with eyes as if roused from sleep, without answering his questions; others smiled at him, placing a finger on their lips or pointing to the iron grating through which bright streaks of light entered. But here and there children were crying, frightened by the roaring of beasts, the howling of dogs, the uproar of people, and the forms of their own parents who looked like wild beasts. Vinicius as he walked by the side of Cyrus looked into faces, searched, inquired, at times stumbled against bodies of people who had fainted from the crowd, the stifling air, the heat, and pushed farther into the dark depth of the room, which seemed to be as spacious as a whole amphitheatre.

But he stopped on a sudden, for he seemed to hear near the grating a voice known to him. He listened for a while, turned, and, pushing through the crowd, went near. Light fell on the face of the speaker, and Vinicius recognized under the skin of a wolf the emaciated and implacable countenance of Crispus.

“Mourn for your sins!” exclaimed Crispus, “for the moment is near. But whoso thinks by death itself to redeem his sins commits a fresh sin, and will be hurled into endless fire. With every sin committed in life ye have renewed the Lord’s suffering; how dare ye think that that life which awaits you will redeem this one? To-day the just and the sinner will die the same death; but the Lord will find His own. Woe to you, the claws of the lions will rend your bodies; but not your sins, nor your reckoning with God. The Lord showed mercy sufficient when He let Himself be nailed to the cross; but thenceforth He will be only the judge, who will leave no fault unpunished. Whoso among you has thought to extinguish his sins by suffering, has blasphemed against God’s justice, and will sink all the deeper. Mercy is at an end, and the hour of God’s wrath has come. Soon ye will stand before the awful Judge in whose presence the good will hardly be justified. Bewail your sins, for the jaws of hell are open; woe to you, husbands and wives; woe to you, parents and children.”

And stretching forth his bony hands, he shook them above the bent heads; he was unterrified and implacable even in the presence of death, to which in a while all those doomed people were to go. After his words, were heard voices:

"We bewail our sins!" Then came silence, and only the cry of children was audible, and the beating of hands against breasts.

The blood of Vinicius stiffened in his veins. He, who had placed all his hope in the mercy of Christ, heard now that the day of wrath had come, and that even death in the arena would not obtain mercy. Through his head shot, it is true, the thought, clear and swift as lightning, that Peter would have spoken otherwise to those about to die. Still those terrible words of Crispus filled with fanaticism that dark chamber with its grating, beyond which was the field of torture. The nearness of that torture, and the throng of victims arrayed for death already, filled his soul with fear and terror. All this seemed to him dreadful, and a hundred times more ghastly than the bloodiest battle in which he had ever taken part. The odor and heat began to stifle him; cold sweat came out on his forehead. He was seized by fear that he would faint like those against whose bodies he had stumbled while searching in the depth of the apartment; so when he remembered that they might open the grating any moment, he began to call Lygia and Ursus aloud, in the hope that, if not they, some one knowing them would answer.

In fact, some man, clothed as a bear, pulled his toga, and said, —

"Lord, they remained in prison. I was the last one brought out; I saw her sick on the couch."

"Who art thou?" inquired Vinicius.

"The quarryman in whose hut the Apostle baptized thee, lord. They imprisoned me three days ago, and to-day I die."

Vinicius was relieved. When entering, he had wished to find Lygia; now he was ready to thank Christ that she was not there, and to see in that a sign of mercy. Meanwhile the quarryman pulled his toga again, and said, —

"Dost remember, lord, that I conducted thee to the vineyard of Cornelius, when the Apostle discoursed in the shed?"

"I remember."

"I saw him later, the day before they imprisoned me. He blessed me, and said that he would come to the amphitheatre to bless the perishing. If I could look at him in the moment of death and see the sign of the cross, it would be easier for me to die. If thou know where he is, lord, inform me."

Vinicius lowered his voice, and said, —

"He is among the people of Petronius, disguised as a slave. I know not where they chose their places, but I will return to the Circus and see. Look thou at me when ye enter the arena. I will rise and turn my face toward them; then thou wilt find him with thy eyes."

"Thanks to thee, lord, and peace be with thee."

