



A LIGHTNING
SPARK
FOR
POMPEIAN
VISITORS

BY V. MACCHIORO

MARY E. RAIOLA
NAPLES

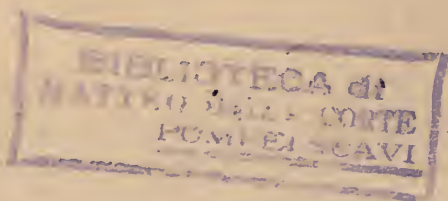
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P R E F A C E

This pamphlet is not intended at all to be regarded as a « Guide to Pompei », as this term is generally understood: and, in order to obviate to any possible misunderstanding between me and my reader, I wish to state in a few words why this booklet was written by me.

Generally the monuments of classical antiquity are considered in a purely exterior, artistic and historical light, as though they belonged to a civilization which has no rapport whatsoever with our own. This is a mistake, for, given the deep and vast inheritance left us by the classical civilization—for good or for ill—in our own civilization, it is well for us to try and penetrate beyond the mere artistic and historic exterior, and to try to cull the very soul of the ancient civilization in its most hidden essence, in order to judge what does or does not accord with our conscience.

No spot in the world is better adapted than Pompei for this intimate penetration of Roman civilization,

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for in no other place can you observe and grasp it so completely as you can in Pompei. And yet the books on Pompei which are mostly read, - though often erudite enough and very interesting - present the dead City in its purely exterior aspect and from a strictly artistic and historic point of view, not troubling to lead the visitors beyond this cold and dead crust for him to reach up to and grasp the antique soul in all that it contains - be it good or ill - of real and live matter for us.

This is what I have aimed at. I have aimed at giving to those who visit Pompei some directing ideas that may be for them a kind of lightning spark, so that they may penetrate into the very heart of the Roman civilization, and look at it and consider it not like a dead thing which may be of interest to them but does not require a special spiritual valuation, but like a live matter whose wide influence and echo, without even our knowing it, affect deeply the conscience of the modern man.

V. M.

I.

The best way to understand Pompei

It is very easy to visit Pompei, but to understand it is far more difficult. You may be sure that, among the hundreds of thousands who visit her yearly, but a few ever understand her. Surely that certain business-man never understood her who came to Europe and to Italy for the first time simply because he is rich, and that doing so is the duty of every rich person. Having arrived at Naples the previous day with one of Cook's or of the American Express touring parties, he has been carried post-haste to Pompei, where he was ordered to see and to understand every thing in precisely three hours. The good man has obeyed most punctually, looking at those things he was told by the guide to look at, stopping where the others stopped, walking on when the others did so, exclaiming admiringly when one of his fellow-sufferers admonished him that the propitious moment to admire had arrived. After three hours of walking and stopping and gaping, he went back to his hotel, truly very much pleased, carrying in his head a whole vocabulary of words new

to him, but, I contend, without having understood Pompei the least little bit.

Another one, being somewhat more cultured, has, before venturing coming to Italy, studied seriously a Manual of Roman Antiquities and a Manual of History of Ancient Art. And then one fine day he started for Pompei. With his Baedeker in hand, his Kodak flung over his shoulders and his field-glass on his breast, he roamed around for a whole day in the dead City and has penetrated in every garden, in every shop and in every cellar; he has observed with the greatest care every wall, every stone, every cloud, exclaiming at every moment: «Stupendous! Marvelous!», and has gone back to Naples with a swelled head and broken limbs, satisfied with his martyrdom, which he offers up to Science, convinced to have got out of Pompei all there was to know about it. Fancy that! But I trow that not even *he* has understood Pompei!

On the other hand, there is someone to whom nobody would ever dare to deny the right of assevering that he *has* understood Pompei as few others in the whole world can do: this one is a Professor of Archæology who comes every summer to Pompei in order to study the Etruscan column or the triangular Forum. And he solemnly takes up his abode at the Albergo del Sole. Then, he spends many hours each day in measuring, exploring, drawing, surrounded by the mute admiration of the custodians who consider him a kind of oracle, until, one fine day, he publishes

an important paper in a magazine. Who would dare to say that *he* does not understand Pompei? And yet, alack and alas! I firmly believe that he has *not* understood her! What, then must be done to understand Pompei?

Oh! a very simple thing!

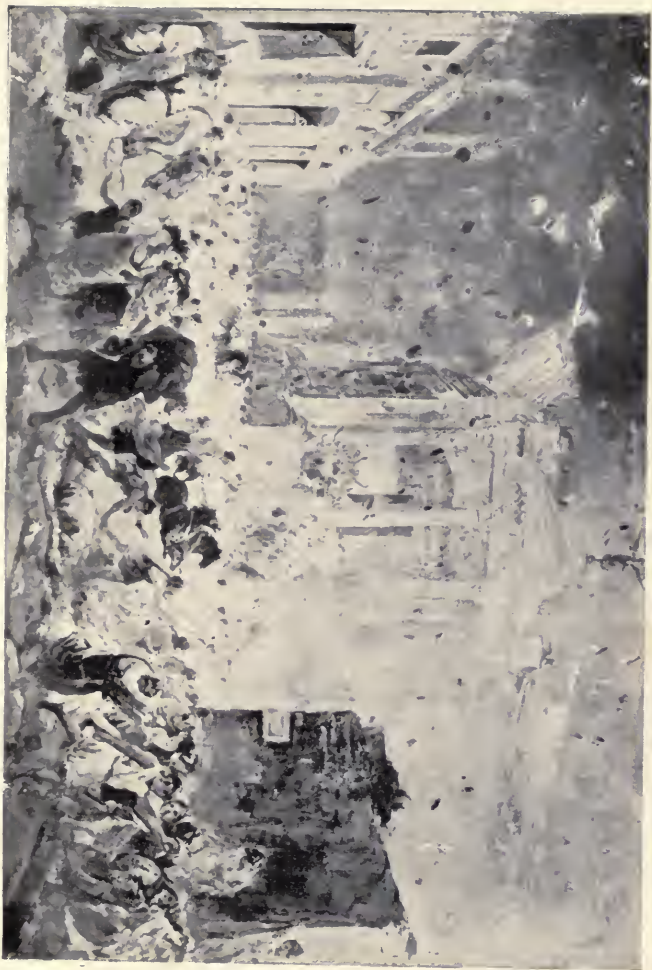
Behold: there is, at Pompei, a very humble thing, the poorest and most humble thing in the world, known by every one, and this thing contains exactly the secret that leads to understanding Pompei, that secret which you have been looking for uselessly in the Manuals and in the Guides. This poor thing is that dog, suffocated to death, whose cast of plaster is preserved in the Museum of Pompei.

How pitiful is that poor little animal, all crippled and convulsed in its useless attempts to break the cruel chain that held him so tightly and inexorably! Nothing can be more pitiful than this unconscious and instinctive revolt against an iron fate! Well. This poor dog is the true key which reveals the secret of the dead City, for he is the very symbol of that poor city that died in the same way he did, while she was struggling, trying to break the chain of that fate which tied her pitilessly to death, without understanding the reason of her very undoing.

Thus, thus, Pompei died: like unto this poor dog. The catastrophe caught her unexpectedly, treacherously, without giving her time to understand what was happening. Even the most learned Plinius did not understand it at first.

Many Pompeians died believing that the Giants had come out of Tartarus and that the last day had come, to again thrust down the world in the shapeless chaos of which speak the very ancient Cosmogonies. It was lightning-swift and monstrous a thing: the houses were waving here and there, rocked by the earthquake, knocking against each other; the cart in which Plinius the Young was fleeing, was shaken about, on the ground, in such a way that they were compelled to load it with stones; the sea drew back, leaving the fish on dry land, panting; a terror-striking obscurity broken only by flames and lightning, descended on the city, together with a thick cloud of cinders and lapilli; and under all this, poor humanity was struggling, crying loudly and wildly, frenzied by an all-deadening panic. After the third day of this hellishly destructive work, the sun shone again, but its rays were yellowish and pale, and looked on nothing, for nothing was left of all the lately extant grandeur and magnificence of the unfortunate city. «All was covered with cinders – says Plinius – as with a sheet of snow». And, to-day the human dead of that time come back to the light, just as that poor dog does, and we can follow their agony and see them die, as it were under our very eyes!

In the House of the tragic Poet two young women are hastily assembling their jewels, and are about to flee, when they fall to the ground, suffocated, spilling all their jewels. In the House of the Faun, slaves and animals take refuge together, and together



We can follow their agony and see them die

FUSCHETTI

they die, falling one over the other in one heap.

