and that the authors of the conflagration are Christians, thy punishment will be limited to stripes and exile."

"I cannot do that," answered Chilo, calmly.

Tigellinus approached him with slow step, and with a voice also low but terrible, —

"How is that?" asked he. "Thou canst not, Greek dog? Wert thou not drunk, and dost thou not understand what is waiting for thee? Look there!" and he pointed to a corner of the atrium in which, near a long wooden bench, stood four Thracian slaves in the shade with ropes, and with pincers in their hands.

But Chilo answered, —

"I cannot!"

Rage seized Tigellinus, but he restrained himself yet.

"Hast thou seen," inquired he, "how Christians die? Dost wish to die in that way?"

The old man raised his pale face; for a time his lips moved in silence, and he answered, —

"I too believe in Christ."

Tigellinus looked at him with amazement.

"Dog, thou hast gone mad in fact!"

And suddenly the rage in his breast broke its bonds. Springing at Chilo, he caught him by the beard with both hands, hurled him to the floor, trampled him, repeating, with foam on his lips, —

"Thou wilt retract! thou wilt!"

"I cannot!" answered Chilo from the floor.

"To the tortures with him!"

At this command the Thracians seized the old man, and placed him on the bench; then, fastening him with ropes to it, they began to squeeze his thin shanks with pincers. But when they were tying him he kissed their hands with humility; then he closed his eyes, and seemed dead.

He was alive, though; for when Tigellinus bent over him and inquired once again, "Wilt thou retract?" his white lips moved slightly, and from them came the barely audible whisper, —

"I cannot."

Tigellinus gave command to stop the torture, and began to walk up and down in the atrium with a face distorted by anger, but helpless. At last a new idea came to his head, for he turned to the Thracians and said, —

"Tear out his tongue!"

CHAPTER LXII.

The drama "Aureolus" was given usually in theatres or amphitheatres, so arranged that they could open and present as it were two separate stages. But after the spectacle in the gardens of Cæsar the usual method was omitted; for in this case the problem was to let the greatest number of people look at a slave who, in the drama, is devoured by a bear. In the theatres the rôle of the bear is played by an actor sewed up in a skin, but this time the representation was to be real. This was a new idea of Tigellinus. At first Cæsar refused to come, but changed his mind at persuasion of the favorite. Tigellinus explained that after what had happened in the gardens it was all the more his duty to appear before the people, and he guaranteed that the crucified slave would not insult him as had Crispus. The people were somewhat sated and tired of blood-spilling; hence a new distribution of lottery tickets and gifts was promised, as well as a feast, for the spectacle was to be in the evening, in a brilliantly lighted amphitheatre.

About dusk the whole amphitheatre was packed; the Augustians, with Tigellinus at the head of them, came to a man, — not only for the spectacle itself, but to show their devotion to Cæsar and their opinion of Chilo, of whom all Rome was then talking.

They whispered to one another that Cæsar, when returning from the gardens, had fallen into a frenzy and could not sleep, that terrors and wonderful visions had attacked him; therefore he had announced on the following morning his early journey to Achæa. But others denied this, declaring that he would be all the more pitiless to the Christians. Cowards, however, were not lacking, who foresaw that the accusation which Chilo had thrown into Cæsar's face might have the worst result possible. In conclusion, there were those who through humanity begged Tigellinus to stop persecution.

"See whither ye are going," said Barcus Soranus. "Ye wished to allay people's anger and convince them that punishment was falling on the guilty; the result is just the opposite."

"True!" added Antistius Verus, "all whisper to one

another now that the Christians were innocent. If that be cleverness, Chilo was right when he said that your brains could be held in a nut-shell."

Tigellinus turned to them and said: "Barcus Soranus, people whisper also to one another that thy daughter Servilia secreted her Christian slaves from Cæsar's justice; they say the same also of thy wife, Antistius."

"That is not true!" exclaimed Barcus, with alarm.

"Your divorced women wished to ruin my wife, whose virtue they envy," said Antistius Verus, with no less alarm.

But others spoke of Chilo.

"What has happened to him?" asked Eprius Marcellus. "He delivered them himself into the hands of Tigellinus; from a beggar he became rich; it was possible for him to live out his days in peace, have a splendid funeral, and a tomb: but, no! All at once he preferred to lose everything and destroy himself; he must, in truth, be a maniac."

"Not a maniac, but he has become a Christian," said Tigellinus.

"Impossible!" said Vitelius.

"Have I not said," put in Vestinius, "'Kill Christians if ye like; but believe me ye cannot war with their divinity. With it there is no jesting'? See what is taking place. I have not burned Rome; but if Cæsar permitted I would give a hecatomb at once to their divinity. And all should do the same, for I repeat: With it there is no jesting! Remember my words to you."

"And I said something else," added Petronius. "Tigellinus laughed when I said that they were arming, but I say more, — they are conquering."

"How is that? how is that?" inquired a number of voices.

"By Pollux, they are! For if such a man as Chilo could not resist them, who can? If ye think that after every spectacle the Christians do not increase, become coppersmiths, or go to shaving beards, for then ye will know better what people think, and what is happening in the city."

"He speaks pure truth, by the sacred peplus of Diana," cried Vestinius.

But Barcus turned to Petronius.

"What is thy conclusion?"

"I conclude where ye began, — there has been enough of bloodshed."

Tigellinus looked at him jeeringly, —

"Ei! — a little more!"

"If thy head is not sufficient, thou hast another on thy cane," said Petronius.

