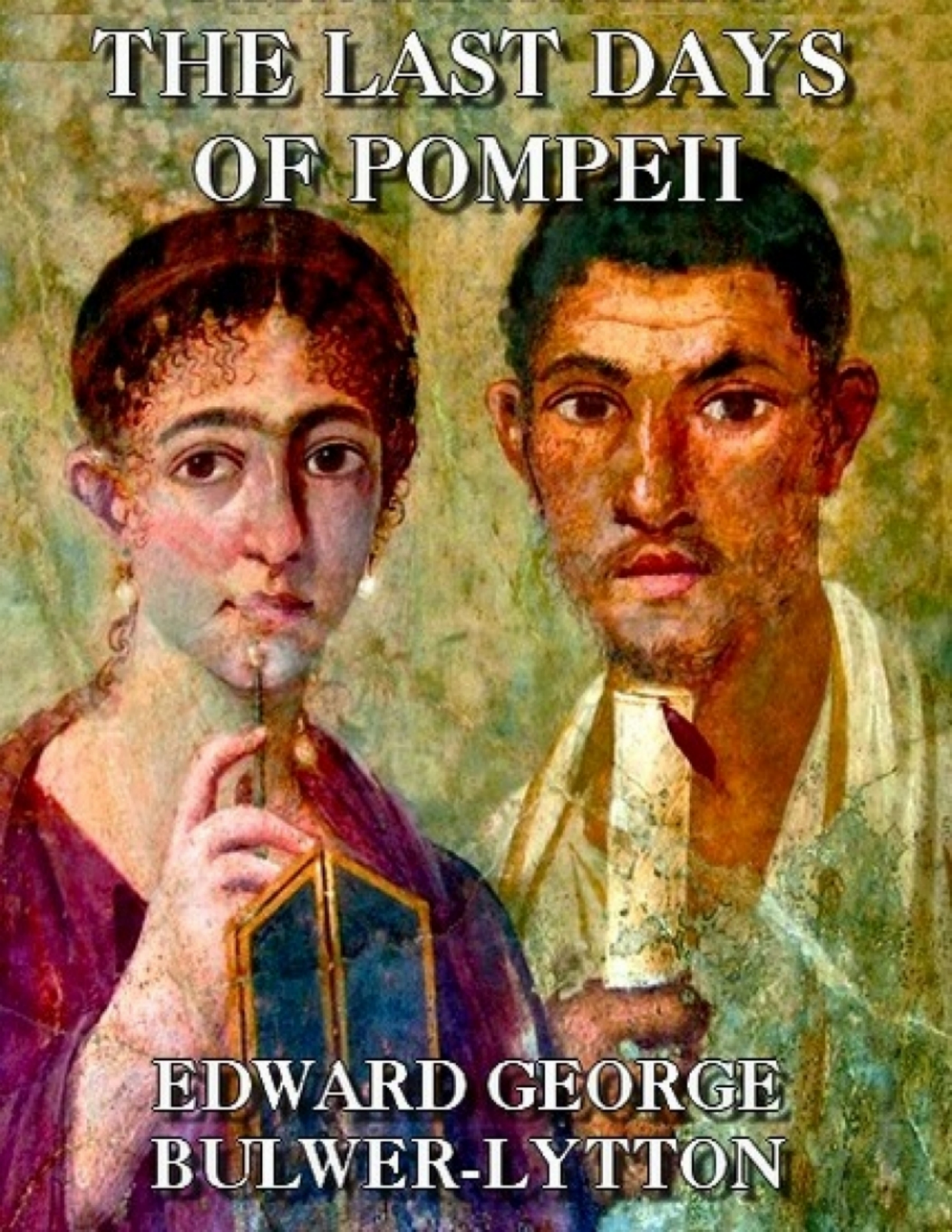
THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII



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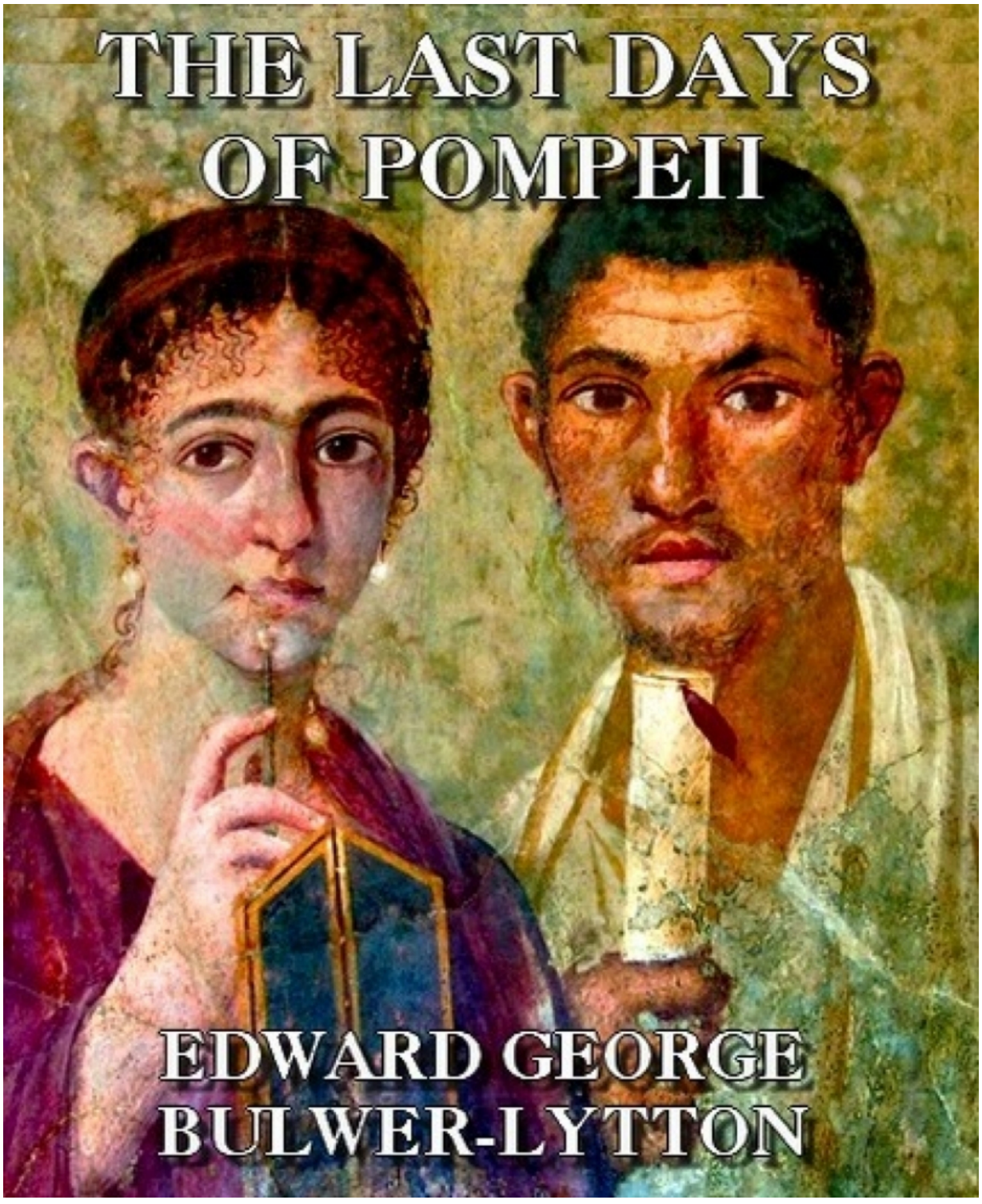
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By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

