



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

QUO VADIS

Henryk
Sienkiewicz

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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QUO VADIS

A NARRATIVE OF THE TIME OF NERO

by

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ



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INTRODUCTORY

In the trilogy *With Fire and Sword*, *The Deluge*, and *Pan Michael*, Sienkiewicz has given pictures of a great and decisive epoch in modern history. The results of the struggle begun under Bogdan Hmelnitski have been felt for more than two centuries, and they are growing daily in importance. The Russia which rose out of that struggle has become a power not only of European but of worldwide significance, and, to all human seeming, she is yet in an early stage of her career.

In *Quo Vadis* the author gives us pictures of opening scenes in the conflict of moral ideas with the Roman Empire—a conflict from which Christianity issued as the leading force in history.

The Slavs are not so well known to Western Europe or to us as they are sure to be in the near future; hence the trilogy, with all its popularity and merit, is not appreciated yet as it will be.

The conflict described in *Quo Vadis* is of supreme interest to a vast number of persons reading English; and this book will rouse, I think, more attention at first than anything written by Sienkiewicz hitherto.

JEREMIAH CURTIN
Ilom, Northern Guatemala,
June, 1896

I

Petronius woke only about midday, and as usual greatly wearied. The evening before he had been at one of Nero's feasts, which was prolonged till late at night. For some time his health had been failing. He said himself that he woke up benumbed, as it were, and without power of collecting his thoughts. But the morning bath and careful kneading of the body by trained slaves hastened gradually the course of his slothful blood, roused him, quickened him, restored his strength, so that he issued from the *elaeothesium*, that is, the last division of the bath, as if he had risen from the dead, with eyes gleaming from wit and gladness, rejuvenated, filled with life, exquisite, so unapproachable that Otho himself could not compare with him, and was really that which he had been called—*arbiter elegantiarum*.

He visited the public baths rarely, only when some rhetor happened there who roused admiration and who was spoken of in the city, or when in the *ephebiae* there were combats of exceptional interest. Moreover, he had in his own *insula* private baths which Celer, the famous contemporary of Severus, had extended for him, reconstructed and arranged with such uncommon taste that Nero himself acknowledged their excellence over those of the Emperor, though the imperial baths were more extensive and finished with incomparably greater luxury.

After that feast, at which he was bored by the jesting of Vatinius with Nero, Lucan, and Seneca, he took part in a diatribe as to whether woman has a soul. Rising late, he used, as was his custom, the baths. Two enormous *balneatores* laid him on a cypress table covered with snow-white Egyptian byssus, and with hands dipped in perfumed olive oil began to rub his shapely body; and he waited with closed eyes till the heat of the laconicum and the heat of their hands passed through him and expelled weariness.

But after a certain time he spoke, and opened his eyes; he inquired about the weather, and then about gems which the jeweler Idomeneus had promised to send him for examination that day. It appeared that the weather was beautiful, with a light breeze from the Alban hills, and that the gems had not been brought. Petronius closed his eyes again, and had given command to bear him to the tepidarium, when from behind the curtain the nomenclator looked in, announcing that young Marcus Vinicius, recently returned from Asia Minor, had come to visit him.

Petronius ordered to admit the guest to the tepidarium, to which he was borne himself. Vinicius was the son of his oldest sister, who years before had

married Marcus Vinicius, a man of consular dignity from the time of Tiberius. The young man was serving then under Corbulo against the Parthians, and at the close of the war had returned to the city. Petronius had for him a certain weakness bordering on attachment, for Marcus was beautiful and athletic, a young man who knew how to preserve a certain aesthetic measure in his profligacy; this, Petronius prized above everything.

"A greeting to Petronius," said the young man, entering the tepidarium with a springy step. "May all the gods grant thee success, but especially Asclepius and Cypris, for under their double protection nothing evil can meet one."

"I greet thee in Rome, and may thy rest be sweet after war," replied Petronius, extending his hand from between the folds of soft *karbas* stuff in which he was wrapped. "What's to be heard in Armenia; or since thou wert in Asia, didst thou not stumble into Bithynia?"

Petronius on a time had been proconsul in Bithynia, and, what is more, he had governed with energy and justice. This was a marvelous contrast in the character of a man noted for effeminacy and love of luxury; hence he was fond of mentioning those times, as they were a proof of what he had been, and of what he might have become had it pleased him.

"I happened to visit Heraclea," answered Vinicius. "Corbulo sent me there with an order to assemble reinforcements."

"Ah, Heraclea! I knew at Heraclea a certain maiden from Colchis, for whom I would have given all the divorced women of this city, not excluding Poppaea. But these are old stories. Tell me now, rather, what is to be heard from the Parthian boundary. It is true that they weary me every Vologeses of them, and Tiridates and Tigranes—those barbarians who, as young Arulenus insists, walk on all fours at home, and pretend to be human only when in our presence. But now people in Rome speak much of them, if only for the reason that it is dangerous to speak of aught else."

"The war is going badly, and but for Corbulo might be turned to defeat."

"Corbulo! by Bacchus! a real god of war, a genuine Mars, a great leader, at the same time quick-tempered, honest, and dull. I love him, even for this—that Nero is afraid of him."

"Corbulo is not a dull man."

"Perhaps thou art right, but for that matter it is all one. Dullness, as Pyrrho says, is in no way worse than wisdom, and differs from it in nothing."

Vinicius began to talk of the war; but when Petronius closed his eyes again, the young man, seeing his uncle's tired and somewhat emaciated face, changed the conversation, and inquired with a certain interest about his health.

Petronius opened his eyes again.

Health!—No. He did not feel well. He had not gone so far yet, it is true, as young Sissena, who had lost sensation to such a degree that when he was brought to the bath in the morning he inquired, "Am I sitting?" But he was not well. Vinicius had just committed him to the care of Asclepius and Cypris. But he, Petronius, did not believe in Asclepius. It was not known even whose son that Asclepius

was, the son of Arsinoe or Koronis; and if the mother was doubtful, what was to be said of the father? Who, in that time, could be sure who his own father was?

Hereupon Petronius began to laugh; then he continued—"Two years ago, it is true, I sent to Epidaurus three dozen live blackbirds and a goblet of gold; but dost thou know why? I said to myself, 'Whether this helps or not, it will do me no harm.' Though people make offerings to the gods yet, I believe that all think as I do—all, with the exception, perhaps, of mule-drivers hired at the Porta Capena by travelers. Besides Asclepius, I have had dealings with sons of Asclepius. When I was troubled a little last year in the bladder, they performed an incubation for me. I saw that they were tricksters, but I said to myself: 'What harm! The world stands on deceit, and life is an illusion. The soul is an illusion too. But one must have reason enough to distinguish pleasant from painful illusions.' I shall give command to burn in my *hypocaustum*, cedarwood sprinkled with ambergris, for during life I prefer perfumes to stench. As to Cypris, to whom thou hast also confided me, I have known her guardianship to the extent that I have twinges in my right foot. But as to the rest she is a good goddess! I suppose that thou wilt bear sooner or later white doves to her altar."