Further conversation was interrupted by the coming of Cæsar, who occupied his place in company with Pythagoras. Immediately after began the representation of "Aureolus," to which not much attention was paid, for the minds of the audience were fixed on Chilo. The spectators, familiar with blood and torture, were bored; they hissed, gave out shouts uncomplimentary to the court, and demanded the bear scene, which for them was the only thing of interest. Had it not been for gifts and the hope of seeing Chilo, the spectacle would not have held the audience.

At last the looked-for moment came. Servants of the Circus brought in first a wooden cross, so low that a bear standing on his hind feet might reach the martyr's breast; then two men brought, or rather dragged in, Chilo, for as the bones in his legs were broken, he was unable to walk alone. They laid him down and nailed him to the wood so quickly that the curious Augustians had not even a good look at him, and only after the cross had been fixed in the place prepared for it did all eyes turn to the victim. But it was a rare person who could recognize in that naked man the former Chilo. After the tortures which Tigellinus had commanded, there was not one drop of blood in his face, and only on his white beard was evident a red trace left by blood after they had torn his tongue out. Through the transparent skin it was quite possible to see his bones. He seemed far older also, almost decrepit. Formerly his eyes cast glances ever filled with disquiet and ill-will, his watchful face reflected constant alarm and uncertainty; now his face had an expression of pain, but it was as mild and calm as faces of the sleeping or the dead. Perhaps remembrance of that thief on the cross whom Christ had forgiven lent him confidence; perhaps, also, he said in his soul to the merciful God, —

"O Lord, I bit like a venomous worm; but all my life I was unfortunate. I was famishing from hunger, people trampled on me, beat me, jeered at me. I was poor and very unhappy, and now they put me to torture and nail me to a cross; but Thou, O Merciful, wilt not reject me in this hour!" Peace descended evidently into his crushed heart. No one laughed, for there was in that crucified man something so calm, he seemed so old, so defenceless, so weak,

calling so much for pity with his lowliness, that each one asked himself unconsciously how it was possible to torture and nail to crosses men who would die soon in any case. The crowd was silent. Among the Augustians Vestinius, bending to right and left, whispered in a terrified voice, "See how they die!" Others were looking for the bear, wishing the spectacle to end at the earliest.

The bear came into the arena at last, and, swaying from side to side a head which hung low, he looked around from beneath his forehead, as if thinking of something or seeking something. At last he saw the cross and the naked body. He approached it, and stood on his hind legs; but after a moment he dropped again on his fore-paws, and sitting under the cross began to growl, as if in his heart of a beast pity for that remnant of a man had made itself heard.

Cries were heard from Circus slaves urging on the bear, but the people were silent.

Meanwhile Chilo raised his head with slow motion, and for a time moved his eyes over the audience. At last his glance rested somewhere on the highest rows of the amphitheatre; his breast moved with more life, and something happened which caused wonder and astonishment. That face became bright with a smile; a ray of light, as it were, encircled that forehead; his eyes were uplifted before death, and after a while two great tears which had risen between the lids flowed slowly down his face.

And he died.

At that same moment a resonant manly voice high up under the velarium exclaimed, —

"Peace to the martyrs!"

Deep silence reigned in the amphitheatre.

CHAPTER LXIII.

After the spectacle in Cæsar's gardens the prisons were emptied considerably. It is true that victims suspected of the Oriental superstition were seized yet and imprisoned; but pursuit brought in fewer and fewer persons, — barely enough for coming exhibitions, which were to follow quickly. People were sated with blood; they showed growing weariness, and increasing alarm because of the unparalleled conduct of the condemned. Fears like those of the superstitious Vestinius seized thousands of people. Among the crowds tales more and more wonderful were related of the vengefulness of the Christian God. Prison typhus, which had spread through the city, increased the general dread. The number of funerals was evident, and it was repeated from ear to ear that fresh piacula were needed to mollify the unknown god. Offerings were made in the temples to Jove and Libitina. At last, in spite of every effort of Tigellinus and his assistants, the opinion kept spreading that the city had been burned at command of Cæsar, and that the Christians were suffering innocently.

But for this very reason Nero and Tigellinus were untiring in persecution. To calm the multitude, fresh orders were issued to distribute wheat, wine, and olives. To relieve owners, new rules were published to facilitate the building of houses; and others touching width of streets and materials to be used in building so as to avoid fires in future. Cæsar himself attended sessions of the Senate, and counselled with the "fathers" on the good of the people and the city; but not a shadow of favor fell on the doomed. The ruler of the world was anxious, above all, to fix in people's minds a conviction that such merciless punishments could strike only the guilty. In the Senate no voice was heard on behalf of the Christians, for no one wished to offend Cæsar; and besides, those who looked farther into the future insisted that the foundations of Roman rule could not stand against the new faith.

The dead and the dying were given to their relatives, as Roman law took no vengeance on the dead. Vinicius received a certain solace from the thought that if Lygia died

he would bury her in his family tomb, and rest near her. At that time he had no hope of rescuing her; half separated from life, he was himself wholly absorbed in Christ, and dreamed no longer of any union except an eternal one. His faith had become simply boundless; for it eternity seemed something incomparably truer and more real than the fleeting life which he had lived up to that time. His heart was overflowing with concentrated enthusiasm. Though yet alive, he had changed into a being almost immaterial, which desiring complete liberation for itself desired it also for another. He imagined that when free he and Lygia would each take the other's hand and go to heaven, where Christ would bless them, and let them live in light as peaceful and boundless as the light of dawn. He merely implored Christ to spare Lygia the torments of the Circus, and let her fall asleep calmly in prison; he felt with perfect certainty that he himself would die at the same time. In view of the sea of blood which had been shed, he did not even think it permitted to hope that she alone would be spared. He had heard from Peter and Paul that they, too, must die as martyrs. The sight of Chilo on the cross had convinced him that even a martyr's death could be sweet; hence he wished it for Lygia and himself as the change of an evil, sad, and oppressive fate for a better.