The Two Gentlemen of Pompeii

'HO, Diomed, well met! Do you sup with Glaucus to-night?' said a young man of small stature, who wore his tunic in those loose and effeminate folds which proved him to be a gentleman and a coxcomb.

'Alas, no! dear Clodius; he has not invited me,' replied Diomed, a man of portly frame and of middle age. 'By Pollux, a scurvy trick! for they say his suppers are the best in Pompeii'.

'Pretty well—though there is never enough of wine for me. It is not the old Greek blood that flows in his veins, for he pretends that wine makes him dull the next morning.'

'There may be another reason for that thrift,' said Diomed, raising his brows. 'With all his conceit and extravagance he is not so rich, I fancy, as he affects to be, and perhaps loves to save his amphorae better than his wit.'

'An additional reason for supping with him while the sesterces last. Next year, Diomed, we must find another Glaucus.'

'He is fond of the dice, too, I hear.'

'He is fond of every pleasure; and while he likes the pleasure of giving suppers, we are all fond of him.'

'Ha, ha, Clodius, that is well said! Have you ever seen my wine-cellars, by-the-by?'

'I think not, my good Diomed.'

'Well, you must sup with me some evening; I have tolerable muraenae in my reservoir, and I ask Pansa the aedile to meet you.'

'O, no state with me!—Persicos odi apparatus, I am easily contented. Well, the day wanes; I am for the baths—and you…'

'To the quaestor—business of state—afterwards to the temple of Isis. Vale!'

'An ostentatious, bustling, ill-bred fellow,' muttered Clodius to himself, as he sauntered slowly away. 'He thinks with his feasts and his wine- cellars to make us forget that he is the son of a freedman—and so we will, when we do him the honour of winning his money; these rich plebeians are a harvest for us spendthrift nobles.'

Thus soliloquising, Clodius arrived in the Via Domitiana, which was crowded with passengers and chariots, and exhibited all that gay and animated exuberance of life and motion which we find at this day in the streets of Naples.

The bells of the cars as they rapidly glided by each other jingled merrily on the ear, and Clodius with smiles or nods claimed familiar acquaintance with whatever equipage was most elegant or fantastic: in fact, no idler was better known in Pompeii.

'What, Clodius! and how have you slept on your good fortune?' cried, in a pleasant and musical voice, a young man, in a chariot of the most fastidious and graceful fashion. Upon its surface of bronze were elaborately wrought, in the still exquisite workmanship of Greece, reliefs of the Olympian games; the two horses that drew the car were of the rarest breed of Parthia; their slender limbs seemed to disdain the ground and court the air, and yet at the slightest touch of the charioteer, who stood behind the young owner of the equipage, they paused motionless, as if suddenly transformed into stone—lifeless, but lifelike, as one of the breathing wonders of Praxiteles. The owner himself was of that slender and beautiful symmetry from which the sculptors of Athens drew their models; his Grecian origin betrayed itself in his light but clustering locks, and the perfect harmony of his features. He wore no toga, which in the time of the emperors had indeed ceased to be the general distinction of the Romans, and was especially ridiculed by the pretenders to fashion; but his tunic glowed in the richest hues of the Tyrian dye, and the fibulae, or buckles, by which it was fastened, sparkled with emeralds:

around his neck was a chain of gold, which in the middle of his breast twisted itself into the form of a serpent's head, from the mouth of which hung pendent a large signet ring of elaborate and most exquisite workmanship; the sleeves of the tunic were loose, and fringed at the hand with gold: and across the waist a girdle wrought in arabesque designs, and of the same material as the fringe, served in lieu of pockets for the receptacle of the handkerchief and the purse, the stilus and the tablets.

'My dear Glaucus!' said Clodius, 'I rejoice to see that your losses have so little affected your mien. Why, you seem as if you had been inspired by Apollo, and your face shines with happiness like a glory; any one might take you for the winner, and me for the loser.'

'And what is there in the loss or gain of those dull pieces of metal that should change our spirit, my Clodius? By Venus, while yet young, we can cover our full locks with chaplets—while yet the cithara sounds on unsated ears—while yet the smile of Lydia or of Chloe flashes over our veins in which the blood runs so swiftly, so long shall we find delight in the sunny air, and make bald time itself but the treasurer of our joys. You sup with me to-night, you know.'

'Who ever forgets the invitation of Glaucus!'

'But which way go you now?'

'Why, I thought of visiting the baths: but it wants yet an hour to the usual time.'