In the barracks of the Gladiators two poor fellows whose feet were fettered, died thus, without even being able to try to flee away.

In the temple of Isis, one of the priests takes refuge in the vaults, but, sensing death approaching, he breaks first one, then a second and then a third partition with an ax, but dies just as he was going to gain the open.

In the Street of the Baths, a woman is fleeing with her three children: caught by death, she falls to the ground together with her little ones.

In the Villa of Diomedes, all the family – eighteen persons – take refuge in the wine-cellar, carrying there some food and their most precious belongings, and barricade the door: but the avalanche of cinders blocked the entrance, and they died thus, walled in alive, in the horror of dense darkness. The master of the house, however, had fled first, taking away the key with him and followed by a slave who was carrying some silver vases, a lantern and a bag with about hundred precious pieces of money, but both the master and the slave died, suffocated, on the very threshold of the door that opened unto the fields. What horrible and frightful struggles against death, while the lapilli and the cinders descended, descended, grimly, inexorably!

Some there were who died serenely and who still show in their faces the peace of slumber, like unto that poor slave, who seems to sleep, content with

dying at last, and that other woman who died leaning her head on her husband's bosom; but there are others in whom intense suffering, fright and despair are vividly depicted by gnashing of teeth and the fast closing of their fists, like unto felled giants would die.

One must think of all this; one must *see* it, if Pompei is to be understood. One must not consider her as an immense museum of interesting things, and, may be, congratulate one's self - without daring to utter such a thought aloud - that Mount Vesuvius had buried her, so that we may have the pleasure of roaming with our own feet over the pavements of an ancient roman city.

The traveller as well as the scientist, are both - tho' through divers reasons - sacrilegious. We must, first of all, respect the colossal tragedy; we must sense it as a living thing, and adore its profound, immeasurable mystery.

Pompei is not indeed what it appears to be at first sight, for, at first, it seems to us that it should only interest and delight us, as we look at its paintings and its ruins from the cool standpoint of cultured curiosity.

But, if we want indeed to understand Pompei, we must needs go deeper, under her scientific and artistic rind, and reach and touch with our heart's thoughts her deeper meaning, her very death and undoing.

Pompei belongs to the realm of death. No loud voices must be heard at Pompei; there, life must be

hushed, and our footsteps must be noiseless, because the dead are every where.

There are other dead cities-let us take, for example, Ostia or Timgad - but they are vastly different from Pompei; they have passed on by a natural, historical process, dying away naturally, as by old age. But Pompei died being struck unexpectedly, like a young man broken off in the flower of his youth. At Ostia and at Timgad, there are ruins, but no dead people; that is, there are no unexpectedly broken off and crumbled away lives, all at once, outside of any known historical process. In those two cities, one breathes the atmosphere of the past, but not the sense of violent death that permeates every thing at Pompei. There, we may be historians, and scientists and artists and nothing else, while here, the first requisite is a truly human heart, and the other qualities must needs be but secondary attributes.

This is the way to know Pompei.

II.

The very soul of Pompei

What must we look for, first of all, at Pompei? To answer tourists and professors is very easy: they must first of all look for the most characteristic houses and the monuments most worthy of notice, where there is most to learn and to observe. And nobody ignores the most important monuments of Pompei: the House

of the Vettii, House of Lucretius Fronto, House of the Faun, Theatre, Baths and so on. It's an old, well-known, almost hackneyed story, don't you know?

I don't deny that this reply be reasonable, but it is not adequate; for, behind every monument, be it ancient or modern, there is the soul of the man and of the nation that have created it, and you cannot understand that monument if, first, you don't know that soul. Therefore, the first thing that is to be done, is to find the soul of Pompei. It is not very difficult, if we understand each other.

If you look upon Pompei as merely an immense exhibition of art und history, you shall never be able to pluck the truth out of it. The deed city will appear to you as do the statues of Aphrodite, of Apollo and of Artemis, which are gaped at by all who approach them in our Museums. Who remembers, who thinks that these statues and their originals were sacred idols of a then live religion, for sooth? that once upon a time they stood in a temple built for them, and silently and solemnly listened to vows and to prayers? But now that that religion of which they were the symbols is dead and gone, they, too, have become dead and cold statues, which may be weighed and measured, but cannot be understood. It is the same with Pompei, if you forget that she, too, had a soul, and if you consider and study her monuments as dead things.

Well, let's begin by realizing that, in order to grasp the soul of Pompei, we can't start from the cons-

ciousness of our own soul, for this one is a product of the spirit of Christendom, and we see the world from a very different standpoint from that from which the pagans beheld it, for Christendom has reversed the valuation of things and thoughts. And the immense difference that exists between our own soul and the soul of the ancients incapacitates us often to value rightly and to judge fairly the ancient people, and, therefore, whoever wishes to become thoroughly acquainted with ancient civilization and wishes to understand its value as well as its defects and also to realize how much, both in good and in bad, we have inherited from the classical culture, must, before all else, I say, know that, however easy the interpretation of the ancient monuments may seem, behind them stands a soul, which is very far indeed from our own soul.

Now, let's try and find out what is the essential difference between the pagan and the christian soul.

You shall certainly not expect – or perhaps wish – me to give you here a lesson in philosophy or in history, since I am not at all pedantic, and so, believe me, it will be better for us to roam together in Pompei. Come, let us penetrate together into the usual houses known to all, and let us observe all carefully. But let's visit beforehand the halls of the Museum where the objects and the furniture unearthed at Pompei are exhibited. These halls are very necessary for the researches to be made regarding the pagan soul, albeit people, always attracted by the usual and best-known

statues -- generally barely deign to glance at them in passing.

Here are beds, chairs, braziers, lamps, chandeliers, mirrors, gold bracelets, cups, vases, jugs and pitchers, and instruments of every kind. People usually marvel at them all, and exclaim: « Look, look! every thing just as we have them to-day! » And they are astonished at the Pompeians having had baths and looking glasses, just as though they had been Papuasians.

But no. It is not true that all that was then was as things are now. We must learn to look at the bottom of things. The appearance may be the same, but the substance is very different. Look, for instance, at these old oil-lamps; what a variety of shapes! And their handles! There are some in the shape of a leaf, or of a halfmoon, or formed like a horse's head or an ox's head, or a lion's head, or like a rope-lancer or a Satyr or a Sphynx or a Cupid or a mask. And these cups! at the bottom of them we see usually a medallion, representing now a flower, now a head, sometimes a whole figure or, may be, even a group; and the handles may be shaped as an archaic small statue, or as a bough of leaves or as a ram's head. And the water-pitchers are no less remarkable; look here! Give a glance to these handles! One of them is adorned with the head of a wild beast, another with a horse's head, this other one with that of a Sphynx, here a head, there a gorgoneion. And the chandeliers! Look here. There are some ending with a capital, others with the image of a beast, others again with that of

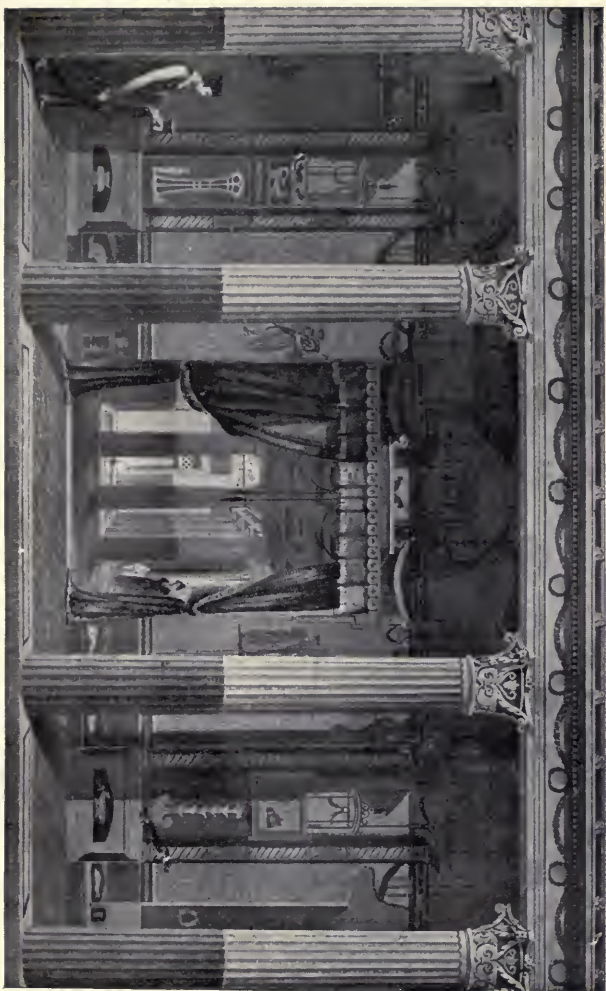
a sphynx, and some others again with a kantharus; this one portrays a bamboo, that one the trunk of a tree, a third one a column. What a variety! And the finding of two identical objects, i.e. of two objects that are shaped in one form, is an exceedingly rare happening. We receive the impression that all these things have been worked out solely for the joy of creating them, and sometimes they even bear the stamp of the joy of an artist who finds his supreme satisfaction in his work. Behold, how funny, for instance, is the figure of this corpulent Satyr, who, being tipsy, leans on the frame of that lamp-stand! Or glance at the old man on the handle of this pitcher, in the act of thrashing that young one, who, while still receiving his medicine, hides I don't know what behind his back!