"May the Redeemer be merciful to thee."

"Amen."

Vinicius went out of the cuniculum, and betook himself to the amphitheatre, where he had a place near Petronius among the other Augustians.

"Is she there?" inquired Petronius.

"No; she remained in prison."

"Hear what has occurred to me, but while listening look at Nigidia for example, so that we may seem to talk of her hair-dressing. Tigellinus and Chilo are looking at us now. Listen then. Let them put Lygia in a coffin at night and carry her out of the prison as a corpse; thou divinest the rest?"

"Yes," answered Vinicius.

Their further conversation was interrupted by Tullius Senecio, who, bending toward them, asked, —

"Do ye know whether they will give weapons to the Christians?"

"We do not," answered Petronius.

"I should prefer that arms were given," said Tullius; "if not, the arena will become like butcher's shambles too early. But what a splendid amphitheatre!"

The sight was, in truth, magnificent. The lower seats, crowded with togas, were as white as snow. In the gilded podium sat Cæsar, wearing a diamond collar and a golden crown on his head; next to him sat the beautiful and gloomy Augusta, and on both sides were vestal virgins, great officials, senators with embroidered togas, officers of the army with glittering weapons, — in a word, all that was powerful, brilliant, and wealthy in Rome. In the farther rows sat knights; and higher up darkened in rows a sea of common heads, above which from pillar to pillar hung festoons of roses, lilies, ivy, and grapevines.

People conversed aloud, called to one another, sang; at times they broke into laughter at some witty word which was sent from row to row, and they stamped with impatience to hasten the spectacle.

At last the stamping became like thunder, and unbroken. Then the prefect of the city, who rode around the arena with a brilliant retinue, gave a signal with a handkerchief, which was answered throughout the amphitheatre by "A-a-a!" from thousands of breasts.

Usually a spectacle was begun by hunts of wild beasts, in which various Northern and Southern barbarians excelled; but this time they had too many beasts, so they began with andabates, — that is, men wearing helmets without an opening for the eyes, hence fighting blindfold. A number of these came into the arena together, and slashed at random with their swords; the scourgers with long forks pushed some toward others to make them meet. The more select of the audience looked with contempt and indifference at this spectacle; but the crowd were amused by the awkward motions of the swordsmen. When it happened that they met with their shoulders, they burst out in loud laughter. "To the right!" "To the left!" cried they, misleading the opponents frequently by design. A number of pairs closed, however, and the struggle began to be bloody. The determined combatants cast aside their shields, and giving their left hands to each other, so as not to part again, struggled to the death with their right. Whoever fell raised his fingers, begging mercy by that sign; but in the beginning of a spectacle the audience demanded death usually for the wounded, especially in the case of men who had their faces covered and were unknown. Gradually the number of combatants decreased; and when at last only two remained, these were pushed together; both fell on the sand, and stabbed each other mutually. Then, amid cries of "Peractum est!" servants carried out the bodies, youths raked away the bloody traces on the sand and sprinkled it with leaves of saffron.

Now a more important contest was to come, — rousing interest not only in the herd, but in exquisites; during this contest young patricians made enormous bets at times, often losing all they owned. Straightway from hand to hand went tablets on which were written names of favorites, and also the number of sestertia which each man wagered on his favorite. "Spectati" — that is, champions who had appeared already on the arena and gained victories — found most partisans; but among betters were also those who risked considerably on gladiators who were new and quite unknown, hoping to win immense sums should these conquer. Cæsar himself bet; priests, vestals, senators, knights bet; the populace bet.

People of the crowd, when money failed them, bet their own freedom frequently. They waited with heart-beating and even with fear for the combatants, and more than one made audible vows to the gods to gain their protection for a favorite.