"True," answered Vinicius. "The arrows of the Parthians have not reached my body, but a dart of Amor has struck me—unexpectedly, a few stadia from a gate of this city."

"By the white knees of the Graces! thou wilt tell me of this at a leisure hour."

"I have come purposely to get thy advice," answered Marcus.

But at that moment the *epitatores* came, and occupied themselves with Petronius. Marcus, throwing aside his tunic, entered a bath of tepid water, for Petronius invited him to a plunge bath.

"Ah, I have not even asked whether thy feeling is reciprocated," said Petronius, looking at the youthful body of Marcus, which was as if cut out of marble. "Had Lysippos seen thee, thou wouldst be ornamenting now the gate leading to the Palatine, as a statue of Hercules in youth."

The young man smiled with satisfaction, and began to sink in the bath, splashing warm water abundantly on the mosaic which represented Hera at the moment when she was imploring Sleep to lull Zeus to rest. Petronius looked at him with the satisfied eye of an artist.

When Vinicius had finished and yielded himself in turn to the *epitatores*, a lector came in with a bronze tube at his breast and rolls of paper in the tube.

"Dost wish to listen?" asked Petronius.

"If it is thy creation, gladly!" answered the young tribune; "if not, I prefer conversation. Poets seize people at present on every street corner."

"Of course they do. Thou wilt not pass any basilica, bath, library, or book-shop without seeing a poet gesticulating like a monkey. Agrippa, on coming here from the East, mistook them for madmen. And it is just such a time now. Caesar writes verses; hence all follow in his steps. Only it is not permitted to write better verses than Caesar, and for that reason I fear a little for Lucan.

But I write prose, with which, however, I do not honor myself or others. What the lector has to read are *codicilli* of that poor Fabricius Veiento.”

“Why ‘poor?’”

“Because it has been communicated to him that he must dwell in Odessa and not return to his domestic hearth till he receives a new command. That Odyssey will be easier for him than for Ulysses, since his wife is no Penelope. I need not tell thee, for that matter, that he acted stupidly. But here no one takes things otherwise than superficially. His is rather a wretched and dull little book, which people have begun to read passionately only when the author is banished. Now one hears on every side, ‘*Scandala! scandala!*’ and it may be that Veiento invented some things; but I, who know the city, know our patres and our women, assure thee that it is all paler than reality. Meanwhile every man is searching in the book—for himself with alarm, for his acquaintances with delight. At the bookshop of Avirnus a hundred copyists are writing at dictation, and its success is assured.”

“Are not thy affairs in it?”

“They are; but the author is mistaken, for I am at once worse and less flat than he represents me. Seest thou we have lost long since the feeling of what is worthy or unworthy—and to me even it seems that in real truth there is no difference between them, though Seneca, Musonius, and Trasca pretend that they see it. To me it is all one! By Hercules, I say what I think! I have preserved loftiness, however, because I know what is deformed and what is beautiful; but our poet, Bronzebeard, for example, the charioteer, the singer, the actor, does not understand this.”

“I am sorry, however, for Fabricius! He is a good companion.”

“Vanity ruined the man. Everyone suspected him, no one knew certainly; but he could not contain himself, and told the secret on all sides in confidence. Hast heard the history of Rufinus?”

“No.”

“Then come to the frigidarium to cool; there I will tell thee.”

They passed to the frigidarium, in the middle of which played a fountain of bright rose-color, emitting the odor of violets. There they sat in niches which were covered with velvet, and began to cool themselves. Silence reigned for a time. Vinicius looked awhile thoughtfully at a bronze faun which, bending over the arm of a nymph, was seeking her lips eagerly with his lips.

“He is right,” said the young man. “That is what is best in life.”

“More or less! But besides this thou lovest war, for which I have no liking, since under tents one’s fingernails break and cease to be rosy. For that matter, every man has his preferences. Bronzebeard loves song, especially his own; and old Scaurus his Corinthian vase, which stands near his bed at night, and which he kisses when he cannot sleep. He has kissed the edge off already. Tell me, dost thou not write verses?”

“No; I have never composed a single hexameter.”

“And dost thou not play on the lute and sing?”

“No.”

“And dost thou drive a chariot?”

“I tried once in Antioch, but unsuccessfully.”

“Then I am at rest concerning thee. And to what party in the hippodrome dost thou belong?”

“To the Greens.”

“Now I am perfectly at rest, especially since thou hast a large property indeed, though thou art not so rich as Pallas or Seneca. For seest thou, with us at present it is well to write verses, to sing to a lute, to declaim, and to compete in the Circus; but better, and especially safer, not to write verses, not to play, not to sing, and not to compete in the Circus. Best of all, is it to know how to admire when Bronzebeard admires. Thou art a comely young man; hence Poppaea may fall in love with thee. This is thy only peril. But no, she is too experienced; she cares for something else. She has had enough of love with her two husbands; with the third she has other views. Dost thou know that that stupid Otho loves her yet to distraction? He walks on the cliffs of Spain, and sighs; he has so lost his former habits, and so ceased to care for his person, that three hours each day suffice him to dress his hair. Who could have expected this of Otho?”

“I understand him,” answered Vinicius; “but in his place I should have done something else.”

“What, namely?”

“I should have enrolled faithful legions of mountaineers of that country. They are good soldiers—those Iberians.”

“Vinicius! Vinicius! I almost wish to tell thee that thou wouldst not have been capable of that. And knowest why? Such things are done, but they are not mentioned even conditionally. As to me, in his place, I should have laughed at Poppaea, laughed at Bronzebeard, and formed for myself legions, not of Iberian men, however, but Iberian women. And what is more, I should have written epigrams which I should not have read to anyone—not like that poor Rufinus.”

“Thou wert to tell me his history.”

“I will tell it in the *unctorium*.”

But in the *unctorium* the attention of Vinicius was turned to other objects; namely, to wonderful slave women who were waiting for the bathers. Two of them, Africans, resembling noble statues of ebony, began to anoint their bodies with delicate perfumes from Arabia; others, Phrygians, skilled in hairdressing, held in their hands, which were bending and flexible as serpents, combs and mirrors of polished steel; two Grecian maidens from Kos, who were simply like deities, waited as *vestiplicae*, till the moment should come to put statuesque folds in the togas of the lords.

“By the cloud-scattering Zeus!” said Marcus Vinicius, “what a choice thou hast!”

“I prefer choice to numbers,” answered Petronius. “My whole ‘familia’¹ in Rome does not exceed four hundred, and I judge that for personal attendance only upstarts need a greater number of people.”

"More beautiful bodies even Bronzebeard does not possess," said Vinicius, distending his nostrils.

"Thou art my relative," answered Petronius, with a certain friendly indifference, "and I am neither so misanthropic as Barsus nor such a pedant as Aulus Plautius."

