CHAPTER XLI

THE HOUSE OF THE VETTII

The house of the Vettii, excavated in the years 1894-1895, bears the same relation to the other houses built in the Roman period that the house of the Faun does to those of the earlier time; it is the most important representative of its class. It was situated in a quiet part of the city, and was not conspicuous by reason of its size; its interest for us lies chiefly in its paintings and in the adornment of the well preserved peristyle.

The relationship between the two owners, Aulus Vettius Restitutus and Aulus Vettius Conviva (p. 508) is not known. They were perhaps freedmen, manumitted by the same master;
Conviva, as we learn from a painted inscription, was a member of the Brotherhood of Augustus,—Vettii Conviva, Augustalis.

The exterior of the house (Fig. 157) was unpretentious. The main entrance was on the east side, and there was a side door near the southeast corner; elsewhere the street walls were unbroken except by small, square windows, part of which were in low second story rooms.

The vestibule (Fig. 158, a), as in the house of Epipolanius Rufus (p. 249), was connected with the fauces (b) by a large double door and also by a small door at the right. The atrium (c) is without a tablinum; at the rear it opens directly on the peristyle. One of the alae (d) at the time of the eruption was used as a wardrobe. At the sides of the atrium were two money chests; the one at the right is seen in Fig. 159.

Opening on the peristyle are three large apartments (n, p, q), and two smaller rooms (o, r). A door at the right leads into a small side peristyle (s, shown in Fig. 160), with a quiet dining room (t) and bedroom (u).

The domestic apartments were near the front of the house. At the right of the principal atrium is a small side atrium (v) without a separate street entrance. Grouped about it were rooms for the slaves and the kitchen (w) with a large hearth (Fig. 125). Beyond the kitchen is a room for the cook (x').

At the rear of the small atrium is the niche for the household gods (Fig. 127).

The corridor at the left of the principal atrium (y) led to an unimportant room (β) with a door opening on a side street. In this corridor there was a stairway to the second story, which extended over this corner of the house (above e, f, h, n, o, β, δ). Along the front also were low chambers, over the fauces and the small rooms on either side (d, k), and over the rooms adjoining the small atrium (x, y, z).

In the accompanying sections two restorations of the interior are given. In the first (Fig. 159) we are looking toward the right side of the atrium and the inner end of the peristyle; the depth of the peristyle more than equals that of the atrium, together with the vestibule and fauces. The difference in height between the atrium and the peristyle, as in the house of the Tragic Poet, is much less than in the houses built in the pre-Roman period; and the corners of the alae were protected by simple wooden casings, altogether unlike the stately pilasters of the olden time.

The transverse section (Fig. 160) presents the long side of the peristyle next to the atrium, with the side of the small peristyle at the north end. The extent of the house is greater measured across the two peristyles (along the line C−D on the plan) than from front to rear. Of the three entrance from the atrium into the peristyle, that in the middle is broader and higher than the other two, which are not much wider than ordinary doors; the arrangement of the openings is similar to that in houses having a tablinum open toward the peristyle with an andron on one side, and on the other a room with a door corresponding with the door of the andron.

The columns of the peristyle are well preserved (Fig. 161). They are white, with ornate capitals moulded in stucco and painted with a variety of colors. Part of the entablature also remains; the architrave is ornamented with an acanthus arabesque in white stucco relief on a yellow background.

The roof of the greater part of the colonnade has been restored, and the garden has been planted with shrubs in accordance with the arrangement indicated by the appearance
of the ground at the time of excavation. Nowhere else in Pompeii will the visitor so easily gain an impression of the aspect presented by a peristyle in ancient times. The main part of the house was searched for objects of value after the eruption, but the garden was left undisturbed, and we see in it to-day the fountain basins, statuettes, and other sculptures placed there by the proprietor.

In each corner of the colonnade is a round fountain basin

(indicated on the plan), at each side an oblong basin, all of marble. Jets fell into them from statuettes standing on pedestals beside the columns; there were two figures for each side of the house of the Vetti, restored.

basin, one each for those at the corners. The two statuettes at the inner end of the colonnade (Fig. 162) are of bronze;

they represent a boy with a duck, from the bill of which the water spurted. The rest are of marble, and not of special interest. Among them are a Bacchus and two satyrs. The
water pipes were so well preserved that it has been found possible to place them in repair, and they are now ready for use. There were also two fountains in the garden.

