CHAPTER LV

THE PAINTINGS

The hanging of pictures upon the walls seems not to have been in vogue at Pompeii during the period to which the remains belong. The system of decoration left no room for framed paintings, and no traces of any such have been discovered. The paintings which have been preserved at Pompeii, not merely the small groups and single figures introduced to enliven the design, but the large compositions as well, all formed a part of the wall decoration.

The number is relatively large. In the catalogue by Helbig, published in 1868, there are nearly two thousand entries, including a few paintings from Herculaneum and other Campanian sites. The supplement compiled by Sogliano in 1879 records more than eight hundred pictures brought to light in the preceding decade. We are probably safe in estimating the whole number of Pompeian paintings still in existence, or known from description, as about thirty-five hundred.

In all this wealth of examples, however, it is not possible to find any evidence of a progressive development either in composition or in technique. There are indeed slight differences, mainly in regard to technical handling and color scheme, which distinguish the paintings found in the decoration of the third style from those of the other two styles in which paintings appear; but, on the other hand, the distinction between those of the second and those of the fourth style is much less marked.

The period from 80 B.C. to 79 A.D. was as little creative in the field of painting as in that of sculpture. No new types appear, no improvements are worked out; the painter, as the sculptor, was an eclectic, who drew upon the creations of the past as suited his fancy, and contented himself with copying or imitating. In
the adaptation of paintings to decorative use the artist reproduced either entire compositions or single motives which seemed to answer his purpose. The general preference was for paintings of the Hellenistic age, after the death of Alexander; yet examples of earlier styles are occasionally found, as the Sacrifice of Iphigenia (Fig. 156) and the dramatic scene in which Orestes and Pylades appear before King Thoas (Fig. 182).

New discoveries and the progress of research will sometime, perhaps, make it possible to present a general survey of the Pompeian paintings from the historical and critical point of view. No such comprehensive treatment is yet possible, however, and we must content ourselves with offering a few observations in regard to the distribution of the paintings among the different decorative styles and the classes of subjects represented.

The Incrustation Style, as previously remarked, left no place for paintings upon the walls. Nevertheless, in isolated cases, we find a simple pictorial representation upon the surface of one of the blocks painted in imitation of marble, as if the veins of the stone had run into a shape suggestive of an object, as a vase or a bird; in one instance, curiously enough, a wrestling match is outlined, between Hercules and Antaeus. In the Tufo Period the desire for paintings was satisfied by the mosaic pictures upon the floor.

The earlier walls of the second style in this respect resemble those of the first; the examples in the house of the Labyrinth have no paintings. The later walls, however, are rich in pictures, but those of Pompeii are not so abundantly adorned as those in Rome (p. 462). The elaborate painting shown in the pavilion frame in Plate XII is exceptional among the Pompeian remains of this style.

The great majority of the paintings are found upon walls of the third and fourth styles. On the older walls of the third style, as we have seen, the principal painting appears in a frame, the design of which is taken from that of the conventional pavilion of the second style. In later examples the close relation between the picture and the frame is no longer maintained; the frame simply encloses a large panel of uniform color, in the middle of which a relatively small picture is seen. This arrangement was carried over into the fourth style, but the conception of a pavilion frame is entirely lost sight of; the painting is in the middle of a large panel of brilliant color, around which the architectural framework is extended. A Pompeian room well decorated in either of the later styles contained four of these prominent paintings, in case there was no door at the middle of one of the sides; if a door interfered, there were only three.

Paintings were also placed in the divisions of the wall at the right and the left of the central panel. In Plate XII we noticed a single figure on either side of the pavilion, but such additions are rare in the second style. In the third style the side panels are uniformly adorned with paintings. In Fig. 263 the small figure in the middle of the panel at the left is a Cupid; frequently a flying swan is seen, or a landscape lightly sketched in monochrome on the ground of the panel. Sometimes the painting is set off by a separate frame; if this is round, a bust is usually represented. Groups of two figures were preferred for the side panels of the fourth style, the favorite subject being a satyr and a bacchante, as in Fig. 265; these sometimes appear as busts, but are more often represented as floating figures.

Characteristic of the fourth style, in respect to the distribution of paintings, is the use of single figures and simple compositions to add life to the fantastic architectural designs in the upper part of the wall and in the divisions between the large panels. Here we may see satyrs and bacchantes, young girls and solemn-visaged men with implements of sacrifice; the figures appear in great variety of type and subject. Sometimes groups are broken up, and the elements of a mythological scene, as that of Admetus and Alcestis, are distributed as single figures in the architectural framework.