At times he had a foretaste of life beyond the grave. That sadness which hung over the souls of both was losing its former burning bitterness, and changing gradually into a kind of trans-terrestrial, calm abandon to the will of God. Vinicius, who formerly had toiled against the current, had struggled and tortured himself, yielded now to the stream, believing that it would bear him to eternal calm. He divined, too, that Lygia, as well as he, was preparing for death, — that, in spite of the prison walls separating them, they were advancing together; and he smiled at that thought as at happiness.

In fact, they were advancing with as much agreement as if they had exchanged thoughts every day for a long time. Neither had Lygia any desire, any hope, save the hope of a life beyond the grave. Death was presented to her not only as a liberation from the terrible walls of the prison, from the hands of Cæsar and Tigellinus, — not only as liberation, but as the hour of her marriage to Vinicius. In view of this unshaken certainty, all else lost importance. After death would come her happiness, which was even earthly, so that

she waited for it also as a betrothed waits for the wedding-day.

And that immense current of faith, which swept away from life and bore beyond the grave thousands of those first confessors, bore away Ursus also. Neither had he in his heart been resigned to Lygia's death; but when day after day through the prison walls came news of what was happening in the amphitheatres and the gardens, when death seemed the common, inevitable lot of all Christians and also their good, higher than all mortal conceptions of happiness, he did not dare to pray to Christ to deprive Lygia of that happiness or to delay it for long years. In his simple barbarian soul he thought, besides, that more of those heavenly delights would belong to the daughter of the Lygian chief, that she would have more of them than would a whole crowd of simple ones to whom he himself belonged, and that in eternal glory she would sit nearer to the "Lamb" than would others. He had heard, it is true, that before God men are equal; but a conviction was lingering at the bottom of his soul that the daughter of a leader, and besides of a leader of all the Lygians, was not the same as the first slave one might meet. He hoped also that Christ would let him continue to serve her. His one secret wish was to die on a cross as the "Lamb" died. But this seemed a happiness so great that he hardly dared to pray for it, though he knew that in Rome even the worst criminals were crucified. He thought that surely he would be condemned to die under the teeth of wild beasts; and this was his one sorrow. From childhood he had lived in impassable forests, amid continual hunts, in which, thanks to his superhuman strength, he was famous among the Lygians even before he had grown to manhood. This occupation had become for him so agreeable that later, when in Rome, and forced to live without hunting, he went to vivaria and amphitheatres just to look at beasts known and unknown to him. The sight of these always roused in the man an irresistible desire for struggle and killing; so now he feared in his soul that on meeting them in the amphitheatre he would be attacked by thoughts unworthy of a Christian, whose duty it was to die piously and patiently. But in this he committed himself to Christ, and found other and more agreeable thoughts to comfort him. Hearing that the "Lamb" had declared war against the powers of hell and evil spirits with which the Christian faith connected all pagan divinities, he thought that in this war he might serve

the "Lamb" greatly, and serve better than others, for he could not help believing that his soul was stronger than the souls of other martyrs. Finally, he prayed whole days, rendered service to prisoners, helped overseers, and comforted his queen, who complained at times that in her short life she had not been able to do so many good deeds as the renowned Tabitha of whom Peter the Apostle had told her. Even the prison guards, who feared the terrible strength of this giant, since neither bars nor chains could restrain it, came to love him at last for his mildness. Amazed at his good temper, they asked more than once what its cause was. He spoke with such firm certainty of the life waiting after death for him, that they listened with surprise, seeing for the first time that happiness might penetrate a dungeon which sunlight could not reach. And when he urged them to believe in the "Lamb," it occurred to more than one of those people that his own service was the service of a slave, his own life the life of an unfortunate; and he fell to thinking over his evil fate, the only end to which was death.

But death brought new fear, and promised nothing beyond; while that giant and that maiden, who was like a flower cast on the straw of the prison, went toward it with delight, as toward the gates of happiness.

CHAPTER LXIV.

One evening Scevinus, a Senator, visited Petronius and began a long conversation, touching the grievous times in which they were living, and also touching Cæsar. He spoke so openly that Petronius, though his friend, began to be cautious. Scevinus complained that the world was living madly and unjustly, that all must end in some catastrophe more dreadful still than the burning of Rome. He said that even Augustians were dissatisfied; that Fenius Rufus, second prefect of the pretorians, endured with the greatest effort the vile orders of Tigellinus; and that all Seneca's relatives were driven to extremes by Cæsar's conduct as well toward his old master as toward Lucan. Finally, he began to hint of the dissatisfaction of the people, and even of the pretorians, the greater part of whom had been won by Fenius Rufus.

"Why dost thou say this?" inquired Petronius.

"Out of care for Cæsar," said Scevinus. "I have a distant relative among the pretorians, also Scevinus; through him I know what takes place in the camp. Disaffection is growing there also; Caligula, knowest thou, was mad too, and see what happened. Cassius Chærea appeared. That was a dreadful deed, and surely there is no one among us to praise it; still Chærea freed the world of a monster."

"Is thy meaning as follows: 'I do not praise Chærea, but he was a perfect man, and would that the gods had given us as many such as possible'?" inquired Petronius.