'Well, I will dismiss my chariot, and go with you. So, so, my Phylias,' stroking the horse nearest to him, which by a low neigh and with backward ears playfully acknowledged the courtesy: 'a holiday for you to-day. Is he not handsome, Clodius?'

'Worthy of Phoebus,' returned the noble parasite—'or of Glaucus.'

The Athenian's Confession

TALKING lightly on a thousand matters, the two young men sauntered through the streets; they were now in that quarter which was filled with the gayest shops, their open interiors all and each radiant with the gaudy yet harmonious colors of frescoes, inconceivably varied in fancy and design. The sparkling fountains, that at every vista threw upwards their grateful spray in the summer air; the crowd of passengers, or rather loiterers, mostly clad in robes of the Tyrian dye; the gay groups collected round each more attractive shop; the slaves passing to and fro with buckets of bronze, cast in the most graceful shapes, and borne upon their heads; the country girls stationed at frequent intervals with baskets of blushing fruit, and flowers more alluring to the ancient Italians than to their descendants (with whom, indeed, "latet anguis in herba," a disease seems lurking in every violet and rose); the numerous haunts which fulfilled with that idle people the office of cafes and clubs at this day; the shops, where on shelves of marble were ranged the vases of wine and oil, and before whose thresholds, seats, protected from the sun by a purple awning, invited the weary to rest and the indolent to lounge—made a scene of such glowing and vivacious excitement, as might well give the Athenian spirit of Glaucus an excuse for its susceptibility to joy.

'Talk to me no more of Rome,' said he to Clodius. 'Pleasure is too stately and ponderous in those mighty walls: even in the precincts of the court—even in the Golden House of Nero, and the incipient glories of the palace of Titus, there is a certain dulness of magnificence—the eye aches—the spirit is wearied; besides, my Clodius, we are discontented when we compare the enormous luxury and wealth of others with the mediocrity of our own state. But

here we surrender ourselves easily to pleasure, and we have the brilliancy of luxury without the lassitude of its pomp.'

'It was from that feeling that you chose your summer retreat at Pompeii?'

'It was. I prefer it to Baiae: I grant the charms of the latter, but I love not the pedants who resort there, and who seem to weigh out their pleasures by the drachm.'

'Yet you are fond of the learned, too; and as for poetry, why, your house is literally eloquent with AEschylus and Homer, the epic and the drama.'

'Yes, but those Romans who mimic my Athenian ancestors do everything so heavily. Even in the chase they make their slaves carry Plato with them; and whenever the boar is lost, out they take their books and their papyrus, in order not to lose their time too. When the dancing-girls swim before them in all the blandishment of Persian manners, some drone of a freedman, with a face of stone, reads them a section of Cicero "De Officiis". Unskilful pharmacists! pleasure and study are not elements to be thus mixed together, they must be enjoyed separately: the Romans lose both by this pragmatical affectation of refinement, and prove that they have no souls for either. Oh, my Clodius, how little your countrymen know of the true versatility of a Pericles, of the true witcheries of an Aspasia! It was but the other day that I paid a visit to Pliny: he was sitting in his summer-house writing, while an unfortunate slave played on the tibia. His nephew (oh! whip me such philosophical coxcombs!) was reading Thucydides' description of the plague, and nodding his conceited little head in time to the music, while his lips were repeating all the loathsome details of that terrible delineation. The puppy saw nothing incongruous in learning at the same time a ditty of love and a description of the plague.'

'Why, they are much the same thing,' said Clodius.

'So I told him, in excuse for his coxcombry—but my youth stared me rebukingly in the face, without taking the jest,

and answered, that it was only the insensate ear that the music pleased, whereas the book (the description of the plague, mind you!) elevated the heart. "Ah!" quoth the fat uncle, wheezing, "my boy is quite an Athenian, always mixing the utile with the dulce." O Minerva, how I laughed in my sleeve! While I was there, they came to tell the boy-sophist that his favorite freedman was just dead of a fever. "Inexorable death!" cried he; "get me my Horace. How beautifully the sweet poet consoles us for these misfortunes!" Oh, can these men love, my Clodius? Scarcely even with the senses. How rarely a Roman has a heart! He is but the mechanism of genius—he wants its bones and flesh.'

Though Clodius was secretly a little sore at these remarks on his countrymen, he affected to sympathize with his friend, partly because he was by nature a parasite, and partly because it was the fashion among the dissolute young Romans to affect a little contempt for the very birth which, in reality, made them so arrogant; it was the mode to imitate the Greeks, and yet to laugh at their own clumsy imitation.

Thus conversing, their steps were arrested by a crowd gathered round an open space where three streets met; and, just where the porticoes of a light and graceful temple threw their shade, there stood a young girl, with a flower-basket on her right arm, and a small three-stringed instrument of music in the left hand, to whose low and soft tones she was modulating a wild and half- barbaric air. At every pause in the music she gracefully waved her flower-basket round, inviting the loiterers to buy; and many a sesterce was showered into the basket, either in compliment to the music or in compassion to the songstress —for she was blind.

'It is my poor Thessalian,' said Glaucus, stopping; 'I have not seen her since my return to Pompeii. Hush! her voice is sweet; let us listen.'

THE BLIND FLOWER-GIRL'S SONG

I.

Buy my flowers—O buy—I pray!
The blind girl comes from afar;
If the earth be as fair as I hear them say,
These flowers her children are!
Do they her beauty keep?
They are fresh from her lap, I know;
For I caught them fast asleep
In her arms an hour ago.
With the air which is her breath—
Her soft and delicate breath—
Over them murmuring low!
On their lips her sweet kiss lingers yet,
And their cheeks with her tender tears are wet.
For she weeps—that gentle mother weeps—
(As morn and night her watch she keeps,
With a yearning heart and a passionate care)
To see the young things grow so fair;
She weeps—for love she weeps;
And the dews are the tears she weeps
From the well of a mother's love!

II.