At the time of the eruption the fondness for pictorial representations was increasing, and they were being introduced into every part of the decoration, including the frieze of the main part of the wall, the use of which in this way commenced in the time of the third style (Fig. 263), and the stripe below, between the main part of the wall and the base (Fig. 265);
how elaborate this intermediate decoration might become we have already seen in the case of the house of the Vettii.

Frequently in the fourth style the lower part of the architectural framework separating two large panels appears to be closed, as in Plate XIII, by a narrow panel, above which a painting is seen. The pictures found in these places often represent still life. Seafights are also a favorite subject; such may be seen in the temple of Isis, the Macellum, and one of the rooms in the house of the Vettii. Generally on the walls of the fourth style, wherever there is available space, we find small pictures in great variety, the most common being landscapes, simply painted, with the use of few colors.

It is by no means easy to make a satisfactory classification of Pompeian paintings according to subject. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, they may be roughly grouped in four general classes, mythological paintings, genre paintings, landscapes, and still life. Most of the large and important pictures belong to the first class. The mythological paintings will therefore be discussed at somewhat greater length; the other three classes will require only a brief characterization.

The still-life paintings represent all kinds of meat, fish, fowl, and fruits. According to Vitruvius, this kind of picture was called Xenion. The reason given for the name recalls a curious custom of ancient Greece. When a guest, xenos, was received into a Greek home, says this writer, he was invited to sit at the table for one day. After that provisions were furnished to him uncooked, and he prepared his own meals. A portion of unprepared victuals thus came to be called xenion, 'the stranger's portion,' and the name was afterwards transferred to pictures in which such provisions appear. A fruit piece, now in the Naples Museum, is shown in Fig. 266.

Fig. 266.—A fruit piece, Xenion.

Landscapes are numerous and of all sizes. Occasionally a garden wall of the fourth style is covered with a single large painting, in which villas, gardens, roads, and harbors are realistically presented. Such pictures are of Italian origin; the name of the artist who first painted them is probably Sextus Tadius, but the reading of the passage in which the name occurs (Plin. N. H. XXXV. x. 116) is uncertain.

Common to the third and fourth styles are garden scenes, in which, behind a light barrier, the plants of a garden appear, with birds, statues, and fountains. The finest extant example is in the villa of Livia, at Prima Porta, near Rome.

Large landscapes sometimes have a place in the principal panels of the walls. These are all of Hellenistic origin, and are found almost without exception in the decoration of the third style. They generally represent a quiet nook of woodland, with high cliffs; in the foreground is a shrine—perhaps more than one—with figures of men sacrificing or coming to offer worship.

The great majority of the landscapes, however, are introduced into various parts of the decoration outside of the large panels, and are quite small. In them we see little shrines or villas by the seaside; a river with a bridge on which a traveller appears crossing the stream; or buildings on an island or peninsula in the edge of a body of water, as in Fig. 267. Often they are
simply light sketches; now and then one of these small landscapes is painted in a peculiar tint, as if the scene were represented by moonlight.

The genre paintings are of special importance on account of the light they shed on the life and customs of the ancients. A number have already been described or illustrated in the chapter on the house of the Vettii, and in the part devoted to the trades and occupations. To these we should add the picture of an artist in the house of the Surgeon (Fig. 128), and the scenes from the life of the Forum (Figs. 16, 17).

Here belong also the groups in which figures are seen with a roll of papyrus or a writing tablet, suggestive of literary pursuits, and figures with musical instruments. A group of musicians is shown in Fig. 268, in which are four women, one of whom is tuning a couple of stringed instruments to sound in unison.

In the same class are included two small painted busts not infrequently met with, that of a girl with a writing tablet in her left hand holding the end of a stylus against her lips, as if pondering what to write, and that of a young man with one end of a roll of papyrus, in which he has been reading, under his chin. A Pompeian baker, Publius Paquius Proculus, brought these two ideal busts into one painting, substituting for the faces of the youth and maiden those of himself and his wife (Fig. 269). The portraits are realistic, but the faces are not unattractive; that of Proculus seems more kindly and ingenuous than the face of Caecilius Jucundus (Fig. 256).

Two ideal painted busts have recently been found, each of a youth with a roll of papyrus. Their chief interest lies in the
fact that each roll is provided with a narrow tag or label, of the
sort that the Romans called index, on which the names Plato
and Homerus can be plainly read. The two types of face well
 correspond with the trend of taste suggested by the titles: the
delicacy features and upturned gaze of the one indicate a poetic
temperament; the other has a high forehead and an air of
meditation, appropriate for a student of philosophy.