But Scevinus changed the conversation, and began all at once to praise Piso, exalting his family, his nobility of mind, his attachment to his wife, and, finally, his intellect, his calmness, and his wonderful gift of winning people.

"Cæsar is childless," said he, "and all see his successor in Piso. Doubtless, too, every man would help him with whole soul to gain power. Fenius Rufus loves him; the relatives of Annæus are devoted to him altogether. Plautius Lateranus and Tullius Senecio would spring into fire for him; as would Natalis, and Subrius Flavius, and Sulpicius Asper, and Afranius Quinetianus, and even Vestinius."

"From this last man not much will result to Piso," replied Petronius. "Vestinius is afraid of his own shadow."

"Vestinius fears dreams and spirits," answered Scevinus, "but he is a practical man, whom people wish wisely to make consul. That in his soul he is opposed to persecuting Christians, thou shouldst not take ill of him, for it concerns thee too that this madness should cease."

"Not me, but Vinicius," answered Petronius. "Out of concern for Vinicius, I should like to save a certain maiden; but I cannot, for I have fallen out of favor with Ahenobarbus."

"How is that? Dost thou not notice that Cæsar is approaching thee again, and beginning to talk with thee? And I will tell thee why. He is preparing again for Achæa, where he is to sing songs in Greek of his own composition. He is burning for that journey; but also he trembles at thought of the cynical genius of the Greeks. He imagines that either the greatest triumph may meet him or the greatest failure. He needs good counsel, and he knows that no one can give it better than thou. This is why thou art returning to favor."

"Lucan might take my place."

"Bronzebeard hates Lucan, and in his soul has written down death for the poet. He is merely seeking a pretext, for he seeks pretexts always."

"By Castor!" said Petronius, "that may be. But I might have still another way for a quick return to favor."

"What?"

"To repeat to Bronzebeard what thou hast told me just now."

"I have said nothing!" cried Scevinus, with alarm.

Petronius placed his hand upon the Senator's shoulder. "Thou hast called Cæsar a madman, thou hast foreseen the heirship of Piso, and hast said, 'Lucan understands that there is need to hasten.' What wouldst thou hasten, carissime?"

Scevinus grew pale, and for a moment each looked into the eyes of the other.

"Thou wilt not repeat!"

"By the hips of Kypris, I will not! How well thou knowest me! No; I will not repeat. I have heard nothing, and, moreover, I wish to hear nothing. Dost understand? Life is too short to make any undertaking worth the while. I beg thee only to visit Tigellinus to-day, and talk with him as long as thou hast with me of whatever may please thee."

"Why?"

"So that should Tigellinus ever say to me, 'Scevinus was with thee,' I might answer, 'He was with thee, too, that very day.'"

Scevinus, when he heard this, broke the ivory cane which he had in his hand, and said, —

"May the evil fall on this stick! I shall be with Tigellinus to-day, and later at Nerva's feast. Thou, too, wilt be there? In every case till we meet in the amphitheatre, where the last of the Christians will appear the day after to-morrow. Till we meet!"

"After to-morrow!" repeated Petronius, when alone. "There is no time to lose. Ahenobarbus will need me really in Achæa; hence he may count with me."

And he determined to try the last means.

In fact, at Nerva's feast Cæsar himself asked that Petronius recline opposite, for he wished to speak with the arbiter about Achæa and the cities in which he might appear with hopes of the greatest success. He cared most for the Athenians, whom he feared. Other Augustians listened to this conversation with attention, so as to seize crumbs of the arbiter's opinions, and give them out later on as their own.

"It seems to me that I have not lived up to this time," said Nero, "and that my birth will come only in Greece."

"Thou wilt be born to new glory and immortality," answered Petronius.

"I trust that this is true, and that Apollo will not seem jealous. If I return in triumph, I will offer him such a hecatomb as no god has had so far."

Scevinus fell to repeating the lines of Horace: —

"Sic te diva potens Cypri,
Sic fratres Helenæ, lucida sidera,
Ventorumque regat Pater — "

"The vessel is ready at Naples," said Cæsar. "I should like to go even to-morrow."

At this Petronius rose, and, looking straight into Nero's eyes, said, —

"Permit me, O divinity, to celebrate a wedding-feast, to which I shall invite thee before others."

"A wedding-feast! What wedding-feast?" inquired Nero.

"That of Vinicius with thy hostage the daughter of the Lygian King. She is in prison at present, it is true; but as a hostage she is not subject to imprisonment, and, secondly, thou thyself hast permitted Vinicius to marry her; and as thy sentences, like those of Zeus, are unchangeable, thou wilt give command to free her from prison, and I will give her to thy favorite."

The cool blood and calm self-possession with which Petronius spoke disturbed Nero, who was disturbed whenever any one spoke in that fashion to him.

"I know," said he, dropping his eyes. "I have thought of her and of that giant who killed Croton."

"In that case both are saved," answered Petronius, calmly.

But Tigellinus came to the aid of his master: "She is in prison by the will of Cæsar; thou thyself hast said, O Petronius, that his sentences are unchangeable."

All present, knowing the history of Vinicius and Lygia, understood perfectly what the question was; hence they were silent, curious as to the end of the conversation.

"She is in prison against the will of Cæsar and through thy error, through thy ignorance of the law of nations," said Petronius, with emphasis. "Thou art a naïve man, Tigellinus; but even thou wilt not assert that she burnt Rome, and if thou wert to do so, Cæsar would not believe thee."

But Nero had recovered and begun to half close his near-sighted eyes with an expression of indescribable malice.

"Petronius is right," said he, after a while.