In fact, when the shrill sound of trumpets was heard, there was a stillness of expectation in the amphitheatre. Thousands of eyes were turned to the great bolts, which a man approached dressed like Charon, and amid the universal silence struck three times with a hammer, as if summoning to death those who were hidden behind them. Then both halves of the gate opened slowly, showing a black gully, out of which gladiators began to appear in the bright arena. They came in divisions of twenty-five, Thracians, Mirmillons, Samnites, Gauls, each nation separately, all heavily armed; and last the retiarii, holding in one hand a net, in the other a trident. At sight of them, here and there on the benches rose applause, which soon turned into one immense and unbroken storm. From above to below were seen excited faces, clapping hands, and open mouths, from which shouts burst forth. The gladiators encircled the whole arena with even and springy tread, gleaming with their weapons and rich outfit; they halted before Cæsar's podium, proud, calm, and brilliant. The shrill sound of a horn stopped the applause; the combatants stretched their right hands upward, raised their eyes and heads toward Cæsar, and began to cry or rather to chant with drawing voice, —

"Ave, Cæsar imperator!
Morituri te salutant!"

Then they pushed apart quickly, occupying their places on the arena. They were to attack one another in whole detachments; but first it was permitted the most famous fencers to have a series of single combats, in which the strength, dexterity, and courage of opponents were best exhibited. In fact, from among the Gauls appeared a champion, well known to lovers of the amphitheatre under the name of Lanio, a victor in many games. With a great helmet on his head, and in mail which formed a ridge in front of his powerful breast and behind, he looked in the gleam of the golden arena like a giant beetle. The no less famous retiarius Calendio came out against him.

Among the spectators people began to bet.

"Five hundred sestertia on the Gaul!"

"Five hundred on Calendio!"

"By Hercules, one thousand!"

"Two thousand!"

Meanwhile the Gaul, reaching the centre of the arena, began to withdraw with pointed sword, and, lowering his head, watched his opponent carefully through the opening of his visor; the light retiarius, stately, statuesque, wholly naked save a belt around his loins, circled quickly about his heavy antagonist, waving the net with graceful movement, lowering or raising his trident, and singing the usual song of the retiarius, —

"Non te peto, piscem peto;
Quid me fugis, Galle?"¹

But the Gaul was not fleeing, for after a while he stopped, and standing in one place began to turn with barely a slight movement, so as to have his enemy always in front. In his form and monstrously large head there was now something terrible. The spectators understood perfectly that that heavy body encased in bronze was preparing for a sudden throw to decide the battle. The retiarius meanwhile sprang up to him, then sprang away, making with his three-toothed fork motions so quick that the eye hardly followed them. The sound of the teeth on the shield was heard repeatedly; but the Gaul did not quiver, giving proof by this of his gigantic strength. All his attention seemed fixed, not on the trident, but the net which was circling above his head, like a bird of ill omen. The spectators held the breath in their breasts, and followed the masterly play of the gladiators. The Gaul waited, chose the moment, and rushed at last on his enemy; the latter with equal quickness shot past under his sword, straightened himself with raised arm, and threw the net.

The Gaul, turning where he stood, caught it on his shield; then both sprang apart. In the amphitheatre shouts of "Macte!" thundered; in the lower rows they began to make new bets. Cæsar himself, who at first had been talking with Rubria, and so far had not paid much attention to the spectacle, turned his head toward the arena.

They began to struggle again, so regularly and with such precision in their movements, that sometimes it seemed that with them it was not a question of life or death, but of ex-

¹ "I seek not thee, I seek a fish;
Why flee from me, O Gaul?"

hibiting skill. The Gaul, escaping twice more from the net, pushed toward the edge of the arena; those who held bets against him, not wishing the champion to rest, began to cry, "Bear on!" The Gaul obeyed, and attacked. The arm of the retiarius was covered on a sudden with blood, and his net dropped. The Gaul summoned his strength, and sprang forward to give the final blow. That instant Calendio, who feigned inability to wield the net, sprang aside, escaped the thrust, ran the trident between the knees of his opponent, and brought him to the earth.

The Gaul tried to rise, but in a twinkling he was covered by the fatal meshes, in which he was entangled more and more by every movement of his feet and hands. Meanwhile stabs of the trident fixed him time after time to the earth. He made one more effort, rested on his arm, and tried to rise; in vain! He raised to his head his failing hand which could hold the sword no longer, and fell on his back. Calendio pressed his neck to the ground with the trident, and, resting both hands on the handle of it, turned toward Cæsar's box.

