CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE HOUSE OF THE SILVER WEDDING

Among the more interesting of the large houses excavated in the last decade is the house of the Silver Wedding, which marks the limit of excavation in the fifth Region (V. ii. a on Plan VI). The main part was cleared in 1892 (Fig. 8); and in April, 1893, in connection with the festivities with which the Silver Wedding of the King and Queen of Italy was celebrated, a special excavation was made in one of the rooms, in the presence of their Majesties and of their imperial guests, the Emperor and Empress of Germany. Portions of the house are still covered, the façade, the inner end of the oecus, and the greater part of an extensive garden on the left side.

Notwithstanding the extent of the house — the greatest length is not far from 150 feet, the breadth of the excavated portion 130 — and the number of apartments, the plan is simple (Fig. 146). From the fauces (a) we pass into a tetrastyle atrium (α), the largest of its kind yet discovered, with alae on either side and a high tablinum (ε). Back of this is a Rhodian peristyle, at the rear of which is an exedra (γ) with sleeping rooms at the right and the left (x, z). Opening into the rear of the peristyle on one side is the oecus (4), on the other a long dining room (w).

Another series of apartments lay between the peristyle and the garden at the right (2), a kitchen (s), and a bath (τ-υ). In front of the garden and extending to the street is a small house (α-ε) which had been joined to the larger establishment; it was connected with this by a small door under the stairs in the corner of the atrium (β), which opened into a side room (ε) of the large atrium.

The essential parts of the house date from the Tufa Period. Alterations were made from time to time in the course of the
two centuries during which it was occupied, but they were not so extensive as to obscure the original plan. The most obvious changes were those affecting the wall decoration.

In the small rooms at the right of the atrium are traces of the decoration of the first style, which was in vogue when the house was built. Toward the end of the Republic almost the whole interior was redecorated in the second style, but without paintings. Brilliant blocks and panels dating from this renovation may still be seen upon the upper part of the walls of the atrium and on those of the occus, the exedra, the two bedrooms next to the exedra, and the front part of the long apodyterium.

Afterwards a few rooms were done over in the third style, of which scanty remains are found.

Lastly, after the fourth style had come into vogue, but before 60 A.D. — as shown by an inscription on a column of the peristyle — a large part of the house was redecorated in the fourth style, including the tablinum, the andron and the room at the right (g), the peristyle, the long dining room (w), and the inner portion of the apodyterium. The lower part of the walls of the atrium were also painted over, but with designs and coloring that harmonized well with the decoration of the second style above. In this house the history of Pompeian wall decoration can be followed from the century after the Second Punic War to the middle of the first century of our era, from the time of Cato the Elder to that of Claudius and Nero. There are few paintings, however, and they are not of special interest.

In marked contrast with the atriums in the house of the Faun and the other houses which we have examined, the atrium here had a relatively large impluvium (Fig. 147); all parts of the room must have been brilliantly lighted. In summer some kind of protection against the sun was a necessity. It was probably afforded by hanging curtains between the columns; on the side of each column, facing the corner of the atrium, is a bronze ring through which a cord might have been passed to use in drawing the curtains back and forth. The large impluvium with its supporting columns suggests the arrangement of the Corinthian atrium.

The dimensions of the atrium are monumental. The length is approximately 54 feet, the breadth 40; and the Corinthian columns of tufa coated with stucco, are 22 1/2 feet high.

At the rear of the impluvium is a fluted cistern curb of white marble (seen in Fig. 8). In the impluvium near the edge is the square pedestal of a fountain figure, which threw a jet into a round marble basin in front.

The doors of the rooms at the sides of the atrium were originally more than thirteen feet high; those which we now see are comparatively low. The height was reduced because a second floor was placed in the rooms, thus making low chambers, which were reached by three stairways, one (g) at the right of the atrium, the other two (k and m) on the opposite side. The upper rooms were lighted by small windows, part of which opened into the atrium, others upon the garden on the left side of the house. These changes were completed before the atrium received its decoration in the second style. There was no second story over the alae, the tablinum, or the rooms about the peristyle. In the left ala was once a large window opening on the garden, but it was afterwards walled up (p. 259).
The curtain fastenings on the pilasters at the front of the tablinum have been referred to in another connection (p. 256). The arrangement of the rooms at the sides is not unlike that in the house of Sallust; one, $n$, retained its original form; the other was divided up into an andron ($p$), with a bedroom ($q$) at one side.

The peristyle is remarkably well preserved. We find not only the columns in their full height, but also, except on the north side, large portions of the entablature, with its stucco ornamentation intact, supported on a line of planks placed upon the columns at the time of excavation; and the decoration of the walls retains much of its brilliancy of coloring.

The colonnade of this peristyle has been mentioned elsewhere as illustrating the Rhodian form (p. 260). The difference in height between the colonnade in front and on the other three sides was accentuated in the decoration. On the walls in front are large red panels separated by architectural designs on a yellow background; the walls under the lower part of the colonnade were painted with black panels, the designs of the narrow intermediate sections being on a white background. The lower third of the columns in front was yellow; at the sides and rear, dark red, like that on the lower part of the high columns in the atrium. Thus a pleasing contrast was made between the portions of the colonnade designed to receive the sunshine, particularly in winter, and the shadier parts; and the higher front served as an intermediate member between the lofty atrium with its stately tablinum and the lower rear division of the house.

