

CHAPTER LXXI.

ROME had gone mad for a long time, so that the world-conquering city seemed ready at last to tear itself to pieces for want of leadership. Even before the last hour of the Apostles had struck, Piso's conspiracy appeared; and then such merciless reaping of Rome's highest heads, that even to those who saw divinity in Nero, he seemed at last a divinity of death. Mourning fell on the city, terror took its lodgment in houses and in hearts, but porticos were crowned with ivy and flowers, for it was not permitted to show sorrow for the dead. People waking in the morning asked themselves whose turn would come next. The retinue of ghosts following Cæsar increased every day.

Piso paid for the conspiracy with his head; after him followed Seneca, and Lucan, Fenius Rufus, and Plautius Lateranus, and Flavius Scevinus, and Afranius Quinetianus, and the dissolute companion of Cæsar's madnesses, Tullius Senecio, and Proculus, and Araricus, and Tugurinus, and Gratus, and Silanus, and Proximus, — once devoted with his whole soul to Nero, — and Sulpicius Asper. Some were destroyed by their own insignificance, some by fear, some by wealth, others by bravery. Cæsar, astonished at the very number of the conspirators, covered the walls with soldiery and held the city as if by siege, sending out daily centurions with sentences of death to suspected houses. The condemned humiliated themselves in letters filled with flattery, thanking Cæsar for his sentences, and leaving him a part of their property, so as to save the rest for their children. It seemed, at last, that Nero was exceeding every measure on purpose to convince himself of the degree in which men had grown abject, and how long they would endure bloody rule. After the conspirators, their relatives were executed; then their friends, and even simple acquaintances. Dwellers in lordly mansions built after the fire, when they went out on the street, felt sure of seeing a whole row of funerals. Pompeius, Cornelius, Martialis, Flavius Nepos, and Stadius Domitius died because accused of lack of love for Cæsar; Novius Priscus, as a friend of Seneca. Rufus Crispus was deprived of the right of fire and water because on a time he had been the husband of Poppæa. The great Thræsea was

ruined by his virtue; many paid with their lives for noble origin; even Poppæa fell a victim to the momentary rage of Nero.

The Senate crouched before the dreadful ruler; it raised a temple in his honor, made an offering in favor of his voice, crowned his statues, appointed priests to him as to a divinity. Senators, trembling in their souls, went to the Palatine to magnify the song of the "Periodonices," and go wild with him amid orgies of naked bodies, wine, and flowers.

But meanwhile from below, in the field soaked in blood and tears, rose the sowing of Peter, stronger and stronger every moment.

CHAPTER LXXII.

VINICIUS TO PETRONIUS:

"We know, carissime, most of what is happening in Rome, and what we do not know is told us in thy letters. When one casts a stone in the water, the wave goes farther and farther in a circle; so the wave of madness and malice has come from the Palatine to us. On the road to Greece, Carinas was sent hither by Cæsar, who plundered cities and temples to fill the empty treasury. At the price of the sweat and tears of people, he is building the 'golden house' in Rome. It is possible that the world has not seen such a house, but it has not seen such injustice. Thou knowest Carinas. Chilo was like him till he redeemed his life with death. But to the towns lying nearer us his men have not come yet, perhaps because there are no temples or treasures in them. Thou askest if we are out of danger. I answer that we are out of mind, and let that suffice for an answer. At this moment, from the portico under which I write, I see our calm bay, and on it Ursus in a boat, letting down a net in the clear water. My wife is spinning red wool near me, and in the gardens, under the shade of almond-trees, our slaves are singing. Oh, what calm, carissime, and what a forgetfulness of former fear and suffering! But it is not the Parcæ, as thou writest, who spin out our lives so agreeably; it is Christ who is blessing us, our beloved God and Saviour. We know tears and sorrow, for our religion teaches us to weep over the misfortunes of others; but in these tears is a consolation unknown to thee, for whenever the time of our life is ended, we shall find all those dear ones who perished and who are perishing yet for God's truth. For us Peter and Paul are not dead; they are merely born into glory. Our souls see them, and when our eyes weep our hearts are glad with their joy. Oh, yes, my dear friend, we are happy with a happiness which nothing can destroy, since death, which for thee is the end of everything, is for us only a passage into superior rest.