The whole Circus was trembling from plaudits and the roar of people. For those who had bet on Calendio he was at that moment greater than Cæsar; but for this very reason animosity against the Gaul vanished from their hearts. At the cost of his blood he had filled their purses. The voices of the audience were divided. On the upper seats half the signs were for death, and half for mercy; but the retiarius looked only at the box of Cæsar and the vestals, waiting for what they would decide.

To the misfortune of the fallen gladiator, Nero did not like him, for at the last games before the fire he had bet against the Gaul, and had lost considerable sums to Licinus; hence he thrust his hand out of the podium, and turned his thumb toward the earth.

The vestals supported the sign at once. Calendio knelt on the breast of the Gaul, drew a short knife from his belt, pushed apart the armor around the neck of his opponent, and drove the three-edged blade into his throat to the handle.

"Peractum est!" sounded voices in the amphitheatre.

The Gaul quivered a time, like a stabbed bullock, dug the sand with his heels, stretched, and was motionless.

Mercury had no need to try with heated iron if he were living yet. He was hidden away quickly, and other pairs

appeared. After them came a battle of whole detachments. The audience took part in it with soul, heart, and eyes. They howled, roared, whistled, applauded, laughed, urged on the combatants, grew wild. The gladiators on the arena, divided into two legions, fought with the rage of wild beasts; breast struck breast, bodies were intertwined in a death grapple, strong limbs cracked in their joints, swords were buried in breasts and in stomachs, pale lips threw blood on to the sand. Toward the end such terrible fear seized some novices that, tearing themselves from the turmoil, they fled; but the scourgers drove them back again quickly to the battle with lashes tipped with lead. On the sand great dark spots were formed; more and more naked and armed bodies lay stretched like grain sheaves. The living fought on the corpses; they struck against armor and shields, cut their feet against broken weapons, and fell. The audience lost self-command from delight; and intoxicated with death breathed it, sated their eyes with the sight of it, and drew into their lungs the exhalations of it with ecstasy.

The conquered lay dead, almost every man. Barely a few wounded knelt in the middle of the arena, and trembling stretched their hands to the audience with a prayer for mercy. To the victors were given rewards, — crowns, olive wreaths. And a moment of rest came, which, at command of the all-powerful Cæsar, was turned into a feast. Perfumes were burned in vases. Sprinklers scattered saffron and violet rain on the people. Cooling drinks were served, roasted meats, sweet cakes, wine, olives, and fruits. The people devoured, talked, and shouted in honor of Cæsar, to incline him to greater bounteousness. When hunger and thirst had been satisfied, hundreds of slaves bore around baskets full of gifts, from which boys, dressed as Cupids, took various objects and threw them with both hands among the seats. When lottery tickets were distributed, a battle began. People crowded, threw, trampled one another; cried for rescue, sprang over rows of seats, stifled one another in the terrible crush, since whoever got a lucky number might win possibly a house with a garden, a slave, a splendid dress, or a wild beast which he could sell to the amphitheatre afterward. For this reason there were such disorders that frequently the pretorians had to interfere; and after every distribution they carried out people with broken arms or legs, and some were even trampled to death in the throng.

But the more wealthy took no part in the fight for *tesseræ*.

The Augustians amused themselves now with the spectacle of Chilo, and with making sport of his vain efforts to show that he could look at fighting and blood-spilling as well as any man. But in vain did the unfortunate Greek wrinkle his brow, gnaw his lips, and squeeze his fists till the nails entered his palms. His Greek nature and his personal cowardice were unable to endure such sights. His face grew pale, his forehead was dotted with drops of sweat, his lips were blue, his eyes turned in, his teeth began to chatter, and a trembling seized his body. At the end of the battle he recovered somewhat; but when they attacked him with tongues, sudden anger seized him, and he defended himself desperately.

"Ha, Greek! the sight of torn skin on a man is beyond thy strength!" said Vatinius, taking him by the beard.

