CHAPTER XXXIV

THE HOUSE OF THE SURGEON

The house of the Surgeon (casa del Chirurgo) is the oldest of the Pompeian houses that retained to the last, with but slight modifications, its original plan and appearance. It lies at the right of the Strada Consolare (VI. i. 10), about fifty paces inside the Herculaneum Gate. The name was suggested by the discovery of several surgical instruments in one of the rooms.

This house was undoubtedly built before 200 B.C. The façade (Fig. 10) and the walls of the atrium are of large hewn blocks of Sarno limestone; other inner walls are of limestone framework (p. 37). The plan conforms to the simple Italic type, before the addition of the peristyle; yet it does not illustrate the oldest form of the native house, for the tablinum (Fig. 132, 7) has already displaced the recess for the bed opposite the front door. The measurements of the rooms are according to the Osca standard (p. 44), the atrium being about 30 by 35 Osca feet.

We pass directly from the street through the fauces (1) into the Tuscan atrium (5) at the sides of which are sleeping rooms (6) and the two alae (8). Back of the tablinum is a colonnade (16) opening on the garden (20), which originally had a greater length; the room at the right (19) is a later addition, as also the smaller room at the other end (21). The roof of the colonnade was carried by square limestone pillars, one of which has been preserved in its original form.

The oblong room at the right of the tablinum (10) was once square, as (9). Both were well adapted for winter dining rooms; in summer, meals were undoubtedly served in the tablinum. The room at the left of the entrance (2) was a shop, at least in later times. The corresponding room on the other side (6') was retained for domestic use.

The shop at the right (3) and the back room (4), as well as the kitchen with the adjoining rooms at the rear, used as store closets and quarters for slaves, were a later addition; 22 is a light court, to which the rain water was conducted from different parts of the roof. Over these rooms was a second story reached by stairs leading from the colonnade (18). It may be that this part of the house took the place of a garden which previously there was an outside kitchen; that the ground belonged to the house from the beginning is clear from the existence of a door between the rooms 6' and 3, afterwards walled up, and the appearance of the unbroken party wall on this side.

The rooms about the atrium had no upper floor, and were relatively high; the doors measured nearly twelve feet in height, and the ceiling of the tablinum was not far from twenty feet above the floor. In respect to height, this house was not unlike those of the next period.

In the later years of the city, but before 63, the decoration was renewed in the fourth style. There are paintings of interest, however, only in the room at the rear (19), which had a large window opening on the garden. In one of the panels here we see a man sitting with a writing tablet in his hand; opposite him are two girls, one sitting, the other standing; the latter holds a roll of papyrus. This kind of genre picture is not uncommon; the type is spoken of elsewhere (p. 477).

In another panel, which was transferred to the Naples
Museum, a young woman is represented as painting a herm of Dionysus (Fig. 133); a Cupid is holding the unfinished picture while she mixes colors on her palette. Two other maidens are watching the artist with unfeigned interest. Upon the pillar behind the herm hangs a small painting; in the vista another herm is seen, together with a vase standing on a pillar.

The room contained a third picture which is now almost obliterated. Perhaps this pleasant apartment was once the boudoir of a favorite daughter, who busied herself with painting and verse.