The ornamentation of the architrave retains no trace of the decorative forms in vogue at the time when it was constructed. The surface, moulded in stucco, is divided into sections, corresponding with the capitals and intercolumniations, as in the colonnade of the Stabian Baths (Fig. 89); in these sections are small figures of birds and animals and other suitable designs, the effect being heightened by the use of color.

That the decoration of the peristyle received its present form before the earthquake is evident from an inscription scratched upon the plaster of one of the columns on the north side:

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\text{Nerone Caesare Augusto} \\
\text{Cosso Lentulo Cossi fil[io] co[n]s[ulibus]} \\
\text{VIII Idus Febr[i]arias} \\
\text{Dies Solis, Luna XIIIIX, nnu[rinu] Cumn, V nnu. Pompei, —}
\]

'In the consulship of Nero and of Cossus Lentulus the son of Cossus,' that is 60 A.D. The dates given in the rest of the inscription are difficult to explain, and the reading of the number after Luna is uncertain. The memorandum seems to indicate that the eighth day before the Ides of February in this year was the market day at Cumae, being Sunday and the sixteenth day after the New Moon; and that the market day at Pompeii came three days later. The inscription is the earliest yet found in which a day of the week is named in connection with a date.
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The garden plot enclosed by the peristyle was watered by means of two jets at the front corners, fed by pipes under the floor. In the middle was a slight elevation on which were found two crocodiles, a huge toad, and a frog of a whitish glazed earthenware, apparently made in Egypt. The figures are about sixteen inches long.

Each of the bedrooms at the rear had an alcove for a bed, the ceiling being vaulted over the alcove, flat between this and the door; a distinction between the two parts of the room was made also in the wall decoration and in the floor, of black and white mosaic. The frescoing on the walls of the sleeping rooms presents a brilliant variety of colors; the decoration of the exedra is in yellow. One of the bedrooms has a small side door (p. 261). In the large dining room at the right (w) the place for the table is indicated by an ornamental design in the mosaic floor; in the oecus (4) the part of the room designed for the table and couches is distinguished from the rest by a difference in the decoration both of the floor and of the wall.

In the oecus, the excavation was made from which the house received its name. The peristyle had already been cleared, and the volcanic débris had been, for the most part, removed from the front part of the oecus, leaving a layer at the bottom about two feet deep. The King and Queen of Italy, with the Emperor and Empress of Germany and a small suite, stationed themselves in the corner of the peristyle opposite the opening of the oecus; when all was ready a line of workmen proceeded to draw back the loose fragments of pumice stone, exposing the floor to view. Here nothing was found except the bronze fastenings of the large doors; but a more fruitful outcome followed a similar search in a room of a small house adjoining the oecus on the south, in which several vessels of bronze were brought to light.

The bath is unusually complete for a private house, comprising a long, narrow apodyterium (v), an open-air swimming tank in the garden (1), a tepidarium (u), and a caldarium (f). Steps led down into the swimming tank at the corner nearest the door of the apodyterium, and also on the side furthest from the house; on the same side a jet fell into it from a marble stand-

ard adorned with a lion's head. If we imagine a thick growth of shrubs and flowers about the tank, we have the setting which explains the tasteful decoration of the frigidarium in the Stabian Baths (p. 191) and in the Baths near the Forum.

The pavement of the apodyterium is especially effective, being composed of small bits of black, white, dark red, green, and yellow marble and stone; near the rear wall a place for a couch is left white.

The caldarium and the side of the tepidarium next to it were provided with hollow walls; a hollow floor extended under both rooms. In the left wall of the tepidarium is the bronze mouth of a water pipe; perhaps in winter a cold bath was taken here rather than in the swimming tank. In the caldarium the niche for the labrum remains; the bath basin probably stood opposite the entrance, where it could be easily heated from the kitchen.

Above the broad hearth of the kitchen (s), which stands against the wall adjoining the garden, are the vestiges of a painting of the two Lares; near them a serpent is seen coiled around an altar, on which is a large pine cone. At the end next the caldarium is a depression in the floor, for convenience in building a fire to heat the bath rooms. In the corner is a foundation of masonry to support the vessel, of lead, in which water was kept for the bath.

The colonnade at the left of the house (6 on the Plan; see Fig. 148), with its slender eight-sided columns, seems to have been thrown down by the earthquake of 63, and removed. In the place of four of the columns an open-air triclinium was made,
like that in the house of Sallust. It is well preserved, and shows an interesting peculiarity of construction. When the table was not in use, a jet of water would spring from the foundation of masonry supporting the round top. The water was conveyed by a lead pipe, and at the rear of the colonnade one may still see the stopcock by which the flow was regulated.

The stairway at the left of the small atrium (β) led to rooms over the front of the house. Over the rooms at the rear, a bedroom (γ), a central room (δ) taking the place of the tablinum, and a corridor (ε), was a dining room, the front of which was supported by columns (p. 275), the stairway being in the corridor; fragments of the tufa columns are lying on the floor. At the back of the house was originally only the small sleeping room (ζ) with a simple decoration in the first style, and a colonnade (η) with Doric columns opening on the garden (κ). Later the colonnade was turned into an apartment, and two rooms were built at the left, a dining room (θ) and a bedroom (ι).

In the front of one of the rooms (λ) is an unusually well preserved niche for the images of the household gods, ornamented with stucco reliefs and painted in the last style. On the rear wall stands Hercules, with the lion’s skin hanging from his left arm, his club on the left shoulder. In his right hand he holds a large bowl above a round altar; at the left is a hog ready to be offered as a victim.