Chilo bared his last two yellow teeth at him and answered, —

"My father was not a cobbler, so I cannot mend it."

"Macte! habet (Good! he has caught it!)" called a number of voices; but others jeered on.

"He is not to blame that instead of a heart he has a piece of cheese in his breast," said Senecio.

"Thou art not to blame that instead of a head thou hast a bladder," retorted Chilo.

"Maybe thou wilt become a gladiator! thou wouldst look well with a net on the arena."

"If I should catch thee in it, I should catch a stinking hoopoe."

"And how will it be with the Christians?" asked Festus, from Liguria. "Wouldst thou not like to be a dog and bite them?"

"I should not like to be thy brother."

"Thou Mæotian copper-nose!"

"Thou Ligurian mule!"

"Thy skin is itching, evidently, but I don't advise thee to ask me to scratch it."

"Scratch thyself. If thou scratch thy own pimple, thou wilt destroy what is best in thee."

And in this manner they attacked him. He defended himself venomously, amid universal laughter. Cæsar, clapping his hands, repeated, "Macte!" and urged them on. After a while Petronius approached, and, touching the Greek's shoulder with his carved ivory cane, said coldly, —

"This is well, philosopher; but in one thing thou hast blundered: the gods created thee a pickpocket, and thou

hast become a demon. That is why thou canst not endure."

The old man looked at him with his red eyes, but this time somehow he did not find a ready insult. He was silent for a moment; then answered, as if with a certain effort, —

"I shall endure."

Meanwhile the trumpets announced the end of the interval. People began to leave the passages where they had assembled to straighten their legs and converse. A general movement set in with the usual dispute about seats occupied previously. Senators and patricians hastened to their places. The uproar ceased after a time, and the amphitheatre returned to order. On the arena a crowd of people appeared whose work was to dig out here and there lumps of sand formed with stiffened blood.

The turn of the Christians was at hand. But since that was a new spectacle for people, and no one knew how the Christians would bear themselves, all waited with a certain curiosity. The disposition of the audience was attentive but unfriendly; they were waiting for uncommon scenes. Those people who were to appear had burned Rome and its ancient treasures. They had drunk the blood of infants, and poisoned water; they had cursed the whole human race, and committed the vilest crimes. The harshest punishment did not suffice the roused hatred; and if any fear possessed people's hearts, it was this: that the torture of the Christians would not equal the guilt of those ominous criminals.

Meanwhile the sun had risen high; its rays, passing through the purple velarium, had filled the amphitheatre with blood-colored light. The sand assumed a fiery hue, and in those gleams, in the faces of people, as well as in the empty arena, which after a time was to be filled with the torture of people and the rage of savage beasts, there was something terrible. Death and terror seemed hovering in the air. The throng, usually gladsome, became moody under the influence of hate and silence. Faces had a sullen expression.

Now the prefect gave a sign. The same old man appeared, dressed as Charon, who had called the gladiators to death, and, passing with slow step across the arena amid silence, he struck three times again on the door.

Throughout the amphitheatre was heard the deep murmur, —

"The Christians! the Christians!"

The iron gratings creaked; through the dark openings were heard the usual cries of the scourgers, "To the sand!" and in one moment the arena was peopled with crowds as it were of satyrs covered with skins. All ran quickly, somewhat feverishly, and, reaching the middle of the circle, they knelt one by another with raised hands. The spectators, judging this to be a prayer for pity, and enraged by such cowardice, began to stamp, whistle, throw empty wine-vessels, bones from which the flesh had been eaten, and shout, "The beasts! the beasts!" But all at once something unexpected took place. From out the shaggy assembly singing voices were raised, and then sounded that hymn heard for the first time in a Roman amphitheatre, "Christus regnat!"¹