"And so days and months pass here in calmness of heart. Our servants and slaves believe, as we do, in Christ, and that He enjoins love; hence we love one another. Frequently, when the sun has gone down, or when the moon is shining

in the water, Lygia and I talk of past times, which seem a dream to us; but when I think how that dear head was near torture and death, I magnify my Lord with my whole soul, for out of those hands He alone could wrest her, save her from the arena, and return her to me forever. O Petronius, thou hast seen what endurance and comfort that religion gives in misfortune, how much patience and courage before death; so come and see how much happiness it gives in ordinary, common days of life. People thus far did not know a God whom man could love, hence they did not love one another; and from that came their misfortune, for as light comes from the sun, so does happiness come from love. Neither lawgivers nor philosophers taught this truth, and it did not exist in Greece or Rome; and when I say, not in Rome, that means the whole world. The dry and cold teaching of the Stoics, to which virtuous people rally, tempers the heart as a sword is tempered, but it makes it indifferent rather than better. Though why do I write this to thee, who hast learned more, and hast more understanding than I have? Thou wert acquainted with Paul of Tarsus, and more than once didst converse long with him; hence thou knowest better if in comparison with the truth which he taught all the teachings of philosophers and rhetors are not a vain and empty jingle of words without meaning. Thou rememberest the question which he put thee: 'But if Cæsar were a Christian, would ye not all feel safer, surer of possessing that which ye possess, free of alarm, and sure of tomorrow?' Thou didst say to me that our teaching was an enemy of life; and I answer thee now, that, if from the beginning of this letter I had been repeating only the three words, 'I am happy!' I could not have expressed my happiness to thee. To this thou wilt answer, that my happiness is Lygia. True, my friend. Because I love her immortal soul, and because we both love each other in Christ; for such love there is no separation, no deceit, no change, no old age, no death. For, when youth and beauty pass, when our bodies wither and death comes, love will remain, for the spirit remains. Before my eyes were open to the light I was ready to burn my own house even, for Lygia's sake; but now I tell thee that I did not love her, for it was Christ who first taught me to love. In Him is the source of peace and happiness. It is not I who say this, but reality itself. Compare thy own luxury, my friend, lined with alarm, thy delights, not sure of a morrow, thy orgies, with the lives of Christians,

and thou wilt find a ready answer. But, to compare better, come to our mountains with the odor of thyme, to our shady olive groves on our shores lined with ivy. A peace is waiting for thee, such as thou hast not known for a long time, and hearts that love thee sincerely. Thou, having a noble soul and a good one, shouldst be happy. Thy quick mind can recognize the truth, and knowing it thou wilt love it. To be its enemy, like Cæsar and Tigellinus, is possible, but indifferent to it no one can be. O my Petronius, Lygia and I are comforting ourselves with the hope of seeing thee soon. Be well, be happy, and come to us."

Petronius received this letter in Cumæ, whither he had gone with other Augustians who were following Cæsar. His struggle of long years with Tigellinus was nearing its end. Petronius knew already that he must fall in that struggle, and he understood why. As Cæsar fell lower daily to the rôle of a comedian, a buffoon, and a charioteer; as he sank deeper in a sickly, foul, and coarse dissipation,—the exquisite arbiter became a mere burden to him. Even when Petronius was silent, Nero saw blame in his silence; when the arbiter praised, he saw ridicule. The brilliant patrician annoyed his self-love and roused his envy. His wealth and splendid works of art had become an object of desire both to the ruler and the all-powerful minister. Petronius was spared so far in view of the journey to Achæa, in which his taste, his knowledge of everything Greek, might be useful. But gradually Tigellinus explained to Cæsar that Carinas surpassed him in taste and knowledge, and would be better able to arrange in Achæa games, receptions, and triumphs. From that moment Petronius was lost. There was not courage to send him his sentence in Rome. Cæsar and Tigellinus remembered that that apparently effeminate and æsthetic person, who made "day out of night," and was occupied only in luxury, art, and feasts, had shown amazing industry and energy, when proconsul in Bithynia and later when consul in the capital. They considered him capable of anything, and it was known that in Rome he possessed not only the love of the people, but even of the pretorians. None of Cæsar's confidants could foresee how Petronius might act in a given case; it seemed wiser, therefore, to entice him out of the city, and reach him in a province.

With this object he received an invitation to go to Cumæ with other Augustians. He went, though suspecting the

ambush, perhaps so as not to appear in open opposition, perhaps to show once more a joyful face devoid of every care to Cæsar and the Augustians, and to gain a last victory before death over Tigellinus.

