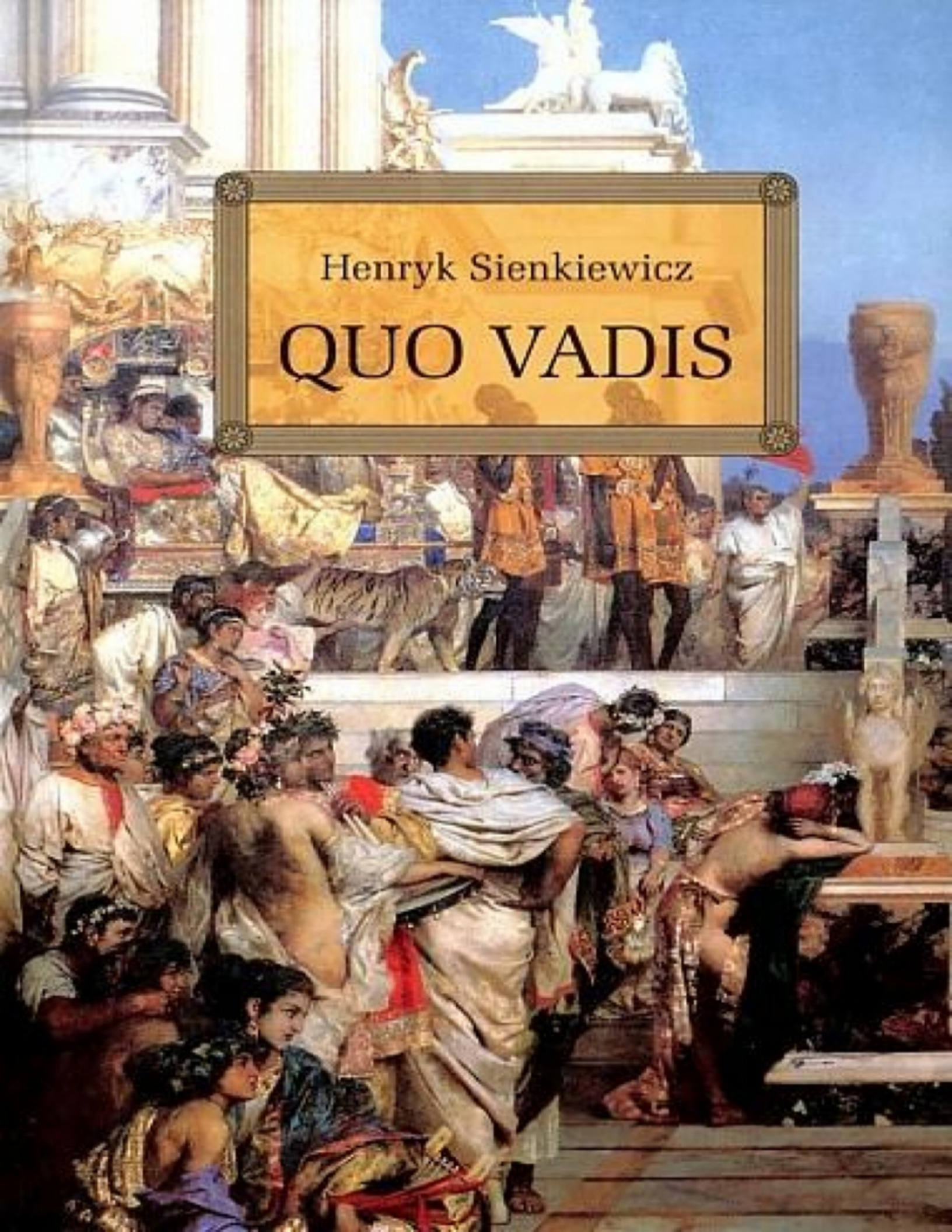
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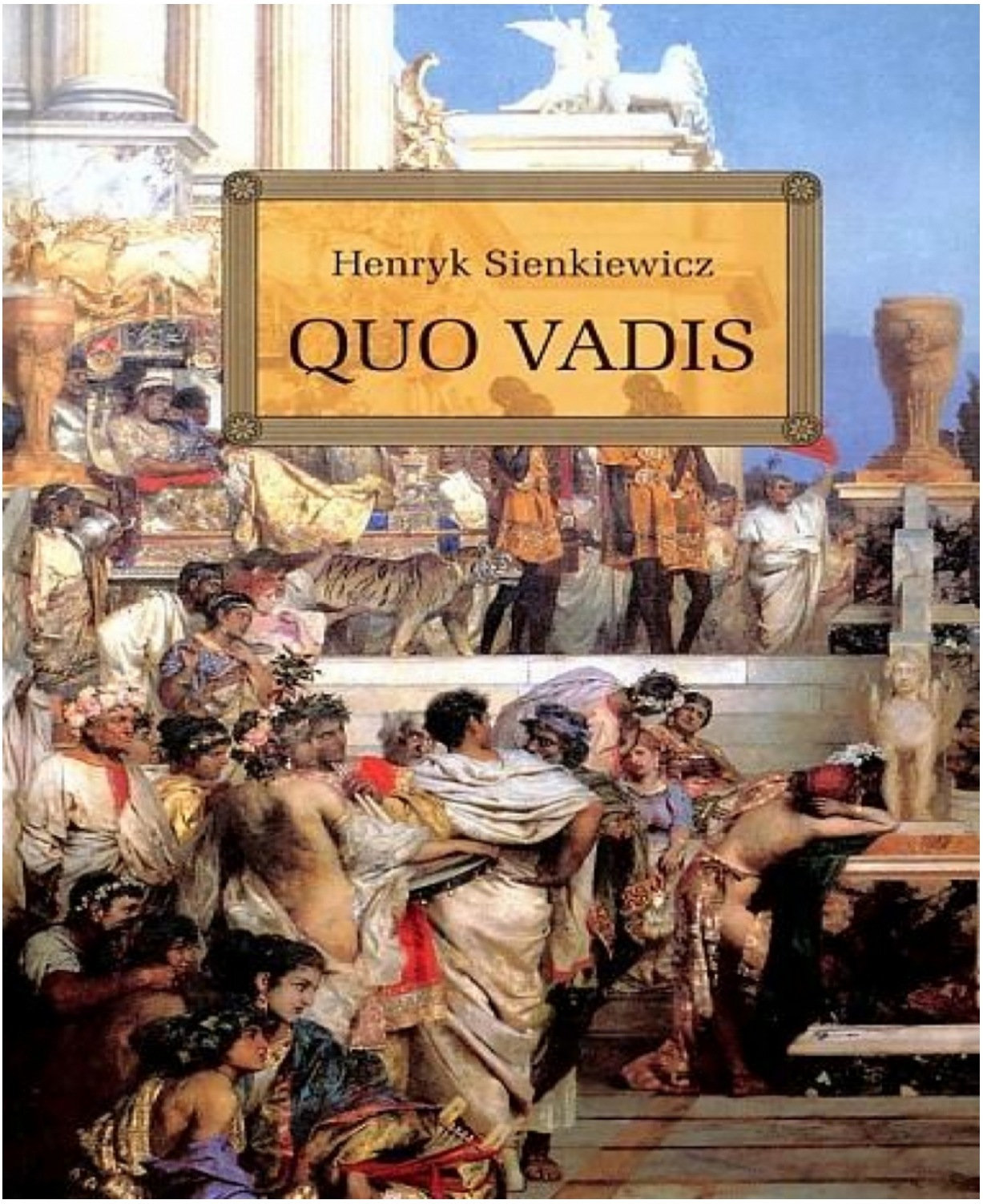
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By Henryk Sienkiewicz