But it isn't only the variety of things, as such, that is interesting; behind this variety hides a kind of instinct, an irresistible need of beautifying even the simplest objects. Look at these vases; one of them is ornamented with six little busts of different deities; another one with two busts, the head of a boar and two cupids; a third one with a whole scene worked out in relief. Look at these «appliques», that were to ornate some furniture; you will find every thing there: gorgoneions, Cupids, masks, Satyrs, panthers, lions' heads, dogs' and sphynxes' heads, victories, Aphrodites, bats; even the scale-weights had to be embellished: some of them are made in the shape of an old man's head, or of a woman's head, or of the head of a Satyr, of a goat, of Mercury; or in the

form of a small bottle, of a vertebra, or of an acorn. Even the theatre-tickets had to be beautified. Look, there are some in the shape of an almond, others in that of a pigeon or of a cranium or of a fish's head, or, for sooth, of a bag-pipe: even the very sieves have their holes disposed in the figure of a star, or in rays, or are disposed around, as picturing a maze! There is a kind of æsthetic mania or fury in all this. One would say that the Pompeian had need of seeing beauty everywhere and in every thing, at every step he made, even in the kitchen.

In all this, there is a psychology totally different from ours: we, too, love the things that surround us to be beautiful, but we limit that beauty to certain places or certain moments; we love to see in the parlor a beautiful chair or a beautiful bronze, but we mind not at all not finding beautiful pans with artistic handles hanging on the wall when we enter our kitchen. We love beauty, but we are not dominated by the mania of it. The Pompeians were evidently happy and comfortable only in the midst of it, while we would end by feeling ourselves oppressed as by a kind of obsession by the excess and uninterrupted continuity of it.

I believe that now you will be better prepared to listen to and understand what I am going to tell you. Let's go to Pompei, now, and visit the various houses that all know so well. You'll receive the same impression: the search for beauty dominates everywhere; everywhere paintings, foliage, architecture, arab-



The search for beauty dominates everywhere

GELL.

esques; there are walls that impress one with the feeling of a real orgy of colour, of lines, of forms; and we notice very forcibly that this was not limited—as it happens in our homes—to the rooms where the family and the guests are wont to stay, as the atrium, the peristyle or the triclinium—oh, no! The small bed-rooms, where the Romans used to retire only to sleep, are often not less decorated and ornamented than are the dining-rooms.

No! we are very different! Even the millionaires, who are fond of art and own galleries of their own which they admire and enjoy daily: even *they* love to allow their eyes and brains the diversity of repose from constant beauty, whatever may be the elegance of their bed-rooms.

But the minute and obstinate search for beauty never left the Pompeian. When it was not possible for him to have it palpably, he created it with his imagination; being obliged to live according to the customs prevailing at Pompei, in small and ill-lighted rooms, he enlarged his rooms with illusive pictures, creating in them, through the architectural lines of perspective drawn cunningly, a back-ground of gardens and streets. When there was no room for a garden in his property, he planted a few plants in a rectangular spot of only a few square meters large, and he enlarged it by painting on the walls some trees, some cows, some birds; and, if the fountains of the garden were too small, it didn't faze him at all: he painted all around it a bridge across a river, added some ducks, and he thor-

oughly enjoyed his beautiful imagery of a fancied bridge, river, and so on.

The only thing that was important to him was to have beautiful things to behold; whether these beautiful things were true or not, didn't matter at all. The question which, for us, is paramount, the one of truth or falsity, of the subjective or the objective, did not even exist for the Pompeian.

When we see a picture, we ask first of all whether it be an original or a copy; and, if we learn that it is only a copy, we cease to love it, and our admiration of it falls below par; instead, the Pompeian beheld his imaginary little garden, painted on the wall, and he enjoyed it as tho' it had been real.

In sooth, this deep and excessive æstheticism belonged not only to Pompei, but to the entire Roman civilization of the Augustean era. Those poets who copy and imitate the lyrism and the tragedy and the comedy of the Greek authors, those artists who reproduce the Greek sculptures and the Greek paintings, those philosophers who repeat the doctrines of the Greek thinkers; all that crowd of people of refined art-lovers, of dandies, of gluttons, idlers, dreamers, parasites, give one the impression of leading an artificial life, without thinking ever of adhering to Truth.

Here lies the difference between the Pagan and the Christian soul, because, in the last analysis, the ultimate goal of our spirit is Truth, while the Romans had not the least conception of Truth, and did not know and never troubled about what Truth meant.

Pilatus asked what Truth was of Him who asserted to have brought Truth to the world. The same query would have been asked of our Lord by the Pompeian who enjoyed his own architecture and his imaginary landscapes as tho' they were real.

III.

How did the Pompeians view life?

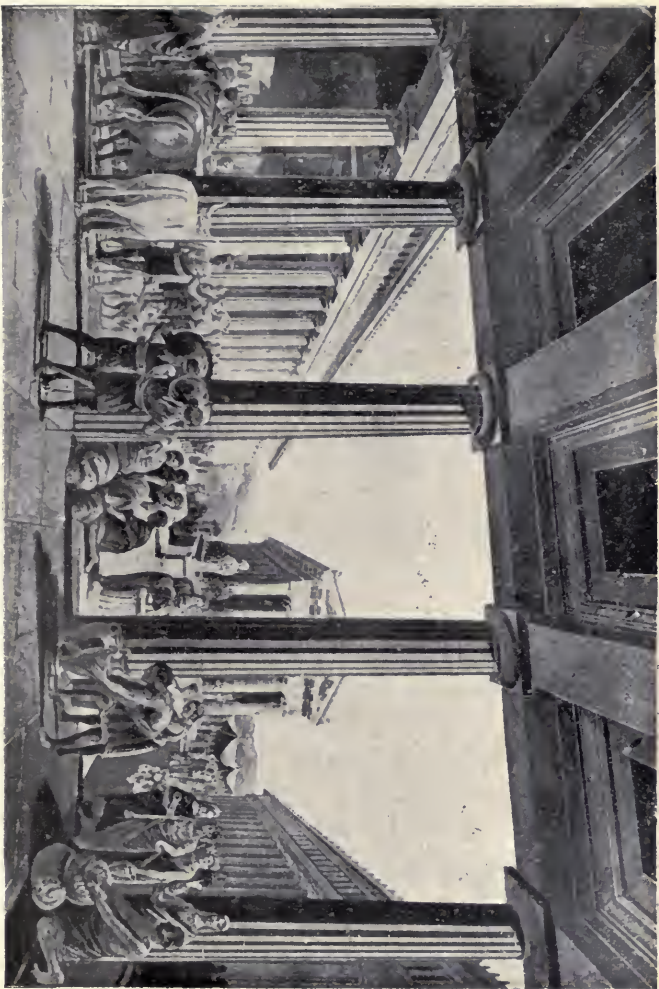
But is this absolute need of beauty appearance or reality? This is the query which I advise to ask, not only you, who visit Pompei, but all those who wish to know thoroughly the classical civilization. Beauty, as such, cannot be discussed: we feel that our own life is, from the æsthetic point of view, exceedingly lacking if compared to the life of a Pompeian of the middle class. Don't you realize that? What are our own homes, if compared to those? When have our homes given us the subtle æsthetic joys that emanate from the Pompei houses? No! Beauty, as such, cannot be discussed. But our spirit revolts against a conception of life that goes no further than the pure æsthetical sense, and does not put the ethical valuations above the æsthetical ones. And now, we come face to face with the spontaneous problem of the ethical contents of the classical civilization, not for judging or for condemning it, but to value it rightly.