Meanwhile the latter accused him of friendship with the Senator Scevinus, who was the soul of Piso's conspiracy. The people of Petronius, left in Rome, were imprisoned; his house was surrounded by pretorian guards. When he learned this, he showed neither alarm nor concern, and with a smile said to Augustians whom he received in his own splendid villa in Cumæ,—

"Ahenobarbus does not like direct questions; hence ye will see his confusion when I ask him if it was he who gave command to imprison my 'familia' in the capital."

Then he invited them to a feast "before the longer journey," and he had just made preparations for it when the letter from Vinicius came.

When he received this letter, Petronius grew somewhat thoughtful, but after a time his face regained its usual composure, and that same evening he answered as follows:—

"I rejoice at your happiness and admire your hearts, for I had not thought that two lovers could remember a third person who was far away. Ye have not only not forgotten me, but ye wish to persuade me to go to Sicily, so that ye may share with me your bread and your Christ, who, as thou writest, has given you happiness so bountifully.

"If that be true, honor Him. To my thinking, however Ursus had something to do with saving Lygia, and the Roman people also had a little to do with it. But since thy belief is that Christ did the work, I will not contradict. Spare no offerings to Him. Prometheus also sacrificed himself for man; but, alas! Prometheus is an invention of the poets apparently, while people worthy of credit have told me that they saw Christ with their own eyes. I agree with thee that He is the most worthy of the gods.

"I remember the question by Paul of Tarsus, and I think that if Ahenobarbus lived according to Christ's teaching I might have time to visit you in Sicily. In that case we could converse, in the shade of trees and near fountains, of all the gods and all the truths discussed by Greek philosophers at any time. To-day I must give thee a brief answer.

"I care for two philosophers only: Pyrrho and Anacreon. I am ready to sell the rest to thee cheaply, with all the Greek and Roman Stoics. Truth, Vinicius, dwells some-

where so high that the gods themselves cannot see it from the top of Olympus. To thee, carissime, thy Olympus seems higher still, and, standing there, thou callest to me, 'Come, thou wilt see such sights as thou hast not seen yet!' I might. But I answer, 'I have not feet for the journey.' And if thou read this letter to the end, thou wilt acknowledge, I think, that I am right.

"No, happy husband of the Aurora princess! thy religion is not for me. Am I to love the Bithynians who carry my litter, the Egyptians who heat my bath? Am I to love Ahenobarbus and Tigellinus? I swear by the white knees of the Graces, that even if I wished to love them I could not. In Rome there are a hundred thousand persons at least who have either crooked shoulders, or big knees, or thin thighs, or staring eyes, or heads that are too large. Dost thou command me to love these too? Where am I to find the love, since it is not in my heart? And if thy God desires me to love such persons, why in His all might did He not give them the forms of Niobe's children, for example, which thou hast seen on the Palatine? Whoso loves beauty is unable for that very reason to love deformity. One may not believe in our gods, but it is possible to love them, as Phidias, Praxiteles, Miron, Skopas, and Lysias loved.

"Should I wish to go whither thou wouldst lead me, I could not. But since I do not wish, I am doubly unable. Thou believest, like Paul of Tarsus, that on the other side of the Styx thou wilt see thy Christ in certain Elysian fields. Let Him tell thee then Himself whether He would receive me with my gems, my Myrrhene vase, my books published by Sozias, and my golden-haired Eunice. I laugh at this thought; for Paul of Tarsus told me that for Christ's sake one must give up wreaths of roses, feasts, and luxury. It is true that he promised me other happiness; but I answered that I was too old for new happiness, that my eyes would be delighted always with roses, and that the odor of violets is dearer to me than stench from my foul neighbor of the Subura.

"These are reasons why thy happiness is not for me. But there is one reason more, which I have reserved for the last: Thanatos summons me. For thee the light of life is beginning; but my sun has set, and twilight is embracing my head. In other words, I must die, carissime.

"It is not worth while to talk long of this. It had to end thus. Thou, who knowest Ahenobarbus, wilt understand

the position easily. Tigellinus has conquered, or rather my victories have touched their end. I have lived as I wished, and I will die as pleases me.

"Do not take this to heart. No God has promised me immortality; hence no surprise meets me. At the same time thou art mistaken, Vinicius, in asserting that only thy God teaches man to die calmly. No. Our world knew, before thou wert born, that when the last cup was drained, it was time to go, — time to rest, — and it knows yet how to do that with calmness. Plato declares that virtue is music, that the life of a sage is harmony. If that be true, I shall die as I have lived, — virtuously.

