

***MARC  
MONNIER***

***THE WONDERS  
OF POMPEII***

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# **The Wonders of Pompeii**

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# I.

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## THE EXHUMED CITY.

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**THE ANTIQUE LANDSCAPE—THE HISTORY OF POMPEII BEFORE AND AFTER ITS DESTRUCTION.—HOW IT WAS BURIED AND EXHUMED.—WINKELMANN AS A PROPHET.—THE EXCAVATIONS IN THE REIGN OF CHARLES III., OF MURAT, AND OF FERDINAND.—THE EXCAVATIONS AS THEY NOW ARE.—SIGNOR FIORELLI.—APPEARANCE OF THE RUINS.—WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT FOUND THERE.**

A railroad runs from Naples to Pompeii. Are you alone? The trip occupies one hour, and you have just time enough to read what follows, pausing once in a while to glance at Vesuvius and the sea; the clear, bright waters hemmed in by the gentle curve of the promontories; a bluish coast that approaches and becomes green; a green coast that withdraws into the distance and becomes blue; Castellamare looming up, and Naples receding. All these lines and colors existed too at the time when Pompeii was destroyed: the island of Prochyta, the cities of Baiæ, of Bauli, of Neapolis, and of Surrentum bore the names that they retain. Portici was called Herculaneum; Torre dell'Annunziata was called Oplontes; Castellamare, Stabiæ; Misenum and Minerva designated the two extremities of the gulf. However, Vesuvius was not what it has become; fertile and wooded almost to the summit, covered with orchards

and vines, it must have resembled the picturesque heights of Monte San Angelo, toward which we are rolling. The summit alone, honeycombed with caverns and covered with black stones, betrayed to the learned a volcano "long extinct." It was to blaze out again, however, in a terrible eruption; and, since then, it has constantly flamed and smoked, menacing the ruins it has made and the new cities that brave it, calmly reposing at its feet.

What do you expect to find at Pompeii? At a distance, its antiquity seems enormous, and the word "ruins" awakens colossal conceptions in the excited fancy of the traveller. But, be not self-deceived; that is the first rule in knocking about over the world. Pompeii was a small city of only thirty thousand souls; something like what Geneva was thirty years ago. Like Geneva, too, it was marvellously situated—in the depth of a picturesque valley between mountains shutting in the horizon on one side, at a few steps from the sea and from a streamlet, once a river, which plunges into it—and by its charming site attracted personages of distinction, although it was peopled chiefly with merchants and others in easy circumstances; shrewd, prudent folk, and probably honest and clever enough, as well. The etymologists, after having exhausted, in their lexicons, all the words that chime in sound with Pompeii, have, at length, agreed in deriving the name from a Greek verb which signifies *to send, to transport*, and hence they conclude that many of the Pompeians were engaged in exportation, or perhaps, were emigrants sent from a distance to form a colony. Yet these opinions are but conjectures, and it is useless to dwell on them.

All that can be positively stated is that the city was the entrepôt of the trade of Nola, Nocera, and Atella. Its port was large enough to receive a naval armament, for it sheltered the fleet of P. Cornelius. This port, mentioned by certain authors, has led many to believe that the sea washed the walls of Pompeii, and some guides have even thought they could discover the rings that once held the cables of the galleys. Unfortunately for this idea, at the place which the imagination of some of our contemporaries covered with salt water, there were one day discovered the vestiges of old structures, and it is now conceded that Pompeii, like many other seaside places, had its harbor at a distance. Our little city made no great noise in history. Tacitus and Seneca speak of it as celebrated, but the Italians of all periods have been fond of superlatives. You will find some very old buildings in it, proclaiming an ancient origin, and Oscan inscriptions recalling the antique language of the country. When the Samnites invaded the whole of Campania, as though to deliver it over more easily to Rome, they probably occupied Pompeii, which figured in the second Samnite war, B.C. 310, and which, revolting along with the entire valley of the Sarno from Nocera to Stabiæ, repulsed an incursion of the Romans and drove them back to their vessels. The third Samnite war was, as is well known, a bloody vengeance for this, and Pompeii became Roman. Although the yoke of the conquerors was not very heavy—the *municipii*, retaining their Senate, their magistrates, their *comitiæ* or councils, and paying a tribute of men only in case of war—the Samnite populations, clinging frantically to the idea of a separate and independent existence, rose