Ye have a world of light,
Where love in the loved rejoices;
But the blind girl's home is the House of Night,
And its beings are empty voices.
As one in the realm below,
I stand by the streams of woe!
I hear the vain shadows glide,
I feel their soft breath at my side.
And I thirst the loved forms to see,
And I stretch my fond arms around,
And I catch but a shapeless sound, For the living are ghosts to me.
Come buy—come buy?—

(Hark! how the sweet things sigh
For they have a voice like ours),
The breath of the blind girl closes
The leaves of the saddening roses—
We are tender, we sons of light,
We shrink from this child of night;
From the grasp of the blind girl free us—
We yearn for the eyes that see us—
We are for night too gay,
In your eyes we behold the day—
O buy—O buy the flowers!'

'I must have yon bunch of violets, sweet Nydia,' said Glaucus, pressing through the crowd, and dropping a handful of small coins into the basket; 'your voice is more charming than ever.'

The blind girl started forward as she heard the Athenian's voice; then as suddenly paused, while the blood rushed violently over neck, cheek, and temples.

'So you are returned!' said she, in a low voice; and then repeated half to herself, 'Glaucus is returned!'

'Yes, child, I have not been at Pompeii above a few days. My garden wants your care, as before; you will visit it, I trust, to-morrow. And mind, no garlands at my house shall be woven by any hands but those of the pretty Nydia.'

Nydia smiled joyously, but did not answer; and Glaucus, placing in his breast the violets he had selected, turned gaily and carelessly from the crowd.

'So she is a sort of client of yours, this child?' said Clodius.

'Ay—does she not sing prettily? She interests me, the poor slave! Besides, she is from the land of the Gods' hill—Olympus frowned upon her cradle—she is of Thessaly.'

'The witches' country.'

'True: but for my part I find every woman a witch; and at Pompeii, by Venus! the very air seems to have taken a love-

philtre, so handsome does every face without a beard seem in my eyes.'

'And lo! one of the handsomest in Pompeii, old Diomed's daughter, the rich Julia!' said Clodius, as a young lady, her face covered by her veil, and attended by two female slaves, approached them, in her way to the baths.

'Fair Julia, we salute thee!' said Clodius.

Julia partly raised her veil, so as with some coquetry to display a bold Roman profile, a full dark bright eye, and a cheek over whose natural olive art shed a fairer and softer rose.

'And Glaucus, too, is returned!' said she, glancing meaningly at the Athenian. 'Has he forgotten,' she added, in a half-whisper, 'his friends of the last year?'

'Beautiful Julia! even Lethe itself, if it disappear in one part of the earth, rises again in another. Jupiter does not allow us ever to forget for more than a moment: but Venus, more harsh still, vouchsafes not even a moment's oblivion.'

'Glaucus is never at a loss for fair words.'

'Who is, when the object of them is so fair?'

'We shall see you both at my father's villa soon,' said Julia, turning to Clodius.

'We will mark the day in which we visit you with a white stone,' answered the gamester.

Julia dropped her veil, but slowly, so that her last glance rested on the Athenian with affected timidity and real boldness; the glance bespoke tenderness and reproach.

The friends passed on.

'Julia is certainly handsome,' said Glaucus.

'And last year you would have made that confession in a warmer tone.'

'True; I was dazzled at the first sight, and mistook for a gem that which was but an artful imitation.'

'Nay,' returned Clodius, 'all women are the same at heart. Happy he who weds a handsome face and a large dower. What more can he desire?'

Glaucus sighed.

They were now in a street less crowded than the rest, at the end of which they beheld that broad and most lovely sea, which upon those delicious coasts seems to have renounced its prerogative of terror—so soft are the crisping winds that hover around its bosom, so glowing and so various are the hues which it takes from the rosy clouds, so fragrant are the perfumes which the breezes from the land scatter over its depths. From such a sea might you well believe that Aphrodite rose to take the empire of the earth.

'It is still early for the bath,' said the Greek, who was the creature of every poetical impulse; 'let us wander from the crowded city, and look upon the sea while the noon yet laughs along its billows.'

'With all my heart,' said Clodius; 'and the bay, too, is always the most animated part of the city.'

Pompeii was the miniature of the civilization of that age. Within the narrow compass of its walls was contained, as it were, a specimen of every gift which luxury offered to power. In its minute but glittering shops, its tiny palaces, its baths, its forum, its theatre, its circus—in the energy yet corruption, in the refinement yet the vice, of its people, you beheld a model of the whole empire. It was a toy, a plaything, a showbox, in which the gods seemed pleased to keep the representation of the great monarchy of earth, and which they afterwards hid from time, to give to the wonder of posterity—the moral of the maxim, that under the sun there is nothing new.

Crowded in the glassy bay were the vessels of commerce and the gilded galleys for the pleasures of the rich citizens. The boats of the fishermen glided rapidly to and fro; and afar off you saw the tall masts of the fleet under the command of Pliny. Upon the shore sat a Sicilian who, with vehement gestures and flexile features, was narrating to a group of fishermen and peasants a strange tale of shipwrecked mariners and friendly dolphins—just as at this

day, in the modern neighborhood, you may hear upon the Mole of Naples.

Drawing his comrade from the crowd, the Greek bent his steps towards a solitary part of the beach, and the two friends, seated on a small crag which rose amidst the smooth pebbles, inhaled the voluptuous and cooling breeze, which dancing over the waters, kept music with its invisible feet. There was, perhaps, something in the scene that invited them to silence and reverie. Clodius, shading his eyes from the burning sky, was calculating the gains of the last week; and the Greek, leaning upon his hand, and shrinking not from that sun—his nation's tutelary deity—with whose fluent light of poesy, and joy, and love, his own veins were filled, gazed upon the broad expanse, and envied, perhaps, every wind that bent its pinions towards the shores of Greece.

'Tell me, Clodius,' said the Greek at last, 'hast thou ever been in love?'

'Yes, very often.'

'He who has loved often,' answered Glaucus, 'has loved never. There is but one Eros, though there are many counterfeits of him.'

'The counterfeits are not bad little gods, upon the whole,' answered Clodius.

'I agree with you,' returned the Greek. 'I adore even the shadow of Love; but I adore himself yet more.'