"I should like to take farewell of thy godlike wife in the words with which on a time I greeted her in the house of Aulus, 'Very many persons have I seen, but thy equal I know not.'

"If the soul is more than what Pyrrho thinks, mine will fly to thee and Lygia, on its way to the edge of the ocean, and will alight at your house in the form of a butterfly or, as the Egyptians believe, in the form of a sparrow-hawk. Otherwise I cannot come.

"Meanwhile let Sicily replace for you the gardens of Hesperides; may the goddesses of the fields, woods, and fountains scatter flowers on your path, and may white doves build their nests on every acanthus of the columns of your house."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

PETRONIUS was not mistaken. Two days later young Nerva, who had always been friendly and devoted, sent his freedman to Cumæ with news of what was happening at the court of Cæsar.

The death of Petronius had been determined. On the morning of the following day they intended to send him a centurion, with the order to stop at Cumæ, and wait there for further instructions; the next messenger, to follow a few days later, was to bring the death sentence.

Petronius heard the news with unruffled calmness.

"Thou wilt take to thy lord," said he, "one of my vases; say from me that I thank him with my whole soul, for now I am able to anticipate the sentence."

And all at once he began to laugh, like a man who has come upon a perfect thought, and rejoices in advance at its fulfilment.

That same afternoon his slaves rushed about, inviting the Augustians, who were staying in Cumæ, and all the ladies, to a magnificent banquet at the villa of the arbiter.

He wrote that afternoon in the library; next he took a bath, after which he commanded the vestiplicæ to arrange his dress. Brilliant and stately as one of the gods, he went to the triclinium, to cast the eye of a critic on the preparations, and then to the gardens, where youths and Grecian maidens from the islands were weaving wreaths of roses for the evening.

Not the least care was visible on his face. The servants only knew that the feast would be something uncommon, for he had issued a command to give unusual rewards to those with whom he was satisfied, and some slight blows to all whose work should not please him, or who had deserved blame or punishment earlier. To the cithara players and the singers he had ordered beforehand liberal pay. At last, sitting in the garden under a beech, through whose leaves the sun-rays marked the earth with bright spots, he called Eunice.

She came, dressed in white, with a sprig of myrtle in her hair, beautiful as one of the Graces. He seated her at his

side, and, touching her temple gently with his fingers, he gazed at her with that admiration with which a critic gazes at a statue from the chisel of a master.

"Eunice," asked he, "dost thou know that thou art not a slave this long time?"

She raised to him her calm eyes, as blue as the sky, and denied with a motion of her head.

"I am thine always," said she.

"But perhaps thou knowest not," continued Petronius, "that the villa, and those slaves twining wreaths here, and all which is in the villa, with the fields and the herds, are thine henceforward."

Eunice, when she heard this, drew away from him quickly, and asked in a voice filled with sudden fear, —

"Why dost thou tell me this?"

Then she approached again, and looked at him, blinking with amazement. After a while her face became as pale as linen. He smiled, and said only one word, —

"So!"

A moment of silence followed; merely a slight breeze moved the leaves of the beech.

Petronius might have thought that before him was a statue cut from white marble.

"Eunice," said he, "I wish to die calmly."

And the maiden, looking at him with a heart-rending smile, whispered, —

"I hear thee."

In the evening the guests, who had been at feasts given by Petronius previously, and knew that in comparison with them even Cæsar's banquets seemed tiresome and barbarous, began to arrive in numbers. To no one did it occur, even, that that was to be the last "symposium." Many knew, it is true, that the clouds of Cæsar's anger were hanging over the exquisite arbiter; but that had happened so often, and Petronius had been able so often to scatter them by some dexterous act or by a single bold word, that no one thought really that serious danger threatened him. His glad face and usual smile, free of care, confirmed all, to the last man, in that opinion. The beautiful Eunice, to whom he had declared his wish to die calmly, and for whom every word of his was like an utterance of fate, had in her features a perfect calmness, and in her eyes a kind of wonderful radiance, which might have been considered delight. At the door of the triclinium, youths with hair in golden nets put wreaths of roses on the

heads of the guests, warning them, as the custom was, to pass the threshold right foot foremost. In the hall there was a slight odor of violets; the lamps burned in Alexandrian glass of various colors. At the couches stood Grecian maidens, whose office it was to moisten the feet of guests with perfumes. At the walls cithara players and Athenian choristers were waiting for the signal of their leader.