twice again in revolt; once just after the battle of Cannæ, when they threw themselves into the arms of Hannibal, and then against Sylla, one hundred and twenty-four years later—facts that prove the tenacity of their resistance. On both occasions Pompeii was retaken, and the second time partly dismantled and occupied by a detachment of soldiers, who did not long remain there. And thus we have the whole history of this little city. The Romans were fond of living there, and Cicero had a residence in the place, to which he frequently refers in his letters. Augustus sent thither a colony which founded the suburb of Augustus Felix, administered by a mayor. The Emperor Claudius also had a villa at Pompeii, and there lost one of his children, who perished by a singular mishap. The imperial lad was amusing himself, as the Neapolitan boys do to this day, by throwing pears up into the air and catching them in his mouth as they fell. One of the fruits choked him by descending too far into his throat. But the Neapolitan youngsters perform the feat with figs, which render it infinitely less dangerous.

We are, then, going to visit a small city subordinate to Rome, much less than Marseilles is to Paris, and a little more so than Geneva is to Berne. Pompeii had almost nothing to do with the Senate or the Emperor. The old tongue—the Oscan—had ceased to be official, and the authorities issued their orders in Latin. The residents of the place were Roman citizens, Rome being recognized as the capital and fatherland. The local legislation was made secondary to Roman legislation. But, excepting these reservations, Pompeii formed a little world, apart, independent, and

complete in itself. She had a miniature Senate, composed of decurions; an aristocracy in epitome, represented by the *Augustales*, answering to knights; and then came her *plebs* or common people. She chose her own pontiffs, convoked the comitiæ, promulged municipal laws, regulated military levies, collected taxes; in fine selected her own immediate rulers—her consuls (the *duumvirs* dispensing justice), her ediles, her quæstors, etc. Hence, it is not a provincial city that we are to survey, but a petty State which had preserved its autonomy within the unity of the Empire, and was, as has been cleverly said, a miniature of Rome.

Another circumstance imparts a peculiar interest to Pompeii. That city, which seemed to have no good luck, had been violently shaken by earthquake in the year B.C. 63. Several temples had toppled down along with the colonnade of the Forum, the great Basilica, and the theatres, without counting the tombs and houses. Nearly every family fled from the place, taking with them their furniture and their statuary; and the Senate hesitated a long time before they allowed the city to be rebuilt and the deserted district to be re-peopled. The Pompeians at last returned; but the decurions wished to make the restoration of the place a complete rejuvenation. The columns of the Forum speedily reappeared, but with capitals in the fashion of the day; the Corinthian-Roman order, adopted almost everywhere, changed the style of the monuments; the old shafts covered with stucco were patched up for the new topwork they were to receive, and the Oscan inscriptions disappeared. From all this there sprang great blunders in an artistic point of view, but a uniformity and consistency that please those who are



fond of monuments and cities of one continuous derivation. Taste loses, but harmony gains thereby, and you pass in review a collective totality of edifices that bear their age upon their fronts, and give a very exact and vivid idea of what a *municeps* a Roman colony must have been in the time of Vespasian.

They went to work, then, to rebuild the city, and the undertaking was pushed on quite vigorously, thanks to the contributions of the Pompeians, especially of the functionaries. The temples of Jupiter and of Venus—we adopt the consecrated names—and those of Isis and of Fortune, were already up; the theatres were rising again; the handsome columns of the Forum were ranging themselves under their porticoes; the residences were gay with brilliant paintings; work and pleasure had both resumed their activity; life hurried to and fro through the streets, and crowds thronged the amphitheatre, when, all at once, burst forth the terrible eruption of 79. I will describe it further on; but here simply recall the fact that it buried Pompeii under a deluge of stones and ashes. This re-awakening of the volcano destroyed three cities, without counting the villages, and depopulated the country in the twinkling of an eye.

After the catastrophe, however, the inhabitants returned, and made the first excavations in order to recover their valuables; and robbers, too—we shall surprise them in the very act—crept into the subterranean city. It is a fact that the Emperor Titus for a moment entertained the idea of clearing and restoring it, and with that view sent two Senators to the spot, intrusted with the mission of making

the first study of the ground; but it would appear that the magnitude of the work appalled those dignitaries, and that the restoration in question never got beyond the condition of a mere project. Rome soon had more serious cares to occupy her than the fate of a petty city that ere long disappeared beneath vineyards, orchards, and gardens, and under a thick growth of woodland—remark this latter circumstance—until, at length, centuries accumulated, and with them the forgetfulness that buries all things. Pompeii was then, so to speak, lost, and the few learned men who knew it by name could not point out its site. When, at the close of the sixteenth century, the architect Fontana was constructing a subterranean canal to convey the waters of the Sarno to Torre dell' Annunziata, the conduit passed through Pompeii, from one end to the other, piercing the walls, following the old streets, and coming upon sub structures and inscriptions; but no one bethought him that they had discovered the place of the buried city. However, the amphitheatre, which, roofed in by a layer of the soil, formed a regular excavation, indicated an ancient edifice, and the neighboring peasantry, with better information than the learned, designated by the half-Latin name of *Civita*, which dim tradition had handed down, the soil and debris that had accumulated above Pompeii.

