PART VI

THE INSCRIPTIONS OF POMPEII

CHAPTER LVI

IMPORTANCE OF THE INSCRIPTIONS.—MONUMENTAL
INSRIPTIONS AND PUBLIC NOTICES

The inscriptions discovered at Pompeii number more than six thousand. They cover a wide field, ranging from commemorative tablets put up at public expense to the scribblings of idlers upon the plastered walls. It would be an exaggeration to say that they contribute to our knowledge of antiquity much that is new; their value lies rather in the insight which they give into the life of the city and its people.

In one respect the evidence derived from inscriptions, though often of the most fragmentary character, is especially satisfactory. We feel that we are handling original documents, without the intervention of that succession of copyists which stands between the author of a Greek or Roman masterpiece and the modern reader. The shapes of the letters and the spelling are just as they were left by the stonecutter or the scribbler; the various handwritings can still be as plainly distinguished on the charred tablets of Caecilius Jucundus as though the signatures were witnessed only yesterday. Through the inscriptions we are brought into contact with the personality of the Pompeians as in no other way.

The inscriptions may be classified either according to the subject matter or according to the form in which they appear, whether cut in stone, or painted, or scratched upon a smooth surface with a stylus. No detailed classification need be given here; it will be sufficient for our purposes to discuss the main divisions briefly under four heads,—monumental inscriptions and
public notices, graffiti, and inscriptions relating to business affairs.

Monumental inscriptions include those which are cut in hard material and are intended to be read by all who see them. They are found at Pompeii chiefly in or upon public buildings, on pedestals of statues and on sepulchral monuments. They are characterized by extreme brevity. A few are in the Oscan language, the rest are in Latin. The more important examples have been presented in the preceding pages in connection with the monuments to which they belong. A list of them is given in the Index under "Inscriptions."

The public notices are painted upon the walls along the sides of the streets, ordinarily in a bright red color; a few are in black. The most important are the election notices, in which a candidate is recommended for a public office. These are about sixteen hundred in number, and the names of more than a hundred different candidates appear in them.

The election notices fall into two classes, distinguished both by the style of writing and by the manner of expression,—earlier, from the time of the Republic, and later, belonging to the Imperial period. The shapes of the letters in those of the former class are irregular, and bear the mark of an unpractised hand. The later notices, on the contrary, have a more finished appearance; they are executed in a kind of calligraphic style that suggests the employment of skilled clerks who made the painting of electoral recommendations a part of their business. We have already met with the name of one painter of notices who signed his work, Aemilius Celer (p. 223). His house has been discovered, near the northeast corner of the ninth Region; it was identified by means of an inscription painted on the outside: Aemilius Celer hic habitat,—'Aemilius Celer lives here.'

The language of the earlier recommendations is of the simplest. We find the name of the candidate with no suggestion of praise excepting occasionally the letters v. b., for virum bonum, 'good man.' The name of the office is given in an abbreviated form, but that of the person who makes the recommendation nowhere appears. In one example the elements of the common formula o. v. f., for oros vos, facite, are given almost in full: M. Marium acd. facii., oros vos.—'Make Marcus Marius acdile, I beg of you.' The following notice appears on Stabian Street in letters nearly 8 inches high: P. FVR. II. V. · B. · O. · F, that is Publum Furius duumvirum, virum bonum, oros vos, facite,—'Make Publius Furius duumvir, I beg of you; he's a good man.'

Some of the later election notices are almost equally brief, presenting merely the name of the candidate, the office for which he is recommended, and the formula o. v. f., as in this instance: Herennius Celsum acd[item] o. v. f.,—'Make Herennius Celsus acdile, I beg of you.' Occasionally even the formula is omitted, and we have simply the name of the candidate and of the office, both invariably in the accusative case, as Casellium acd., which appears in several places, and M. Holconium Prisci
cum II. vir. i. d.

More frequently the recommendation includes a reference to the good qualities of the candidate. Sometimes he is simply styled 'a good man,' as in the earlier notices; but the most common formula in this connection is d. v. p., for dignum re publica, 'worthy of public office.' In some instances the characterization is more definite. More than one candidate is affirmed to be 'an upright young man' (iuvemn probum), or 'a youth of singular modesty' (vercundissimum iuvem). In regard to one aspirant for office we are informed that 'he will be the watch-dog of the treasury'—hic aerarium conservabit.

The names of those who make the recommendations often appear in the later notices. Now and then individuals assume the responsibility, as Vesonius Primus (p. 396), and Acceptus and Euhodia (p. 341), who were undoubtedly owners of the property on which the notices appear. Thus the candidate's neighbors are sometimes represented as favoring his election, as in the case of Claudius Verus: Ti. Claudium Verum II. vir. vicini rogant,—'His neighbors request the election of Tiberius Claudius Verus as duumvir.' Electoral recommendations are painted on all sides of the house of Verus—the extensive establishment in the ninth Region known as the house of the Centenary.

The class of election notices in which we find the members of
a craft united in the support of a candidate has been sufficiently
illustrated in another connection (p. 384). To these we may
add a recommendation found on a wall facing the temple of
Isis: *Cn. Helvius Sabinum aed. Isiaci universi rog* [ant],—"The
worshippers of Isis, as a body, request the election of Gnaeus
Helvius Sabinus as aedile." A suburb also might have a can-
didate, as in the following instance: *M. Epidius Sabinum aed.
Campaniensis rog.*, — "The inhabitants of the Pagus Campanus
ask for the election of Marcus Epidius Sabinus as aedile."