If you wish to reach the bottom of the Pompeian conscience, and see the Pompeian as he really was,

and not only as you may assume him to have been, as you glance at the paintings of the House of the Vettii, you must know the graffiti of Pompei, i. e. those inscriptions the Pompeians used to trace on the walls, a little everywhere.

I do not pretend that every one of you should have gone through the large volume in folio of the «Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum» where these graffiti are collected, but I cannot help thinking that an intelligent visitor to Pompei must know them. While running through them, the Roman and the Campanian soul is plainly revealed with an astonishing sincerity and we feel ourselves as transported into another world.

There appears in them at once quite another type of Pompeian: not the one, refined and elegant who enjoys having the beautiful greek pictures of the hellenic art reproduced on the walls of his house, and loves to read Virgil and Catullus seated in his own beautiful garden, listening the while to the soft murmurs of the small pretty modest fountain, but quite another type which appears new to us, and which, at first, we are at a loss to know where he sprung from. And then, we recall having already met him somewhere else, in a world very different from the hellenic world; I mean to say in the atellan farces, then in Plautus' comedies, and again-let said with all respect-in the inimitable ad immortal Pulcinella. If you do not know the atellan farces, so called because they originated in Atella, a small town near Naples,



There appears at-once quite another type of Pompeian

FISCHETTI

and if you do not know Plautus, you shall never be able to know the real Pompeian, the one of the graffiti: there he is, in that world of brazenfaced parasites, of old fools, of thieving slaves, of cunning prostitutes, of spendthrift youths, of dishonest trades people, that you will find the real Pompeians, those who traced on the walls all that passed through their head: poets' verses, impertinences, salutations, braggings, unclean sayings, all of it with an innocence or a cynicism worthy of Rabelais or of Brantôme. You find a little of every thing on Pompei's walls, and much of that which you find there cannot be repeated. But even limiting us to that which *can* be repeated, there is still ample room for genuine astonishment. One brags openly of an amorous conquest; another sends salutations to his beloved or to his friend; another yet jots down some poetic verses remembered there and then; this one curses the thieving host; another host writes: « when my sausage is done, if we serve it to a customer, he, before even tasting it, licks the saucepan ». A certain laundryman, named Cerdon, being tipsy, covers the walls of the tavern with hurrahs for Pompei, for the laundrymen, for Nuceriens, for the whole world, and then signs his name to it all. A piggish man soils the hosts' bed, and excuses himself for it with a joke in two verses; a parasite blabs in inconsolable and burlesque verse; and a husband, who has caught his wife in flagrant adultery, writes: « I hold her, I hold her, there is no doubt about that. Romula is here, with that rascal! », and

we can't make out for the life of us if he jokes or speaks seriously: and another one invokes all the twelve Gods and Diana, and Jupiter optimus maximus against whomsoever should soil the wall: a custom that, – by the way – must have been very frequent at Pompei. And over all this meddley of buffoonery and vulgarity hovers that which has been the sickness and the ruin of the classical world, that sensualism which overflows every moment, and reveals incontrovertibly the existence of a kind of inward fermentation which never rests. «No one is handsome, who has not loved» says one of the graffiti, and this is really the bottom of the essential thought of paganism.

One must love, one must enjoy: there is nothing else in the world. Listen to that.

You may object that these were only the populace of Pompei, which had nothing in common with the intelligent and cultured part of the population. Heaven! I must confess that the middle-class Pompeian, that of the House of the Vettii or of the House of the Faun, appears to me to be even worse than the populace. Are you familiar with the electoral manifestoes of Pompei? You don't know them? They are upon my word the most amusing thing in the world: by them one sees and feels that the Pompeian lacked even the shadow of honest politics. The candidates to the ædileship, the same whose dining rooms we admire, used to court the recommendation of the prostitutes, and the smallest assembly of artisans, the most miserable corporation had its heart's candidate.

The goldsmiths Cuspius Pansa, the pastry-cooks and perfume-vendors Trebius; the chicken-vendors Epidius, Suetlius, Elvius, the laundrymen Gneius Secundus, the peasants Casellius, the cartwrights Marcellus, the carpenters Olconius. The populace went with those who gave them their best-beloved games and good bread. Cecilius Jucundus was the very by-word and a fit representative of this class of cynical business-mongers; a scoundrel businessman, in whose business methods we are able to pry, thanks to the waxed tablets on which he was wont to note his contracts, and which were found and are now at the Naples' Museum. This worthy man undertook and conducted the public auction-sales; he advanced some money to those who had none and could therefore not take part in the auctions, and received from these suckers 2 % per month; thus he tempted them to compete in the auctions, and he again collected another share on the receipts at the conclusion of the sales.

From all this results, little by little, a kind of peculiar contrast. The Pompeian civilization appears to you almost divided in two different and contrasting parts, which you are at a loss to conciliate: on one side, an extraordinary refinement; on the other hand, an extraordinary vulgarity. You don't know how to accord the hellenistic Pompei with the Campanian Pompei, and you understand at last that it was really a vulgar and sensual civilization, over which the Greek influence had spread a thick stratum of varnish.

But, indeed, the Roman civilization shows us the same contrast, for there you find side by side with the gentle nobility and smoothness of the poetry derived from the hellenistic Poets, the frightful hard-heartedness of the Gladiators' games and of slavery and, close to the purest enjoyment of artistic forms, we find the most cynical exploitation of men and things.

The Romans, too, loved pictures and statues, but, in those dining-rooms blessed with every beauty, the most colossal and revolting debauchery was unfolded, and we can well fancy that even some of those admirable tricliniums, which seem to us to be so serene and decorously peaceful, may have witnessed some of those Roman gluttonous orgies, in which hour after hour, and seasoned and prepared in most strange fashions, the rarest and most exciting and appetizing foods, culled from all parts of the globe, passed, as though in an epicurean review: the honey from Tarentum, the cranes of Melos, the phaesans from Media, the hares of Spain, the kids of Ambracia, the figs of Chalkis, the wines of Chios, Naxos, Lesbos; and also in these houses, which look so serene, those terrible episodes of the slavery have undoubtedly taken place, the mere thought of which breaks the heart, so painful it is to see man fallen down to a level below that of the most savage beast, in his behavior to another human being.

The Greek influence truly polished the Roman soul, but could not destroy in it, that hard and compact temperament which constituted its very nature.



The most colossal and revolting debauchery was unfolded

COUTURE

And, notwithstanding its artistic appearances, Pompei was not at all, as many people assume it to have been, an hellenistic City, but, instead, was deeply Roman, and, in order to understand her, we must look not to Greece but to Rome.

Who studies the Pompeian civilization in the light of Greek Art, makes the same error than one would make in studying the soul of a business man in the light of the civilization of the Renaissance for the sole reason that this business man may have adorned his house with pictures of that period.

Pompei was Roman, and its population was identical with the population of Rome, always ready to adore solely success and strength, and to throw itself on the side of the victor; always the friend of Sulla against Marius, of Cæsar against Pompeius, of Augustus against Antonius; ready to applaud equally Caligola and Titus as long as the games be splendid and bread abundant.

Do you really wish to know this Roman populace? do you? Then go and look for it in its true realm: the Amphitheatre. This great building is some ways off, and people often neglect to go there, but they are wrong. One ought to go, sit down on a stone and think. If you really know how to think, you will feel in the air something that clamours for vengeance, not so much for what may have happened right here, in the amphitheatre of Pompei, but for the monstrous insult to humanity of which this amphitheatre is the symbol and the memory. Humanity, especially in ancient tim-

es, was not tender towards man, for the brotherhood of man is a Christian concept; but no nation ever thought of amusing itself by looking at men killing each other, or thought of constraining by force prisoners and slaves to kill each other for its own amusement; nor did they think of making a public spectacle of this blood-curdling thing, regulated and prepared by magistrates, spending enormous sums for it, in immense buildings, scenarios, and squandering moneys in every wag. No, truly not! The gladiatorial games are something which, on thinking it over, strikes one as a monstrous nightmare, and not as some thing that really existed, like some atrocious and unnatural crimes that bewilder us even more than they offend us.