Tigellinus looked at him with amazement.

"Petronius is right," repeated Nero; "to-morrow the gates of the prison will be open to her, and of the marriage feast we will speak the day after at the amphitheatre."

"I have lost again," thought Petronius.

When he had returned home, he was so certain that the end of Lygia's life had come that he sent a trusty freedman to the amphitheatre to bargain with the chief of the spoliarium for the delivery of her body, since he wished to give it to Vinicius.

CHAPTER LXV.

Evening exhibitions, rare up to that period and given only exceptionally, became common in Nero's time, both in the circus and amphitheatre. The Augustians liked them, frequently because they were followed by feasts and drinking-bouts which lasted till daylight. Though the people were sated already with blood-spilling, still, when the news went forth that the end of the games was approaching, and that the last of the Christians were to die at an evening spectacle, a countless audience assembled in the amphitheatre. The Augustians came to a man, for they understood that it would not be a common spectacle; they knew that Cæsar had determined to make for himself a tragedy out of the suffering of Vinicius. Tigellinus had kept secret the kind of punishment intended for the betrothed of the young tribune; but that merely roused general curiosity. Those who had seen Lygia at the house of Plautius told wonders of her beauty. Others were occupied above all with the question, would they see her really on the arena that day; for many of those who had heard the answer given Petronius and Nerva by Cæsar explained it in two ways: some supposed simply that Nero would give or perhaps had given the maiden to Vinicius; they remembered that she was a hostage, hence free to worship whatever divinities she liked, and that the law of nations did not permit her punishment.

Uncertainty, waiting, and curiosity had mastered all spectators. Cæsar arrived earlier than usual; and immediately at his coming people whispered that something uncommon would happen, for besides Tigellinus and Vatinius, Cæsar had with him Cassius, a centurion of enormous size and gigantic strength, whom he summoned only when he wished to have a defender at his side, — for example, when he desired night expeditions to the Subura, where he arranged the amusement called "sagatio," which consisted in tossing on a soldier's mantle maidens met on the way. It was noted also that certain precautions had been taken in the amphitheatre itself. The pretorian guards were increased; command over them was held, not by a centurion, but by the tribune Subrius Flavius, known hitherto for blind attach-

ment to Nero. It was understood, then, that Cæsar wished in every case to guard himself against an outburst of despair from Vinicius, and curiosity rose all the more.

Every eye was turned with strained gaze to the place where the unfortunate lover was sitting. He was exceedingly pale, and his forehead was covered with drops of sweat; he was in as much doubt as were other spectators, but alarmed to the lowest depth of his soul. Petronius knew not what would happen; he was silent, except that, while turning from Nerva, he asked Vinicius whether he was ready for everything, and next, whether he would remain at the spectacle. To both questions Vinicius answered "Yes," but a shudder passed through his whole body; he divined that Petronius did not ask without reason. For some time he had lived with only half his life, — he had sunk in death, and reconciled himself to Lygia's death, since for both it was to be liberation and marriage; but he learned now that it was one thing to think of the last moment when it was distant as of a quiet dropping asleep, and another to look at the torment of a person dearer to one than life. All sufferings endured formerly rose in him anew. Despair, which had been set at rest, began again to cry in his soul; the former desire to save Lygia at any price seized him anew. Beginning with the morning, he had tried to go to the cunicula to be sure that she was there; but the pretorians watched every entrance, and orders were so strict that the soldiers, even those whom he knew, would not be softened by prayers or gold. It seemed to the tribune that uncertainty would kill him before he should see the spectacle. Somewhere at the bottom of his heart the hope was still throbbing, that perhaps Lygia was not in the amphitheatre, that his fears were groundless. At times he seized on this hope with all his strength. He said in his soul that Christ might take her to Himself out of the prison, but could not permit her torture in the Circus. Formerly he was resigned to the divine will in everything; now, when repulsed from the doors of the cunicula, he returned to his place in the amphitheatre, and when he learned, from the curious glances turned on him, that the most dreadful suppositions might be true, he began to implore in his soul with passionateness almost approaching a threat. "Thou canst!" repeated he, clenching his fists convulsively, "Thou canst!" Hitherto he had not supposed that that moment when present would be so terrible. Now, without clear consciousness of what was happening in his mind, he had the feeling that if he should

see Lygia tortured, his love for God would be turned to hatred, and his faith to despair. But he was amazed at the feeling, for he feared to offend Christ, whom he was imploring for mercy and miracles. He implored no longer for her life; he wished merely that she should die before they brought her to the arena, and from the abyss of his pain he repeated in spirit: "Do not refuse even this, and I will love Thee still more than hitherto." And then his thoughts raged as a sea torn by a whirlwind. A desire for blood and vengeance was roused in him. He was seized by a mad wish to rush at Nero and stifle him there in presence of all the spectators; but he felt that desire to be a new offence against Christ, and a breach of His command. To his head flew at times flashes of hope that everything before which his soul was trembling would be turned aside by an almighty and merciful hand; but they were quenched at once, as if in measureless sorrow that He who could destroy that Circus with one word and save Lygia had abandoned her, though she trusted in Him and loved Him with all the strength of her pure heart. And he thought, moreover, that she was lying there in that dark place, weak, defenceless, deserted, abandoned to the whim or disfavor of brutal guards, drawing her last breath, perhaps, while he had to wait, helpless, in that dreadful amphitheatre, without knowing what torture was prepared for her, or what he would witness in a moment. Finally, as a man falling over a precipice grasps at everything which grows on the edge of it, so did he grasp with both hands at the thought that faith of itself could save her. That one method remained! Peter had said that faith could move the earth to its foundations.