'Art thou, then, soberly and honestly in love? Hast thou that feeling which the poets describe—a feeling that makes us neglect our suppers, forswear the theatre, and write elegies? I should never have thought it. You dissemble well.'

'I am not far gone enough for that,' returned Glaucus, smiling, 'or rather I say with Tibullus—

He whom love rules, where'er his path may be, Walks safe and sacred.

In fact, I am not in love; but I could be if there were but occasion to see the object. Eros would light his torch, but

the priests have given him no oil.'

'Shall I guess the object?—Is it not Diomed's daughter? She adores you, and does not affect to conceal it; and, by Hercules, I say again and again, she is both handsome and rich. She will bind the door-posts of her husband with golden fillets.'

'No, I do not desire to sell myself. Diomed's daughter is handsome, I grant: and at one time, had she not been the grandchild of a freedman, I might have... Yet no—she carries all her beauty in her face; her manners are not maiden-like, and her mind knows no culture save that of pleasure.'

'You are ungrateful. Tell me, then, who is the fortunate virgin?'

'You shall hear, my Clodius. Several months ago I was sojourning at Neapolis, a city utterly to my own heart, for it still retains the manners and stamp of its Grecian origin—and it yet merits the name of Parthenope, from its delicious air and its beautiful shores. One day I entered the temple of Minerva, to offer up my prayers, not for myself more than for the city on which Pallas smiles no longer. The temple was empty and deserted. The recollections of Athens crowded fast and meltingly upon me: imagining myself still alone in the temple, and absorbed in the earnestness of my devotion, my prayer gushed from my heart to my lips, and I wept as I prayed. I was startled in the midst of my devotions, however, by a deep sigh; I turned suddenly round, and just behind me was a female. She had raised her veil also in prayer: and when our eyes met, methought a celestial ray shot from those dark and smiling orbs at once into my soul. Never, my Clodius, have I seen mortal face more exquisitely molded: a certain melancholy softened and yet elevated its expression: that unutterable something, which springs from the soul, and which our sculptors have imparted to the aspect of Psyche, gave her beauty I know not what of divine and noble; tears were rolling down her eyes. I guessed at once that she was also of Athenian

lineage; and that in my prayer for Athens her heart had responded to mine. I spoke to her, though with a faltering voice—"Art thou not, too, Athenian?" said I, "O beautiful virgin!" At the sound of my voice she blushed, and half drew her veil across her face.—"My forefathers' ashes," said she, "repose by the waters of Ilissus: my birth is of Neapolis; but my heart, as my lineage, is Athenian."—"Let us, then," said I, "make our offerings together": and, as the priest now appeared, we stood side by side, while we followed the priest in his ceremonial prayer; together we touched the knees of the goddess—together we laid our olive garlands on the altar. I felt a strange emotion of almost sacred tenderness at this companionship. We, strangers from a far and fallen land, stood together and alone in that temple of our country's deity: was it not natural that my heart should yearn to my countrywoman, for so I might surely call her? I felt as if I had known her for years; and that simple rite seemed, as by a miracle, to operate on the sympathies and ties of time. Silently we left the temple, and I was about to ask her where she dwelt, and if I might be permitted to visit her, when a youth, in whose features there was some kindred resemblance to her own, and who stood upon the steps of the fane, took her by the hand. She turned round and bade me farewell. The crowd separated us: I saw her no more. On reaching my home I found letters, which obliged me to set out for Athens, for my relations threatened me with litigation concerning my inheritance. When that suit was happily over, I repaired once more to Neapolis; I instituted inquiries throughout the whole city, I could discover no clue of my lost countrywoman, and, hoping to lose in gaiety all remembrance of that beautiful apparition, I hastened to plunge myself amidst the luxuries of Pompeii. This is all my history. I do not love; but I remember and regret.'

As Clodius was about to reply, a slow and stately step approached them, and at the sound it made amongst the

pebbles, each turned, and each recognized the new-comer.

It was a man who had scarcely reached his fortieth year, of tall stature, and of a thin but nervous and sinewy frame. His skin, dark and bronzed, betrayed his Eastern origin; and his features had something Greek in their outline (especially in the chin, the lip, and the brow), save that the nose was somewhat raised and aquiline; and the bones, hard and visible, forbade that fleshy and waving contour which on the Grecian physiognomy preserved even in manhood the round and beautiful curves of youth. His eyes, large and black as the deepest night, shone with no varying and uncertain lustre. A deep, thoughtful, and half-melancholy calm seemed unalterably fixed in their majestic and commanding gaze. His step and mien were peculiarly sedate and lofty, and something foreign in the fashion and the sober hues of his sweeping garments added to the impressive effect of his quiet countenance and stately form. Each of the young men, in saluting the new-comer, made mechanically, and with care to conceal it from him, a slight gesture or sign with their fingers; for Arbaces, the Egyptian, was supposed to possess the fatal gift of the evil eye.

'The scene must, indeed, be beautiful,' said Arbaces, with a cold though courteous smile, 'which draws the gay Clodius, and Glaucus the all admired, from the crowded thoroughfares of the city.'

'Is Nature ordinarily so unattractive?' asked the Greek.

'To the dissipated—yes.'

'An austere reply, but scarcely a wise one. Pleasure delights in contrasts; it is from dissipation that we learn to enjoy solitude, and from solitude dissipation.'

'So think the young philosophers of the Garden,' replied the Egyptian; 'they mistake lassitude for meditation, and imagine that, because they are sated with others, they know the delight of loneliness. But not in such jaded bosoms can Nature awaken that enthusiasm which alone draws from her chaste reserve all her unspeakable beauty: she

demands from you, not the exhaustion of passion, but all that fervor, from which you only seek, in adoring her, a release. When, young Athenian, the moon revealed herself in visions of light to Endymion, it was after a day passed, not amongst the feverish haunts of men, but on the still mountains and in the solitary valleys of the hunter.'

'Beautiful simile!' cried Glaucus; 'most unjust application! Exhaustion! that word is for age, not youth. By me, at least, one moment of satiety has never been known!'

