

were looking at each other, one of which would vanish quickly as a bloody dream, and the other, dressed in simple garments, would seize in eternal possession the world and the city."

It was the old struggle; Holofernes with the forces of the world against the Lord of Hosts. Nero puts a bold face on his cruel designs; he openly avowed his intention of extinguishing the christian name throughout his empire; he issued decrees to that effect; he most injudiciously displayed his racks and cauldrons. This enemy was met, thousands of christians came forward, their numbers wearied persecution's edge; their blood, which flowed from the executioner's stroke, was of a baptismal efficacy, and it was found that the axe was the best pruning knife of the Lord's vineyard, and disciples' blood its most fruitful seed. What a contrast to the maudlin sentimentality and Dead Sea faith of the pagans, which Petronius describes—"Two years ago I sent to Epidarus three dozen live cocks 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 they all think as I do—all; with the exception, perhaps, of mule-drivers on the road at the Porta Capena." Even the pagan priests, when goblets of wine loosened their tongues, jeered at their own gods.

It is in the conversion of Vinicius, the aesthetic pagan profligate, that the author of *Quo Vadis* displays consummate skill and portrays, in most vivid colors, the influence that Christianity wields over the intellect, the will, the imagination and the heart. Were this the only aim of the novel, it would serve a most

beautiful purpose. It is a realistic demonstration of God's providential power, inscrutable ways, incomprehensible wisdom, displayed in the history of a love between two of His creatures. Vinicius himself gives us the first inkling of the marvels Cupid was to work—"Mopsus appeared in a dream to me, and declared that through love a great change in my life would take place." The conversion of Vinicius does not come, like an unnatural flash of lightning in a clear sky, to puzzle us with its freakishness; on the contrary, the rumblings of the storm in his soul are heard, the portentous sky is overlaid with murky, threatening clouds that roll upon his intellectual horizon, occasional flashes light up the gloom, to leave it only in denser shadow, when the brief electrical display is over. At Nero's banquet, Lygia sees that Vinicius is "a drunken, wicked satyr, who filled her with horror and repulsion." Then, when Lygia is snatched from his voluptuous grasp, the storm-king arranges his forces in battle-array, cruel doubt, rage, fury, despair are let loose upon distracted Vinicius' crazed mind; his tortured soul trembles 'twixt Christ and Jove; at length the rainbow of peace—God's covenant with man—floods his soul and the holy waters of Baptism are poured upon his brow. The struggle is over; Christ has won, Jove has lost. Throughout the novel, we have a beautiful picture of a human attachment which is gradually strengthened and deepened; which softens, chastens, purifies Vinicius' heart and prepares it to receive the seed of christianity. Human love may seem to be a strange progenitor of religion; "the little pebble on the streamlet's edge has changed the course of many a noble river."