

Pompeii was partly destroyed by two earthquakes in the year 63 A.D. Its inhabitants were still engaged in rebuilding the injured portion, when, on August 24, 79, a great eruption of Vesuvius overwhelmed the city and the adjacent towns of Herculaneum and Stabiae. So sudden was the outbreak that the escape of the people was prevented. A dense cloud of black smoke burst forth from the crater, and settled thickly over the town, plunging it in complete darkness. A dense rain of thin light ashes followed, and then showers of hot stones, mingled with masses of lava giving off mephitic gases. Meanwhile great rivers of black lava poured irresistibly down the mountain sides, filling the streets and cutting off the exit of those who had taken refuge in cellars; while others, who were attempting to leave the city by the gates, were blinded by the drifting ashes and overcome by the sulphurous vapors. For three days this terrible infliction continued; and then, when the smoke dispersed, where once was a beautiful town was but an arid mass of ashes, pumicestone, and hardened mud.

Centuries went by. The rich volcanic soil became covered with a profusion of vegetation, and a new town sprang up over the buried city, only to be destroyed by earthquake four hundred years after the great eruption. Pompeii then existed only in tradition; and this located the lost city several miles from the uninhabited plain under which it was eventually discovered. In the middle of the last century, the finding of relics in the vicinity induced the government to undertake systematic excavations. An inscription was soon unearthed establishing the fact that the true Pompeii had undoubtedly been found: and since that time the work of uncovering the buildings has been slowly and carefully carried on.

A fine series of engravings, from "Italian Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil," presented herewith, give an excellent idea both of the appearance of the excavation and the manner of conducting the work. Fortunately the material which chiefly covered the city was not lava, which would have set like stone after probably burning paintings and melting objects in metal, but a fine light ash, which insinuated itself into the minutest crevices, and even through porous earthenware. The writer assisted in opening a large wine jar still bearing the seals placed over its mouth at the time of filling. The white ashes had replaced the wine, and had made their way through pottery of close texture and now harder than stone. Generally, however, the presence of ashes has proved a positive advantage, because in opening a street for example, as shown in Fig. 1, they are easily dug out and removed; while by packing closely around perishable objects they have formed perfect moulds, retaining the form of the objects after the same have wholly decayed and disappeared. The work of removing the *débris* from a room is represented in Fig. 2. It is not frequently that articles are found at a height above four feet from the floor, as their weight naturally carries them downward through the soft mass of ashes. The digging is therefore rapidly prosecuted until the above uniform level is attained. Then shovels and picks are put aside, and the ashes are taken out by handfuls, each workman carefully crumbling the material to powder before rejecting it. As soon as the experienced eye of any workman recognizes the indications of a mould being formed in the ashes, labor near that point is stopped, and tamping irons are cautiously inserted to make two or three vents in the cavity. Then liquid plaster is poured in; and after being left sufficiently long to harden, the ashes are taken away and the cast removed. Fig. 9 is from a photograph of casts thus obtained. The bodies are those of two women, apparently poor people, as on the finger of one an iron ring was found. The elder one has the limbs drawn up as if in agony; the other, a girl probably of fifteen years of age, is more composed. One of the hands is half open, as if holding something. The texture of the dress is exactly reproduced, even to the stitches of the seams.

It is believed that of the inhabitants of Pompeii thousands perished. Many hand in hand groped their way through the streets, and so escaped to the open country. At the chief gate there stood a sentinel, who sternly kept his post through the thunders of that dreadful day. He died in harness. Planted in his sentry box, he covered his mouth with his tunic, and held on against the choking and sulphurous shower. But the ashes fell and fell, and finally filled the box, and buried the soldier alive, still grasping his weapon in one hand and veiling his mouth with the other. There, after ages of rest, he was found—a grisly skeleton clutching a rusty sword.