Chapter 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 elæothesium, 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 ephebias 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 jeweller 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 Asklepios and Kypris, 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 marvellous 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 Heraklea," answered Vinicius. "Corbulo sent me there with an order to assemble reinforcements."

"Ah, Heraklea! I knew at Heraklea a certain maiden from Colchis, for whom I would have given all the divorced women of this city, not excluding Poppæa. 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. Dulness, 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 Asklepios and Kypris. But he, Petronius, did not believe in Asklepios. It was not known even whose son that Asklepios 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 travellers. Besides Asklepios, I have had dealings with sons of Asklepios. 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, cedar-wood sprinkled with ambergris, for during life I prefer perfumes to stenches. As to Kypris, 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 epilatores 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 epilatores, 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. Cæsar writes verses; hence all follow in his steps. Only it is not permitted to write better verses than Cæsar, 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 Odyssa 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 book-shop 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. Every one 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 finger-nails 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 Poppæa 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 Poppæa, 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 any one,—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 vestiplicæ, 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' [household servants] 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. Brr!"

"Not with Pomponia—eheu!" 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 skilful 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 Hermunduri, 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 Yazygi; 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 Cæsar 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 Yazygi; 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 Græcina, the wife of Plautius. In that house where all—beginning with the masters and ending with the poultry in the hen-house—are virtuous, that maiden grew up as virtuous, alas! as Græcina herself, and so beautiful that even Poppæa, 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 Græcina. 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 [Nero's name was originally L. Domitius Ahenobarbus]. 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 elegantiæ, 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.

Chapter 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 Carinæ; their nearest way, therefore, was below the Forum; but since Petronius wished to step in on the way to see the jeweller 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 tabernæ of every kind.

Gigantic Africans bore the litter and moved on, preceded by slaves called pedisequii. 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 Cæsar, 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 jewellery-shops, the book-shops, 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 tympans stood forth the sculptured forms of gods; from the summits winged golden quadrigæ 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 Cæsar; 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 venders of marvellous 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 sambuké, 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 Narbonic Gaul. In the throng of slaves, with pierced ears, were not lacking also freemen,—an idle population, which Cæsar 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 head-dresses, 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 "insulæ" 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!" (Here he is). They loved him for his munificence; and his peculiar popularity increased from the time when they learned that he had spoken before Cæsar 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 Cæsar only privately, as the arbiter elegantiarum whose æsthetic 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 Rubelius 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 sceptical Petronius was superstitious also. He had a twofold contempt for the multitude,—as an aristocrat and an æsthetic person. Men with the odor of roast beans, which they carried in their bosoms, and who besides were eternally hoarse and sweating from playing mora 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 book-shop 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 Trimalchion's feast. As to verses, they have disgusted me, since Nero is writing an epic. Vitelius, 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 Idomeneus 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 thee doorkeepers are without chains?" "This is a wonderful house," answered Petronius, in an undertone. "Of course it is known to thee that Pomponia Græcina 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! To-day, 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 water-birds. 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 tortoise-shell 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 any one. 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, Poppæa, 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.