CHAPTER XXXVII

A HOUSE NEAR THE PORTA MARINA

The height of the important rooms can be accurately determined in so few houses of the Tufa Period, that special importance attaches to a house on the edge of the city north of the Porta Marina (No. 13), in which not merely the three-quarter columns at the entrance of the tablinum, but also the pilasters at the corners of the fauces and alae and part of the Ionic columns of the peristyle are seen in their full height. The atrium is the best preserved of any in the large pre-Roman houses, and the height of the ceiling in several of the adjoining rooms is clearly indicated. The house lies about seventy paces north of the Strada della Marina, on the last street leading to the right. It is without a name and is seldom visited.

Neither the decoration, renewed in the second style and without paintings, nor the arrangement of the rooms (Fig. 144) requires extended comment. There are two atria, the smaller with the domestic apartments being at the left and entered directly from the street. The fauces of the other are of unusual width, being about two fifths of the width of the atrium. The alae are at the middle of the sides, as in the house of Epipidius Rufus and the smaller atrium of the house of the Faun. At the sides of the tablinum are large windows opening into two dining rooms, which are entered from the peristyle.

More than a third of the plot enclosed by the peristyle is taken up by a deep rectangular basin for fish. At the rear are apparently other rooms, adjusted to the slope of the ground, which, however, have not yet been excavated.

It will, perhaps, be easier to appreciate the stately character of the pre-Roman atriums if we give a few of the dimensions which were used in making our restoration (Fig. 145).

The atrium is 41 by 29 feet. The tablinum measures 13 feet 9 inches between the three-quarter columns which stand, in place of the usual pilasters, at the entrance; it is thus half as wide as the atrium. The height of the tablinum at the entrance is 18 feet 6 inches; according to the proportions given by Vitruvius it should be 15 feet 4 inches.

The alae and fauces also exceed the dimensions presented by the Roman architect, the former being 12 3/4 feet wide and 16 1/4 feet high, while the height of the broad fauces, 17 1/2 feet, is only a trifle less than that of the tablinum.

The height of the walls of the atrium is easily determined with the help of the data before us; and the arrangement of the roof over the fauces, atrium, tablinum, and colonnade of the peristyle must have been very similar to that shown in our restoration. The entablature seen over the entrance of the left ala is restored in accordance with the architectural forms commonly used in the period when the house was built.

Both the three-quarter columns and the pilasters present a peculiarity of construction found also in other houses, but not
easy to explain. The former appear as half-columns on the side of the tablinum, but present fully three fourths of their breadth on the side of the atrium. The pilasters at the entrances of the alae and fauces have, on the inside, a good proportion, the breadth being about one eighth of the height; but on the outside, toward the atrium, they are much more slender.

A well designed scroll pattern appears in the black and white mosaic floor of the fauces, which, as often in Pompeian houses, slopes gently toward the street. The floor of the atrium is made of black mosaic with pieces of colored marble arranged in rows, and white stripes at the edges. The base of a shrine for the household gods stands against the right wall. In the first room at the right was an alcove for a bed opposite the door; the ceiling of the alcove, in the form of a vault, was lower than that of the rest of the room.