Near the middle of the garden is a round, marble table. Three others stand under the colonnade, one of which, at the right near the inner end, is particularly elegant. The three feet are

![Base, capital, and section of the entablature from the colonnade of the peristyle.](image)

carved to represent lions' claws; the heads above are well executed, and there are traces of yellow color on the manes. On two pillars in the garden are double busts, the subjects of which are taken from the bacchic cycle. One represents Bacchus and a bacchante (Fig. 257), the other Bacchus and Ariadne; there are traces of painting on the hair, beard, and eyes.

The wall paintings of this house are the most remarkable yet discovered at Pompeii. Although the decoration of which they form a part is throughout of the fourth style, they fall into two groups, an earlier and a later, distinguished by differences in composition and handling that are easily perceived.

The earlier paintings are found in the atrium (c), the alae (h, i), and the large room at the end of the peristyle (g). At the time when they were painted the left ala (h) was connected with the room behind it (n) by a door, and had a large window

![Peristyle of the house of the Vettii, looking south from the colonnade at the north end.](image)
opening on the peristyle like that in the other ala (seen in Fig. 160). Afterwards both window and door were walled up and the ala was turned into a wardrobe. After this change had been made, as the remains of the masonry show, the earthquake of 63 threw down a part of the wall between the ala and the peristyle. The earlier paintings, then, must have been placed upon the walls before the year 63, in the reign of Claudius or the earlier part of the reign of Nero.

The later pictures are on the walls of the fœuces (b), the large apartment at the left of the atrium (e), the colonnade of the
peristyle ($f$), the two dining rooms opening on the peristyle ($h, p$), and the small peristyle ($s$) with the adjoining rooms ($t, n$); to the same class belongs also the painting of the Genius with the Lares in the side atrium ($v$), which, aside from this, contains no pictures. The remaining rooms present nothing of interest.

The paintings of the first group are characterized by refinement in the choice of subjects, fertility in the composition, firmness of touch in the drawing, and exquisite finish in even the smallest details. The colors used are simple and harmonious, violent contrasts being avoided. A number of these pictures show the hand of a true artist, whose work has been found in no other house, and the system of decoration is the most effective of its kind in Pompeii.

The decoration of the walls painted after the earthquake is not unlike that found in other houses upon walls of the fourth style. The designs are sketchy and without painstaking in the handling of details; the lines are coarse, the colors sometimes crude. The pictures in the panels are by different painters, some of whom were not without skill, yet none far above the average. One of the decorators had a fondness for representing mythological death scenes, manifesting a taste little short of barbarous.

The contrast between the earlier and the later decoration is so marked that it seems impossible to explain except on the assumption of a change of owners. We may well believe that about the middle of the first century this was the home of a family of culture and standing, who secured for the decoration of it the best artist that could be obtained, bringing him perhaps from Rome or from a Greek city. But within a score of years afterwards the house passed into the hands of the Vetti, freedmen, perhaps, whose taste in matters of art was far inferior to that of the former occupants, and a number of rooms were redecorated.

The excellent preservation of a large part of both the earlier and the later decoration gives the house the appearance of an art gallery. To describe fully and interpret all the paintings would require a small volume. The limitations of space make it possible to present here only the more important; we com-
mence with those in the large room at the right of the peristyle, which are the most interesting of the entire series.

This apartment (c) may have been used either as a dining room or as a sitting room. The scheme of decoration is indicated in Fig. 163, which presents the division of the end wall; the side walls had five large panels instead of three.

The ground of the base is black. The stripe separating the base from the main part of the wall is red, except the small sections (4, 4), which have a black ground; the vertical stripes between the panels are black, and the same color forms the background of the border above. The ground of the panels is cinnabar red. The painting in the central panel (1) has not been preserved; in those at the sides (2) are floating figures. The upper division of the wall (6) is filled with an architectural framework upon a white background, against which many figures, skilfully disposed, stand out with unusual distinctness.

The floating figures in the side panels differ from those found elsewhere in the choice of subjects. Here instead of satyrs and bacchantes we find gods and heroes. In one panel is Poseidon with a female figure, perhaps Amymone; in another, Apollo with Daphne. Bacchus and Ariadne also appear, and Perseus with Andromeda.

