

**THE VESTAL; OR, A
TALE OF POMPEII**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649391271

The vestal; or, A tale of Pompeii by Anonymous

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ANONYMOUS

**THE VESTAL; OR, A
TALE OF POMPEII**

DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, TO WIT.

District Clerk's Office.

BE it remembered, that on the thirteenth day of September, A.D. 1890, in the fifty-fifth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Gray & Bowen, of the said district, have deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

"The Vestal, or a Tale of Pompeii.

Oh Time! thou beautifier of the dead,
Adorn'er of the ruin,

Amidst this wreck, where thou hast made a shrine
And temple more divinely dwelt,
Among thy mightier offerings here are mine.

CHARLES HAROLD."

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned"; and also to an act, entitled, "An act supplementary to an act, entitled, 'An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned,' and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

JNO. W. DAVIS,

Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.

CAMBRIDGE:

E. W. METCALF AND COMPANY.

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1764

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PREFACE.

At the outset of a tale like the following, it seems proper to state in what particulars actual facts have been departed from. In the description of places and things, I have rigidly followed the facts, as ascertained by the most accurate description that could be obtained on the spot, aided by personal examination, except in two instances; viz. there is no temple of Vesta yet discovered, nor are there subterranean passages beneath the city, like the catacombs of Rome and Naples. The house of the Vestals, however, exists there precisely as described. The house of Diomedes is the first show upon entering the street of tombs, and is well known to all who have visited this most interesting city. The forums, the temples, the tombs, the houses, are precisely as described. I have altered no inscriptions, and have changed no names. Pompeii as she now is, has sat for the portrait of what she once was. In the house of Diomedes, and the sepulchral chamber of Saturninus, as will be noticed, I have even retained the actual names of the owners; and in the houses that I have had occasion to describe, I have selected particular ones, which will be readily recognised by those who have visited Pompeii. A more minute account of these houses will be found in the notes. The theatres, the amphitheatre, the prisons, the quarters of the soldiers, the basilica,—all in short are unchanged from the facts.

But in the following tale I have not only entered the houses of the Pompeians, I have even occupied their very

bones. The character of the priest of Isis is built upon the manner in which his bones were found; and they may seem to afford but a narrow basis for the superstructure reared upon them. He might himself smile perhaps, could he look over the pages of this veracious history, and compare himself as delineated here, with what he actually was. He might smile—he probably would not blush. His virtues are his own—his failings are those of the times, of situation, of paganism, and as there is good reason to believe, of the Pompeian priests of Isis.

With regard to dates, I have taken some liberty. Pompeii was buried A. D. 79, under the reign of Titus. The day of the month I find variously stated; Pliny in his letter to Tacitus, mentioning the 28th of August, another the 1st of November, another the 23d of November, &c. It is sufficiently evident that it was at the time the inhabitants were laying in their winter stock of fruits, yet I have thought it probable that Pliny's date was most likely to be correct. Domitian succeeded Titus, A. D. 81; and the second persecution of the Christians under that emperor, took place A. D. 95. It is to this period that I have found it convenient to defer the eruption.

Pompeii is situated on a plain at the distance of six or seven miles from the summit of Vesuvius; and as we sit in the amphitheatre looking towards the mountain, it is with difficulty we can realize the possibility of such a city being buried by ashes thrown from such a distance. At present but one fifth part of Pompeii is disinterred. Lying on the "banks of the sea, which wound round two of its sides, it formed a peninsula. At the part towards the amphitheatre the shore made a curve which extended to Stabia. Here was its port, in a basin formed by the embouchure of the Sarnus.

INTRODUCTION.

PERHAPS it will not be considered as using too strong language to say, that the whole world presents not another remnant of antiquity of equal interest with that of the ancient city of Pompeii. After a period of nearly two thousand years, when history has become almost a fable, and fable is registered with the chronicles of history,—when facts and legends, in the long line of time, have become blended together, as the outlines of the far-off mountaintops fade into the perpetual clouds that rest upon them, there is a sensation of inexpressible interest and delight in the feeling with which we view this astonishing preservation of antiquity; almost realizing the fairy tale that delighted our childhood, in which the sleeping princess, who had wounded her hand with a spindle, with her whole court was put to sleep; and when, after the lapse of many years, the enchantment was broken, they all awoke as young as when they first slept, and all instantly recommenced the avocations that occupied them at the moment of the enchantment, unconscious of the lapse of years, or of the changes of the world around them.

To one emerging from the noise and bustle of Naples, a dreamy, melancholy repose seems to brood over this ill-fated city. The ashes that buried it, covered with soil, are sprinkled with vines and flowers, that seem like those scattered upon the grave. There is enough here to ex-

cite contemplation in the lightest and the gayest mind. On entering the limits of this sepulchre of a city, we seem to have stepped back over a space of two thousand years. We are transported at once from modern times to the days of our Saviour and of his apostles. The curtain that separated the past from the present is taken away, and we breathe and move among realized dreams and fables.

Among the first of our schoolboy labors, is the study of ancient history; and when by dint of spur and whip we toil heavily along through labored accounts of wars and men, temples and statues, gods and manners, so long before our day, we scarcely realize that history is other than a fable, pleasing or otherwise, according as which of our principal extremities did or suffered most actively at that period in the cause of learning.

Accordingly, the moment we set our foot in Pompeii, we are in a world of illusions. The temples and the gods are before us. The altars are still reeking as it were from the sacrifice. The bones of the victims are around them. Household utensils, ornaments, provisions, lie carelessly about, as if just left by the inmates of the house. In the temples we see the secret passage and chamber, running behind the altar and beneath the base of the statue of the god, whence the sacred oracles could be uttered by the priest. They have no secrets from us now. We are not merely informed of their general history, but are admitted in *penetratio*. We may enter the family circle, and witness its domestic economy; we may see their wealth, refinement, mode of life, furniture, the Lares and Penates, nay, the very remnants of the half-eaten meal, with the vessels overturned around them. Amphoræ still recline against the walls of the cellar. Loaves of bread bear the name of the baker stamped on them, while the stamps themselves which were used for this purpose, and which have likewise been found, inspire only surprise

that with so near an approach to the art of printing, that art should not have been discovered. We see, in short, their traces in every object, fresh as if left but yesterday—strange as two thousand years can make them.

But amid the interest that all this excites in the mind of the visitor, there is blended a feeling of disappointment and surprise, at perceiving not only how few are the boasted improvements of modern times, but absolutely how little we have changed. The world seems to have been running in a circle, and mistaking motion for progress. Household utensils, children's toys, ornaments, culinary apparatus, the fine arts and the mechanic arts (in both which last they are even capable of being our masters), with the luxury of their dwellings, all serve to fill us with surprise, and prove to us how much less have been our improvements than we have been in the habit of boasting and believing.

I have sometimes fancied that something even of individual character may be gathered from the situation and circumstances in which the skeletons are found. Thus in the temple of Isis, one of the priests was found at table, in the refectory of the temple. He had been dining, and the relics of his meal lay before him. The dishes were overturned on the table; and his own bones lay scattered beneath his seat. He must have been a gourmand. In another cell of the same temple, was one who had lain down and died quietly on his bed;—and still another who had remained in his cell, till, probably, unable to open the door, from the collection of ashes without. Then, in his desperate frenzy, he had seized a hatchet, and endeavoured to beat through the solid brick wall. The wall still remains marred and beaten, an evidence of his violent struggle for life; while on the floor beneath lay the bones of the unfortunate priest, his hatchet still grasped in his skeleton hand. Five skeletons were found not far