Again the Egyptian smiled, but his smile was cold and blighting, and even the unimaginative Clodius froze beneath its light. He did not, however, reply to the passionate exclamation of Glaucus; but, after a pause, he said, in a soft and melancholy voice:

'After all, you do right to enjoy the hour while it smiles for you; the rose soon withers, the perfume soon exhales. And we, O Glaucus! strangers in the land and far from our fathers' ashes, what is there left for us but pleasure or regret!—for you the first, perhaps for me the last.'

The bright eyes of the Greek were suddenly suffused with tears. 'Ah, speak not, Arbaces,' he cried—'speak not of our ancestors. Let us forget that there were ever other liberties than those of Rome! And Glory!—oh, vainly would we call her ghost from the fields of Marathon and Thermopylae!'

'Thy heart rebukes thee while thou speakest,' said the Egyptian; 'and in thy gaieties this night, thou wilt be more mindful of Leoena than of Lais. Vale!'

Thus saying, he gathered his robe around him, and slowly swept away.

'I breathe more freely,' said Clodius. 'Imitating the Egyptians, we sometimes introduce a skeleton at our feasts. In truth, the presence of such an Egyptian as yon gliding shadow were spectre enough to sour the richest grape of the Falernian.'

'Strange man! said Glaucus, musingly; 'yet dead though he seem to pleasure, and cold to the objects of the world,

scandal belies him, or his house and his heart could tell a different tale.'

'Ah! there are whispers of other orgies than those of Osiris in his gloomy mansion. He is rich, too, they say. Can we not get him amongst us, and teach him the charms of dice? Pleasure of pleasures! hot fever of hope and fear! inexpressible unjaded passion! how fiercely beautiful thou art, O Gaming!'

'Inspired—inspired!' cried Glaucus, laughing; 'the oracle speaks poetry in Clodius. What miracle next!'

Parentage of Glaucus

HEAVEN had given to Glaucus every blessing but one: it had given him beauty, health, fortune, genius, illustrious descent, a heart of fire, a mind of poetry; but it had denied him the heritage of freedom. He was born in Athens, the subject of Rome. Succeeding early to an ample inheritance, he had indulged that inclination for travel so natural to the young, and had drunk deep of the intoxicating draught of pleasure amidst the gorgeous luxuries of the imperial court.

He was an Alcibiades without ambition. He was what a man of imagination, youth, fortune, and talents, readily becomes when you deprive him of the inspiration of glory. His house at Rome was the theme of the debauchees, but also of the lovers of art; and the sculptors of Greece delighted to task their skill in adorning the porticoes and exedrae of an Athenian. His retreat in Pompeii—alas! the colors are faded now, the walls stripped of their paintings!—its main beauty, its elaborate finish of grace and ornament, is gone; yet when first given once more to the day, what eulogies, what wonder, did its minute and glowing decorations create—its paintings—its mosaics! Passionately enamoured of poetry and the drama, which recalled to Glaucus the wit and the heroism of his race, that fairy mansion was adorned with representations of AEschylus and Homer. And antiquaries, who resolve taste to a trade, have turned the patron to the professor, and still (though the error is now acknowledged) they style in custom, as they first named in mistake, the disburied house of the Athenian Glaucus 'THE HOUSE OF THE DRAMATIC POET'.

Previous to our description of this house, it may be as well to convey to the reader a general notion of the houses of Pompeii, which he will find to resemble strongly the plans of Vitruvius; but with all those differences in detail, of caprice and taste, which being natural to mankind, have

always puzzled antiquaries. We shall endeavor to make this description as clear and unpedantic as possible.

You enter then, usually, by a small entrance-passage (called cestibulum), into a hall, sometimes with (but more frequently without) the ornament of columns; around three sides of this hall are doors communicating with several bedchambers (among which is the porter's), the best of these being usually appropriated to country visitors. At the extremity of the hall, on either side to the right and left, if the house is large, there are two small recesses, rather than chambers, generally devoted to the ladies of the mansion; and in the centre of the tessellated pavement of the hall is invariably a square, shallow reservoir for rain water (classically termed impluvium), which was admitted by an aperture in the roof above; the said aperture being covered at will by an awning. Near this impluvium, which had a peculiar sanctity in the eyes of the ancients, were sometimes (but at Pompeii more rarely than at Rome) placed images of the household gods—the hospitable hearth, often mentioned by the Roman poets, and consecrated to the Lares, was at Pompeii almost invariably formed by a movable brazier; while in some corner, often the most ostentatious place, was deposited a huge wooden chest, ornamented and strengthened by bands of bronze or iron, and secured by strong hooks upon a stone pedestal so firmly as to defy the attempts of any robber to detach it from its position. It is supposed that this chest was the money-box, or coffer, of the master of the house; though as no money has been found in any of the chests discovered at Pompeii, it is probable that it was sometimes rather designed for ornament than use.

Illustration

House of the Tragic Poet

In this hall (or atrium, to speak classically) the clients and visitors of inferior rank were usually received. In the houses of the more 'respectable', an atriensis, or slave peculiarly

devoted to the service of the hall, was invariably retained, and his rank among his fellow-slaves was high and important. The reservoir in the centre must have been rather a dangerous ornament, but the centre of the hall was like the grass-plot of a college, and interdicted to the passers to and fro, who found ample space in the margin. Right opposite the entrance, at the other end of the hall, was an apartment (tablinum), in which the pavement was usually adorned with rich mosaics, and the walls covered with elaborate paintings. Here were usually kept the records of the family, or those of any public office that had been filled by the owner: on one side of this saloon, if we may so call it, was often a dining-room, or triclinium; on the other side, perhaps, what we should now term a cabinet of gems, containing whatever curiosities were deemed most rare and costly; and invariably a small passage for the slaves to cross to the further parts of the house, without passing the apartments thus mentioned. These rooms all opened on a square or oblong colonnade, technically termed peristyle. If the house was small, its boundary ceased with this colonnade; and in that case its centre, however diminutive, was ordinarily appropriated to the purpose of a garden, and adorned with vases of flowers, placed upon pedestals: while, under the colonnade, to the right and left, were doors admitting to bedrooms, to a second triclinium, or eating-room (for the ancients generally appropriated two rooms at least to that purpose, one for summer, and one for winter—or, perhaps, one for ordinary, the other for festive, occasions); and if the owner affected letters, a cabinet, dignified by the name of library—for a very small room was sufficient to contain the few rolls of papyrus which the ancients deemed a notable collection of books.