Sit on a step of the amphitheatre, close your eyes, and think matters over. Here is this enormous basin, overflowing with a half drunken crowd, perspiring, laughing, clamouring to blood: and look at those men, down there, in the arena, who fight against each other, piercing and transfixing each other with sword and trident! They are only poor prisoners, Sarmatians, Tracians, Germans, Britains, captured during one of those terrible wars of conquest that the Romans were wont to wage; they were taken and carried there in that amphitheatre to fight against each other and kill each other, solely to amuse the populace. Who is there, among the twenty thousand persons looking on at the fights, yelling, laughing, singing, bantering, who is there who feels pity for those unfortunate ones, compelled thus to slaughter each other, perhaps being





compatriots and perhaps friends? Not one. Pity is no Roman virtue. Woe to the vanquished. That's all. And if one of them, overpowered by fright or by pity, seems not to fight ferociously enough, the crowd rises up in revolt, fills the big basin with cries, and excites the keepers to put courage into the fainting hearts with the red iron and the whip: « Kill, burn, whip them! » – « Why does that coward face the iron so timidly? Why does he kill with so little courage? Why does he die so unwillingly? » These comments uttered by the crowd have been preserved for us by Seneca.

And Plinius has transmitted another piece of news to us: the custom to descend into the arena and to sip the blood, while still warm, flowing from the wounds of the gladiators: a thing which strikes us with horror when we behold the beast commit the same thing in the same arena. The Romans esteemed that drinking that blood, warm and expiring, together with the very soul of the unhappy victims, from the wounds was a most efficacious remedy against epilepsy, while the human mouth was not tolerated to be brought in contact even with the wounds of the animals.

Why does he die unwillingly? Truly, Rome had but one pretense: that the world should be disposed to die willingly for her. It was the duty of Orient and Occident to be disposed to give to Rome money, statues, meals, women, nay, life itself. When rich Romans wished to amuse themselves during a banquet, they had gladiators fight before them; they revelled,

and the others cut their throats; at times some blood sprinkled on the food or on the togas, but that only did give zest to the already keen pleasure. Romans had still something of the wild beasts: the blood excited them.

But those unfortunate were not always willing to accept such an honor, for such was this horror deemed to be; some of them revolted against throwing themselves thus against unknown people or even perhaps against compatriots or friends: then, the rebel was forced a-head through lashing, and, in order that no one of them should succeed in escaping by feigning to be dead, they branded the bodies of the dead gladiators with a red-hot iron before carrying them away. And it was not always possible to hope in the grace or the pity of the people. Could it be that one should not die willingly for Rome's pleasure?

But there was something still more horrible than these very horrors: the human fight against the wild animals.

The Romans used often this kind of amusement, for which the crowd showed itself most greedy, and in order, for sooth, to dispose of an excessive number of prisoners, of those barbarians that triumphant Rome dragged into slavery and of whom, every now and then, she was gorged, as would of food a man who had eaten to excess. Then, the prisoners were fed to the wild beasts. Whole crowds of Britons, Gauls, Hebrews were dragged to slaughter in this way. Once, such an enormous number of prisoners were



Their revelled and the others cut their throats

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thrown to the wild animals, that these were unable to devour so much human flesh. And not always had those wretched prisoners the courage to do as some twenty-nine Saxons did, who, having been thrown to the savage beasts, throttled one another.

To-day, the amphitheatre is lonely and silent, but, if awakened to speech by a knowing hand, it will relate to us the horrors of by-gone days, and you behold with your mind's eye, the wild beasts rushing out of the trap-doors, roaring and pouncing upon the human beings whom terror has petrified. And they overthrow them, they floor them with one thrust of their huge paws, they plunge greedily their cruel fangs in them, they toss them here and there, they tear them to pieces, they scatter their mangled and bleeding members about, and, at last, they munch and devour them, under the very eyes of the blood-drunken crowd, of women and of young girls, then, they prowl about, satiated with such an orgy of human flesh, and the wild beasts are foul with blood, and the arena is foul with blood, and all this gore exhales a kind of madness that takes hold of you also, so that you wonder whether you are awake or the prey of a nightmare, and you are under the impression of having become raving-mad.

We have now reached the bottom: further we cannot go. Thought rebels at lingering any longer on these horrors. Oh, yes; the Roman civilization has produced great and grand things, and we cannot conceive our own civilization without it; but some times one is

prone to think that some crimes are so great, that no other greatness can ever erase them, and then, we ask ourselves if all the Roman inheritanse is worth the frightful school of cold egotism that exhales from the bottom of Roman History. There are some crimes that make all the goodness and the beauty of life fade away and lose its value.

To-day, the amphitheatre is mute and desert; but there is nothing more eloquent than those stones, there is no spot on earth more fit than a Roman amphitheatre, to make us realize the enormous abyss which separates, beyond all the artistic and historical admirations, our own soul from the Roman soul. And truly, here we fully understand the immense new Truth brought to us by the Gospel.

On the corner of a Pompeian house we find a graffito by an unknown hand; only two words, short and terrible: «Sodoma, Gomora». Who traced these word? Perhaps a Jew, or a despised Christian, railed at by those proud Romans, who, notwithstanding, saw more clearly than others to the bottom of things, and who foresaw that, one day or the other, the wrath of the Lord would surely fall on the city, just as the Prophet Isaiah forewarned the sinful Jerusalem of the divine punishment? We cannot tell, but, instinctively, we look up to the smoking Vesuvius, and we shudder.

However, immediately, more profound, more serene, more just thought invades our soul: there is no condemnation to be uttered. All sinfulness exhibited by the classical antiquity was but the logical con-



Forty

Beauty is a gift of God but that soul is lost, which makes of it the

sequence of the æsthetic and practical conception of life, born from the innate pagan incapacity to conceive of life as a complex of etical values.

Now we see what profound and tragic consequences that very æstheticism bore, which appeared to us so innocuous and so musing interesting, when we were struck by the variety and the beauty of the Pompeian furniture and houses. Beauty is indeed a gift from God, but that soul is lost, which makes of it the goal and aim of life itself.

But why all this? Mystery! Paganism could be no other than it was, and no one may be able to say why it was thus. History has her laws, which puny man may not judge, and Spirit proceeds on his way, which are not ours, and vainly do we ask why, why does humanity pass on its way right through crime. Who would dare to sit in judgment on history? We can only value the past, not to pronounce sentences on the dead, but only so that the living may learn.

IV.

What was the Pompeians' faith?

What, then, have we yet to learn?

The deepest impression Paganism makes on those who are considering it from the point of view of the modern conscience is surely through amorality.

Classical civilization in general and especially the Roman one seems never to have had the precise con-

ception of what is good and what is evil, nor does it sum to feel the least need of such a conception. If we descend to the bottom of the Roman soul, down to where in our own soul the ethical values do abide, i. e. repentance, remorse, shame, and so on, we find nothing there. And it is this sense of moral emptiness that makes us feel that in reality, notwithstanding our artistic heredity, we are very far from Paganism, as though something had cut us off from it all at once and for ever.

How can we explain that moral emptiness?

The best place for the discussion of these matters is the Temple of Jupiter at the Forum. Let us sit on the steps, and, while contemplating the immense melancholic opening under and before us, let us continue our discourse.

The very fact that we are seated on the steps of a temple turns our thoughts toward religion and suggests to us a query which seems simple enough: Why was this lack not filled by religion? This query is very natural coming, from us. Indeed all of us are convinced that it is impossible to build a true and real morality outside or against religion, because only religion can furnish us with that complex of absolute certainties without which morality remains impossible. Therefore it appears quite natural to ask what was the function of religion regarding the Roman conscience.

And even here, must I beg you to try and break this artistic and æsthetic cloud that permanently stays between the classical civilization and ourselves, and

impedes us from getting a clear vision of it: I beg you, that is, not to look at the Roman religion through the beauty of her statues, the majesty of her priests or the solemnity of her rites; I beg of you, in other words, to free yourselves of that traditional and conventional admiration of all things Roman, which we have inherited from the Renaissance, and which our very culture inspires us with.

For one moment, we must free our conscience of this unconscious, underlying culture and place it face to face with the classical civilization as it really is.

What is, according to you, the most important thing in Religion? Surely, it is the idea of God. It is clear that no true and real religion can exist without a clear and precise idea about God. How could you pray to God, hope in God, abandon yourself to God if you have not a complex of precise ideas about Him? Now, it is just this very essential point that the Roman religion has never been able to give to the Romans: a precise idea of Divinity.

