CHAPTER XXX

THE AMPHITHEATRE

In the southeast corner of the city, at a distance from the other excavations, lies the Amphitheatre, the scene of gladiatorial combats. The Pompeians called it 'the show,' spectacula, as in the inscription, preserved in two copies, that gives us the names of the builders: C. Quintius C. f. Valgus, M. Porcius. M. f [ilius] duo vir[i] quing[uenales] coloni ai honoris causa spectacula de sua pec[unia] fac[iunda] coe[rarunt] et coloniis locum in perpetuum dederunt. According to this, the Amphitheatre was built by the same men, Valgus and Porcius, who are already known to us as the builders of the Small Theatre (p. 153); and they presented it to the city in recognition of the honor conferred upon them by their re-election as duumvirs. The Amphitheatre may thus have been finished half a decade later than the Theatre, but in any case it belongs to the earliest years of the Roman colony,—as might be inferred, in default of other evidence, from the archaic spelling of the inscription, and the character of the masonry, which is like that of the Small Theatre and the baths north of the Forum (p. 41).

The colonists, however, did not receive from Rome their impulse to erect such a building. The passion for gladiatorial combats was developed in Campania earlier, and manifested itself more strongly, than in Latium. Strabo's statement that gladiators were brought forward at Campanian banquets, in larger or smaller numbers according to the rank of the guests, has reference to the period before the Second Punic War; but it was considered a noteworthy event in Rome when, in 264 B.C., gladiators engaged in combat in the Forum Boarium in celebration of funeral rites, as also when, on a similar occasion in 216 B.C., twenty-two pairs fought in the Forum. Buildings were erected for gladiatorial shows in Campanian towns earlier than at the Capital. As late as the year 46 B.C. the spectators who witnessed the games given by Julius Caesar sat on wooden seats supported by temporary staging; and the first stone amphitheatre in Rome was built by Statilius Taurus in 29 B.C., almost half a century after the quintennial duumvirate of Valgus and Porcius. The Amphitheatre at Pompeii is the oldest known to us from either literary or monumental sources.

In comparison with later and more imposing structures, our Amphitheatre seems indeed unpretentious. Its exterior elevation is relatively low (Fig. 96); as our section shows (Fig. 99), the arena and the lower ranges of seats are in a great hollow excavated for the purpose below the level of the ground. The dimensions (length 460 feet, breadth 345) are small when compared with those of the Coliseum (613 and 510 feet, respectively) or even the amphitheatres at Capua or Pozzuoli; and the lack of artistic form is noteworthy.

The exhibitions held here must also have been on a modest scale. There were no underground chambers, below the arena, with devices by means of which wild beasts could be lifted up into view and the sand suddenly covered with new combatants. The limited means of this small city were not adequate to make provision for the elaborate equipment and costly decoration found in the amphitheatres of larger towns.

The arena, a view of which is given in Plate VI, is surrounded by a wall about 6½ feet high. This wall was covered with frescoes which, still fresh at the time of excavation, are...
now known to us only from copies in the Naples Museum. They consisted of alternate broad and narrow panels, the latter containing each a herm between two columns, while the larger spaces presented alternately a conventional pattern and a scene connected with the games. One of the scenes gives an interesting glimpse of the preparations for the combat (Fig. 97). In the middle we see the overseer marking out with a long staff the ring within which the combatants must fight. At the right a gladiator stands, partly armed; two attendants are bringing him a helmet and a sword. A hornblower, also partly armed, stands at the left; and behind him two companions, squatting on the ground, make ready his helmet and shield. At either end of the scene, in the background, is an image of a Winged Victory with a wreath and palm.

The limestone coping of the wall about the arena shows traces of iron in the joints between the blocks, apparently remains of a grating designed to protect the spectators from attacks by the infuriated wild beasts. The traces are not visible all the way around, but this may be accounted for on the supposition that repairs were in progress at the time of the eruption.

Two broad corridors (3, 3a) connect the ends of the arena with the outside of the building. The one at the north end, toward Vesuvius, follows a straight line; the other bends sharply to the right in order to avoid the city wall, which bounds the structure on the south and east sides. By these corridors the gladiators entered the arena, first in festal array, passing in stately procession across the sand from one entrance to the other, then coming forth in pairs as they were summoned to mortal combat.