When Vinicius heard this last name, he forgot the maidens from Kos for a moment, and, raising his head vivaciously, inquired—"Whence did Aulus Plautius come to thy mind? Dost thou know that after I had disjointed my arm outside the city, I passed a number of days in his house? It happened that Plautius came up at the moment when the accident happened, and, seeing that I was suffering greatly, he took me to his house; there a slave of his, the physician Merion, restored me to health. I wished to speak with thee touching this very matter."

"Why? Is it because thou hast fallen in love with Pomponia perchance? In that case I pity thee; she is not young, and she is virtuous! I cannot imagine a worse combination. Brrr!"

"Not with Pomponia—*cheu!*" answered Vinicius.

"With whom, then?"

"If I knew myself with whom? But I do not know to a certainty her name even—Lygia or Callina? They call her Lygia in the house, for she comes of the Lygian nation; but she has her own barbarian name, Callina. It is a wonderful house—that of those Plautiuses. There are many people in it; but it is quiet there as in the groves of Subiacum. For a number of days I did not know that a divinity dwelt in the house. Once about daybreak I saw her bathing in the garden fountain; and I swear to thee by that foam from which Aphrodite rose, that the rays of the dawn passed right through her body. I thought that when the sun rose she would vanish before me in the light, as the twilight of morning does. Since then, I have seen her twice; and since then, too, I know not what rest is, I know not what other desires are, I have no wish to know what the city can give me. I want neither women, nor gold, nor Corinthian bronze, nor amber, nor pearls, nor wine, nor feasts; I want only Lygia. I am yearning for her, in sincerity I tell thee, Petronius, as that Dream who is imaged on the Mosaic of thy tepidarium yearned for Paisythea—whole days and night do I yearn."

"If she is a slave, then purchase her."

"She is not a slave."

"What is she? A freed woman of Plautius?"

"Never having been a slave, she could not be a freed woman."

"Who is she?"

"I know not—a king's daughter, or something of that sort."

"Thou dost rouse my curiosity, Vinicius."

"But if thou wish to listen, I will satisfy thy curiosity straightway. Her story is not a long one. Thou art acquainted, perhaps personally, with Vannius, king of the Suevi, who, expelled from his country, spent a long time here in Rome, and became even famous for his skillful play with dice, and his good driving of chariots. Drusus put him on the throne again. Vannius, who was really a strong man, ruled well at first, and warred with success; afterward, however, he began to

skin not only his neighbors, but his own Suevi, too much. Thereupon Vangio and Sido, two sister's sons of his, and the sons of Vibilius, king of the Hermuduri, determined to force him to Rome again—to try his luck there at dice.”

“I remember; that is of recent Claudian times.”

“Yes! War broke out. Vannius summoned to his aid the Yazigi; his dear nephews called in the Lygians, who, hearing of the riches of Vannius, and enticed by the hope of booty, came in such numbers that Caesar himself, Claudius, began to fear for the safety of the boundary. Claudius did not wish to interfere in a war among barbarians, but he wrote to Atelius Hister, who commanded the legions of the Danube, to turn a watchful eye on the course of the war, and not permit them to disturb our peace. Hister required, then, of the Lygians a promise not to cross the boundary; to this they not only agreed, but gave hostages, among whom were the wife and daughter of their leader. It is known to thee that barbarians take their wives and children to war with them. My Lygia is the daughter of that leader.”

“Whence dost thou know all this?”

“Aulus Plautius told it himself. The Lygians did not cross the boundary, indeed; but barbarians come and go like a tempest. So did the Lygians vanish with their wild-ox horns on their heads. They killed Vannius's Suevi and Yazigi; but their own king fell. They disappeared with their booty then, and the hostages remained in Hister's hands. The mother died soon after, and Hister, not knowing what to do with the daughter, sent her to Pomponius, the governor of all Germany. He, at the close of the war with the Catti, returned to Rome, where Claudius, as is known to thee, permitted him to have a triumph. The maiden on that occasion walked after the car of the conqueror; but, at the end of the solemnity—since hostages cannot be considered captives, and since Pomponius did not know what to do with her definitely—he gave her to his sister Pomponia Graecina, the wife of Plautius. In that house where all—beginning with the masters and ending with the poultry in the henhouse—are virtuous, that maiden grew up as virtuous, alas! as Graecina herself, and so beautiful that even Poppaea, if near her, would seem like an autumn fig near an apple of the Hesperides.”

“And what?”

“And I repeat to thee that from the moment when I saw how the sun-rays at that fountain passed through her body, I fell in love to distraction.”

“She is as transparent as a lamprey eel, then, or a youthful sardine?”

“Jest not, Petronius; but if the freedom with which I speak of my desire misleads thee, know this—that bright garments frequently cover deep wounds. I must tell thee, too, that, while returning from Asia, I slept one night in the temple of Mopsus to have a prophetic dream. Well, Mopsus appeared in a dream to me, and declared that, through love, a great change in my life would take place.”

“Pliny declares, as I hear, that he does not believe in the gods, but he believes in dreams; and perhaps he is right. My jests do not prevent me from thinking at times that in truth there is only one deity, eternal, creative, all-powerful, Venus Genetrix. She brings souls together; she unites bodies and things. Eros called the

world out of chaos. Whether he did well is another question; but, since he did so, we should recognize his might, though we are free not to bless it.”

“Alas! Petronius, it is easier to find philosophy in the world than wise counsel.”

“Tell me, what is thy wish specially?”

“I wish to have Lygia. I wish that these arms of mine, which now embrace only air, might embrace Lygia and press her to my bosom. I wish to breathe with her breath. Were she a slave, I would give Aulus for her one hundred maidens with feet whitened with lime as a sign that they were exhibited on sale for the first time. I wish to have her in my house till my head is as white as the top of Soracte in winter.”

“She is not a slave, but she belongs to the ‘family’ of Plautius; and since she is a deserted maiden, she may be considered an ‘alumna.’ Plautius might yield her to thee if he wished.”

“Then it seems that thou knowest not Pomponia Graecina. Both have become as much attached to her as if she were their own daughter.”

“Pomponia I know—a real cypress. If she were not the wife of Aulus, she might be engaged as a mourner. Since the death of Julius she has not thrown aside dark robes; and in general she looks as if, while still alive, she were walking on the asphodel meadow. She is, moreover, a ‘one-man woman’; hence, among our ladies of four and five divorces, she is straightway a phoenix. But! hast thou heard that in Upper Egypt the phoenix has just been hatched out, as ’tis said—an event which happens not oftener than once in five centuries.”

“Petronius! Petronius! Let us talk of the phoenix some other time.”

“What shall I tell thee, my Marcus? I know Aulus Plautius, who, though he blames my mode of life, has for me a certain weakness, and even respects me, perhaps, more than others, for he knows that I have never been an informer like Domitius Afer, Tigellinus, and a whole rabble of Ahenobarbus’s intimates.² Without pretending to be a stoic, I have been offended more than once at acts of Nero, which Seneca and Burrus looked at through their fingers. If it is thy thought that I might do something for thee with Aulus, I am at thy command.”