It was only in 1748, under the reign of Charles III, when the discovery of Herculaneum had attracted the attention of the world to the antiquities thus buried, that, some vine-dressers having struck upon some old walls with their picks and spades, and in so doing unearthed statues, a colonel of engineers named Don Rocco Alcubierra asked permission of

the king to make excavations in the vicinity. The king consented and placed a dozen of galley-slaves at the colonel's disposition. Thus it was that by a lucky chance a military engineer discovered the city that we are about to visit. Still, eight years more had to roll away before any one suspected that it was Pompeii which they were thus exhuming. Learned folks thought they were dealing with Stabiæ.

Shall I relate the history of these underground researches, "badly conducted, frequently abandoned, and resumed in obedience to the same capriciousness that had led to their suspension," as they were? Such are the words of the opinion Barthelemy expressed when writing, in 1755, to the Count de Caylus. Winkelmann, who was present at these excavations a few years later, sharply criticised the tardiness of the galley-slaves to whom the work had been confided. "At this rate," he wrote, "our descendants of the fourth generation will still have digging to do among these ruins." The illustrious German hardly suspected that he was making so accurate a prediction as it has turned out to be. The descendants of the fourth generation are our contemporaries, and the third part of Pompeii is not yet unearthed.

The Emperor Joseph II. visited the excavations on the 6th of April, 1796, and complained bitterly to King Ferdinand IV. of the slight degree of zeal and the small amount of money employed. The king promised to do better, but did not keep his word. He had neither intelligence nor activity in prosecuting this immense task, excepting while the French occupation lasted. At that time, however, the government

carried out the idea of Francesco La Vega, a man of sense and capacity, and purchased all the ground that covered Pompeii. Queen Caroline, the sister of Bonaparte and wife of Murat, took a fancy to these excavations and pushed them vigorously, often going all the way from Naples through six leagues of dust to visit them. In 1813 there were exactly four hundred and seventy-six laborers employed at Pompeii. The Bourbons returned and commenced by re-selling the ground that had been purchased under Murat; then, little by little, the work continued, at first with some activity, then fell off and slackened more and more until, from being neglected, they were altogether abandoned, and were resumed only once in a while in the presence of crowned heads. On these occasions they were got up like New Year's surprise games: everything that happened to be at hand was scattered about on layers of ashes and of pumice-stone and carefully covered over. Then, upon the arrival of such-and-such a majesty, or this or that highness, the magic wand of the superintendent or inspector of the works, caused all these treasures to spring out of the ground. I could name, one after the other, the august personages who were deceived in this manner, beginning with the Kings of the Two Sicilies and of Jerusalem.

But that is not all. Not only was nothing more discovered at Pompeii, but even the monuments that had been found were not preserved. King Ferdinand soon discovered that the 25,000 francs applied to the excavations were badly employed; he reduced the sum to 10,000, and that amount was worn down on the way by passing through so many

hands. Pompeii fell back, gradually presenting nothing but ruins upon ruins.

Happily, the Italian Government established by the revolution of 1860, came into power to set all these acts of negligence and roguery to rights. Signor Fiorelli, who is all intelligence and activity, not to mention his erudition, which numerous writings prove, was appointed inspector of the excavations. Under his administration, the works which had been vigorously resumed were pushed on by as many as seven hundred laborers at a time, and they dug out in the lapse of three years more treasures than had been brought to light in the thirty that preceded them. Everything has been reformed, nay, *moralised*, as it were, in the dead city; the visitor pays two francs at the gate and no longer has to contend with the horde of guides, doorkeepers, rascals, and beggars who formerly plundered him. A small museum, recently established, furnishes the active inquirer the opportunity of examining upon the spot the curiosities that have already been discovered; a library containing the fine works of Mazois, of Raoul Rochette, of Gell, of Zahn, of Overbeck, of Breton, etc., on Pompeii, enables the student to consult them in Pompeii itself; workshops lately opened are continually busy in restoring cracked walls, marbles, and bronzes, and one may there surprise the artist Bramante, the most ingenious hand at repairing antiquities in the world, as likewise my friend, Padiglione, who, with admirable patience and minute fidelity, is cutting a small model in cork of the ruins that have been cleared, which is scrupulously exact. In fine—and this is the main point—the excavations are no longer carried on occasionally only, and in the

presence of a few privileged persons, but before the first comer and every day, unless funds have run short.