Astonishment seized the spectators. The condemned sang with eyes raised to the velarium. The audience saw faces pale, but as it were inspired. All understood that those people were not asking for mercy, and that they seemed not to see the Circus, the audience, the Senate, or Cæsar. "Christus regnat!" rose ever louder, and in the seats, far up to the highest, among the rows of spectators, more than one asked himself the question, "What is happening, and who is that Christus who reigns in the mouths of those people who are about to die?" But meanwhile a new grating was opened, and into the arena rushed, with mad speed and barking, whole packs of dogs, — gigantic, yellow Molossians from the Peloponnesus, pied dogs from the Pyrenees, and wolf-like hounds from Hibernia, purposely famished; their sides lank, and their eyes bloodshot. Their howls and whines filled the amphitheatre. When the Christians had finished their hymn, they remained kneeling, motionless, as if petrified, merely repeating in one groaning chorus, "Pro Christo! Pro Christo!" The dogs, catching the odor of people under the skins of beasts, and surprised by their silence, did not rush on them at once. Some stood against the walls of the boxes, as if wishing to go among the spectators; others ran around barking furiously, as though chasing some unseen beast. The people were angry. A thousand voices began to call; some howled like wild beasts; some barked like dogs; others urged them on in every language. The amphitheatre was trembling from uproar. The excited dogs began to run to the kneeling people, then to draw back, snapping their teeth, till at last one of the Molossians drove his teeth

¹ "Christ reigns!"

into the shoulder of a woman kneeling in front, and dragged her under him.

Tens of dogs rushed into the crowd now, as if to break through it. The audience ceased to howl, so as to look with greater attention. Amidst the howling and whining were heard yet plaintive voices of men and women: "Pro Christo! Pro Christo!" but on the arena were formed quivering masses of the bodies of dogs and people. Blood flowed in streams from the torn bodies. Dogs dragged from each other the bloody limbs of people. The odor of blood and torn entrails was stronger than Arabian perfumes, and filled the whole Circus.

At last only here and there were visible single kneeling forms, which were soon covered by moving squirming masses.

Vinicius, who at the moment when the Christians ran in, stood up and turned so as to indicate to the quarryman, as he had promised, the direction in which the Apostle was hidden among the people of Petronius, sat down again, and with the face of a dead man continued to look with glassy eyes on the ghastly spectacle. At first fear that the quarryman might have been mistaken, and that perchance Lygia was among the victims, benumbed him completely; but when he heard the voices, "Pro Christo!" when he saw the torture of so many victims who, in dying, confessed their faith and their God, another feeling possessed him, piercing him like the most dreadful pain, but irresistible. That feeling was this,—if Christ Himself died in torment, if thousands are perishing for Him now, if a sea of blood is poured forth, one drop more signifies nothing, and it is a sin even to ask for mercy. That thought came to him from the arena, penetrated him with the groans of the dying, with the odor of their blood. But still he prayed and repeated with parched lips, "O Christ! O Christ! and Thy Apostle prayed for her!" Then he forgot himself, lost consciousness of where he was. It seemed to him that blood on the arena was rising and rising, that it was coming up and flowing out of the Circus over all Rome. For the rest he heard nothing, neither the howling of dogs nor the uproar of the people nor the voices of the Augustians, who began all at once to cry,—

"Chilo has fainted!"

"Chilo has fainted!" said Petronius, turning toward the Greek.

And he had fainted really; he sat there white as linen, his head fallen back, his mouth wide open, like that of a corpse.

At that same moment they were urging into the arena new victims, sewed up in skins.

These knelt immediately, like those who had gone before; but the weary dogs would not rend them. Barely a few threw themselves on to those kneeling nearest; but others lay down, and, raising their bloody jaws, began to scratch their sides and yawn heavily.

Then the audience, disturbed in spirit, but drunk with blood and wild, began to cry with hoarse voices,—

"The lions! the lions! Let out the lions!"

The lions were to be kept for the next day; but in the amphitheatres the people imposed their will on every one, even on Cæsar. Caligula alone, insolent and changeable in his wishes, dared to oppose them, and there were cases when he gave command to beat the people with clubs; but even he yielded most frequently. Nero, to whom plaudits were dearer than all else in the world, never resisted. All the more did he not resist now, when it was a question of mollifying the populace, excited after the conflagration, and a question of the Christians, on whom he wished to cast the blame of the catastrophe.