At the end of the peristyle was generally the kitchen. Supposing the house was large, it did not end with the peristyle, and the centre thereof was not in that case a garden, but might be, perhaps, adorned with a fountain, or

basin for fish; and at its end, exactly opposite to the tablinum, was generally another eating-room, on either side of which were bedrooms, and, perhaps, a picture-saloon, or pinacotheca. These apartments communicated again with a square or oblong space, usually adorned on three sides with a colonnade like the peristyle, and very much resembling the peristyle, only usually longer. This was the proper viridarium, or garden, being commonly adorned with a fountain, or statues, and a profusion of gay flowers: at its extreme end was the gardener's house; on either side, beneath the colonnade, were sometimes, if the size of the family required it, additional rooms.

At Pompeii, a second or third story was rarely of importance, being built only above a small part of the house, and containing rooms for the slaves; differing in this respect from the more magnificent edifices of Rome, which generally contained the principal eating-room (or caenaculum) on the second floor. The apartments themselves were ordinarily of small size; for in those delightful climes they received any extraordinary number of visitors in the peristyle (or portico), the hall, or the garden; and even their banquet-rooms, however elaborately adorned and carefully selected in point of aspect, were of diminutive proportions; for the intellectual ancients, being fond of society, not of crowds, rarely feasted more than nine at a time, so that large dinner- rooms were not so necessary with them as with us. But the suite of rooms seen at once from the entrance, must have had a very imposing effect: you beheld at once the hall richly paved and painted—the tablinum—the graceful peristyle, and (if the house extended farther) the opposite banquet-room and the garden, which closed the view with some gushing fount or marble statue.

The reader will now have a tolerable notion of the Pompeian houses, which resembled in some respects the Grecian, but mostly the Roman fashion of domestic architecture. In almost every house there is some difference

in detail from the rest, but the principal outline is the same in all. In all you find the hall, the tablinum, and the peristyle, communicating with each other; in all you find the walls richly painted; and all the evidence of a people fond of the refining elegancies of life. The purity of the taste of the Pompeians in decoration is, however, questionable: they were fond of the gaudiest colors, of fantastic designs; they often painted the lower half of their columns a bright red, leaving the rest uncolored; and where the garden was small, its wall was frequently tinted to deceive the eye as to its extent, imitating trees, birds, temples, etc., in perspective—a meretricious delusion which the graceful pedantry of Pliny himself adopted, with a complacent pride in its ingenuity.

But the house of Glaucus was at once one of the smallest, and yet one of the most adorned and finished of all the private mansions of Pompeii: it would be a model at this day for the house of 'a single man in Mayfair'—the envy and despair of the coelibian purchasers of buhl and marquetry.

You enter by a long and narrow vestibule, on the floor of which is the image of a dog in mosaic, with the well-known 'Cave canem'—or 'Beware the dog'. On either side is a chamber of some size; for the interior part of the house not being large enough to contain the two great divisions of private and public apartments, these two rooms were set apart for the reception of visitors who neither by rank nor familiarity were entitled to admission in the penetralia of the mansion.

Advancing up the vestibule you enter an atrium, that when first discovered was rich in paintings, which in point of expression would scarcely disgrace a Rafaele. You may see them now transplanted to the Neapolitan Museum: they are still the admiration of connoisseurs—they depict the parting of Achilles and Briseis. Who does not acknowledge the force, the vigour, the beauty, employed in delineating the forms and faces of Achilles and the immortal slave!

On one side the atrium, a small staircase admitted to the apartments for the slaves on the second floor; there also were two or three small bedrooms, the walls of which portrayed the rape of Europa, the battle of the Amazons, etc.

You now enter the tablinum, across which, at either end, hung rich draperies of Tyrian purple, half withdrawn. On the walls was depicted a poet reading his verses to his friends; and in the pavement was inserted a small and most exquisite mosaic, typical of the instructions given by the director of the stage to his comedians.

You passed through this saloon and entered the peristyle; and here (as I have said before was usually the case with the smaller houses of Pompeii) the mansion ended. From each of the seven columns that adorned this court hung festoons of garlands: the centre, supplying the place of a garden, bloomed with the rarest flowers placed in vases of white marble, that were supported on pedestals. At the left hand of this small garden was a diminutive fane, resembling one of those small chapels placed at the side of roads in Catholic countries, and dedicated to the Penates; before it stood a bronzed tripod: to the left of the colonnade were two small cubicula, or bedrooms; to the right was the triclinium, in which the guests were now assembled.

This room is usually termed by the antiquaries of Naples 'The Chamber of Leda'; and in the beautiful work of Sir William Gell, the reader will find an engraving from that most delicate and graceful painting of Leda presenting her newborn to her husband, from which the room derives its name. This charming apartment opened upon the fragrant garden. Round the table of citrean wood, highly polished and delicately wrought with silver arabesques, were placed the three couches, which were yet more common at Pompeii than the semicircular seat that had grown lately into fashion at Rome: and on these couches of bronze, studded with

richer metals, were laid thick quiltings covered with elaborate broidery, and yielding luxuriously to the pressure.

'Well, I must own,' said the aedile Pansa, 'that your house, though scarcely larger than a case for one's fibulae, is a gem of its kind. How beautifully painted is that parting of Achilles and Briseis!—what a style!—what heads!—what a-hem!'

'Praise from Pansa is indeed valuable on such subjects,' said Clodius, gravely. 'Why, the paintings on his walls!—Ah! there is, indeed, the hand of a Zeuxis!'