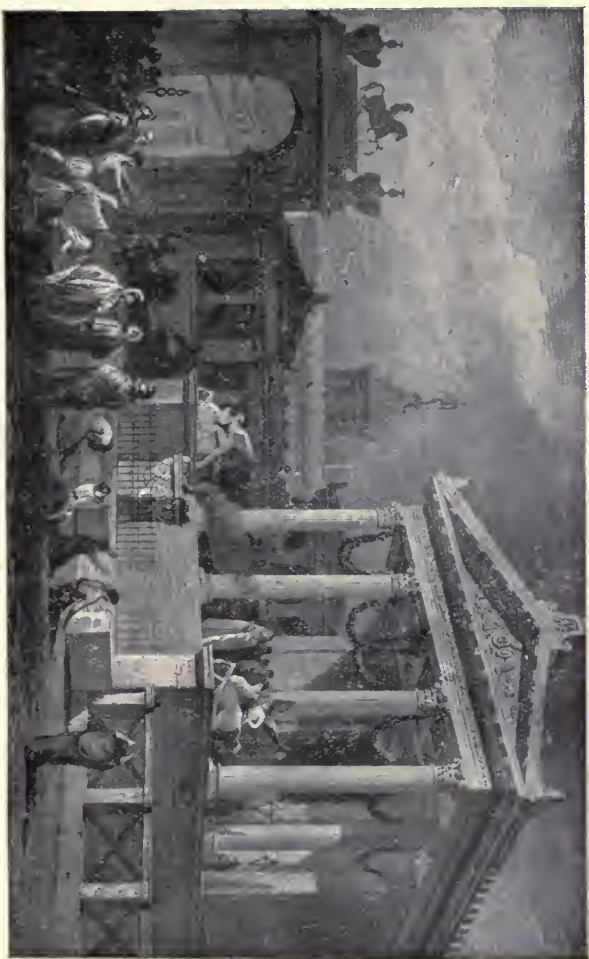
Even in the most remote times the Greeks have had very precise mythological and theological ideas about their Deities, but the Romans instead, whose aptitude to reflection and philosophy was utterly lacking, had, at the beginning, not one clear idea about their own Gods, but thought of them as abstract energies, deprived of personality; and only later, under the influence of the Greek mythology adopted by the Romans, did these ideas take body and shape.

The Romans had therefore no precise idea about

the relation between the soul and God. They knew only that there *were* some Gods, they knew that it was necessary for their own welfare to obtain the help of those Gods, and they tried to procure this help for themselves by following those rites pointed out by tradition as necessary for the continuance of harmony with their Gods and obtaining these latter's favor. But no Roman would have ever thought of feeling towards any of his Gods that abandon of the heart which we so deeply feel for God and which is our greatest assurance that He will indeed help us. For the Romans, therefore, all religion consisted in the rites, in the exact and precise fulfillment of their cults, as they had been imparted to and imposed on them by tradition. But you must not infer that the Romans were not religious. On the contrary, they thought of themselves as being among the most religious nations of the world, and indeed, there was no public or private function in which they did not turn their thoughts to their Deities. But this deep religiosity suffered from the Roman lack of understanding religion as a spiritual position, but not as merely a rite; and of realizing that the real religion cannot consist solely in the scrupulous fulfilment of the prescribed rites.

And indeed, we have but to roam through the streets of Pompei in order to receive a very lively impression of religiosity.

No house in which there is no sacellum to the Lares and to the Penates, and sometimes to other Deities



For the Romans all religion consisted in the rites

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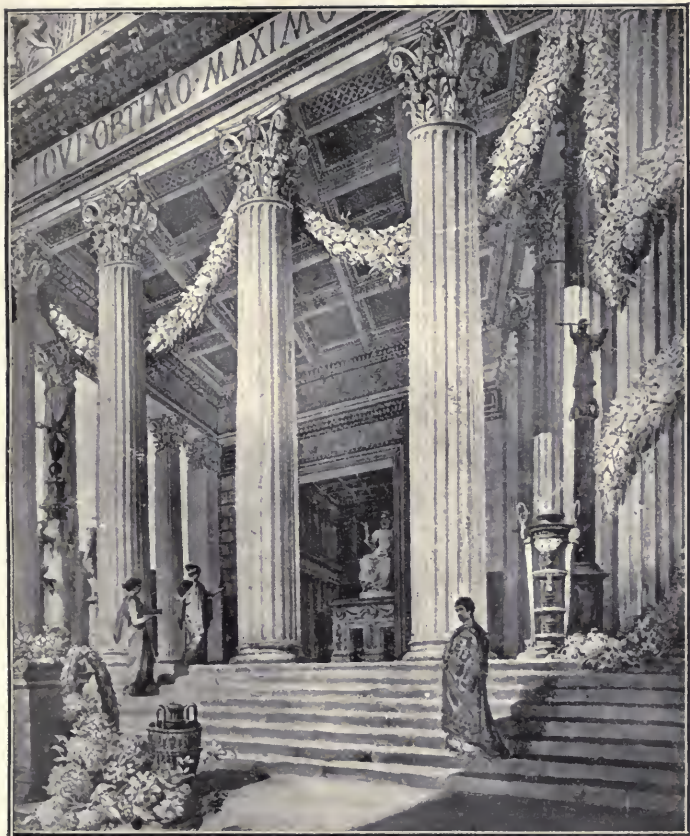
besides these. Where this be situated does not matter. We may find its in the peristyle, in the atrium, in the viridarium, near to the closet, in a cubiculum, in a store, in the kitchen: no matter where, but it had to be there, and not one Roman would ever have dreamed to have a house without its sacellum. Sometimes in the more modest abodes, instead of the sacellum, there is a niche in which the images of the Lares are kept, before which an altar is erected, to receive the offerings; at times this altar was movable, so that it could be used here or there, but often it was very rich and elegant, like unto the one found in the House of Meleager, the ornaments of which were wrought in silver; or like the one all made of marble found in the House of Popidius is. At other times however this movable altar was very modest, like the one built of tuff, found in the House of the Quaestor. And in front of these sacella garlands were hung and lights lighted, and the morning prayers were recited.

Other deities were also honored in the houses; and we have found some of those images: also, for instance, this archaistic Artemis, which is to-day in the Naples Museum, was discovered in the domestic sacellum of one of those houses. And on the outside walls of the houses, as is witness the Street of Abundance, were often painted images of divers deities: the 12 gods, Juppiter, Minerva, Venus, Mercury, Bacchus, Hercules. And every now and then, in the streets, one met with altars and oratories voted to the gods, often placed near the public fountains, where, between

one and the other job, the people of the streets stopped a moment and recited a prayer. The Romans were, then, religious, yes, certainly.

From this false conception issued a fanatic and fearing ritualism which was ever afraid of committing some errors during the sacrifices, so much so that, before celebrating some solemn sacrifice, they used to celebrate another one, so as to expiate in anticipation any error they may commit in the following one, and so much so also that the prayers of the rites were not spoken spontaneously nor recited by heart but were read aloud by a priest and repeated word for word by the people, so as to be sure that not even a syllable was changed, and so much so again, that for centuries and centuries priesthoods, ceremonies and very ancient prayers that were not any more understood by anybody, were maintained in use.

The weakness of the Roman religion obtained here, in this identification of religion and ritualism, which is the death of any conscious, religious faith, because from it no ethical values can ever emerge. Now you will understand why amoralism and religiosity, which are for us irreconcilable terms, could very well be reconciled in the roman conscience, and you will understand the reason of this strange fact, that notwithstanding the small tabernacles and the altars and the images spread all over, the graffiti, — which are the most sincere expression of the pompeian soul — don't contain the slightest religious expression. The Pompeian has expressed in the graffiti every vice and



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The Romans were religious, yes, certainly

every virtue, but has not said one word that may indicate a religious feeling.

And now, seated on the steps of the Temple of Juppiter, the supreme god of the Romans, while my glance scans the ruins of the glory that is past, I strive to think what ideas may have suggested this kind of religion to the Pompeians at the moment of the catastrophe; and I can't comprehend what comfort may have come to them from all these sacrifices, from all these prayers, from all these offerings made with so much precision and so much sincerity during so many years, because I know that behind all this ritualism, there never was the idea of a God into whose hands man can abandon himself with all trust in the moment of distress. And it seems to me that, at the moment of death, the Pompeians must have felt a great lack of comfort and of warmth around the heart.