At the middle of the west side there is a third passage, narrow and low (c); this is the gruesome corridor through which the bodies of the dead were dragged by means of hooks, its entrance being the Porta Libitinensis, ‘Death Gate.’ Near the inner end of each of the three corridors is a small, dark chamber (f) the purpose of which is unknown. It has been
suggested that wild animals may have been confined here, but larger and more easily accessible rooms would have been required for this purpose. They may have been storerooms for appliances of various kinds required for the exhibitions.

The seats, of which there are thirty-five rows, have the same form as those in the Small Theatre, and are of the same material, gray tufa. They are arranged in three divisions,—the lowest, *ima cavea*, having five rows; the middle division, *media cavea*, twelve; and the highest, *summa cavea*, eighteen (Figs. 98, 99). In the middle section of the *ima cavea* on each side the place of the seats is taken by four low, broad ledges, set aside for members of the city council, who could place upon them the seats of honor, *bisellia*, to the use of which they were entitled. At the middle of the east side the second ledge is interrupted for a distance of ten feet (the break is shown in Plate VI), a double width being thus given to the lowest. This place was designed for seats of special honor, and was, no doubt, reserved for the official who provided the games, and his associates. On the same side the ledges are extended into the next section on the south, the continuity of the seats being interrupted by a low barrier. This supplementary section was, perhaps, intended for certain freedmen, as the Augustales (p. 100), who had the right to use bisellia, but who nevertheless could not become members of the city council, and were not ranked on a social equality with the occupants of the middle section.

The seats of the *ima cavea* and *media cavea* were reached through a vaulted passage (4), which, in accordance with ancient usage, we may call a crypt. It ran under the first seats of the second range, and stairs led from it to both divisions. It might be entered either from the two broad corridors leading to the arena, or directly from the west side by means of two separate passages (c, d, on the plan). It is, however, interrupted at the middle on each side of the Amphitheatre. On the west side the prolongation of the crypt would have interfered with the use of the corridor leading to the Death Gate; but as no such reason existed for blocking the east branch, it is probable that the designers of the Amphitheatre interrupted both branches of the crypt in order to force the spectators who had seats in
the lower and middle divisions of the south half of the structure to enter and leave by the somewhat inconvenient south entrances, which are situated in an angle of the city wall. Had the crypt been carried completely around, the crowd would always have pressed into the building through the north entrances, which opened toward the city, thus causing confusion, if not danger, on occasions of special interest.

In the corridor leading from the north entrance, as may be seen on the plan, a row of stones with square holes in them were placed in the pavement near the left wall. In these stakes could be set and connected by ropes, thus making a narrow passageway along the side. The purpose of the arrangement is not difficult to understand. Through the north corridor the gladiators entered and left the building, and the wild beasts were brought in; so provision had to be made to give them a passage separate from that used by the spectators. Before the commencement of an exhibition the whole entrance was accessible to the populace, which eagerly crowded forward to secure seats in good season. When they had for the most part found their places, the barrier was set up, and only a narrow alley was left along the east wall for belated spectators who wished to pass into the crypt on that side; the rest of the passage was reserved for the gladiators, and the spectators whose seats were reached from the opposite branches of the crypt were obliged to use the side entrance (c).

The middle division was separated from the summa cavea (8) by a low parapet with a narrow passage (praecinctio, b) on the upper side. The seats of the summa cavea could be reached in two ways, by passing through the crypt and up the long flights of stairs that led through the middle division to the top (best seen in Fig. 99), or by mounting the stairs on the outside of the
building to the terrace (10), which has the same level as the highest rows of seats; it is also of the same height as the city wall, with which it is merged on the south and east sides. The terrace was no doubt the principal means of access; ample provision was made for the crowd by building two large double stairways (11), with smaller single flights at the corners where the terrace joined the city wall (12).

Between the terrace and the seats of the summa cavea was an elevated gallery, divided up into small boxes, about four feet square; under the row of boxes were vaulted vomitoria, making the seats of the summa cavea accessible from the terrace. A passage ran along the outside of the boxes, with steps leading from the terrace; only every third box was connected with this passage, however, the other two of the group being entered from a narrow ramp along the front (Fig. 100).