'You flatter me, my Clodius; indeed you do,' quoth the aedile, who was celebrated through Pompeii for having the worst paintings in the world; for he was patriotic, and patronized none but Pompeians. 'You flatter me; but there is something pretty—AEdepol, yes—in the colors, to say nothing of the design—and then for the kitchen, my friends—ah! that was all my fancy.'

'What is the design?' said Glaucus. 'I have not yet seen your kitchen, though I have often witnessed the excellence of its cheer.'

'A cook, my Athenian—a cook sacrificing the trophies of his skill on the altar of Vesta, with a beautiful muraena (taken from the life) on a spit at a distance—there is some invention there!'

At that instant the slaves appeared, bearing a tray covered with the first preparative initia of the feast. Amidst delicious figs, fresh herbs strewed with snow, anchovies, and eggs, were ranged small cups of diluted wine sparingly mixed with honey. As these were placed on the table, young slaves bore round to each of the five guests (for there were no more) the silver basin of perfumed water, and napkins edged with a purple fringe. But the aedile ostentatiously drew forth his own napkin, which was not, indeed, of so fine a linen, but in which the fringe was twice as broad, and wiped his hands with the parade of a man who felt he was calling for admiration.

'A splendid nappa that of yours,' said Clodius; 'why, the fringe is as broad as a girdle!'

'A trifle, my Clodius: a trifle! They tell me this stripe is the latest fashion at Rome; but Glaucus attends to these things more than I.'

'Be propitious, O Bacchus!' said Glaucus, inclining reverentially to a beautiful image of the god placed in the centre of the table, at the corners of which stood the Lares and the salt-holders. The guests followed the prayer, and then, sprinkling the wine on the table, they performed the wonted libation.

This over, the convivialists reclined themselves on the couches, and the business of the hour commenced.

'May this cup be my last!' said the young Sallust, as the table, cleared of its first stimulants, was now loaded with the substantial part of the entertainment, and the ministering slave poured forth to him a brimming cyathus —'May this cup be my last, but it is the best wine I have drunk at Pompeii!'

'Bring hither the amphora,' said Glaucus, 'and read its date and its character.'

The slave hastened to inform the party that the scroll fastened to the cork betokened its birth from Chios, and its age a ripe fifty years.

'How deliciously the snow has cooled it!' said Pansa. 'It is just enough.'

'It is like the experience of a man who has cooled his pleasures sufficiently to give them a double zest,' exclaimed Sallust.

'It is like a woman's "No",' added Glaucus: 'it cools, but to inflame the more.'

'When is our next wild-beast fight?' said Clodius to Pansa.

'It stands fixed for the ninth ide of August,' answered Pansa: 'on the day after the Vulcanalia—we have a most lovely young lion for the occasion.'

'Whom shall we get for him to eat?' asked Clodius. 'Alas! there is a great scarcity of criminals. You must positively find some innocent or other to condemn to the lion, Pansa!'

'Indeed I have thought very seriously about it of late,' replied the aedile, gravely. 'It was a most infamous law that which forbade us to send our own slaves to the wild beasts. Not to let us do what we like with our own, that's what I call an infringement on property itself.'

'Not so in the good old days of the Republic,' sighed Sallust.

'And then this pretended mercy to the slaves is such a disappointment to the poor people. How they do love to see a good tough battle between a man and a lion; and all this innocent pleasure they may lose (if the gods don't send us a good criminal soon) from this cursed law!'

'What can be worse policy,' said Clodius, sententiously, 'than to interfere with the manly amusements of the people?'

'Well thank Jupiter and the Fates! we have no Nero at present,' said Sallust.

'He was, indeed, a tyrant; he shut up our amphitheatre for ten years.'

'I wonder it did not create a rebellion,' said Sallust.

'It very nearly did,' returned Pansa, with his mouth full of wild boar.

Here the conversation was interrupted for a moment by a flourish of flutes, and two slaves entered with a single dish.

'Ah, what delicacy hast thou in store for us now, my Glaucus?' cried the young Sallust, with sparkling eyes.

Sallust was only twenty-four, but he had no pleasure in life like eating—perhaps he had exhausted all the others: yet had he some talent, and an excellent heart—as far as it went.

'I know its face, by Pollux!' cried Pansa. 'It is an Ambracian Kid. Ho (snapping his fingers, a usual signal to

the slaves) we must prepare a new libation in honour to the new-comer.'

'I had hoped said Glaucus, in a melancholy tone, 'to have procured you some oysters from Britain; but the winds that were so cruel to Caesar have forbid us the oysters.'

'Are they in truth so delicious?' asked Lepidus, loosening to a yet more luxurious ease his ungirdled tunic.

'Why, in truth, I suspect it is the distance that gives the flavor; they want the richness of the Brundusium oyster. But, at Rome, no supper is complete without them.'

'The poor Britons! There is some good in them after all,' said Sallust. 'They produce an oyster.'

'I wish they would produce us a gladiator,' said the aedile, whose provident mind was musing over the wants of the amphitheatre.

'By Pallas!' cried Glaucus, as his favorite slave crowned his streaming locks with a new chaplet, 'I love these wild spectacles well enough when beast fights beast; but when a man, one with bones and blood like ours, is coldly put on the arena, and torn limb from limb, the interest is too horrid: I sicken—I gasp for breath—I long to rush and defend him. The yells of the populace seem to me more dire than the voices of the Furies chasing Orestes. I rejoice that there is so little chance of that bloody exhibition for our next show!'

The aedile shrugged his shoulders. The young Sallust, who was thought the best-natured man in Pompeii, stared in surprise. The graceful Lepidus, who rarely spoke for fear of disturbing his features, ejaculated 'Hercle!' The parasite Clodius muttered 'AEdepol!' and the sixth banqueter, who was the umbra of Clodius, and whose duty it was to echo his richer friend, when he could not praise him—the parasite of a parasite—muttered also 'AEdepol!'

'Well, you Italians are used to these spectacles; we Greeks are more merciful. Ah, shade of Pindar!—the rapture of a true Grecian game—the emulation of man against man—the generous strife—the half-mournful triumph—so proud