The table service gleamed with splendor, but that splendor did not offend or oppress; it seemed a natural development. Joyousness and freedom spread through the hall with the odor of violets. The guests as they entered felt that neither threat nor constraint was hanging over them, as in Cæsar's house, where a man might forfeit his life for praises not sufficiently great or sufficiently apposite. At sight of the lamps, the goblets entwined with ivy, the wine cooling on banks of snow, and the exquisite dishes, the hearts of the guests became joyous. Conversation of various kinds began to buzz, as bees buzz on an apple-tree in blossom. At moments it was interrupted by an outburst of glad laughter, at moments by murmurs of applause, at moments by a kiss placed too loudly on some white shoulder.

The guests, while drinking wine, spilled from their goblets a few drops to the immortal gods, to gain their protection, and their favor for the host. It mattered not that many of them had no belief in the gods. Custom and superstition prescribed it. Petronius, inclining near Eunice, talked of Rome, of the latest divorces, of love affairs, of the races, of Spiculus, who had become famous recently in the arena, and of the latest books in the shops of Atractus and the Sozii. When he spilled wine, he said that he spilled it only in honor of the Lady of Cyprus, the most ancient divinity and the greatest, the only immortal, enduring, and ruling one.

His conversation was like sunlight which lights up some new object every instant, or like the summer breeze which stirs flowers in a garden. At last he gave a signal to the leader of the music, and at that signal the citharæ began to sound lightly, and youthful voices accompanied. Then maidens from Kos, the birthplace of Eunice, danced, and showed their rosy forms through robes of gauze. Finally, an Egyptian soothsayer told the guests their future from the movement of rainbow colors in a vessel of crystal.

When they had enough of these amusements, Petronius rose somewhat on his Syrian cushion, and said with hesitation,—

“Pardon me, friends, for asking a favor at a feast. Will each man accept as a gift that goblet from which he first shook wine in honor of the gods and to my prosperity?”

The goblets of Petronius were gleaming in gold, precious stones, and the carving of artists; hence, though giftgiving was common in Rome, delight filled every heart. Some thanked him loudly: others said that Jove had never honored gods with such gifts in Olympus; finally, there were some who refused to accept, since the gifts surpassed common estimate.

But he raised aloft the Myrrhene vase, which resembled a rainbow in brilliancy, and was simply beyond price.

“This,” said he, “is the one out of which I poured in honor of the Lady of Cyprus. The lips of no man may touch it henceforth, and no hand may ever pour from it in honor of another divinity.”

He cast the precious vessel to the pavement, which was covered with lily-colored saffron flowers; and when it was broken into small pieces, he said, seeing around him astonished faces,—

“My dear friends, be glad and not astonished. Old age and weakness are sad attendants in the last years of life. But I will give you a good example and good advice: Ye have the power, as ye see, not to wait for old age; ye can depart before it comes, as I do.”

“What dost thou wish?” asked a number of voices, with alarm.

“I wish to rejoice, to drink wine, to hear music, to look on those divine forms which ye see around me, and fall asleep with a garlanded head. I have taken farewell of Cæsar, and do ye wish to hear what I wrote him at parting?”

He took from beneath the purple cushion a paper, and read as follows:—

“I know, O Cæsar, that thou art awaiting my arrival with impatience, that thy true heart of a friend is yearning day and night for me. I know that thou art ready to cover me with gifts, make me prefect of the pretorian guards, and command Tigellinus to be that which the gods made him, a mule-driver in those lands which thou didst inherit after poisoning Domitius. Pardon me, however, for I swear to thee by Hades, and by the shades of thy mother, thy wife, thy brother, and Seneca, that I cannot go to thee. Life is a great treasure. I have taken the most precious jewels from that treasure, but in life there are many things which I

cannot endure any longer. Do not suppose, I pray, that I am offended because thou didst kill thy mother, thy wife, and thy brother; that thou didst burn Rome and send to Erebus all the honest men in thy dominions. No, grandson of Chronos. Death is the inheritance of man; from thee other deeds could not have been expected. But to destroy one's ear for whole years with thy poetry, to see thy belly of a Domitius on slim legs whirled about in a Pyrrhic dance; to hear thy music, thy declamation, thy doggerel verses, wretched poet of the suburbs, — is a thing surpassing my power, and it has roused in me the wish to die. Rome stuffs its ears when it hears thee; the world reviles thee. I can blush for thee no longer, and I have no wish to do so. The howls of Cerberus, though resembling thy music, will be less offensive to me, for I have never been the friend of Cerberus, and I need not be ashamed of his howling. Farewell, but make no music; commit murder, but write no verses; poison people, but dance not; be an incendiary, but play not on a cithara. This is the wish and the last friendly counsel sent thee by the — *Arbiter Elegantiae*."