The figures in the upper part of the wall at the end of the room belong to the bacchic cycle.—Silenus, satyrs, and bacchantes. Of those at the sides, one, near the right-hand corner, represents a poet with a roll of papyrus against his chin, the open manuscript case, scrinium, at his feet; opposite him sits a maiden clothed in white, drinking in his words. A comic mask on the left wall seems to suggest a writer of comedy, and the scene reminds one of the letter of Glycera to Menander, in Alciphron: "What is Athens without Menander, what Menander without Glycera? Without me, who make ready your masks, who
lay out your costume, and then stand behind the scenes pressing my finger tips into the palms of my hands till the applause breaks forth. Then all a-trembling I breathe again, and enfold you, godlike poet, in my arms."

The figures in which we are specially interested, however, are not those in the upper or middle division of the wall, but those in the black stripes (3), nine and ten inches wide, under the panels, in the narrow sections (4) and in the corresponding sections of the base.

In each of the sections at the bottom is a standing figure. In those of the end wall (5) are a satyr and a bacchante; in the two nearest the middle of each side wall are Amazons, in the rest female figures with implements of sacrifice. The Amazons, armed with battle-axe and shield, are full of life; they are distinguished by the colors of their mantles and their Phrygian caps.

In the narrow sections on the end walls (4), and all but four of the others, were Psyches gathering flowers. Only a part of the scenes are preserved; in each are three figures, grouped with a pleasing variety and rendered with singular delicacy of touch. In one, the Psyches are sprightly children (Fig. 164); in another, young girls; and in a third we see a lady sitting at case and plucking the flowers close at hand, while two maids gather the blossoms beyond her reach.

The two narrow sections nearest the middle panel of each side wall contained mythological scenes, of which three are preserved. The subjects are taken from the cycle of myths relating to Apollo and Artemis. In one of the pictures both the divini-
ties appear. Apollo has just slain the Python, which lies coiled about the Omphalos, the sacred symbol of the god as the giver of oracles at Delphi. His bow and quiver are hanging upon a column in the background, and he moves forward with vigorous step singing the Paeon with an accompaniment upon the cithara. At the right, Artemis, with a quiver and long hunting spear, leans upon a pillar looking at her brother. Nearer the Omphalos are a priest and a female attendant, with a bull intended for sacrifice; the relation of these to the rest of the scene is not clear (Plate VIII.).

The companion picture takes us to a sanctuary dedicated to Artemis. At the left a gilt bronze image of the goddess, in hunting costume, stands upon a pillar, to the side of which a bow, quiver, and boar's head are fastened. On one side of the round altar in the middle is a white hind, sacred to the goddess; on the other, moving toward it with a sword in the uplifted right hand, is a kingly figure, the face turned with a wild and threatening look toward a frightened attendant; another attendant, back of the hind, seems not yet to have noticed the sacrilegious intruder. The composition is full of dramatic power; the subject can be none other than the slaying of the hind of Artemis by the impious Agamemnon (Plate VIII.).

The third of these small paintings presents a scene not infrequently met with on Pompeian walls, Orestes and Pylades at Tauris in the presence of King Thoas, and of Iphigenia, who is now a priestess of Artemis. The conception is akin to that of the painting in the house of the Citharist (Fig. 182), but the picture is partially obliterated.

The long stripe below the panels is preserved in more than half its length, on the end wall (3), on that at the right, and on the short sections of the front wall; there is also a fragment on the left side. It contains a series of charming pictures representing Cupids and Psyches. Some of the little creatures are engaged in sports, others are celebrating a festival, while others still are busying themselves with the manifold work of everyday life. The execution is less careful than in the small mythological pictures; yet the figures are so full of life, their movements are so purposeful, and their bearing so suggestive that we seem to
catch the expression of the tiny faces. The Cupids and Psyches, whether playing the part of children or of men and women in elegant attire, whether garland makers or vinedressers or smiths, are always Cupids and Psyches still; we instinctively recognize them as such, not by reason of outward attributes so much as by their bearing. Prosaic daily toil has nowhere been more happily idealized.

The Cupids at the left of the entrance are playing with a duck. One holds the duck under his arm ready to let it go; the other stretches out his hands to catch it as it tries to escape. The group on the other side are throwing at a wooden mark.

One is setting up the target. Two are making ready to throw, one of them being mounted on the back of a companion; the successful contestant in such games was called “the king,” the loser, “the ass,” because he had to carry the others upon his back. A fifth stands ruefully beside the target, awaiting his turn to carry the victor.