The mythological paintings rarely present rapid movement.
To the few exceptions belong the two familiar pictures placed
opposite each other in the tablinum of the house of Castor
and Pollux, Achilles among the daughters of Lycomedes
on the island of Scyros, and the quarrel between Achilles and
Agamemnon. Only part of the latter painting is preserved,
but both are strong compositions, and are repeated on other
walls.

Scenes of combat, the interest of which lies in the display of
physical force, are still more infrequently met with, and seem
out of harmony with the prevailing taste. Two pictures from
Herculaneum represent Hercules putting forth his strength; in
one he is struggling with the Nemean lion, in the other carrying
the Erymanthian boar. The few paintings of this kind at
Pompeii are badly preserved. In two of them Meleager
appears, engaged in combat with the boar; in another we see
Achilles before the walls of Troy with drawn sword in one
hand, with the other grasping by the hair Troilus, an effemi-
nate Trojan youth, attired in Oriental fashion, who mounted
on his horse is vainly trying to escape; a fourth represents
a combat between a heavy-armed warrior and an Amazon.
But such paintings are the more conspicuous by reason of their
rarity, and those that have thus far been discovered are all
found upon walls of the third style.

A much larger number of mythological compositions repre-
sent a moment of dramatic interest, the artist relying for his
effect upon the bearing and facial expression of the persons
appearing in the scene. The interest is purely psychological,
and several of the pictures that have been preserved give us an
exceedingly favorable idea of the ability of ancient painters to
express emotion, especially when we remember that these paint-
ings are merely decorative copies of masterpieces the originals
of which in most cases had probably never been seen by the
workmen who painted the copies on the walls.

Among the more familiar examples is the face of Orestes in
the painting found in the house of the Citharist (Fig. 182), and
that of Io, watched by Argus, in the Macellum. Emotion is
expressed with even greater skill in the face of Io in a painting
of the temple of Isis. The goddess welcomes the wanderer to
Egypt after her long season of suffering; the traces of the suf-
ferring are clearly seen, yet are illumined by the ineffable and
serene joy of final deliverance.

One of the most beautiful specimens of ancient painting is
a fragment, badly preserved, in the tablinum of the house of
Caecilius Jucundus. The composition probably repre-
sented Priam turning back toward Troy with
the body of Hector, which
he had just ransomed. In
the fragment, shown in
Fig. 270, we see the aged
Hecuba, together with a
daughter or maidservant,
looking with unutterable
anguish from an upper
window down upon the
scene. The gray-haired
queen, whose features still retain much of their youthful beauty,
gazes upon the dust-stained body of her son with grief too deep
for tears.

In the majority of paintings the subjects of which are taken
from myths the characters are represented either in a relation of
rest, not suggestive of intense emotion, or in a lasting situation
of dramatic interest, which is devoid of momentary excitement
and does not suggest the display of evanescent feeling. The
situation is sometimes cheerful, sometimes calculated to arouse
sympathy; if the characters were not mythological, the scenes
might pass for those of everyday life. Thus we see Narcissus
looking at the reflection of his face in a clear spring in the forest; Polyphemus, on the seashore, receiving from the hands of a Cupid a letter sent by Galatea; and Apollo playing on the lyre for Admetus, while the herd grazes around him.

To the same series of cheerful or idyllic pictures belong the Selene hovering over the sleeping Endymion; Paris and Oenone on Mt. Ida, Paris cutting the name of his sweetheart in the bark of a tree; and Perseus with Andromeda looking at the reflection of the head of Medusa in a pool. With these we may class also the representations of Bacchus as he moves along with his rollicking band and suddenly comes upon the sleeping Ariadne; and Hercules with Omphale, sometimes sitting in woman's attire beside her and spinning, sometimes staggering in his cups or lying drunk upon the ground while she stands or sits near him.

Examples of a pathetic situation are equally abundant. We find Aphrodite caring for the wounded Adonis, and Cyparissus grieving over the dead stag. The pathos of the scene, however, is not always so obviously suggested. The familiar painting of Europa represents the maiden playfully sitting upon the bull, which one of her girlish companions is caressing. The situation, from one point of view, is idyllic, yet it brings to mind the unhappy fate of the girl, borne far away from home over the sea to a distant land, and the effect is heightened by giving her a wonderfully beautiful form.