The guests were terrified, for they knew that the loss of dominion would have been less cruel to Nero than this blow. They understood, too, that the man who had written that paper must die; and at the same time pale fear flew over them because they had heard such a paper.

But Petronius laughed with sincere and gladsome joy, as if it were a question of the most innocent joke; then he cast his eyes on all present, and said, —

"Be joyous, and drive away fear. No one need boast that he heard this letter. I will boast of it only to Charon when I am crossing in the boat with him."

He beckoned then to the Greek physician, and stretched out his arm. The skilled Greek in the twinkle of an eye opened the vein at the bend of the arm. Blood spurted on the cushion, and covered Eunice, who, supporting the head of Petronius, bent over him and said, —

"Didst thou think that I would leave thee? If the gods gave me immortality, and Cæsar gave me power over the earth, I would follow thee still."

Petronius smiled, raised himself a little, touched her lips with his, and said, —

"Come with me."

She stretched her rosy arm to the physician, and after a while her blood began to mingle and be lost in his blood.

Then he gave a signal to the leader of the music, and again the voices and citharæ were heard. They sang "Harmodius;" next the song of Anacreon resounded, — that song in which he complained that on a time he had found Aphrodite's boy chilled and weeping under trees; that he brought him in, warmed him, dried his wings, and the ungrateful child pierced his heart with an arrow, — from that moment peace had deserted the poet.

Petronius and Eunice, resting against each other, beautiful as two divinities, listened, smiling and growing pale. At the end of the song Petronius gave directions to serve more wine and food; then he conversed with the guests sitting near him of trifling but pleasant things, such as are mentioned usually at feasts. Finally, he called to the Greek to bind his arm for a moment; for he said that sleep was tormenting him, and he wanted to yield himself to Hypnos before Thanatos put him to sleep forever.

In fact, he fell asleep. When he woke, the head of Eunice was lying on his breast like a white flower. He placed it on the pillow to look at it once more. After that his veins were opened again.

At his signal the singers raised the song of Anacreon anew, and the citharæ accompanied them so softly as not to drown a word. Petronius grew paler and paler; but when the last sound had ceased, he turned to his guests again and said, —

"Friends, confess that with us perishes —"

But he had not power to finish; his arm with its last movement embraced Eunice, his head fell on the pillow, and he died.

The guests looking at those two white forms, which resembled two wonderful statues, understood well that with them perished all that was left to their world at that time, — poetry and beauty.

EPILOGUE.

At first the revolt of the Gallic legions under Vindex did not seem very serious. Cæsar was only in his thirty-first year, and no one was bold enough to hope that the world could be freed so soon from the nightmare which was stifling it. Men remembered that revolts had occurred more than once among the legions, — they had occurred in previous reigns, — revolts, however, which passed without involving a change of government; as during the reign of Tiberius, Drusus put down the revolt of the Pannonian legions. "Who," said people, "can take the government after Nero, since all the descendants of the divine Augustus have perished?" Others, looking at the Colossus, imagined him a Hercules, and thought that no force could break such power. There were those even who since he went to Achæa were sorry for him, because Helius and Polythetes, to whom he left the government of Rome and Italy, governed more murderously than he had.

No one was sure of life or property. Law ceased to protect. Human dignity and virtue had perished, family bonds existed no longer, and degraded hearts did not even dare to admit hope. From Greece came accounts of the incomparable triumphs of Cæsar, of the thousands of crowns which he had won, the thousands of competitors whom he had vanquished. The world seemed to be one orgy of buffoonery and blood; but at the same time the opinion was fixed that virtue and deeds of dignity had ceased, that the time of dancing and music, of profligacy, of blood, had come, and that life must flow on for the future in that way. Cæsar himself, to whom rebellion opened the road to new robberies, was not concerned much about the revolt of the legions and Vindex; he even expressed his delight on that subject frequently. He did not wish to leave Achæa even; and only when Helius informed him that further delay might cause the loss of dominion did he move to Naples.