“I judge that thou hast the power. Thou hast influence over him; and, besides, thy mind possesses inexhaustible resources. If thou wert to survey the position and speak with Plautius.”

“Thou hast too great an idea of my influence and wit; but if that is the only question, I will talk with Plautius as soon as they return to the city.”

“They returned two days since.”

“In that case let us go to the triclinium, where a meal is now ready, and when we have refreshed ourselves, let us give command to bear us to Plautius.”

“Thou hast ever been kind to me,” answered Vinicius, with vivacity; “but now I shall give command to rear thy statue among my Lares—just such a beauty as this one—and I will place offerings before it.”

Then he turned toward the statues which ornamented one entire wall of

the perfumed chamber, and pointing to the one which represented Petronius as Hermes with a staff in his hand, he added—"By the light of Helios! if the 'godlike' Alexander resembled thee, I do not wonder at Helen."

And in that exclamation there was as much sincerity as flattery; for Petronius, though older and less athletic, was more beautiful than even Vinicius. The women of Rome admired not only his pliant mind and his taste, which gained for him the title *Arbiter elegantiae*, but also his body. This admiration was evident even on the faces of those maidens from Kos who were arranging the folds of his toga; and one of whom, whose name was Eunice, loving him in secret, looked him in the eyes with submission and rapture. But he did not even notice this; and, smiling at Vinicius, he quoted in answer an expression of Seneca about woman—*Animal impudens*, etc. And then, placing an arm on the shoulders of his nephew, he conducted him to the triclinium.

In the *unctorium* the two Grecian maidens, the Phrygians, and the two Ethiopians began to put away the vessels with perfumes. But at that moment, and beyond the curtain of the frigidarium, appeared the heads of the *balneatores*, and a low "Psst!" was heard. At that call one of the Grecians, the Phrygians, and the Ethiopians sprang up quickly, and vanished in a twinkle behind the curtain. In the baths began a moment of license which the inspector did not prevent, for he took frequent part in such frolics himself. Petronius suspected that they took place; but, as a prudent man, and one who did not like to punish, he looked at them through his fingers.

In the *unctorium* only Eunice remained. She listened for a short time to the voices and laughter which retreated in the direction of the laconicum. At last she took the stool inlaid with amber and ivory, on which Petronius had been sitting a short time before, and put it carefully at his statue. The *unctorium* was full of sunlight and the hues which came from the many-colored marbles with which the wall was faced. Eunice stood on the stool, and, finding herself at the level of the statue, cast her arms suddenly around its neck; then, throwing back her golden hair, and pressing her rosy body to the white marble, she pressed her lips with ecstasy to the cold lips of Petronius.

II

After a refreshment, which was called the morning meal and to which the two friends sat down at an hour when common mortals were already long past their midday *prandium*, Petronius proposed a light doze. According to him, it was too early for visits yet. "There are, it is true," said he, "people who begin to visit their acquaintances about sunrise, thinking that custom an old Roman one, but I look on this as barbarous. The afternoon hours are most proper—not earlier, however, than that one when the sun passes to the side of Jove's temple on the Capitol and begins to look slantwise on the Forum. In autumn it is still hot, and people are glad to sleep after eating. At the same time it is pleasant to hear the noise of the fountain in the atrium, and, after the obligatory thousand steps, to doze in the red light which filters in through the purple half-drawn velarium."

Vinicius recognized the justice of these words; and the two men began to walk, speaking in a careless manner of what was to be heard on the Palatine and in the city, and philosophizing a little upon life. Petronius withdrew then to the cubiculum, but did not sleep long. In half an hour he came out, and, having given command to bring verbena, he inhaled the perfume and rubbed his hands and temples with it.

"Thou wilt not believe," said he, "how it enlivens and freshens one. Now I am ready."

The litter was waiting long since; hence they took their places, and Petronius gave command to bear them to the Vicus Patricius, to the house of Aulus. Petronius's *insula* lay on the southern slope of the Palatine, near the so-called Carinae; their nearest way, therefore, was below the Forum; but since Petronius wished to step in on the way to see the jeweler Idomeneus, he gave the direction to carry them along the Vicus Apollinis and the Forum in the direction of the Vicus Sceleratus, on the corner of which were many *tabernae* of every kind.

Gigantic Africans bore the litter and moved on, preceded by slaves called *pedisequi*. Petronius, after some time, raised to his nostrils in silence his palm odorous with verbena, and seemed to be meditating on something.

"It occurs to me," said he after a while, "that if thy forest goddess is not a slave she might leave the house of Plautius, and transfer herself to thine. Thou wouldst surround her with love and cover her with wealth, as I do my adored Chrysothemis, of whom, speaking between us, I have quite as nearly enough as she has of me."

Marcus shook his head.

"No?" inquired Petronius. "In the worst event, the case would be left with Caesar, and thou mayst be certain that, thanks even to my influence, our Bronzebeard would be on thy side."

"Thou knowest not Lygia," replied Vinicius.

"Then permit me to ask if thou know her otherwise than by sight? Hast spoken with her? hast confessed thy love to her?"

"I saw her first at the fountain; since then I have met her twice. Remember that during my stay in the house of Aulus, I dwelt in a separate villa, intended for guests, and, having a disjointed arm, I could not sit at the common table. Only on the eve of the day for which I announced my departure did I meet Lygia at supper, but I could not say a word to her. I had to listen to Aulus and his account of victories gained by him in Britain, and then of the fall of small states in Italy, which Licinius Stolo strove to prevent. In general I do not know whether Aulus will be able to speak of aught else, and do not think that we shall escape this history unless it be thy wish to hear about the effeminacy of these days. They have pheasants in their preserves, but they do not eat them, setting out from the principle that every pheasant eaten brings nearer the end of Roman power. I met her a second time at the garden cistern, with a freshly plucked reed in her hand, the top of which she dipped in the water and sprinkled the irises growing around. Look at my knees. By the shield of Hercules, I tell thee that they did not tremble when clouds of Parthians advanced on our maniples with howls, but they trembled before the cistern. And, confused as a youth who still wears a bulla on his neck, I merely begged pity with my eyes, not being able to utter a word for a long time."

Petronius looked at him, as if with a certain envy. "Happy man," said he, "though the world and life were the worst possible, one thing in them will remain eternally good—youth!"

After a while he inquired: "And hast thou not spoken to her?"

"When I had recovered somewhat, I told her that I was returning from Asia, that I had disjointed my arm near the city, and had suffered severely, but at the moment of leaving that hospitable house I saw that suffering in it was more to be wished for than delight in another place, that sickness there was better than health somewhere else. Confused too on her part, she listened to my words with bent head while drawing something with the reed on the saffron-colored sand. Afterward she raised her eyes, then looked down at the marks drawn already; once more she looked at me, as if to ask about something, and then fled on a sudden like a hamadryad before a dull faun."

"She must have beautiful eyes."