Not infrequently a similar result is produced by placing figures of incongruous type in sharp contrast; so in the oft-repeated composition in which the beautiful Thetis in elegant attire sits in the workshop of Hephaestus, looking at the shield which the rough and grimy smith is finishing for Achilles. In another composition Pasiphaë is seen in the shop of Daedalus, who points out the wooden cow; and a similar idea of contrast must have been present in the mind of the artist who painted Danaë after she had been cast ashore in a chest on the island of Seriphus, sitting on the beach with little Perseus in her lap, while two fishermen standing near make inquiry concerning her strange fate.

The symmetrical arrangement of the paintings in a Pompeian room can hardly have failed to influence the choice of compositions for the principal panels, especially in cases in which mythological scenes were to be represented. Sometimes, though not so frequently as might have been expected, pictures were grouped according to subject. We have already noticed the relation of two paintings, in the house of Castor and Pollux, in which Achilles is the principal figure. The first of these, Achilles among the daughters of Lycomedes, is found in a room of another house in a group of three; one of the companion pieces represents Thetis in the smithy of Hephaestus looking at the weapons which are being made for Achilles, while in the other she is seen riding over the sea on a Triton, bringing them to her son. There is another group of three pictures related by subject in a room in the house of the Vetti; they belong to the Theban cycle, and represent the infant Hercules strangling the serpents, the death of Pentheus, and the binding of Dirce.

Similarity of scene and of treatment influenced the selection of paintings for a room much more often than unity of subject. A good illustration is the pair of pictures several times found together, one of which represents Polyphemus on the beach receiving from a Cupid a letter written by Galatea; in the other Aphrodite is seen on the seashore fishing, with Cupids all about her. The suggestion of Love is common to both paintings, but the juxtaposition of the two as counterparts is due to the similarity of scene. Opposite the picture of Europa referred to above, is a Pan playing on his pipe, with nympha around him; the two pictures, which appear in a room of the third style, from the decorative point of view form an effective pair.

A sleeping room of the same style — though in respect to grouping no difference between the styles is apparent — offers an interesting example of a double group. The four principal paintings form two pairs. In one pair we see, on one side, Hercules in the garden of the Hesperides approaching an altar around which three maidens are standing; on the other, a shrine of Artemis in a forest with three worshippers drawing near, one of whom brings a garland. The two pictures harmonize in the character of the scenery and in the arrangement of the figures.

The effectiveness of the other pair as a decorative counterpart can be seen in our illustrations; the subject of one of the
paintings is the fate of the pipes which Athena cast aside (Fig. 271), and of the other the fall of Icarus (Fig. 272).

In the first of the two pictures we have one of the few extant examples of a kind of painting associated with the name of Philostratus, in which different scenes representing the successive stages of an action are united in one composition.

In the foreground at the left sits Athena, with her shield on the ground beside her, playing the double pipe; a nymph in front rising from the surface of a stream holds up a mirror in which the goddess may see her face reflected as she plays.

The next two scenes lie just across the brook. At the foot of the cliff sits the divinity of the country, Phrygia, in which the story of Marsyas is localized.

Above, at the left, we see the satyr with a shepherd's crook in his left hand blowing a Pan's pipe; he has not yet espied the pipes thrown away by Athena.

At the right he appears again, near the tree, having found the pipes discarded by the goddess and picked them up. Lastly, in the middle of the background, we see him playing the pipes in the presence of the Muses, who are serving as judges in the contest of skill between the satyr and Apollo.

The final scene with the flaying of Marsyas, which was sometimes represented in sculpture, and appears also in several Pompeian paintings, is here omitted.

The inner connection of the other picture is not so clear. It is perhaps a confused form of a composition in which Icarus, lying on the ground after his fall, was the central figure; the local divinities and natives of the region were looking upon the body of the hapless youth with pity; while Daedalus, hovering in the air above, was trying to find the spot where he had fallen.

Our artist, however, thinking to heighten the effect, represented Icarus as plunging headlong through the air, with the result shown in the illustration; neither Daedalus nor the figures in the foreground seem yet to have become aware of the catastrophe.

We can in no way more appropriately bring to a close our brief survey of the Pompeian paintings than by presenting a reproduction of the scene in which Zeus and Hera appear on
Mt. Ida (Fig. 273). This painting has been sufficiently discussed in another connection (pp. 316-317); though preserved in a damaged condition, it clearly represents an original of no slight merit.