Sad discoveries were made in the street leading to that gate. There were two skeletons locked in close embrace, the teeth perfect, indicating youth in its prime: skeletons of a young man

and maid. They had fallen together in their flight, and death had wedded them. There was a mother with her three children hand in hand, who tried vainly to outrun death. Perhaps the mother singly might have done it, but she could not leave her children. Plenty of food for sad thought is furnished in remembering that six hundred skeletons have already been exhumed!—many in such positions and circumstances as to suggest very touching episodes accompanying the final catastrophe. Of the family of Diomed, seventeen persons were stifled in a wine cellar wellstocked with amphoræ of wine, some of which bore the date of the vintage. The fugitives in their agony of fear stood all huddled in a corner. One swooning girl fell forwards on to the bed of ashes that had drifted in. She left the impress of her bosom in the drift like a seal in softened wax.

An interesting little circumstance is connected with one of these houses. The skeleton of a dove was found in a niche overlooking the garden. Like the sentinel, she had kept to her post, sat on her nest through all the storm, and from beneath her was taken the egg she would not leave.

The shops and taverns which have been exhumed are very interesting as illustrating the domestic life of the people. Fig. 5 represents the interior of a baker's shop. Eighteen hundred years ago, the baker, having placed his loaves in the oven, had closed the iron door, when he had to fly for his life. A few years since the batch was drawn. The loaves are jet black, and of stony hardness; but the marks of the baker's fingers show plainly on them. In an eating house were found raisins, olives, onions, figs, fish cooked in oil, and other articles of food, some retaining their natural appearance and all plainly recognizable. It is a curious fact that a precisely similar mode of cookery prevails in the modern Italian villages to that indicated by the utensils and prepared food found in Pompeii; and in some instances vessels have been found which might at the present day be put to their original use, as they differ little from those now employed. In one eating house, for instance, is a dresser of brickwork in which are large metal and earthenware vessels for soup, with furnaces to keep it warm and ladles to distribute it, precisely as are used in modern restaurants. Amphoræ of wine are marked with the year of the vintage, the characteristic quality, and the name of the wine merchant from whom they were purchased. Taverns are indicated by checkers on the doorpost, or by a sign painted on the wall. The streets are paved with solid blocks of stone worn in deep ruts by chariot wheels; and at one drinking fountain, where slaves stooped and drank from the flowing spout, on the edge of the trough is a spot worn smooth by the pressure of the many hands that rested against it.

The dwellings for the most part are small and low, few exceeding two stories. They have little ornamentation externally, and are well adapted to a people accustomed to pass most of the day in the open air. The upper stories, being of wood, with flat roofs, were speedily consumed; but as those portions of the house were generally used as storerooms or apartments for servants, their loss is of little consequence. The ground apartments have escaped serious injury; and on their walls some of the frescoes appear as brilliant as if recently painted. Figs. 6, 7, and 8 afford an excellent idea of the various objects found in the dwellings, as well as of their remarkable state of preservation. Fig. 6 shows a collection of cooking utensils. It is hardly necessary to call attention to the colander, the frying pan, and the forks and spoons, as being the same as those now used. Gold ornaments, copied from the designs shown in Fig. 7, are now quite common; and many of the terra cotta lamps depicted in Fig. 8 have served as suggestions for the pattern of modern gas fixtures.

The walls of the city, which have been traced throughout their full extent, indicate that an irregular oval area of about two miles in circumference was occupied. It has generally been supposed that the population was 20,000 to 50,000, but according to Signor Fiorelli, the general superintendent of the excavations, Pompeii had not more than 12,000 inhabitants at the time of the eruption. Eight gates have been discovered, and the roads outside of them were lined on each side with tombs of considerable size and architectural pretension. The Street of Tombs, before the gate of Herculaneum, Fig. 3, was probably the principal burial place of the city; and the sepulchral monuments adorning it give evidence of the refined taste and great wealth of prominent Pompeians. The streets, which for the most part run in regular lines, are with some exceptions barely wide enough to admit a single vehicle. The widest does not exceed 30 feet in breadth, and few exceed 22 feet. Five of the main streets have been partially or wholly traced; and with these a regular system of minor streets appear to have been connected. These thorough-