"As the sea—and I was drowned in them, as in the sea. Believe me that the archipelago is less blue. After a while a little son of Plautius ran up with a question. But I did not understand what he wanted."

"O Athene!" exclaimed Petronius, "remove from the eyes of this youth the bandage with which Eros has bound them; if not, he will break his head against the columns of Venus's temple."

“O thou spring bud on the tree of life,” said he, turning to Vinicius, “thou first green shoot of the vine! Instead of taking thee to the Plautiuses, I ought to give command to bear thee to the house of Gelocius, where there is a school for youths unacquainted with life.”

“What dost thou wish in particular?”

“But what did she write on the sand? Was it not the name of Amor, or a heart pierced with his dart, or something of such sort, that one might know from it that the satyrs had whispered to the ear of that nymph various secrets of life? How couldst thou help looking on those marks?”

“It is longer since I have put on the toga than seems to thee,” said Vinicius, “and before little Aulus ran up, I looked carefully at those marks, for I know that frequently maidens in Greece and in Rome draw on the sand a confession which their lips will not utter. But guess what she drew!”

“If it is other than I supposed, I shall not guess.”

“A fish.”

“What dost thou say?”

“I say, a fish. What did that mean—that cold blood is flowing in her veins? So far I do not know; but thou, who hast called me a spring bud on the tree of life, wilt be able to understand the sign certainly.”

“*Carissime!* ask such a thing of Pliny. He knows fish. If old Apicius were alive, he could tell thee something, for in the course of his life he ate more fish than could find place at one time in the bay of Naples.”

Further conversation was interrupted, since they were borne into crowded streets where the noise of people hindered them.

From the Vicus Apollinis they turned to the Boarium, and then entered the Forum Romanum, where on clear days, before sunset, crowds of idle people assembled to stroll among the columns, to tell and hear news, to see noted people borne past in litters, and finally to look in at the jewelery-shops, the bookshops, the arches where coin was changed, shops for silk, bronze, and all other articles with which the buildings covering that part of the market placed opposite the Capitol were filled.

One-half of the Forum, immediately under the rock of the Capitol, was buried already in shade; but the columns of the temples, placed higher, seemed golden in the sunshine and the blue. Those lying lower cast lengthened shadows on marble slabs. The place was so filled with columns everywhere that the eye was lost in them as in a forest.

Those buildings and columns seemed huddled together. They towered some above others, they stretched toward the right and the left, they climbed toward the height, and they clung to the wall of the Capitol, or some of them clung to others, like greater and smaller, thicker and thinner, white or gold colored tree-trunks, now blooming under architraves, flowers of the acanthus, now surrounded with Ionic corners, now finished with a simple Doric quadrangle. Above that forest gleamed colored triglyphs; from tympana stood forth the sculptured forms of gods; from the summits winged golden quadrigae seemed ready to fly away

through space into the blue dome, fixed serenely above that crowded place of temples. Through the middle of the market and along the edges of it flowed a river of people; crowds passed under the arches of the basilica of Julius Caesar; crowds were sitting on the steps of Castor and Pollux, or walking around the temple of Vesta, resembling on that great marble background many-colored swarms of butterflies or beetles. Down immense steps, from the side of the temple on the Capitol dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, came new waves; at the rostra people listened to chance orators; in one place and another rose the shouts of hawkers selling fruit, wine, or water mixed with fig-juice; of tricksters; of vendors of marvelous medicines; of soothsayers; of discoverers of hidden treasures; of interpreters of dreams. Here and there, in the tumult of conversations and cries, were mingled sounds of the Egyptian sistra, of the sambucae, or of Grecian flutes. Here and there the sick, the pious, or the afflicted were bearing offerings to the temples. In the midst of the people, on the stone flags, gathered flocks of doves, eager for the grain given them, and like movable many-colored and dark spots, now rising for a moment with a loud sound of wings, now dropping down again to places left vacant by people. From time to time the crowds opened before litters in which were visible the affected faces of women, or the heads of senators and knights, with features, as it were, rigid and exhausted from living. The many-tongued population repeated aloud their names, with the addition of some term of praise or ridicule. Among the unordered groups pushed from time to time, advancing with measured tread, parties of soldiers, or watchers, preserving order on the streets. Around about, the Greek language was heard as often as Latin.

Vinicius, who had not been in the city for a long time, looked with a certain curiosity on that swarm of people and on that Forum Romanum, which both dominated the sea of the world and was flooded by it, so that Petronius, who divined the thoughts of his companion, called it “the nest of the *Quirites*—without the *Quirites*.” In truth, the local element was well-nigh lost in that crowd, composed of all races and nations. There appeared Ethiopians, gigantic light-haired people from the distant north, Britons, Gauls, Germans, sloping-eyed dwellers of Lericum; people from the Euphrates and from the Indus, with beards dyed brick color; Syrians from the banks of the Orontes, with black and mild eyes; dwellers in the deserts of Arabia, dried up as a bone; Jews, with their flat breasts; Egyptians, with the eternal, indifferent smile on their faces; Numidians and Africans; Greeks from Hellas, who equally with the Romans commanded the city, but commanded through science, art, wisdom, and deceit; Greeks from the islands, from Asia Minor, from Egypt, from Italy, from Gallia Narbonensis. In the throng of slaves, with pierced ears, were not lacking also freemen—an idle population, which Caesar amused, supported, even clothed—and free visitors, whom the ease of life and the prospects of fortune enticed to the gigantic city; there was no lack of venal persons. There were priests of Serapis, with palm branches in their hands; priests of Isis, to whose altar more offerings were brought than to the temple of the Capitoline Jove; priests of Cybele, bearing in their hands golden ears of rice; and priests of nomad divinities; and dancers of the East with bright

headdresses, and dealers in amulets, and snake-tamers, and Chaldean seers; and, finally, people without any occupation whatever, who applied for grain every week at the storehouses on the Tiber, who fought for lottery-tickets to the Circus, who spent their nights in rickety houses of districts beyond the Tiber, and sunny and warm days under covered porticos, and in foul eating-houses of the Subura, on the Milvian Bridge, or before the *insulae* of the great, where from time to time remnants from the tables of slaves were thrown out to them.