Among the most attractive groups are those of the flower dealers, at the end of the right wall near the entrance. First we see the gardener leading to market a goat laden with roses; his little son trudges along behind the animal, carrying a basket of roses suspended from a stick on the left shoulder. Next is the dealer, who stands behind a broad marble table covered with garlands; he is handing two to a youth who already has several, while a Psyche near by is placing the garlands in a basket. Beyond these, workmen are making garlands, which hang in profusion from a wooden frame. At the extreme left is a lady asking the price. One of the workmen holds up two fingers, signifying two asses. The price of a wreath is given in a graffito as three asses (p. 497).

In the following scene Cupids appear as makers and sellers of oil (Fig. 165). At the right is the oil press. It stands upon a square stone, the upper surface of which contains a semicircular incision to catch the oil and carry it to a round vessel standing in front. The two sides, each with a broad vertical opening, and selling oil, make

are securely fastened by a crosspiece at the top. The ends of four horizontal boards are fitted to the openings, in which they move up and down. The olives are placed under the lowest board; in the spaces between the others, and between the upper board and the crosspiece, thick wooden wedges are driven. As the workmen drive in the wedges with heavy mallets, the pressure upon the olives is increased, and the oil is forced out. The arrangement may be more plainly seen in Fig. 166, from a wall painting at Herculaneum, in which a similar press appears.
At the left of the press is a large kettle resting on a tripod. The oil is being stirred as it is heated; a similar kettle appears in the scene in a shop presented in the other part of the picture. Further on are two figures beside a deep vessel, but the process represented is not clear.

The rest of the picture relates to the selling of oil. In the background is a cupboard, with a statuette — possibly an Aphrodite — on the upper shelf. In front is an open chest resting on four legs. Both the cupboard and the box contain bottles and jars of various shapes and sizes for holding oil; a Cupid has just taken one up. On the top of the chest is a roll of papyrus with a pair of scales; oil was sold by weight. A memorandum on the wall of an adjoining house reads: *XIII. K. Fe. oli. p. DCCCXXX*, — January 20, 840 pounds of oil.

The central figure of the group at the left is the lady who has come to make a purchase. A cushioned seat has been placed for her, with a footstool; the maid stands motionless behind, a large fan resting on the right shoulder. The proprietor holds in his right hand a spoon containing a sample which he has just taken from the jar under his arm; the lady seems to be testing the quality on the back of her wrist. The article sold is undoubtedly the fine perfumed oil, not the common variety.

Hardly less animated are the scenes in which Cupids take the place of goldsmiths (Fig. 167). At the right is the furnace, adorned with the head of Hephaestus, the patron divinity of workers in metals. In front is a Cupid with a blowpipe and pincers. Behind it another is working with a graver’s tool upon a large gold vessel. The pose, suggesting at the same time exertion and perfect steadiness, is rendered with remarkable skill.

Next is a figure at a small anvil; then the counter for the sale of jewellery, which is displayed in three open drawers. Be-
work is properly done, and folding the finished garments for
delivery to the owners.

Three of the pictures—two on the end wall and one on the
left side—relate to wine.

The first is a vintage scene (Fig. 168), of which only a part
is distinct. At the left is a Cupid gathering grapes, from vines
trained to run from tree to tree. The press is worked on a
different principle from the one shown in Fig. 165. Here two
Cupids are turning a windlass by means of long levers. The
windlass is connected by a pulley with a press beam above; as
the end of this is gradually lowered, the pressure upon the
grapes underneath is increased.

The triumph of Bacchus is presented in another picture,

![Fig. 168.—Vintage scene: Cupids gathering and pressing grapes.
Wall painting in the house of the Vettii.](image)

which is fortunately in a better state of preservation. At the
head of the procession is a bacchante, riding on a panther.
Bacchus sits in a four-wheeled chariot drawn by goats; the
coachman is a satyr. Behind the triumphal car is Pan, danc-
ing and playing the double flute; last comes a vine-crowned
Cupid, dancing, with a large mixing bowl upon his shoulder.
The skill shown in the pose of the dancing figures is especially
noteworthy; they stand lightly erect, seeming not to feel their
weight or the exertion of rapid movement.

In the last of this series, upon the left wall, Cupids appear
as wine dealers; the part of the picture that has been preserved
is shown in Fig. 169. The rustic bearing of the seller, at the
left, is in pleasing contrast with the free and graceful carriage
of the well-bred buyer, to whom he is handing a sample of the
wine in a cup. At the right two servants are drawing another
sample from an amphora; one tips the amphora so cautiously
that the other, who is holding the bowl, presses the neck gently
with his left hand in order to make the slender stream flow
faster.