Sometimes all those who are engaged in an occupation are
urged to support a candidate. "Innkeepers, make Sallustius
Capito aedile," we read in one notice. In others, various classes
of citizens having a common bond, as the ballplayers, and the
dealers in perfumes, are exhorted to work for the election of a
candidate presumably favorable to their interests. In one in-
tance there is a direct appeal to an individual, involving a
pledge of future support: *Sabinum aed [ilem], Proculo, fac, et
ille te faciet, — "Proculus, make Sabinus aedile, and he will do
as much for you."

In view of the deep interest in the municipal elections, re-
vealed by these notices, it is not surprising to find that the
support of a candidate by a man of unusual prominence was
extensively advertised. In three different parts of the city the
attention of voters was directed to the fact that Suedius Clemens,
the commissioner sent by Vespasian to decide the ownership of
certain plots of ground (p. 407), favored the election of Epidius
Sabinus as duumvir. One of the notices reads: *M. Epidium
Sabinum II. vir. iur. dic. o. v. f., dignum iuvenem, Suedius
Clemens sanctissimus index facit vicinis rogantibus, — "At the
request of the neighbors, Suedius Clemens, most upright judge, is
working for the election of Marcus Epidius Sabinus, a worthy
young man, as duumvir with judicial authority. He begs of
you to elect this candidate."

So public a method of pressing a candidacy put a formidable
weapon into the hands of the candidate's enemies, and the form
of a recommendation was sometimes used against an office
seeker with telling effect. *Vatiam aed. furunculi rog.*, — "The
sneak thieves request the election of Vatia as aedile," we find

conspicuously painted on a wall on Augustales Street. Accord-
ing to other notices near by, 'The whole company of late
drinkers' (*seribibi universi*) and 'all the people who are asleep'
(*dormientes universi*) favored the candidacy of the same un-
happy Vatia. The last notice which we shall present in this
connection may have been painted on the order of the girl who
appears in it: *Claudium II. vir. animula factet, — 'His little
sweetheart is working for the election of Claudius as duumvir.'
The reference is probably to the Tiberius Claudius Verus men-
tioned above.

The other kinds of public notices are represented by rela-
tively few examples. Of special interest are the announcements
of gladiatorial combats, which were discussed in a previous
chapter (p. 221). Next in importance are perhaps the advertise-
ments of buildings to rent. One of these, relating to the Ele-
phant Inn, has already been mentioned (p. 408). We present
here two others, which have to do with large properties. The
first, which has now disappeared, was painted on a wall in the
sixth Region, at the south end of the third Insula. It reads as
follows: —

INSULA ARRIANA

POLLIANA CN. ALLEI NIGIDI MAI

LOCANTUR EX K[ALENDIS] IULIS PRIMIS TABERNAE

CUM PERGULIS SUIS ET CENACULA

EQUESTRIA ET DOMUS CONDUCTOR

CONVENTO PRIMUM, CN. ALLEI

NIGIDI MAI SER[UM].

'To rent, from the first day of next July, shops with the floors
over them, fine upper chambers, and a house, in the Arrius
Pollio block owned by Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius. Pro-
spective lessees may apply to Primus, slave of Gnaeus Alleius
Nigidius Maius.'

The word *equestria*, translated 'fine,' is used colloquially with
cenacula, in the sense 'fit for a knight.' The Insula named
after Arrius Pollio was thought by Fiorelli to be the so-called
house of Pansa, across the street from the block on which the
advertisement was found. The identification may be correct,
but a notice painted in so prominent a place might refer to a block in any part of the city.

The following inscription was found in the last century near the Amphitheatre, on a wall of the extensive establishment named from it the villa of Julia Felix:—

IN PRAEDIS IULIAE SP. F. FELICIS
LOCANTUR
BALNEUM VENERIUM ET NONGENTUM, TABERNAE, PERGULAE,
CENACULA EX IDIBUS AUG. PRIMIS IN IDUS AUG. SEXTAS, ANNOS
CONTINUOS QUINQUE
S. Q. D. L. E. N. C.

'To let, for the space of five years, from the thirteenth day of next August to the thirteenth day of the sixth August thereafter, the Venus bath, fitted up for the best people, shops, rooms over shops, and second story apartments in the property owned by Julia Felix, daughter of Spurius.'

The bath may have received its name from Venus Pompeiana. The word nongentum is difficult to understand. The interpretation given is based upon a passage of Pliny the Elder, from which we understand that in colloquial language the knights were known as 'the nine hundred.' A bath 'of the nine hundred' would then be one designed to attract the patronage of the best people. The seven letters at the end of the inscription have not yet been satisfactorily explained.

Advertisements of articles lost or found are also met with. A notice in regard to a stray horse, painted on one of the tombs east of the Amphitheatre, is given on p. 436. On the east side of Insula VIII. v.—vi. we read:—

VRNA AENIA PEREIT DE TABerna
SEVIS · REPTVLERIT DABVNTVR
HS LXV. SEI. FVREM
DABIT · VND

'A copper pot has been taken from this shop. Whoever brings it back will receive 65 sesterces. If any one shall hand over the thief'... (the rest of the inscription is illegible).