Petronius was well known to those crowds. Vinicius's ears were struck continually by "*Hic est!*".³³ They loved him for his munificence; and his peculiar popularity increased from the time when they learned that he had spoken before Caesar in opposition to the sentence of death issued against the whole "familia," that is, against all the slaves of the prefect Pedanius Secundus, without distinction of sex or age, because one of them had killed that monster in a moment of despair. Petronius repeated in public, it is true, that it was all one to him, and that he had spoken to Caesar only privately, as the *arbiter elegantiarum* whose aesthetic taste was offended by a barbarous slaughter befitting Scythians and not Romans. Nevertheless, people who were indignant because of the slaughter loved Petronius from that moment forth. But he did not care for their love. He remembered that that crowd of people had loved also Britannicus, poisoned by Nero; and Agrippina, killed at his command; and Octavia, smothered in hot steam at the Pandataria, after her veins had been opened previously; and Rubellius Plautus, who had been banished; and Thrasea, to whom any morning might bring a death sentence. The love of the mob might be considered rather of ill omen; and the skeptical Petronius was superstitious also. He had a twofold contempt for the multitude—as an aristocrat and an aesthetic person. Men with the odor of roast beans, which they carried in their bosoms, and who besides were eternally hoarse and sweating from playing *morra* on the street-corners and peristyles, did not in his eyes deserve the term "human." Hence he gave no answer whatever to the applause, or the kisses sent from lips here and there to him. He was relating to Marcus the case of Pedanius, reviling meanwhile the fickleness of that rabble which, next morning after the terrible butchery, applauded Nero on his way to the temple of Jupiter Stator. But he gave command to halt before the bookshop of Avirnus, and, descending from the litter, purchased an ornamented manuscript, which he gave to Vinicius.

"Here is a gift for thee," said he.

"Thanks!" answered Vinicius. Then, looking at the title, he inquired, "*Satyricon?* Is this something new? Whose is it?"

"Mine. But I do not wish to go in the road of Rufinus, whose history I was to tell thee, nor of Fabricius Veiento; hence no one knows of this, and do thou mention it to no man."

"Thou hast said that thou art no writer of verses," said Vinicius, looking at the middle of the manuscript; "but here I see prose thickly interwoven with them."

“When thou art reading, turn attention to Trimalchio’s feast. As to verses, they have disgusted me, since Nero is writing an epic. Vitellius, when he wishes to relieve himself, uses ivory fingers to thrust down his throat; others serve themselves with flamingo feathers steeped in olive oil or in a decoction of wild thyme. I read Nero’s poetry, and the result is immediate. Straightway I am able to praise it, if not with a clear conscience, at least with a clear stomach.”

When he had said this, he stopped the litter again before the shop of Idomeus the goldsmith, and, having settled the affair of the gems, gave command to bear the litter directly to Aulus’s mansion.

“On the road I will tell thee the story of Rufinus,” said he, “as proof of what vanity in an author may be.”

But before he had begun, they turned in to the Vicus Patricius, and soon found themselves before the dwelling of Aulus. A young and sturdy “janitor” opened the door leading to the ostium, over which a magpie confined in a cage greeted them noisily with the word, “Salve!”

On the way from the second antechamber, called the ostium, to the atrium itself, Vinicius said—“Hast noticed that the doorkeepers are without chains?”

“This is a wonderful house,” answered Petronius, in an undertone. “Of course it is known to thee that Pomponia Graecina is suspected of entertaining that Eastern superstition which consists in honoring a certain Chrestos. It seems that Crispinilla rendered her this service—she who cannot forgive Pomponia because one husband has sufficed her for a lifetime. A one-man Woman! Today, in Rome, it is easier to get a half-plate of fresh mushrooms from Noricum than to find such. They tried her before a domestic court—”

“To thy judgment this is a wonderful house. Later on I will tell thee what I heard and saw in it.”

Meanwhile they had entered the atrium. The slave appointed to it, called *atriensis*, sent a nomenclator to announce the guests; and Petronius, who, imagining that eternal sadness reigned in this severe house, had never been in it, looked around with astonishment, and as it were with a feeling of disappointment, for the atrium produced rather an impression of cheerfulness. A sheaf of bright light falling from above through a large opening broke into a thousand sparks on a fountain in a quadrangular little basin, called the impluvium, which was in the middle to receive rain falling through the opening during bad weather; this was surrounded by anemones and lilies. In that house a special love for lilies was evident, for there were whole clumps of them, both white and red; and, finally, sapphire irises, whose delicate leaves were as if silvered from the spray of the fountain. Among the moist mosses, in which lily-pots were hidden, and among the bunches of lilies were little bronze statues representing children and waterbirds. In one corner a bronze fawn, as if wishing to drink, was inclining its greenish head, grizzled, too, by dampness. The floor of the atrium was of mosaic; the walls, faced partly with red marble and partly with wood, on which were painted fish, birds, and griffins, attracted the eye by the play of colors. From the door to the side chamber they were ornamented with tortoiseshell or even ivory; at the walls

between the doors were statues of Aulus's ancestors. Everywhere calm plenty was evident, remote from excess, but noble and self-trusting.

Petronius, who lived with incomparably greater show and elegance, could find nothing which offended his taste; and had just turned to Vinicius with that remark, when a slave, the *velarius*, pushed aside the curtain separating the atrium from the tablinum, and in the depth of the building appeared Aulus Plautius approaching hurriedly.

He was a man nearing the evening of life, with a head whitened by hoar frost, but fresh, with an energetic face, a trifle too short, but still somewhat eagle-like. This time there was expressed on it a certain astonishment, and even alarm, because of the unexpected arrival of Nero's friend, companion, and suggester.

Petronius was too much a man of the world and too quick not to notice this; hence, after the first greetings, he announced with all the eloquence and ease at his command that he had come to give thanks for the care which his sister's son had found in that house, and that gratitude alone was the cause of the visit, to which, moreover, he was emboldened by his old acquaintance with Aulus.

Aulus assured him that he was a welcome guest; and as to gratitude, he declared that he had that feeling himself, though surely Petronius did not divine the cause of it.

In fact, Petronius did not divine it. In vain did he raise his hazel eyes, endeavoring to remember the least service rendered to Aulus or to anyone. He recalled none, unless it might be that which he intended to show Vinicius. Some such thing, it is true, might have happened involuntarily, but only involuntarily.

"I have great love and esteem for Vespasian, whose life thou didst save," said Aulus, "when he had the misfortune to doze while listening to Nero's verses."

"He was fortunate," replied Petronius, "for he did not hear them; but I will not deny that the matter might have ended with misfortune. Bronzebeard wished absolutely to send a centurion to him with the friendly advice to open his veins."

"But thou, Petronius, laughed him out of it."

"That is true, or rather it is not true. I told Nero that if Orpheus put wild beasts to sleep with song, his triumph was equal, since he had put Vespasian to sleep. Ahenobarbus may be blamed on condition that to a small criticism a great flattery be added. Our gracious Augusta, Poppaea, understands this to perfection."

"Alas! such are the times," answered Aulus. "I lack two front teeth, knocked out by a stone from the hand of a Briton, I speak with a hiss; still my happiest days were passed in Britain."

"Because they were days of victory," added Vinicius.

But Petronius, alarmed lest the old general might begin a narrative of his former wars, changed the conversation.

"See," said he, "in the neighborhood of Praeneste country people found a dead wolf whelp with two heads; and during a storm about that time lightning struck off an angle of the temple of Luna—a thing unparalleled, because of the late autumn. A certain Cotta, too, who had told this, added, while telling it, that

the priests of that temple prophesied the fall of the city or, at least, the ruin of a great house—ruin to be averted only by uncommon sacrifices.”