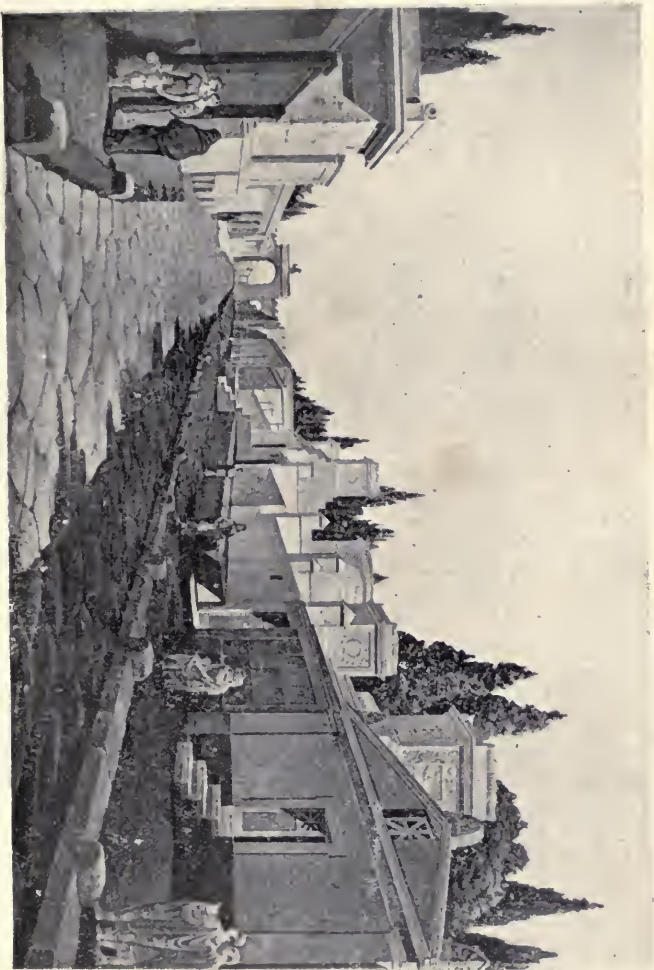
V.

How did the Pompeians consider death?

Now I beg you to come out through the Herculaneum Gate, and sit there again, thinking. On the right and on the left of the great desert avenue tombs stand erect. Every now and then a cypress sends to heaven a funereal note. Have you ever asked yourself why, oh, why did the Romans bury their dead outside the gates, and on the roadside? At Rome, ba-

rely outside of every gate, real and immense avenues of sepulchres were stretching. Why?

You certainly know that, in the ancient times, the Roman used to bury their dead in the houses near the hearth. The XII Tables forbad this barbarous custom to be followed any longer, ordering that no body should henceforth be buried in the city; and from that time dates the custom to bury the dead just outside the gates, the nearest possible to the living. Indeed the first Romans had no clear conception of what death is. In the prehistoric age, as many of the other primitive peoples, they could not realize that death should modificate life very deeply and they believed that the dead continued to live in intimacy with their family. It is from this conception that the deep and sincere cult of the dead sprang up, which characterizes the Romans, and that constitutes that feature of his religious consciousness which is the most sincere and full of feeling, and of which so many sepulchral epigraphs do testify. The funeral rites give a striking evidence of this cult for the dead. Nothing, for instance, can be more touching than the Parentalia, when, for three full days, all the city was pervaded by a funereal breath, when business was stopped, marriages could not take place, and all the temples were closed; while the whole population went to make offerings to their dead and to honor their tombs. And it is strange to observe how, much later, the very ancient conception persisted that the dead, in some unexplained way, adhered to his tombs: and the custom to gather



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They believed that the dead continued to live in intimacy with their family

every now and then around the dead one, almost so as to tighten the bonds which tied him to the living. Very often, the tombs' very construction show how deeply this concept was rooted in them.

Look, for instance, on the tomb of M. Cerinnus Restitutus: it is a small edifice with the urn buried in it under the altar, and near it is a seat on which the living came to sit down. See, following this tomb, that of Aulus Veius: it is built in a semi-circular shape and on this tomb also the living came to sit. Look at the tomb of Cneius Vibrius Saturninus: it is altogether like to a triclinium, on which the living came to sit down for the funereal banquets at which the dead one ideally took part.

For us, grown up under the influence of the Christian spirituality, it is hard to fancy such a connection with the dead. We believe that they are near unto us in spirit, and we honor their tombs, but we don't believe that, by standing near that tomb, we are nearer to the departed, and neither do we believe that he is concretely present to our lives. We know very well that, however sacred our dead may be for us, and however much we feel sure of their presence, they are not with us, nor are they within the tomb, but that they are somewhere else, altho' we ignore both where and how they were, exalted in the after life where their self is perpetuated.

And it is just this that the Romans lacked: they had a very deep cult for the dead, they knew that the departed one was an energy that continued to act

after death, but they could not say what this energy really was, or where it was. In this as well as in all the rest of their religion, the Romans proved themselves utterly incapable to think mythically and philosophically, and never they were able to conceive a real and true life beyond this world. In reality, the Romans did honor the dead, not because death had sanctified or purified them, but because they thought that the dead were an energy which it was well for them to conciliate and into whose good graces they wished to be: but they did not understand death.

What must then so many of those intelligent and cultured Pompeians have thought when they beheld the abyss of death gaping before their faces? In the mouth of these epicurians, crushed in the fullness of their joy, we cannot imagine but some of those terrible protests which some of the Roman sepulchral epitaphs have preserved for us: that one, for instance, which says: « To the wicked Gods, who have ravished thy innocent soul »; or that other terrible one: « I lift my hand against the God who cut me off, me, innocent. »

Or, if not absolute revolt, at least an acute regret, a great sorrow for having had to leave, without any apparent reason, so many things beautiful and dear, the lovely peristyles, so cool and quiet, and the beautiful rooms, the stately mansions, full of bronzes, marbles, paintings. The Romans were essentially epicurean by temperament more than by reflection: their practical mentality was adverse to any speculation; they did not know how to go beyond the empirical



They did not understand death

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life; death was for them the end of every thing, the eternal unconscious sleep, the loss of every conscious sense, the great nothing. One funereal epigraph tells us: "After death there is nothing, and this, which thou seest, is Man!" And another one: «Thou who readest, live a joyful life, oh my friend, for after death there will be neither laughter nor fun, nor any pleasure»; and another one again: «Eat, drink, have a good time, and come to me.» From such sentiments nothing can come but an unbridled dissolute, having only a great desire to live, and an acute regret that he should have to die and to renounce every joy known to him; sentiments which are typically roman, both of them. In the light of these concepts, the orgy of beauty to which the Pompeian abandoned himself has a deeper and sadder significance: the ultra æsthetic sense and the sensualism appear as the natural outcome of those who exploit life to the utmost because he thinks that, after death, there is nothing else: «Live a life of pleasure, my friend, for, after death, there will be neither laughter nor fun.»

We must not think, however, that this epicurean concept of death should have always derived from spiritual meanness; oh, no! This is so untrue, that the sepulchral epigraphs give ample proof that other and much more elevated concepts were current at Rome; but these were the product of foreign philosophical currents and were never very widely spread. The Roman was rather dull of comprehension. Philosophical impotency chained, so to speak, the Pompeian to the material

life, and prevented him from imagining with precision whatever there was life beyond this terrestrial one. His epicurianism derived therefore from the fact that, from his point of view, all that was worth anything was only our earthly life; all the rest might be there or not, but it had no intrinsic value.

The Romans lacked, therefore, that which was the great consolation of the Greek mysticism and that which is, to-day, the great comfort of the Christian: the certainty that, after death, there exists another and better life, and which contains retribution and punishment, and in which our own life flows into, and resolves itself. Now, what is it that reconciles us to the sorrows and the injustices of life, if not just the idea that these are transient and apparent, but, in the end they must needs cede the way to another life less sorrowful and more just? For the Romans, in truth, death only sanctions error and wrong, rendering them irreparable: after our death, there is nothing else, and at the point of death all we suffer unjustly presents itself to us as a fatality, which we must perforce submit to. And here the other feature of Roman conscience evolves itself, i. e. the stoicism, or the willed and forced indifference towards all that life brings us, be it ill or good, awaiting death to close the drama of our existence. Thence comes the piety the Romans ever showed for their dead, and which appears to our conscience to be sorrowfully sterile. What is the use to decorate the tomb with flowers and to offer gifts and sacrifices to the departed and

even to celebrate on his tomb, together with him, the funereal meal if, in the last analysis, we know nothing of him, we ignore whether he is happy or unhappy, if he enjoys the reward of his good deeds and of his sufferings, if indeed he has a conscience, a will, a life? The cult of the departed, when not accompanied by faith in the immortality of the soul, is sterile and empty, not less so that the animism of the primitive peoples.