There he played and sang, neglecting news of events of growing danger. In vain did Tigellinus explain to him that

former rebellions of legions had no leaders, while at the head of affairs this time was a man descended from the ancient kings of Gaul and Aquitania, a famous and tried soldier. "Here," answered Nero, "the Greeks listen to me, — the Greeks, who alone know how to listen, and who alone are worthy of my song." He said that his first duty was art and glory. But when at last the news came that Vindex had proclaimed him a wretched artist, he sprang up and moved toward Rome. The wounds inflicted by Petronius, and healed by his stay in Greece, opened in his heart anew, and he wished to seek retribution from the Senate for such unheard-of injustice.

On the road he saw a group cast in bronze, representing a Gallic warrior as overcome by a Roman knight; he considered that a good omen, and thenceforward, if he mentioned the rebellious legions and Vindex, it was only to ridicule them. His entrance to the city surpassed all that had been witnessed earlier. He entered in the chariot used by Augustus in his triumph. One arch of the Circus was destroyed to give a road to the procession. The Senate, knights, and innumerable throngs of people went forth to meet him. The walls trembled from shouts of "Hail, Augustus! Hail, Hercules! Hail, divinity, the incomparable, the Olympian, the Pythian, the immortal!" Behind him were borne the crowns, the names of cities in which he had triumphed; and on tablets were inscribed the names of the masters whom he had vanquished. Nero himself was intoxicated with delight, and with emotion he asked the Augustians who stood around him, "What was the triumph of Julius compared with this?" The idea that any mortal should dare to raise a hand on such a demigod did not enter his head. He felt himself really Olympian, and therefore safe. The excitement and the madness of the crowd roused his own madness. In fact, it might seem in the day of that triumph that not merely Cæsar and the city, but the world, had lost its senses.

Through the flowers and the piles of wreaths no one could see the precipice. Still that same evening columns and walls of temples were covered with inscriptions, describing Nero's crimes, threatening him with coming vengeance, and ridiculing him as an artist. From mouth to mouth went the phrase, "He sang till he roused the Gauls." Alarming news made the rounds of the city, and reached enormous measures. Alarm seized the Augustians. People, uncertain of the

future, dared not express hopes or wishes; they hardly dared to feel or think.

But he went on living only in the theatre and music. Instruments newly invented occupied him, and a new water-organ, of which trials were made on the Palatine. With childish mind, incapable of plan or action, he imagined that he could ward off danger by promises of spectacles and theatrical exhibitions reaching far into the future. Persons nearest him, seeing that instead of providing means and an army, he was merely searching for expressions to depict the danger graphically, began to lose their heads. Others thought that he was simply deafening himself and others with quotations, while in his soul he was alarmed and terrified. In fact, his acts became feverish. Every day a thousand new plans flew through his head. At times he sprang up to rush out against danger; gave command to pack up his lutes and citharæ, to arm the young slave women as Amazons, and lead the legions to the East. Again he thought to finish the rebellion of the Gallic legions, not with war, but with song; and his soul laughed at the spectacle which was to follow his conquest of the soldiers by song. The legionaries would surround him with tears in their eyes; he would sing to them an epinicion, after which the golden epoch would begin for him and for Rome. At one time he called for blood; at another he declared that he would be satisfied with governing in Egypt. He recalled the prediction which promised him lordship in Jerusalem, and he was moved by the thought that as a wandering minstrel he would earn his daily bread, — that cities and countries would honor in him, not Cæsar, the lord of the earth, but a poet whose like the world had not produced before.

And so he struggled, raged, played, sang, changed his plan, changed his quotations, changed his life and the world into a dream absurd, fantastic, dreadful, into an uproarious hunt composed of unnatural expressions, bad verses, groans, tears, and blood; but meanwhile the cloud in the west was increasing and thickening every day. The measure was exceeded; the insane comedy was nearing its end.

When news that Galba and Spain had joined the uprising came to his ears, he fell into rage and madness. He broke goblets, overturned the table at a feast, and issued orders which neither Helius nor Tigellinus himself dared to execute. To kill Gauls resident in Rome, fire the city a second time, let out the wild beasts, and transfer the capital to Alexan-

dria seemed to him great, astonishing, and easy. But the days of his dominion had passed, and even those who shared in his former crimes began to look on him as a madman.

The death of Vindex, and disagreement in the revolting legions seemed, however, to turn the scale to his side. Again new feasts, new triumphs, and new sentences were issued in Rome, till a certain night when a messenger rushed up on a foaming horse, with the news that in the city itself the soldiers had raised the standard of revolt, and proclaimed Galba Cæsar.

