

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

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

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

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

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