Aulus, when he had heard the narrative, expressed the opinion that such signs should not be neglected; that the gods might be angered by an over-measure of wickedness. In this there was nothing wonderful; and in such an event expiatory sacrifices were perfectly in order.

“Thy house, Plautius, is not too large,” answered Petronius, “though a great man lives in it. Mine is indeed too large for such a wretched owner, though equally small. But if it is a question of the ruin of something as great, for example, as the *Domus Transitoria*, would it be worthwhile for us to bring offerings to avert that ruin?”

Plautius did not answer that question—a carefulness which touched even Petronius somewhat, for, with all his inability to feel the difference between good and evil, he had never been an informer; and it was possible to talk with him in perfect safety. He changed the conversation again, therefore, and began to praise Plautius’s dwelling and the good taste which reigned in the house.

“It is an ancient seat,” said Plautius, “in which nothing has been changed since I inherited it.”

After the curtain was pushed aside which divided the atrium from the *tablinum*, the house was open from end to end, so that through the *tablinum* and the following *peristyle* and the hall lying beyond it which was called the *oecus*, the glance extended to the garden, which seemed from a distance like a bright image set in a dark frame. Joyous, childlike laughter came from it to the atrium.

“Oh, general!” said Petronius, “permit us to listen from near by to that glad laughter which is of a kind heard so rarely in these days.”

“Willingly,” answered Plautius, rising; “that is my little Aulus and Lygia, playing ball. But as to laughter, I think, Petronius, that our whole life is spent in it.”

“Life deserves laughter, hence people laugh at it,” answered Petronius, “but laughter here has another sound.”

“Petronius does not laugh for days in succession,” said Vinicius; “but then he laughs entire nights.”

Thus conversing, they passed through the length of the house and reached the garden, where Lygia and little Aulus were playing with balls, which slaves, appointed to that game exclusively and called *spheristae*, picked up and placed in their hands. Petronius cast a quick passing glance at Lygia; little Aulus, seeing Vinicius, ran to greet him; but the young tribune, going forward, bent his head before the beautiful maiden, who stood with a ball in her hand, her hair blown apart a little. She was somewhat out of breath, and flushed.

In the garden *triclinium*, shaded by ivy, grapes, and woodbine, sat Pomponia Graecina; hence they went to salute her. She was known to Petronius, though he did not visit Plautius, for he had seen her at the house of Antistia, the daughter of Rubellius Plautus, and besides at the house of Seneca and Polion. He could not resist a certain admiration with which he was filled by her face, pensive but mild, by the dignity of her bearing, by her movements, by her words. Pomponia

disturbed his understanding of women to such a degree that that man, corrupted to the marrow of his bones, and self-confident as no one in Rome, not only felt for her a kind of esteem, but even lost his previous self-confidence. And now, thanking her for her care of Vinicius, he thrust in, as it were involuntarily, *domina*, which never occurred to him when speaking, for example, to Calvia Crispinilla, Scribonia, Veleria, Solina, and other women of high society. After he had greeted her and returned thanks, he began to complain that he saw her so rarely, that it was not possible to meet her either in the Circus or the Amphitheater; to which she answered calmly, laying her hand on the hand of her husband:

“We are growing old, and love our domestic quiet more and more, both of us.”

Petronius wished to oppose; but Aulus Plautius added in his hissing voice—
“And we feel stranger and stranger among people who give Greek names to our Roman divinities.”

“The gods have become for some time mere figures of rhetoric,” replied Petronius, carelessly. “But since Greek rhetoricians taught us, it is easier for me even to say Hera than Juno.”

He turned his eyes then to Pomponia, as if to signify that in presence of her no other divinity could come to his mind: and then he began to contradict what she had said touching old age.

“People grow old quickly, it is true; but there are some who live another life entirely, and there are faces moreover which Saturn seems to forget.”

Petronius said this with a certain sincerity even, for Pomponia Graecina, though descending from the midday of life, had preserved an uncommon freshness of face; and since she had a small head and delicate features, she produced at times, despite her dark robes, despite her solemnity and sadness, the impression of a woman quite young.

Meanwhile little Aulus, who had become uncommonly friendly with Vinicius during his former stay in the house, approached the young man and entreated him to play ball. Lygia herself entered the triclinium after the little boy. Under the climbing ivy, with the light quivering on her face, she seemed to Petronius more beautiful than at the first glance, and really like some nymph. As he had not spoken to her thus far, he rose, inclined his head, and, instead of the usual expressions of greeting, quoted the words with which Ulysses greeted Nausikaa—

“I supplicate thee, O queen, whether thou art some goddess or a mortal! If thou art one of the daughters of men who dwell on earth, thrice blessed are thy father and thy lady mother, and thrice blessed thy brethren.”

The exquisite politeness of this man of the world pleased even Pomponia. As to Lygia, she listened, confused and flushed, without boldness to raise her eyes. But a wayward smile began to quiver at the corners of her lips, and on her face a struggle was evident between the timidity of a maiden and the wish to answer; but clearly the wish was victorious, for, looking quickly at Petronius, she answered him all at once with the words of that same Nausikaa, quoting them at one breath, and a little like a lesson learned—

“Stranger, thou seemest no evil man nor foolish.”

Then she turned and ran out as a frightened bird runs.

This time the turn for astonishment came to Petronius, for he had not expected to hear verses of Homer from the lips of a maiden of whose barbarian extraction he had heard previously from Vinicius. Hence he looked with an inquiring glance at Pomponia; but she could not give him an answer, for she was looking at that moment, with a smile, at the pride reflected on the face of her husband.

He was not able to conceal that pride. First, he had become attached to Lygia as to his own daughter; and second, in spite of his old Roman prejudices, which commanded him to thunder against Greek and the spread of the language, he considered it as the summit of social polish. He himself had never been able to learn it well; over this he suffered in secret. He was glad, therefore, that an answer was given in the language and poetry of Homer to this exquisite man both of fashion and letters, who was ready to consider Plautius's house as barbarian.

"We have in the house a pedagogue, a Greek," said he, turning to Petronius, "who teaches our boy, and the maiden overhears the lessons. She is a wagtail yet, but a dear one, to which we have both grown attached."

Petronius looked through the branches of woodbine into the garden, and at the three persons who were playing there. Vinicius had thrown aside his toga, and, wearing only his tunic, was striking the ball, which Lygia, standing opposite, with raised arms was trying to catch. The maiden did not make a great impression on Petronius at the first glance; she seemed to him too slender. But from the moment when he saw her more nearly in the triclinium he thought to himself that Aurora might look like her; and as a judge he understood that in her there was something uncommon. He considered everything and estimated everything; hence her face, rosy and clear, her fresh lips, as if set for a kiss, her eyes blue as the azure of the sea, the alabaster whiteness of her forehead, the wealth of her dark hair, with the reflection of amber or Corinthian bronze gleaming in its folds, her slender neck, the divine slope of her shoulders, the whole posture, flexible, slender, young with the youth of May and of freshly opened flowers. The artist was roused in him, and the worshiper of beauty, who felt that beneath a statue of that maiden one might write "Spring." All at once he remembered Chrysothemis, and pure laughter seized him. Chrysothemis seemed to him, with golden powder on her hair and darkened brows, to be fabulously faded—something in the nature of a yellowed rose-tree shedding its leaves. But still Rome envied him that Chrysothemis. Then he recalled Poppaea; and that most famous Poppaea also seemed to him soulless, a waxen mask. In that maiden with Tanagrian outlines there was not only spring, but a radiant soul, which shone through her rosy body as a flame through a lamp.