Rapidity of movement reaches a climax in the middle picture
of the right wall, which represents the games of the Circus.
The scene is laid in the country; each goal is marked by three
trees. Antelopes take the place of horses, and the groups are
conceived with wonderful realism. The tiny, fluttering gar-
ments of the drivers display the colors of the four parties,—
green, red, white, and blue.

Two of the pictures on the end wall are so damaged that it is
not easy to make out the details. One of them, like that just
described, presents a purely Roman subject—the festival of
Vesta (Fig. 170). Cupids and Psyches are reclining at ease
about a serving table in the shape of a deep platter with two
handles, on which drinking vessels are seen; in the background
are two asses, sacred to Vesta (p. 98). Some, at least, of the
Cupid pictures could not have been taken from Greek origi-

In the atrium also there was a black stripe containing Cupids
similar to those already described, but the figures are not so well
preserved. The most interesting scene represents a sacrifice to
Fortuna. Cupids appear also riding and driving. Some are mounted on goats and engaged in a contest. One stands on a crab, guiding the ungainly creature with reins and plying the whip; another is similarly mounted on a lobster. A few are in chariots, the chariot in one case being drawn by two dolphins.

In each division of the wall of the atrium near the bottom is the half-length figure of a child, painted on a dark red ground. The children are busied with vessels of all kinds, apparently intended for sacrifice. The seriousness of their task, the importance which they attach to their helpfulness, is finely expressed in the faces, which are individualized in the manner of a true artist.

We may dismiss the later paintings of the house with few words. In the fauces (β) are small monochrome panels containing a pair of deer, a cock fight, vases, and a wallet with a herald's staff, attributes of Mercury, who perhaps had a place among the Penates of the house.

In the room at the left of the atrium (ε) is a painting of Cyparissus, the youth beloved of Apollo, with his wounded deer on the ground near him; in another part of the room is the wrestling match between Pan and Eros. Among the figures seen in the architectural framework of the upper division of the wall is Zeus, sitting on his throne, represented as a youth, unbearded; Leda with the swan also appears, and Danaë holding out her robe to catch the golden rain.

The direction of the owner's tastes is perhaps indicated by a painting in the peristyle, at the middle of the wall under the colonnade at the left. It contains a portrait, probably of an author; near by is a manuscript case with rolls of papyrus.

The paintings in the two dining rooms opening on the peristyle, η and ρ, are in a better state of preservation than those of any other part of the house. In the first room, η, the simple and restful decoration surrounding the large pictures is in striking contrast with the pictures themselves, one of which is placed at the middle of each of the three walls. Here we see the infant Hercules strangling the serpents, there Pentheus and the Maenads about to tear him in pieces; the subject of the third painting is the punishment of Dirce, the treatment being not unlike that of the sculptured Farnese group in the Naples Museum.

The decorative effect of the other room, ρ, is more harmonious. The divisions of the wall space, the relation of the three principal paintings to the decorative design, and the distribution of ornament are indicated in our illustration (Plate IX); but no reproduction can do justice to the richness of the coloring.

The painting in the middle panel at the right brings before us Bacchus with his train as they come upon the sleeping Ariadne. On the left wall opposite is Daedalus, pointing out the wooden cow that he has made to Pasiphae, who hands to him a golden arm band. The subject of the third picture is here met with for the first time at Pompeii—the punishment of Ixion.

The tragedy of the scene (Fig. 171) is plainly suggested, but not forced upon the beholder; we see, at the left, only half of the ever revolving wheel to which the wretched victim is bound. The other figures are more prominent and, with one exception, convey no suggestion of pain or sympathy in either pose or expression of face. Nearest the wheel is Hephaestus, who has just fastened Ixion upon it; his pincers, hammer, and anvil are lying upon the ground in the corner. In front of him is Hermes, who, in obedience to the command of Zeus, brought the offender to the place of punishment.

A sad-faced female figure with veiled head sits in the foreground—a personification of the spirit of one who has died, a shade introduced to indicate that the place of punishment is the Underworld. The left hand is involuntarily raised with the shock that the thought of the victim's suffering brings; the face
has been thought by some to resemble that often given to the Madonna.

The two figures at the right of the picture are of the upper world, not directly connected with the main action, yet well con-

ceived and skilfully introduced. Nearer the foreground Hera sits enthroned, her sceptre in her left hand; behind her stands Iris, faithful messenger, who points out to her the well deserved fate of him who dared to offer an affront to the queen of heaven.