CHAPTER XXXIX

THE HOUSE OF EPIDIUS RUFUS

The house of Epidius Rufus, built, like those previously described, in the pre-Roman time, presents a pleasing example of a Corinthian atrium. In one respect it resembles the oldest Pompeian houses, such as that of the Surgeon; in the place of the peristyle is a garden extending back from a colonnade at the rear of the tablinum. In a period when large peristyles were the fashion, a Pompeian of wealth and taste, whose building lot was ample enough to admit of an extension of his house toward the rear, contented himself with a single group of rooms arranged about one central apartment.

The arrangement of rooms is seen at a glance (Fig. 149). The vestibule, like that of the principal entrance in the house of the Faun, had a triple door at the end toward the street (shown in Fig. 150), which was no doubt left open in the daytime. Entering, one would pass into the fauces ordinarily through the small door at the right (p. 248), the large double doors between the vestibule and the fauces only being opened for the reception of clients or on special occasions.

The front of each ala (7, 13) is adorned with two Ionic columns. At the corners of the entrances are pilasters, the Corinthian capitals of which have a striking ornament, a female head, moulded in stucco, looking out from the midst of the acanthus leaves. The eyes and hair are painted, and in one instance the features of a bacchante can be recognized.

In the right ala is an elaborate house shrine, built like a temple with a façade supported by columns, raised on a podium five feet high (Fig. 151). On the front of the podium is a dedicatory inscription to the Genius of the master (p. 270).

The tablinum originally opened on the atrium in its full width, the entrance being set off by pilasters at the corners. It was
then higher; when the entrance was changed
the height was reduced to about twelve
feet. The sixteen Doric columns about
the impluvium, well preserved for the
most part, are only a trifle over fourteen
feet high.

The contrast be-
tween this atrium and
the lofty halls of the
houses of Sallust and
the Faun was indeed
marked. Here the
atrium had become
more like a court than
a hall; yet the im-
pluvium, paved with
tufa, was retained,
and we find the same
arrangement for the
flow of water as in
many houses with
Tuscan and tetrastyle
atriums. On the edge
of the impluvium at
the rear is the pedes-
tal of a fountain
figure which threw a jet
into a basin resting
on two rectangular
stands; the places
of these, as well as
the course of the feed
pipe, are indicated on

the plan. Behind the pedestal is a round cistern curb; another
jet rose in the middle of the impluvium.

The apartment at the right of the tablinum (20) was a dining
room. Of the smaller rooms about the atrium, three (6, 8, and
12) were sleeping rooms for members of the family; some of
the others were so poorly decorated as to prompt the suggestion
that they were intended for slaves. That next the stairs (14)
was a storeroom; the traces of the shelving are easily distin-
guished. Under the stairs was a low room (16), perhaps used
for a similar purpose; the small double room (17) was also low,
and used as a sleeping room.

The domestic apartments were reached by the andron (18).
In the kitchen (21) is a broad hearth (6); a dim light was fur-
ished by narrow windows. The little room at the entrance of
the kitchen (a) was perhaps a storeroom; the closet, as often,
was in the corner of the kitchen.

At the opposite end of the colonnade is the gardener's room
(23). The main part of the garden (24), as indicated by the
arrangement of the ground, was used for vegetables; the small
flower garden at the rear (25) was on a higher level.

In the house originally there was no second floor. In the
Roman period, apparently near the end of the Republic, a large
upper room—probably a dining room—was built over the
kitchen; and there may have been one or two small storerooms
at the head of the stairway which was built in one of the side
rooms of the atrium.
Traces of the first and third decorative styles are found in the atrium; but the most interesting remains are those of the last style. The alae and several rooms were redecorated shortly before the destruction of the city. The dining room (20) contains a series of paintings illustrating the contest between Apollo and Marsyas; they are skilfully displayed in a light architectural framework on a white ground. On the wall at the left (at a) Apollo is seen with left foot advanced, striking with his right hand a large cithara which rests against his left shoulder. Opposite him (at b) is Marsyas, playing the double flute; on the intervening panels (d, e) are the Muses, who are acting as judges in the contest of skill. The painting at c seems to relate to Apollo, but the subject has not been explained. The choice of subjects such as these may have been influenced by the cult of the early divinity of the city; but it probably implies a taste for poetry and music on the part of the proprietor.

There were no shops in the front of this house, but in one respect our restoration of the façade (Fig. 150) can not be taken as indicating the appearance of such houses in general. Here the front line was set back several feet from that of the adjoining houses on either side, and the space thus gained was given to a terrace or ramp about four feet high, mounted by steps at either end. The elevation of the front entrance above the sidewalk and the placing of the approaches at the ends of the ramp gave the house an appearance of seclusion.