Nero was asleep when the messenger came; but when he woke he called in vain for the night-guard, which watched at the entrance to his chambers. The palace was empty. Slaves were plundering in the most distant corners that which could be taken most quickly. But the sight of Nero frightened them; he wandered alone through the palace, filling it with cries of despair and fear.

At last his freedmen, Phaon, Sporus, and Epaphroditus came to his rescue. They wished him to flee, and said that there was no time to be lost; but he deceived himself still. If he should dress in mourning and speak to the Senate, would it resist his prayers and eloquence? If he should use all his eloquence, his rhetoric and skill of an actor, would any one on earth have power to resist him? Would they not give him even the prefecture of Egypt?

The freedmen, accustomed to flatter, had not the boldness yet to refuse him directly; they only warned him that before he could reach the Forum the people would tear him to pieces, and declared that if he did not mount his horse immediately, they too would desert him.

Phaon offered refuge in his villa outside the Nomentan Gate. After a while they mounted horses, and, covering Nero's head with a mantle, they galloped off toward the edge of the city. The night was growing pale. But on the streets there was a movement which showed the exceptional nature of the time. Soldiers, now singly and now in small groups, were scattered through the city. Not far from the camp Cæsar's horse sprang aside suddenly at sight of a corpse. The mantle slipped from his head; a soldier recognized Nero, and, confused by the unexpected meeting, gave the military salute. While passing the pretorian camp, they heard thundering shouts in honor of Galba. Nero understood at last that the hour of death was near. Terror and reproaches of conscience seized him.

He declared that he saw darkness in front of him in the form of a black cloud. From that cloud came forth faces in which he saw his mother, his wife, and his brother. His teeth were chattering from fright; still his soul of a comedian found a kind of charm in the horror of the moment. To be absolute lord of the earth and lose all things, seemed to him the height of tragedy; and faithful to himself, he played the first rôle to the end. A fever for quotations took possession of him, and a passionate wish that those present should preserve them for posterity. At moments he said that he wished to die, and called for Spiculus, the most skilled of all gladiators in killing. At moments he declaimed, "Mother, wife, father, call me to death!" Flashes of hope rose in him, however, from time to time, — hope vain and childish. He knew that he was going to death, and still he did not believe it.

They found the Nomentan Gate open. Going farther, they passed near Ostrianum, where Peter had taught and baptized. At daybreak they reached Phaon's villa.

There the freedmen hid from him no longer the fact that it was time to die. He gave command then to dig a grave, and lay on the ground so that they might take accurate measurement. At sight of the earth thrown up, however, terror seized him. His fat face became pale, and on his forehead sweat stood like drops of dew in the morning. He delayed. In a voice at once abject and theatrical, he declared that the hour had not come yet; then he began again to quote. At last he begged them to burn his body. "What an artist is perishing!" repeated he, as if in amazement.

Meanwhile Phaon's messenger arrived with the announcement that the Senate had issued the sentence that the "paricide" was to be punished according to ancient custom.

"What is the ancient custom?" asked Nero, with whitened lips.

"They will fix thy neck in a fork, flog thee to death, and hurl thy body into the Tiber," answered Epaphroditus, abruptly.

Nero drew aside the robe from his breast.

"It is time, then!" said he, looking into the sky. And he repeated once more, "What an artist is perishing!"

At that moment the tramp of a horse was heard. That was the centurion coming with soldiers for the head of Ahenobarbus.

"Hurry!" cried the freedmen.

Nero placed the knife to his neck, but pushed it only timidly. It was clear that he would never have courage to thrust it in. Epaphroditus pushed his hand suddenly, — the knife sank to the handle. Nero's eyes turned in his head, terrible, immense, frightened.

"I bring thee life!" cried the centurion, entering.

"Too late!" said Nero, with a hoarse voice; then he added, —

"Here is faithfulness!"

In a twinkle death seized his head. Blood from his heavy neck rushed in a dark stream on the flowers of the garden. His legs kicked the ground, and he died.

On the morrow the faithful Acte wrapped his body in costly stuffs, and burned him on a pile filled with perfumes.

And so Nero passed, as a whirlwind, as a storm, as a fire, as war or death passes; but the basilica of Peter rules till now, from the Vatican heights, the city, and the world.

Near the ancient Porta Capena stands to this day a little chapel with the inscription, somewhat worn: *Quo Vadis, Domine?*

THE END.