He gave the sign therefore to open the cuniculum, seeing which, the people were calmed in a moment. They heard the creaking of the doors behind which were the lions. At sight of the lions the dogs gathered with low whines, on the opposite side of the arena. The lions walked into the arena one after another, immense, tawny, with great shaggy heads. Cæsar himself turned his wearied face toward them, and placed the emerald to his eye to see better. The Augustians greeted them with applause; the crowd counted them on their fingers, and followed eagerly the impression which the sight of them would make on the Christians kneeling in the centre, who again had begun to repeat the words, without meaning for many, though annoying to all, "Pro Christo! Pro Christo!"

But the lions, though hungry, did not hasten to their victims. The ruddy light in the arena dazzled them and they half closed their eyes as if dazed. Some stretched their yellowish bodies lazily; some, opening their jaws, yawned,—one might have said that they wanted to show their terrible teeth to the audience. But later the odor of blood and torn bodies, many of which were lying on the sand, began to act on them. Soon their movements became restless, their manes rose, their nostrils drew in the air with

hoarse sound. One fell suddenly on the body of a woman with a torn face, and, lying with his fore paws on the body, licked with rough tongue the stiffened blood: another approached a man who was holding in his arms a child sewed up in a fawn's skin.

The child, trembling from crying, and weeping, clung convulsively to the neck of its father; he, to prolong its life even for a moment, tried to pull it from his neck, so as to hand it to those kneeling farther on. But the cry and the movement irritated the lion. All at once he gave out a short, broken roar, killed the child with one blow of his paw, and seizing the head of the father in his jaws, crushed it in a twinkling.

At sight of this all the other lions fell upon the crowd of Christians. Some women could not restrain cries of terror; but the audience drowned these with plaudits, which soon ceased, however, for the wish to see gained the mastery. They beheld terrible things then: heads disappearing entirely in open jaws, breasts torn apart with one blow, hearts and lungs swept away; the crushing of bones under the teeth of lions. Some lions, seizing victims by the ribs or loins, ran with mad springs through the arena, as if seeking hidden places in which to devour them; others fought, rose on their hind legs, grappled one another like wrestlers, and filled the amphitheatre with thunder. People rose from their places. Some left their seats, went down lower through the passages to see better, and crowded one another mortally. It seemed that the excited multitude would throw itself at last into the arena, and rend the Christians in company with the lions. At moments an unearthly noise was heard; at moments applause; at moments roaring, rumbling, the clashing of teeth, the howling of Molossian dogs; at times only groans.

Cæsar, holding the emerald to his eye, looked now with attention. The face of Petronius assumed an expression of contempt and disgust. Chilo had been borne out of the Circus.

But from the cuniculum new victims were driven forth continually.

From the highest row in the amphitheatre the Apostle Peter looked at them. No one saw him, for all heads were turned to the arena; so he rose and as formerly in the vineyard of Cornelius he had blessed for death and eternity those who were intended for imprisonment, so now he blessed with the cross those who were perishing under the teeth of wild

beasts. He blessed their blood, their torture, their dead bodies turned into shapeless masses, and their souls flying away from the bloody sand. Some raised their eyes to him, and their faces grew radiant; they smiled when they saw high above them the sign of the cross. But his heart was rent, and he said, "O Lord! let Thy will be done. These my sheep perish to Thy glory in testimony of the truth. Thou didst command me to feed them; hence I give them to Thee, and do Thou count them, Lord, take them, heal their wounds, soften their pain, give them happiness greater than the torments which they suffered here."

And he blessed them one after another, crowd after crowd, with as much love as if they had been his children whom he was giving directly into the hands of Christ. Then Cæsar, whether from madness, or the wish that the exhibition should surpass everything seen in Rome so far, whispered a few words to the prefect of the city. He left the podium and went at once to the cuniculum. Even the populace were astonished when, after a while, they saw the gratings open again. Beasts of all kinds were let out this time,—tigers from the Euphrates, Numidian panthers, bears, wolves, hyenas, and jackals. The whole arena was covered as with a moving sea of striped, yellow, flax-colored, dark-brown, and spotted skins. There rose a chaos in which the eye could distinguish nothing save a terrible turning and twisting of the backs of wild beasts. The spectacle lost the appearance of reality, and became as it were an orgy of blood, a dreadful dream, a gigantic kaleidoscope of mad fancy. The measure was surpassed. Amidst roars, howls, whines, here and there on the seats of the spectators were heard the terrified and spasmodic laughter of women, whose strength had given way at last. The people were terrified. Faces grew dark. Various voices began to cry, "Enough! enough!"