The Amphitheatre had a seating capacity of about twenty thousand persons. We have no information in regard to the distribution of seats, but it may safely be assumed, from the arrangements known to have existed elsewhere, that the lowest division was reserved for the city officials with their friends and other prominent people; that an admission fee was charged for the seats of the middle division; and that the seats of the upper division were free. The gallery was doubtless set aside for women, who were permitted by a regulation promulgated in the reign of Augustus to have a place only in the upper portion of the Amphitheatre.

Besides the inscription giving the names of the builders (p. 212) there are several others of interest in connection with the building. Four of them, cut in large letters in the travertine coping of the wall about the arena, commemorate the construction of seats. One reads: L. Saginius H via i. d. pr[o] l[is] l[inibus] ex d[ecurionum] d[ecreto] cum[cum], — 'Lucius Saginius, duumvir with judiciary authority, in accordance with a resolution of the city council (constructed) a section of seats in the place of the games and illumination,' that otherwise he would have been required to provide. Another of the series is even more abbreviated, but the meaning is clear: MAG · PAG · AUG · F ·

S · PRO · LUD · EX · D · D, that is, Magistri Pagii Augusti Felicis Suburbani pro ludis ex decurionum decreto, — 'The officials of the suburb Pagus Augustus Felix by authority of a resolution of the city council (constructed a section of seats) in the place of providing games.'

From an inscription in the Stabian Baths, to which reference has already been made (p. 195), it is clear that some freedom of choice was permitted to the city officials regarding the disposition of the sum which they were required to contribute for public purposes in recognition of the honor conferred upon them by their election. The Amphitheatre was not provided with seats at the beginning, and one wedge-shaped section (cuneus) after another was added until the divisions were complete; meanwhile the spectators made themselves as comfortable as they could on the sloping ground. As the organization of the Pagus Augustus Felix did not take place till 7 B.C., the construction of the seats could not at that time have been completed; but they were all finished before the overwhelming of the city.

The north entrance to the arena was adorned with two portrait statues of Gaius Cuspius Pansa, father and son, placed in niches in the walls facing each other. The statues have disappeared, but the inscriptions underneath are still in place. What services the Pansas had rendered in connection with the Amphitheatre to merit this distinction, we do not know; but the father, as the inscription indicates, was 'prefect in accordance with the law of Petronius' (p. 14); that is, he was appointed by the city council to exercise the functions of the two duumvirs when no valid election occurred. Bulver Lytton, by a natural error, makes Pansa a commissioner to secure the execution of an altogether different Lex Petronia, which forbade the giving of slaves to wild beasts unless judicial sentence had been previously passed upon them.

The attraction of the gladiatorial exhibitions, together with the ample seating capacity of the building, stimulated attendance from neighboring cities, and on one occasion unfortunate results followed. In the year 59 A.D. a Roman senator, Lívineius Regulus, who had been expelled from the Senate, and
had apparently taken up his residence at Pompeii, gave an exhibition that attracted a great conourse. Among those who came to witness the combats were many inhabitants of Nuceria. The people of the two towns may not have been on the best of terms previously; whatever the cause, the Pompeians and Nucerians commenced with mutual bantering and recriminations, then resorted to stone-throwing, and finally engaged in a free fight with weapons.

The Nucerians, as can easily be understood, fared the worse, having many killed and wounded. They carried the matter to Rome, lodging a complaint with Nero; the emperor referred the case to the Senate, which decreed that Regulus and the leaders of the disturbance should be sent into exile, that the Pompeians should not be permitted to hold any gladiatorial exhibitions for the space of ten years, and that the illegal societies at Pompeii — in regard to which, unfortunately, we have no further information — should be dissolved. From the receipts of Caecilius Jucundus we learn, further, that the duumvirs of the year 59 were removed from office, and that with the new duumvirs, elected in their places, a magistrate with extraordinary powers, praefectus iuri dicundo, was associated — measures that indicate how serious the disturbance of public order must have been.

Reminiscences of this bloody fray are found in several inscriptions scratched on walls; and a lively idea of it is given by a wall painting found in 1869 in a house near the theatres, now in the Naples Museum (Fig. 101). The picture is of special interest as throwing light on the surroundings of the Amphitheatre and some of its arrangements. The open space with the trees in the foreground, among which are various booths, remind one of a park; at the right is a single house. It is clear from the painting that the women's boxes, in the gallery, were arched in front; and we see how the great awning, velum, was stretched over the south end to protect the audience from the sun. It was carried by the two towers of the city wall (one of them is indicated on the plan, 13) and by masts that stood in the passage behind the women's boxes, where several of the perforated stones in which they were set may still be seen.