Hence he rallied; he crushed doubt in himself, he compressed his whole being into the sentence, "I believe," and he looked for a miracle.

But as an overdrawn cord may break, so exertion broke him. The pallor of death covered his face, and his body relaxed. He thought then that his prayer had been heard, for he was dying. It seemed to him that Lygia must surely die too, and that Christ would take them to Himself in that way. The arena, the white togas, the countless spectators, the light of thousands of lamps and torches, all vanished from his vision.

But his weakness did not last long. After a while he roused himself, or rather the stamping of the impatient multitude roused him.

"Thou art ill," said Petronius; "give command to bear thee home."

And without regard to what Cæsar would say, he rose to support Vinicius and go out with him. His heart was filled with pity, and, moreover, he was irritated beyond endurance because Cæsar was looking through the emerald at Vinicius, studying his pain with satisfaction, to describe it afterwards, perhaps, in pathetic strophes, and win the applause of hearers.

Vinicius shook his head. He might die in that amphitheatre, but he could not go out of it. Moreover the spectacle might begin any moment.

In fact, at that very instant almost, the prefect of the city waved a red handkerchief, the hinges opposite Cæsar's podium creaked, and out of the dark gully came Ursus into the brightly lighted arena.

The giant blinked, dazed evidently by the glitter of the arena; then he pushed into the centre, gazing around as if to see what he had to meet. It was known to all the Augustians and to most of the spectators that he was the man who had stifled Croton; hence at sight of him a murmur passed along every bench. In Rome there was no lack of gladiators larger by far than the common measure of man, but Roman eyes had never seen the like of Ursus. Cassius, standing in Cæsar's podium, seemed puny compared with that Lygian. Senators, vestals, Cæsar, the Augustians, and the people gazed with the delight of experts at his mighty limbs as large as tree-trunks, at his breast as large as two shields joined together, and his arms of a Hercules. The murmur rose every instant. For those multitudes there could be no higher pleasure than to look at those muscles in play in the exertion of a struggle. The murmur rose to shouts, and eager questions were put: "Where do the people live who can produce such a giant?" He stood there, in the middle of the amphitheatre, naked, more like a stone colossus than a man, with a collected expression, and at the same time the sad look of a barbarian; and while surveying the empty arena, he gazed wonderingly with his blue childlike eyes, now at the spectators, now at Cæsar, now at the grating of the cunicula, whence, as he thought, his executioners would come.

At the moment when he stepped into the arena his simple heart was beating for the last time with the hope that perhaps a cross was waiting for him; but when he saw neither the cross nor the hole in which it might be put, he thought

that he was unworthy of such favor, — that he would find death in another way, and surely from wild beasts. He was unarmed, and had determined to die as became a confessor of the "Lamb," peacefully and patiently. Meanwhile he wished to pray once more to the Saviour; so he knelt on the arena, joined his hands, and raised his eyes toward the stars which were glittering in the lofty opening of the amphitheatre.

That act displeased the crowds. They had had enough of those Christians who died like sheep. They understood that if the giant would not defend himself the spectacle would be a failure. Here and there hisses were heard. Some began to cry for scourgers, whose office it was to lash combatants unwilling to fight. But soon all had grown silent, for no one knew what was waiting for the giant, nor whether he would not be ready to struggle when he met death eye to eye.

In fact, they had not long to wait. Suddenly the shrill sound of brazen trumpets was heard, and at that signal a grating opposite Cæsar's podium was opened, and into the arena rushed, amid shouts of beast-keepers, an enormous German aurochs, bearing on his head the naked body of a woman.

"Lygia! Lygia!" cried Vinicius.

Then he seized his hair near the temples, squirmed like a man who feels a sharp dart in his body, and began to repeat in hoarse accents, —

"I believe! I believe! O Christ, a miracle!"

And he did not even feel that Petronius covered his head that moment with the toga. It seemed to him that death or pain had closed his eyes. He did not look, he did not see. The feeling of some awful emptiness possessed him. In his head there remained not a thought; his lips merely repeated, as if in madness, —

"I believe! I believe! I believe!"

This time the amphitheatre was silent. The Augustians rose in their places, as one man, for in the arena something uncommon had happened. That Lygian, obedient and ready to die, when he saw his queen on the horns of the wild beast, sprang up, as if touched by living fire, and bending forward he ran at the raging animal.

From all breasts a sudden cry of amazement was heard, after which came deep silence.

The Lygian fell on the raging bull in a twinkle, and seized him by the horns.

"Look!" cried Petronius, snatching the toga from the head of Vinicius.

The latter rose and bent back his head; his face was as pale as linen, and he looked into the arena with a glassy, vacant stare.

All breasts ceased to breathe. In the amphitheatre a fly might be heard on the wing. People could not believe their own eyes. Since Rome was Rome, no one had seen such a spectacle.

The Lygian held the wild beast by the horns. The man's feet sank in the sand to his ankles, his back was bent like a drawn bow, his head was hidden between his shoulders, on his arms the muscles came out so that the skin almost burst from their pressure; but he had stopped the bull in his tracks. And the man and the beast remained so still that the spectators thought themselves looking at a picture showing a deed of Hercules or Theseus, or a group hewn from stone. But in that apparent repose there was a tremendous exertion of two struggling forces. The bull sank his feet as well as did the man in the sand, and his dark, shaggy body was curved so that it seemed a gigantic ball. Which of the two would fail first, which would fall first, — that was the question for those spectators enamoured of such struggles; a question which at that moment meant more for them than their own fate, than all Rome and its lordship over the world. That Lygian was in their eyes then a demigod worthy of honor and statues. Cæsar himself stood up as well as others. He and Tigellinus, hearing of the man's strength, had arranged this spectacle purposely, and said to each other with a jeer, "Let that slayer of Croton kill the bull which we choose for him;" so they looked now with amazement at that picture, as if not believing that it could be real.