But certainly not all Pompeians shall have remained satisfied with the ancient Roman cult many of them — as was the case in Rome — must have been inclined to accept the faith in the after life which greek mysticism had brought to Rome very early. These concepts were a faith sometimes grossly material, and gave of the after-life an excessively earthly concept, but at least, they affirmed that which is necessary for man to believe, that is, that life does not end with death and that there is a reward or a punishment after life be ended. The reward was certainly trivial in our eyes for it consisted of an intensified enjoyment of all those joys which make the delight of men on earth, and the punishment was certainly grotesque, for they consisted in stupid and material torments.

Certainly our conscience cannot believe as the Orphic did, that the persons who had been good are sent, after death, to inhabit a most beautiful spot, full of sunshine and of joy, where they pass their time in banquetting, playing instruments and conversing,

and even less can we believe that those who have done wrong should be punished and tormented in the great beyond, as the Orphic believed that Tantalus, Sisyphus and the Danaids were tormented. But at least, they propounded assurance, and man needs this assurance. And the immense importance that these concepts have had for humanity's history, is demonstrated by the fact that, indeed, they have remained true in Christendom.

Greek mysticism, and especially Orphism, gave then to the Romans that which these lacked: a moral assurance. Under the Orphic influence the Roman learned to believe; after having for centuries concentrated all his interest on this life he was learning now to turn his thought to the after-life.

There is perhaps not, in the whole religious history of the world, another so deep upheaval, except the Christian revolution. And the proof that it answered a profound need of the spirit is to be seen in the diffusion that the Greek mysticism brought to Rome in the late Republican age, culminating with Virgil, and determining a real mystical revival.

From this revival derives the presence of the Orphism at Pompei, in the Villa of Mysteries.

Through one of those coincidences which take on the importance of a symbol, the Villa of Mysteries is situated just at the end of the Street of Tombs. It is we go there at last, after having steeped one'sself in the fullness of the Pompeian life, after having tasted almost far enough to be gorged with the æsthetism

of the Pompeian life. Oh, how far they seem to be now, the gorgeous tricliniums, the luxurious cubiculi, and how far seems now paganism, in the remote orphic Basilica !

The laughter which we hear coming as a far-off echo from the tricliniums that still remember the debauchery of times long past, and the echo of the loud moans coming from the Amphitheatre, that still remembers also the massacres held there, both of these are waning because they seem to belong to a far-off past.

We seem to find ourselves in a new world, where the chief aim of life is no longer the enjoyment of the senses but the purification of the soul, and where man takes with him in the tomb, not only what he has eaten and imbibed, but also what he has believed and hoped, and where he is not dominated by the consciousness of his own strength, but by just the reverse, I mean to say by the knowledge of his own inferiority. We feel ourselves, indeed, in a Christian atmosphere, we feel at home.

The Villa of Mysteries reconciles us with Pompei, because it fills up the chasm that separated us from it, and that, from behind the distasteful artistic Pompei which we admire without being able to esteem it, it shows us quite another Pompei, the mystic Pompei, which we can esteem and love, because, although with great diversity of language, it still expresses our very own sorrow. Singular and unknown Pompei, a Pompei that was christian even before Jesus, that believed

in eternal life, believed in recompense and punishment in after-life, believed in a God, dead and resuscitated, in Whom and through Whom man is born again and is redeemed from sin. How far is now, that old traditional Pompei, which we had been taught to admire! How false and distasteful it appears now to us, with its dancing Fauns, with its Cupids, with its tricliniums!

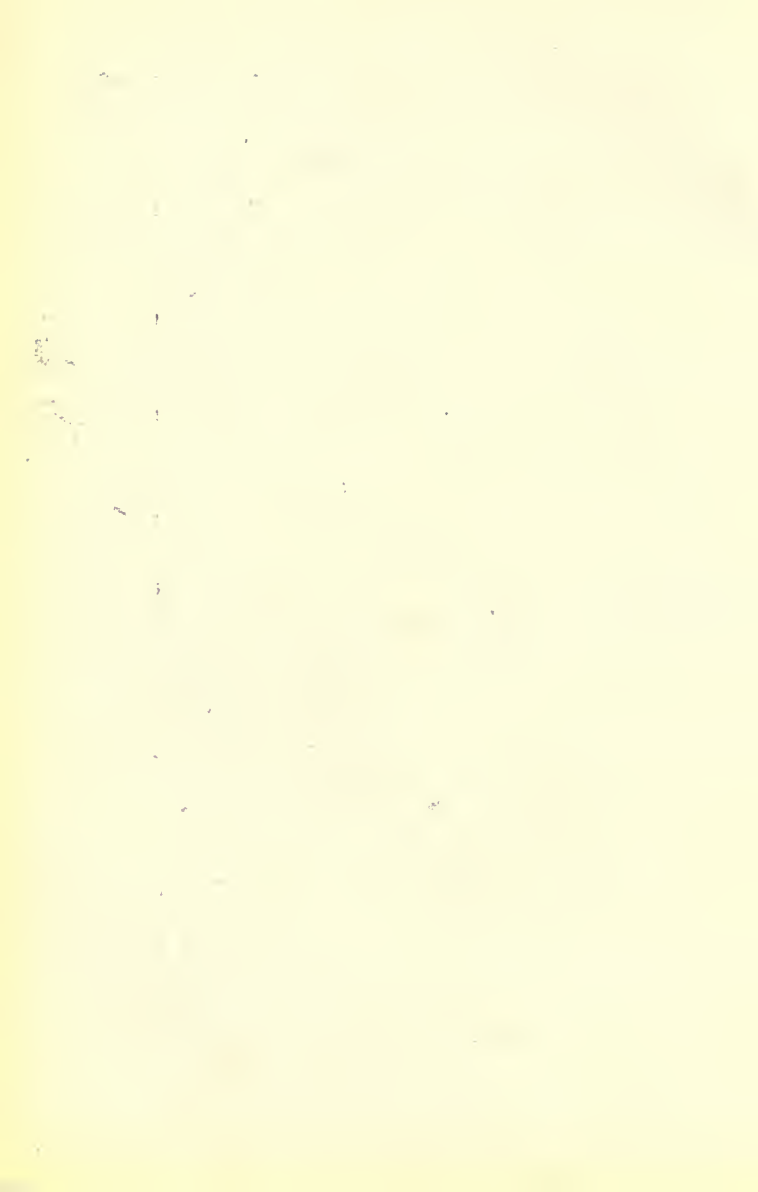
What is now all this stuff, worthy only of Manuals and of picture-cards, compared to the immense drama of the orphic lithurgy, to the gradual transformation of a human being into a being divine, athwart death and resurrection! What must we think of our vaunted æsthetism, which causes us to go into raptures before an old lamp, if we confront it with the terrible admonishment that emanates from the liturgy: Suffer in order to enjoy; die in order to resuscitate. *Per aspera astra*. Is not this, then, exactly what life has taught us? And was this not worth many Fauns and many Cupids? Oh, yes, there was, in antiquity a soul akin to our own, and tormented by almost the same problems, but it lies hidden, and we must learn how to go and look for it.

And so, in the end, after having so much admired and so much reflected, we seem to see opening before us, something like a revelation, the treasure of the ancient civilization. And, in the last analysis, we understand a very simple truth: that the traditional vision of classical antiquity gives us only a superficial and inadequate idea of it, bewitched as it was by the



How far is now that old traditional Pompei!

MUZZIOLI



so-called æsthetic values, forgetting or ignoring the moral values, which are less frequent and more or less easily to be overtaken but all the more precious for us because in them, and not in the æsthetism or in the sensualism, do we detect a part of our own selves.

Pompei a dead city? Yes, most assuredly the tricliniums are dead. We can admire and study them objectively, like we do the animals of a palæontological museum, without our heart being with them. But there was something at Pompei that still remained alive, because it constitutes a link in the eternal chain of Spirit; something which lives and palpitates here in our very heart, and strengthens us for the way we have yet to wander over; and this some thing is alive.

Not because the archaeologists have called it to light again, but because it is, in reality, but an antique page of what Jesus has taught to the world: suffer, in order to redeem thyself.

Tip. FRATELLI CIOLFI - NAPOLI (132)