That the sports of the Amphitheatre had at all times the keenest interest for the Pompeians is evident, not only from the number of notices having to do with the games, which we see painted in red on walls along the streets or on tombs by the roadside, but also from the countless graffiti in both houses and public places having reference to combats and favorite gladiators. The limits of space do not permit us to describe the gladiatorial exhibitions as they took place at Pompeii and other Roman cities; but the inscriptions bring so near to us the scenes and excitement of those days that it seems worth while to quote and interpret a few typical examples.

On a tomb near the Nuceria Gate, excavated in 1886, is the following notice, painted in red letters: Gladi[atorum] par[ia] XX Q. Monni Rufi pug[nabunt] Nola K[alendaris] Mais, VI. V. Nonas Maias, et venatio erit. — 'Twenty pairs of gladiators, furnished by Quintus Monnius Rufus, will fight at Nola May 1,
Pompeii April 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. There will be a big hunt, and awnings. Aemilius Celer wrote this, all alone by the light of the moon.' The reference to Nero as the son of the emperor, shows that the inscription was written after he was adopted by Claudius, in 50 A.D., and before Claudius's death, in 54. Celer was an enterprising painter of notices, whose name appears elsewhere in a similar connection.

Besides the general announcement of a gladiatorial exhibition, a detailed programme, *libellus*, was prepared in advance, of which copies were sold. No such copy has come down to us, but the character of the contents of a programme may be inferred from the order of events which a Pompeian with waste time on his hands scratched on a wall; the memorandum covers two exhibitions, which came near together in the early part of May, the result of each combat being carefully noted. Unfortunately the letters have now become almost illegible; but we give the superscription and three of the nine pairs of combatants mentioned in the second programme, which is the better preserved of the two, adding in a separate column the full forms of the abbreviated words; the figures indicate the number of combats in which the different gladiators had taken part:

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<th>Munus N. . . . IV III</th>
<th>Munus N. . . . IV III</th>
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<td>PRID IDUS IDI[BUS] MAI[S]</td>
<td>pridie Idus, Idibus Mai</td>
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<td>T M</td>
<td>Threx, Myrmillo</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. PUGNAX NER III</td>
<td>vict.</td>
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<td>f. MURRANUS NER III</td>
<td>perit.</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Hoplomachus, Threx</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. CYCNUS IUL VIII</td>
<td>vict.</td>
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<tr>
<td>m. ATTICUS IUL XIV</td>
<td>missus est.</td>
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<td>ESS</td>
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<td>m. P. OSTORIUS LI</td>
<td>missus est.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. SCYLAX IUL XXVI</td>
<td>vict.</td>
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The name of the official who gave the exhibition (*munus*) is obliterated. The contests extended over four days, May 12–15.

In the first pair of gladiators Pugnax, equipped with Thracian weapons—a small, round shield and short, curved sword or
dagger — was matched with the Myrmillo Murranus, who bore arms of the Gallic fashion, with the image of a fish on his helmet. Both were Nerioniani; that is, from the training school for gladiators founded by Nero, apparently at Capua. Pugnax and Murranus had both been through three contests previously. The name of a gladiator entering a combat for the first time was not followed by a number, but by the letter T, standing for tiro, ‘novice.’ At the left we see the record added to the programme by the writer in order to give the result of the combat. Pugnax was the victor, Murranus was killed.

In the second pair Cyclus, in heavy armor, was pitted against Atticus, who had the Thracian arms. Both were from the training school founded by Julius Caesar, probably at Capua, and hence are called Iuliani. Cyclus won, but the audience had compassion on Atticus, and his life was spared. The same term was applied to a defeated gladiator permitted to leave the arena as to a soldier having an honorable discharge — missus, ‘let go.’

The third pair fought in chariots, being dressed in British costume. Scylax was from the Julian school. Such establishments let out gladiators to those who gave exhibitions, and obtained in this way a considerable income. But Publius Ostorius, as his name implies, was a freeman; presumably he was a gladiator, who, having served a full term, had secured his freedom, and was now fighting on his own account. Though beaten, he was permitted to live, perhaps on account of his creditable record; he had engaged in fifty-one combats.