But it was easier to let the beasts in than drive them back again. Cæsar, however, found a means of clearing the arena, and a new amusement for the people. In all the passages between the seats appeared detachments of Numidians, black and stately, in feathers and earrings, with bows in their hands. The people divined what was coming, and greeted the archers with a shout of delight. The Numidians approached the railing, and, putting their arrows to the strings, began to shoot from their bows into the crowd of beasts. That was a new spectacle truly. Their bodies, shapely as if cut from dark marble, bent

backward, stretched the flexible bows, and sent bolt after bolt. The whizzing of the strings and the whistling of the feathered missiles were mingled with the howling of beasts and cries of wonder from the audience. Wolves, bears, panthers, and people yet alive fell side by side. Here and there a lion, feeling a shaft in his ribs, turned with sudden movement, his jaws wrinkled from rage, to seize and break the arrow. Others groaned from pain. The small beasts, falling into a panic, ran around the arena at random, or thrust their heads into the grating; meanwhile the arrows whizzed and whizzed on, till all that was living had lain down in the final quiver of death.

Hundreds of slaves rushed into the arena armed with spades, shovels, brooms, wheelbarrows, baskets for carrying out entrails, and bags of sand. They came, crowd after crowd, and over the whole circle there seethed up a feverish activity. The space was soon cleared of bodies, blood, and mire, dug over, made smooth, and sprinkled with a thick layer of fresh sand. That done, Cupids ran in, scattering leaves of roses, lilies, and the greatest variety of flowers. The censers were ignited again, and the velarium was removed, for the sun had sunk now considerably. But people looked at one another with amazement, and inquired what kind of new spectacle was waiting for them on that day.

Indeed, such a spectacle was waiting as no one had looked for. Cæsar, who had left the podium some time before, appeared all at once on the flowery arena, wearing a purple mantle, and a crown of gold. Twelve choristers holding citharæ followed him. He had a silver lute, and advanced with solemn tread to the middle, bowed a number of times to the spectators, raised his eyes, and stood as if waiting for inspiration.

Then he struck the strings and began to sing, —

“O radiant son of Leto,
Ruler of Tenedos, Chios, Chrysos,
Art thou he who, having in his care
The sacred city of Ilium,
Could yield it to Argive anger,
And suffer sacred altars,
Which blazed unceasingly to his honor,
To be stained with Trojan blood?
Aged men raised trembling hands to thee,
O thou of the far-shooting silver bow,
Mothers from the depth of their breasts

Raised tearful cries to thee,
Imploring pity on their offspring.
Those complaints might have moved a stone,
But to the suffering of people
Thou, O Smintheus, wert less feeling than a stone!”

The song passed gradually into an elegy, plaintive and full of pain. In the Circus there was silence. After a while Cæsar, himself affected, sang on, —

“With the sound of thy heavenly lyre
Thou couldst drown the wailing,
The lament of hearts.
At the sad sound of this song
The eye to-day is filled with tears,
As a flower is filled with dew,
But who can raise from dust and ashes
That day of fire, disaster, ruin?
O Smintheus, where wert thou then?”

Here his voice quivered and his eyes grew moist. Tears appeared on the lids of the vestals; the people listened in silence before they burst into a long unbroken storm of applause.

Meanwhile from outside through the vomitoria came the sound of creaking vehicles on which were placed the bloody remnants of Christians, men, women, and children, to be taken to the pits called “puticuli.”

But the Apostle Peter seized his trembling white head with his hands, and cried in spirit, —

“O Lord, O Lord! to whom hast Thou given rule over the earth, and why wilt Thou found in this place Thy capital?”