"I have frequently been present," wrote a half-Pompeian, a year or two ago, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*—"I have frequently been present for hours together, seated on a sand-bank which itself, perhaps, concealed wonders, and witnessed this rude yet interesting toil, from which I could not withdraw my gaze. I therefore have it in my power to write understandingly. I do not relate what I read, but what I saw. Three systems, to my knowledge, have been employed in these excavations. The first, inaugurated under Charles III., was the simplest. It consisted in hollowing out the soil, in extricating the precious objects found, and then in re-filling the orifice—an excellent method of forming a museum by destroying Pompeii. This method was abandoned so soon as it was discovered that a whole city was involved. The second system, which was gradually brought to perfection in the last century, was earnestly pursued under Murat. The work was started in many places at once, and the laborers, advancing one after the other, penetrating and cutting the hill, followed the line of the streets, which they cleared little by little before them. In following the streets on the ground-level, the declivity of ashes and pumice-stone which obstructed them was attacked below, and thence resulted many regrettable accidents. The whole upper part of the houses, commencing with the roofs, fell in among the rubbish, along with a thousand fragile articles, which were broken and lost without there being any means of determining the point from which they had been hurled down. In order to obviate this inconvenience, Signor Fiorelli

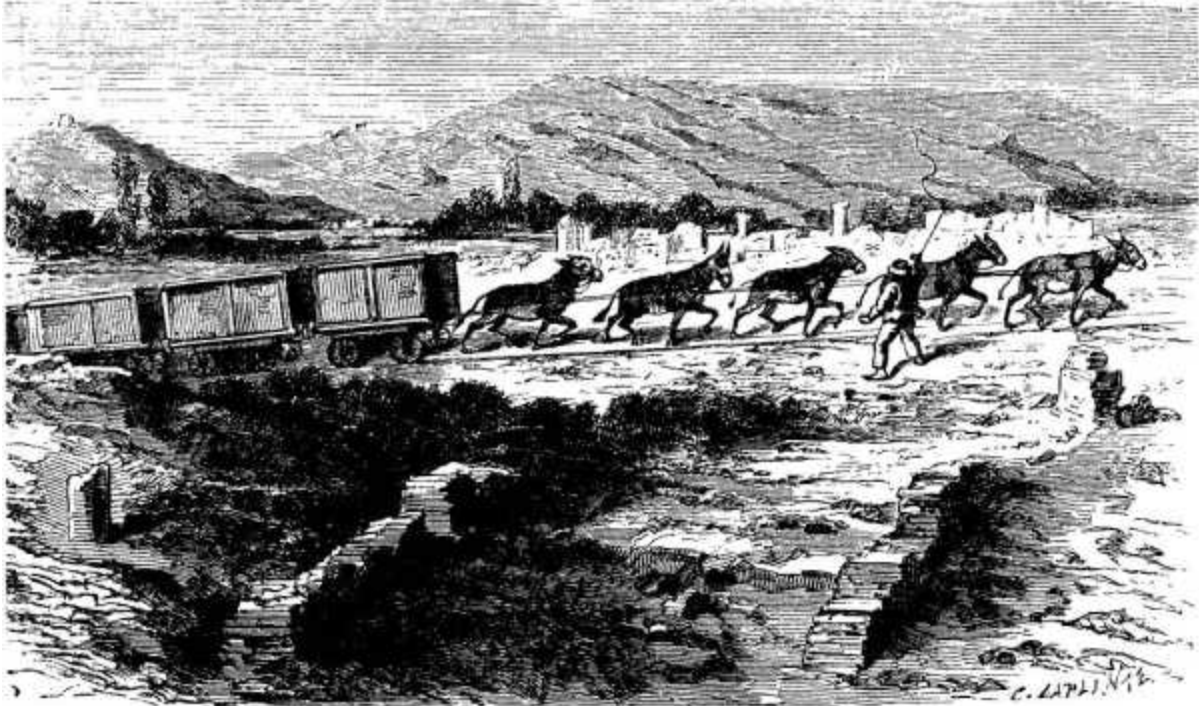
has started a third system. He does not follow the streets by the ground-level, but he marks them out over the hillocks, and thus traces among the trees and cultivated grounds wide squares indicating the subterranean, islets. No one is ignorant of the fact that these islets—*isole, insulæ* in the modern as well as in the ancient language of Italy—indicate blocks of buildings. The islet traced, Signor Fiorelli repurchases the land which had been sold by King Ferdinand I. and gives up the trees found upon it.[\[A\]](#)