The combatants from the schools of Caesar and Nero were especially popular, and were generally victorious; but gladiators belonging to other proprietors are mentioned, as in the inscriptions of a house on Nola Street, which will be mentioned again presently. Here we find gladiators who were evidently freemen named with others who were slaves of different masters. In only one of these inscriptions, however, do we find the name of an owner that is known to us: Essedarius Auriolus Sisen[nus]. The chariot fighter Auriolus belonged to a Sisenna, seemingly either the Sisenna Statilius Taurus, who was consul in 16 A.D., or his son of the same name. As we have seen, it was a Statilius Taurus who built the first permanent amphitheatre in Rome, in 29 B.C. The control of this building remained in the hands of the family. In the columbarium in which the ashes of their slaves and freedmen were placed, we find inscriptions of a ‘guard of the amphitheatre,’ and of a ‘doorkeeper’ — custos de amphitheatro, ostiarius ab amphitheatro. It is highly probable that the family — the first in Rome after the imperial house— possessed a training school, and derived an income from furnishing gladiators to those who gave exhibitions.

In view of these facts, we must suppose that the ‘troop’ (familia gladiatoria) of Suetnius Curtus, for example, was simply a band of gladiators brought together for a particular engagement, not a permanent organization. The giver of an exhibition would make a contract for the gladiators that he might need. At the close of the combats the dead would be counted, the surviving freemen paid off and dismissed, and the surviving slaves returned to their masters, ‘the troop’ thus going out of existence.

Occasionally the individual who provided the combats would erect a monument to the fallen, by way of perpetuating the memory of his munificence. A familiar example is the memorial set up by Gaius Salvius Capito at Venosa, of which the inscription is extant. The names are given of the gladiators who were killed, together with the number of their previous combats and victories. They were slaves of different masters, only one of them, Optatus, being owned by Capito himself. Optatus was a tiro, who fell thus in his first contest. Possibly his master had obliged him, on account of some misdeemeanor, to enter the arena with little previous training. Besides the classes of inscriptions of which examples have been presented, all sorts of scratches upon the plastered walls bear witness to the general enthusiasm for gladiatorial sports. Sometimes there is simply the name of a gladiator, with his school and the number of combats, as Auctus, Iul[ianus], XXXX; sometimes we find a rough outline of a figure with a boastful legend, as Hermaiccus invictus hac, ‘Here’s the unconquered Hermaiccus.’

There are also memoranda in regard to particular combats,
illustrated by rude sketches. Thus on a wall in the house of
the Centenary we find a drawing of a gladiator in flight, pur-
sued by another, with the note: Officiumus fugit VIII Idus
Novembris Drusus Caesare M. Junio Silano cos., — ‘Officiumus
fled on November 6, in the year 15 A.D.’ A similar sketch has
been found in another house, with these words written beside
the fleeing gladiator, Q. P[e]tr[ius] O[rl][tus] XXXIII,
m[issus]; beside the pursuer, Severus libertus, XXXXXV,
[icit]. Severus was thus a gladiator who had been a slave,
and had gained his freedom; he had fought fifty-five combats.
Petronius Octavus may have been a freeman, who had fought
on his own account from the beginning. In taverns a painting
of a gladiator with an inscription like the record of a pro-
gramme was a favorite subject of decoration.

Athletes in all ages have won the admiration of the gentler
sex; and it would be surprising if among so many gladiatorial
graffiti there were not some containing references to female
admirers. In the peristyle of a house on Nola Street (V. v. 3)
the names of about thirty gladiators are found; the kinds of
weapons and the owners are designated, and the number of
previous combats given, as in the programmes, while records
of the results of the combats are entirely lacking. Terms of
endearment are lavished upon two, Celadus, Threx, and Cres-
cens, net fighter; Celadus is suspirium puellarum, ‘maidens’
sigh,’ and puellarum decus, ‘glory of girls’; while Crescens is
dominius, ‘lord o’ lassies,’ and puparum medicus, ‘the
darlings’ doctor.’

Another graffito informs us that at one time — before the year
63 — a gladiator lived in this house: Samus 101 m[umillo],
[des], hic hab[itar], — ‘Samus, who has fought once,
and once conquered (O is for corona, ‘crown’), Myrmillo, and
at the same time fighter on horseback, lives here.’ Other
gladiators, no doubt, shared the dwelling with him; and the
amatory graffito may have been written by one and another
miles gloriosus, referring to conquests outside the arena, or by
companions in bitter scorn.