

Almost perfect in face and figure, and just as beautiful in mind and soul, Lygia was certainly a rare gem amidst all the hollow shells which glittered in Roman society. We cannot but admire the ardor and constancy of her love for Vicinius, but still more praise-worthy is the strength of will, the moral courage she displayed in fleeing and hiding from the man she loved; at Cæsar's feast she had seen what life with him must be, and she unhesitatingly preferred wandering to shame, death to dishonor. Her amiable tenderness, her ready forgiveness, and the firmness of her faith in the religion she professed, proved edifying and inspiring to all with whom she came in contact; and when finally, through her efforts Vinicius was converted, the reader can scarcely help envying the young lovers the happiness likely to be theirs.

And inseparably connected with the lives of Lygia and Vinicius is that of Petronius. This eloquent, easy-going, young epicurean had long maintained first place in the favor of Nero. His wit, his quickness, his exquisite outlining of thought, and his splendid choice of apt phrases for every idea made him easily triumphant over every attack of his envious rivals; his æsthetic nature and the nicety of his judgment in all matters of taste won for him the desirable title "*arbiter elegantiarum*." Though he could brook no opposition nor anything that ruffled his calmness, he was not revengeful; he was too refined to be cruel; and whether through culture or indolence, he never used his power to the detriment or destruction of others. Ever cool, a man of inexhaustible resources, he frequently elicited the admiration of his fellow-courtiers by the surprising dexterity with which he

extricated himself from nets of circumstances which seemed to portend his inevitable ruin. "At moments he ventured to criticise Cæsar to his face, and when others judged that he was going too far, or simply preparing his own ruin, he was able to turn the criticism suddenly in such a way that it came out to his profit; he aroused amazement in those present, and the conviction that there was no position from which he could not issue in triumph."

But what an empty bauble is life without religion! Petronius had often thought over questions relating to the soul; the acuteness of his reasoning powers had led him to reject the gods of the pagans; but those same powers were nonplused by the spiritual snarls pointed out by Vinicius. He could accept nothing without seeing plainly the reason of it; he was too indolent to search earnestly for truth, and, as a consequence, dropped into the state of indifferent scepticism. Still, he had no dread of death, but since he expected nothing from it, he had no wish to invite it. In his own words we see his whole philosophy. "I will fill my life with happiness, as a goblet with the foremost wine which the earth has produced, and I will drink till my hand becomes powerless and my lips grow pale. What will come I care not." What a dreary prospect! And how dejected it makes us feel, that one of such noble qualities of head and heart should be rushing thus blindly forward toward the yawning chasm of destruction. "One wonders almost sadly in the story," says a critic, with regard to this point, "as one does at certain mysterious dispensations in the life about us, when the light of faith and the grace of martyrdom are vouchsafed at last to the despicable Chilo."