In the amphitheatre were men who had raised their arms and remained in that posture. Sweat covered the faces of others, as if they themselves were struggling with the beast. In the Circus nothing was heard save the sound of flame in the lamps, and the crackle of bits of coal as they dropped from the torches. Their voices died on the lips of the spectators, but their hearts were beating in their breasts as if to split them. It seemed to all that the struggle was lasting for ages. But the man and the beast continued on in their monstrous exertion; one might have said that they were planted in the earth.

The Struggle between Ursus and the Aurochs.

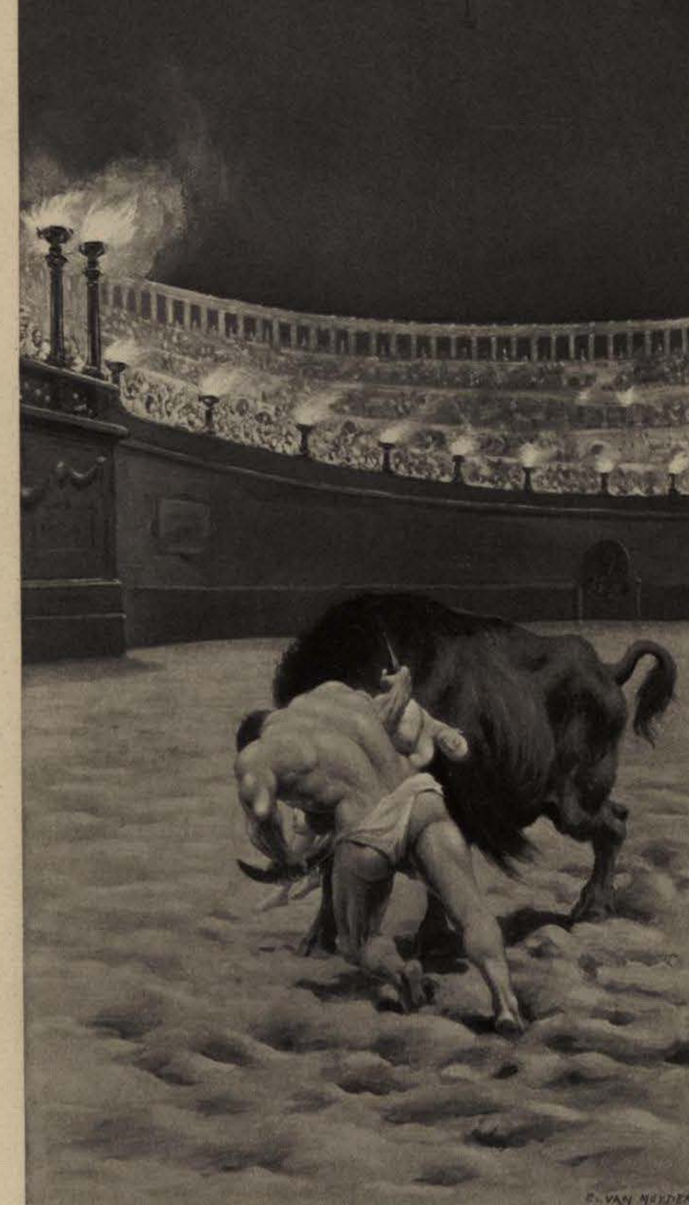
"Look!" cried Petronius, snatching the toga from the head of Vinicius.

The latter rose and bent back his head; his face was as pale as linen, and he looked into the arena with a glassy, vacant stare.

All breasts ceased to breathe. In the amphitheatre a fly might be heard on the wing. People could not believe their own eyes. Since Rome was Rome, no one had seen such a spectacle.

The Lygian held the wild beast by the horns. The man's feet sank in the sand to his ankles, his back was bent like a drawn bow, his head was hidden between his shoulders, on his arms the muscles came out so that the skin almost burst from their pressure; but he had stopped the bull in his tracks. And the man and the beast remained so still that the spectators thought themselves looking at a picture showing a deed of Hercules or Theseus, or a group hewn from stone. But in that apparent repose there was a tremendous exertion of two struggling forces. The bull sank his feet as well as did the man in the sand, and his dark, shaggy body was curved so that it seemed a gigantic ball. Which of the two would fail first, which would fall first, — that was the question for those spectators enamoured of such struggles; a question which at that moment meant more for them than their own fate, than all Rome and its lordship over the world. That Lygian was in their eyes then a demigod worthy of honor and statues. Cæsar himself stood up as well as others. He and Tigellinus, hearing of the man's strength, had arranged this spectacle purposely, and said to each other with a jeer, "Let that slayer of Croton kill the bull which we choose for him;" so they looked now with amazement at that picture, as if not believing that it could be real.

In the amphitheatre were men who had raised their arms and remained in that posture. Sweat covered the faces of others, as if they themselves were struggling with the beast. In the Circus nothing was heard save the sound of flame in the lamps, and the crackle of bits of coal as they dropped from the torches. Their voices died on the lips of the spectators, but their hearts were beating in their breasts as if to split them. It seemed to all that the struggle was lasting for ages. But the man and the beast continued on in their monstrous exertion; one might have said that they were planted in the earth.