"Vinicius is right," thought he, "and my Chrysothemis is old, old!—as Troy!"

Then he turned to Pomponia Graecina, and, pointing to the garden, said—"I understand now, *domina*, why thou and thy husband prefer this house to the Circus and to feasts on the Palatine."

"Yes," answered she, turning her eyes in the direction of little Aulus and Lygia.

But the old general began to relate the history of the maiden, and what he

had heard years before from Atelius Hister about the Lygian people who lived in the gloom of the North.

The three outside had finished playing ball, and for some time had been walking along the sand of the garden, appearing against the dark background of myrtles and cypresses like three white statues. Lygia held little Aulus by the hand. After they had walked a while they sat on a bench near the fishpond, which occupied the middle of the garden. After a time Aulus sprang up to frighten the fish in the transparent water, but Vinicius continued the conversation begun during the walk.

“Yes,” said he, in a low, quivering voice, scarcely audible; “barely had I cast aside the pretexta, when I was sent to the legions in Asia. I had not become acquainted with the city, nor with life, nor with love. I know a small bit of Anacreon by heart, and Horace; but I cannot like Petronius quote verses, when reason is dumb from admiration and unable to find its own words. While a youth I went to school to Musonius, who told me that happiness consists in wishing what the gods wish, and therefore depends on our will. I think, however, that it is something else—something greater and more precious, which depends not on the will, for love only can give it. The gods themselves seek that happiness; hence I too, O Lygia, who have not known love thus far, follow in their footsteps. I also seek her who would give me happiness—”

He was silent—and for a time there was nothing to be heard save the light splash of the water into which little Aulus was throwing pebbles to frighten the fish; but after a while Vinicius began again in a voice still softer and lower—“But thou knowest of Vespasian’s son Titus? They say that he had scarcely ceased to be a youth when he so loved Berenice that grief almost drew the life out of him. So could I too love, O Lygia! Riches, glory, power are mere smoke, vanity! The rich man will find a richer than himself; the greater glory of another will eclipse a man who is famous; a strong man will be conquered by a stronger. But can Caesar himself, can any god even, experience greater delight or be happier than a simple mortal at the moment when at his breast there is breathing another dear breast, or when he kisses beloved lips? Hence love makes us equal to the gods, O Lygia.”

And she listened with alarm, with astonishment, and at the same time as if she were listening to the sound of a Grecian flute or a cithara. It seemed to her at moments that Vinicius was singing a kind of wonderful song, which was instilling itself into her ears, moving the blood in her, and penetrating her heart with a faintness, a fear, and a kind of uncomprehended delight. It seemed to her also that he was telling something which was in her before, but of which she could not give account to herself. She felt that he was rousing in her something which had been sleeping hitherto, and that in that moment a hazy dream was changing into a form more and more definite, more pleasing, more beautiful.

Meanwhile the sun had passed the Tiber long since, and had sunk low over the Janiculum. On the motionless cypresses ruddy light was falling, and the whole atmosphere was filled with it. Lygia raised on Vinicius her blue eyes as if roused from sleep; and he, bending over her with a prayer quivering in his eyes, seemed

on a sudden, in the reflections of evening, more beautiful than all men, than all Greek and Roman gods whose statues she had seen on the façades of temples. And with his fingers he clasped her arm lightly just above the wrist and asked—“Dost thou not divine what I say to thee, Lygia?”

“No,” whispered she as answer, in a voice so low that Vinicius barely heard it.

But he did not believe her, and, drawing her hand toward him more vigorously, he would have drawn it to his heart, which, under the influence of desire roused by the marvelous maiden, was beating like a hammer, and would have addressed burning words to her directly had not old Aulus appeared on a path set in a frame of myrtles, who said, while approaching them—“The sun is setting; so beware of the evening coolness, and do not trifle with Libitina.”

“No,” answered Vinicius; “I have not put on my toga yet, and I do not feel the cold.”

“But see, barely half the sun’s shield is looking from behind the hill. That is a sweet climate of Sicily, where people gather on the square before sunset and take farewell of disappearing Phoebus with a choral song.”

And, forgetting that a moment earlier he had warned them against Libitina, he began to tell about Sicily, where he had estates and large cultivated fields which he loved. He stated also that it had come to his mind more than once to remove to Sicily, and live out his life there in quietness. “He whose head winters have whitened has had enough of hoar frost. Leaves are not falling from the trees yet, and the sky smiles on the city lovingly; but when the grapevines grow yellow-leaved, when snow falls on the Alban hills, and the gods visit the Campania with piercing wind, who knows but I may remove with my entire household to my quiet country-seat?”

“Wouldst thou leave Rome?” inquired Vinicius, with sudden alarm.

“I have wished to do so this long time, for it is quieter in Sicily and safer.”

And again he fell to praising his gardens, his herds, his house hidden in green, and the hills grown over with thyme and savory, among which were swarms of buzzing bees. But Vinicius paid no heed to that bucolic note; and from thinking only of this, that he might lose Lygia, he looked toward Petronius as if expecting salvation from him alone.

Meanwhile Petronius, sitting near Pomponia, was admiring the view of the setting sun, the garden, and the people standing near the fishpond. Their white garments on the dark background of the myrtles gleamed like gold from the evening rays. On the sky the evening light had begun to assume purple and violet hues, and to change like an opal. A strip of the sky became lily-colored. The dark silhouettes of the cypresses grew still more pronounced than during bright daylight. In the people, in the trees, in the whole garden there reigned an evening calm.

That calm struck Petronius, and it struck him especially in the people. In the faces of Pomponia, old Aulus, their son, and Lygia there was something such as he did not see in the faces which surrounded him every day, or rather every night. There was a certain light, a certain repose, a certain serenity, flowing directly

from the life which all lived there. And with a species of astonishment he thought that a beauty and sweetness might exist which he, who chased after beauty and sweetness continually, had not known. He could not hide the thought in himself, and said, turning to Pomponia—"I am considering in my soul how different this world of yours is from the world which our Nero rules."

She raised her delicate face toward the evening light, and said with simplicity—"Not Nero, but God, rules the world."

A moment of silence followed. Near the triclinium were heard in the alley, the steps of the old general, Vinicius, Lygia, and little Aulus; but before they arrived, Petronius had put another question—"But believest thou in the gods, then, Pomponia?"

"I believe in God, who is one, just, and all-powerful," answered the wife of Aulus Plautius.