"The ground, then, being bought and the vegetation removed, work begins. The earth at the summit of the hill is taken off and carried away on a railroad, which descends from the middle of Pompeii by a slope that saves all expense of machinery and fuel, to a considerable distance beyond the amphitheatre and the city. In this way, the most serious question of all, to wit, that of clearing away the dirt, is solved. Formerly, the ruins were covered in with it, and subsequently it was heaped up in a huge hillock, but now it helps to construct the very railroad that carries it away, and will, one day, tip it into the sea.

"Nothing can present a livelier scene than the excavation of these ruins. Men diligently dig away at the earth, and bevvies of young girls run to and fro without cessation, with baskets in their hands. These are sprightly peasant damsels collected from the adjacent villages most of them accustomed to working in factories that have closed or curtailed operations owing to the invasion of English tissues and the rise of cotton. No one would have dreamed that free trade and the war in America would have supplied female hands to work at the ruins of Pompeii. But all things are

linked together now in this great world of ours, vast as it is. These girls then run backward and forward, filling their baskets with soil, ashes, and *lapillo*, hoisting them on their heads, by the help of the men, with a single quick, sharp motion, and thereupon setting off again, in groups that incessantly replace each other, toward the railway, passing and repassing their returning companions. Very picturesque in their ragged gowns of brilliant colors, they walk swiftly with lengthy strides, their long skirts defining the movements of their naked limbs and fluttering in the wind behind them, while their arms, with gestures like those of classic urn-bearers, sustain the heavy load that rests upon their heads without making them even stoop. All this is not out of keeping with the monuments that gradually appear above the surface as the rubbish is removed. Did not the sight of foreign visitors here and there disturb the harmony of the scene, one might readily ask himself, in the midst of this Virgilian landscape, amid these festooning vines, in full view of the smoking Vesuvius, and beneath that antique sky, whether all those young girls who come and go are not the slaves of Pansa, the *ædile*, or of the *dumvir* Holconius."





### The Rubbish Trucks Going up Empty.

We have just glanced over the history of Pompeii before and after its destruction. Let us now enter the city. But a word of caution before we start. Do not expect to find houses or monuments still erect and roofed in like the Pantheon at Rome and the square building at Nismes, or you will be sadly disappointed. Rather picture to yourself a small city of low buildings and narrow streets that had been completely burned down in a single night. You have come to look at it on the day after the conflagration. The upper stories have disappeared, and the ceilings have fallen in. Everything that was of wood, planks, and beams, is in ashes; all is uncovered, and no roofs are to be seen. In these structures, which in other days were either private dwellings or public edifices, you now can everywhere walk under the open sky. Were a shower to come on, you would not know where to seek shelter. It is as though you were in a city in progress of building, with only the first stories as yet

completed, but without the flooring for the second. Here is a house: nothing remains of it but the lower walls, with nothing resting on them. At a distance you would suppose it to be a collection of screens set up for parlor theatricals. Here is a public square: you will now see in it only bottom platforms, supports that hold up nothing, shafts of columns without galleries, pedestals without statues, mute blocks of stone, space and emptiness. I will lead you into more than one temple. You will see there only an eminence of masonry, side and end walls, but no front, no portico. Where is art? Where is the presiding deity of the place? The ruins of your stable would not be more naked a thousand years hence. Stones on all sides, tufa, bricks, lava, here and there some slabs of marble and travertine, then traces of destruction—paintings defaced, pavements disjointed and full of gaps and cracks—and then marks of spoliation, for all the precious objects found were carried off to the museum at Naples, and I can show you now nothing but the places where once stood the Faun, the statue of Narcissus, the mosaic of Arbelles and the famous blue vase. Such is the Pompeii that awaits the traveller who comes thither expecting to find another Paris, or, at least, ruins arranged in the Parisian style, like the tower of St. Jacques, for instance.



Clearing out a Narrow Street in Pompeii.

You will say, perhaps, good reader, that I disenchant you; on the contrary, I prevent your disenchantment. Do not prepare the way for your own disappointment by unreasonable expectations or by ill-founded notions; this is all that I ask of your judgment. Do not come hither to look for the relics of Roman grandeur. Other impressions await you at Pompeii. What you are about to see is an entire city, or at all events the third of an ancient city, remote,