Meanwhile a dull roar resembling a groan was heard from the arena, after which a brief shout was wrested from every breast, and again there was silence. People thought themselves dreaming till the enormous head of the bull began to turn in the iron hands of the barbarian. The face, neck, and arms of the Lygian grew purple; his back bent still more. It was clear that he was rallying the remnant of his superhuman strength, but that he could not last long.

Duller and duller, hoarser and hoarser, more and more painful grew the groan of the bull as it mingled with the whistling breath from the breast of the giant. The head of the beast turned more and more, and from his jaws crept forth a long, foaming tongue.

A moment more, and to the ears of spectators sitting nearer came as it were the crack of breaking bones; then the beast rolled on the earth with his neck twisted in death.

The giant removed in a twinkle the ropes from the horns of the bull and, raising the maiden, began to breathe hurriedly. His face became pale, his hair stuck together from sweat, his shoulders and arms seemed flooded with water. For a moment he stood as if only half conscious; then he raised his eyes and looked at the spectators.

The amphitheatre had gone wild.

The walls of the building were trembling from the roar of tens of thousands of people. Since the beginning of spectacles there was no memory of such excitement. Those who were sitting on the highest rows came down, crowding in the passages between benches to look more nearly at the strong man. Everywhere were heard cries for mercy, passionate and persistent, which soon turned into one unbroken thunder. That giant had become dear to those people enamoured of physical strength; he was the first personage in Rome.

He understood that the multitude were striving to grant him his life and restore him his freedom, but clearly his thought was not on himself alone. He looked around a while; then approached Cæsar's podium, and, holding the body of the maiden on his outstretched arms, raised his eyes with entreaty, as if to say, —

"Have mercy on her! Save the maiden. I did that for her sake!"

The spectators understood perfectly what he wanted. At sight of the unconscious maiden, who near the enormous

Lygian seemed a child, emotion seized the multitude of knights and Senators. Her slender form, as white as if chiselled from alabaster, her fainting, the dreadful danger from which the giant had freed her, and finally her beauty and attachment had moved every heart. Some thought the man a father begging mercy for his child. Pity burst forth suddenly, like a flame. They had had blood, death, and torture in sufficiency. Voices choked with tears began to entreat mercy for both.

Meanwhile Ursus, holding the girl in his arms, moved around the arena, and with his eyes and with motions begged her life for her. Now Vinicius started up from his seat, sprang over the barrier which separated the front places from the arena, and, running to Lygia, covered her naked body with his toga.

Then he tore apart the tunic on his breast, laid bare the scars left by wounds received in the Armenian war, and stretched out his hands to the audience.

At this the enthusiasm of the multitude passed everything seen in a circus before. The crowd stamped and howled. Voices calling for mercy grew simply terrible. People not only took the part of the athlete, but rose in defence of the soldier, the maiden, their love. Thousands of spectators turned to Cæsar with flashes of anger in their eyes and with clinched fists.

But Cæsar halted and hesitated. Against Vinicius he had no hatred indeed, and the death of Lygia did not concern him; but he preferred to see the body of the maiden rent by the horns of the bull or torn by the claws of beasts. His cruelty, his deformed imagination, and deformed desires found a kind of delight in such spectacles. And now the people wanted to rob him. Hence anger appeared on his bloated face. Self-love also would not let him yield to the wish of the multitude, and still he did not dare to oppose it, through his inborn cowardice.

So he gazed around to see if among the Augustians at least, he could not find fingers turned down in sign of death. But Petronius held up his hand, and looked into Nero's face almost challengingly. Vestinius, superstitious but inclined to enthusiasm, a man who feared ghosts but not the living, gave a sign for mercy also. So did Scevinus, the Senator; so did Nerva, so did Tullius Senecio, so did the famous leader Ostorius Scapula, and Antistius, and Piso, and Vetus, and Crispinus, and Minucius Thermus, and Pontius Telesinus, and the most important of all, one honored by the people, Thrasea.

In view of this, Cæsar took the emerald from his eye with an expression of contempt and offence; when Tigellinus, whose desire was to spite Petronius, turned to him and said, —

"Yield not, divinity; we have the pretorians."

Then Nero turned to the place where command over the pretorians was held by the stern Subrius Flavius, hitherto devoted with whole soul to him, and saw something unusual. The face of the old tribune was stern, but covered with tears, and he was holding his hand up in sign of mercy.

Now rage began to possess the multitude. Dust rose from beneath the stamping feet, and filled the amphitheatre. In the midst of shouts were heard cries: "Ahenobarbus! matricide! incendiary!"

Nero was alarmed. Romans were absolute lords in the Circus. Former Cæsars, and especially Caligula, had permitted themselves sometimes to act against the will of the people; this, however, called forth disturbance always, going sometimes to bloodshed. But Nero was in a different position. First, as a comedian and a singer he needed the people's favor; second, he wanted it on his side against the Senate and the patricians, and especially after the burning of Rome he strove by all means to win it, and turn their anger against the Christians. He understood, besides, that to oppose longer was simply dangerous. A disturbance begun in the Circus might seize the whole city, and have results incalculable.

He looked once more at Subrius Flavius, at Scevinus the centurion, a relative of the Senator, at the soldiers; and seeing everywhere frowning brows, excited faces, and eyes fixed on him, he gave the sign for mercy.

Then a thunder of applause was heard from the highest seats to the lowest. The people were sure of the lives of the condemned, for from that moment they went under their protection, and even Cæsar would not have dared to pursue them any longer with his vengeance.