

JENNIE HALL

BURIED CITIES: POMPEII,
OLYMPIA, MYCENAE
(COMPLETE)

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Olympia, Mycenae (Complete)**

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Olympia, Mycenae (Complete)

BURIED CITIES
BY
JENNIE HALL

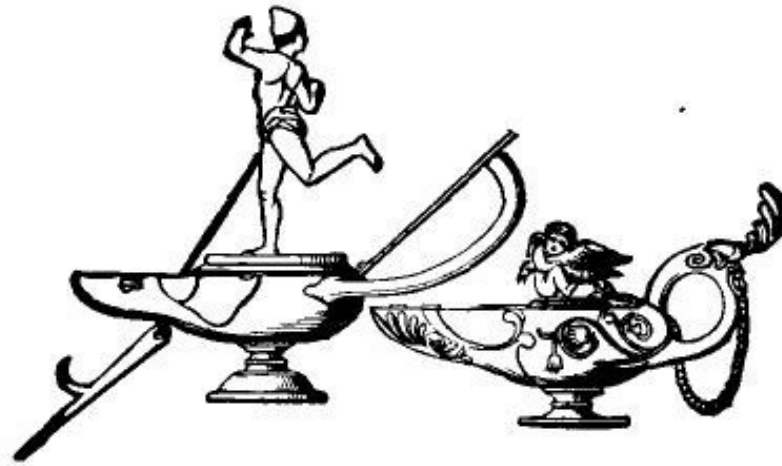
The publishers are grateful to the estate of Miss Jennie Hall and to her many friends for assistance in planning the publication of this book. Especial thanks are due to Miss Nell C. Curtis of the Lincoln School, New York City, for helping to finish Miss Hall's work of choosing the pictures, and to Miss Irene I. Cleaves of the Francis Parker School, Chicago, who wrote the captions. It was Miss Katharine Taylor, now of the Shady Hill School, Cambridge, who brought these stories to our attention.

FOREWORD: TO BOYS AND GIRLS

Do you like to dig for hidden treasure? Have you ever found Indian arrowheads or Indian pottery? I knew a boy who was digging a cave in a sandy place, and he found an Indian grave. With his own hands he uncovered the bones and skull of some brave warrior. That brown skull was more precious to him than a mint of money. Another boy I knew was making a cave of his own. Suddenly he dug into an older one made years before. He crawled into it with a leaping heart and began to explore. He found an old carpet and a bit of burned candle. They proved that some one had lived there. What kind of a man had he been and what kind of life had he lived—black or white or red, robber or beggar or adventurer? Some of us were walking in the woods one day when we saw a bone sticking out of the ground. Luckily we had a spade, and we set to work digging. Not one moment was the tool idle. First one bone and then another came to light and among them a perfect horse's skull. We felt as though we had rescued Captain Kidd's treasure, and we went home draped in bones.

Suppose that instead of finding the bones of a horse we had uncovered a gold-wrapped king. Suppose that instead of a deserted cave that boy had dug into a whole buried city with theaters and mills and shops and beautiful houses. Suppose that instead of picking up an Indian arrowhead you could find old golden vases and crowns and bronze swords lying in the earth. If you could be a digger and a finder and could choose your find, would you choose a marble statue or a buried bakeshop with bread two thousand years old still in the oven or a king's grave filled with golden gifts? It is of such digging and such finding that this book tells.

POMPEII



Line Art of Bronze Lamp. Caption: *Bronze Lamps*.
The bowl held olive oil. A wick came out at the nozzle.
These lamps gave a dim and smoky light.

THE GREEK SLAVE AND THE LITTLE ROMAN BOY

Ariston, the Greek slave, was busily painting. He stood in a little room with three smooth walls. The fourth side was open upon a court. A little fountain splashed there. Above stretched the brilliant sky of Italy. The August sun shone hotly down. It cut sharp shadows of the columns on the cement floor. This was the master's room. The artist was painting the walls. Two were already gay with pictures. They showed the mighty deeds of warlike Herakles. Here was Herakles strangling the lion, Herakles killing the hideous hydra, Herakles carrying the wild boar on his shoulders, Herakles training the mad horses. But now the boy was painting the best deed of all—Herakles saving Alcestis from death. He had made the hero big and beautiful. The strong muscles lay smooth in the great body. One hand trailed the club. On the other arm hung the famous lion skin. With that hand the god led Alcestis. He turned his head toward her and smiled. On the ground lay Death, bruised and bleeding. One batlike black wing hung broken. He scowled after the hero and the woman. In the sky above him stood Apollo, the lord of life, looking down. But the picture of the god was only half finished. The figure was sketched in outline. Ariston was rapidly laying on paint with his little brushes. His eyes glowed with Apollo's own fire. His lips were open, and his breath came through them pantingly.

“O god of beauty, god of Hellas, god of freedom, help me!” he half whispered while his brush worked.

For he had a great plan in his mind. Here he was, a slave in this rich Roman's house. Yet he was a free-born son of Athens, from a family of painters. Pirates had brought him here to Pompeii, and had sold him as a slave. His artist's skill had helped him, even in this cruel land. For his master, Tetreius, loved beauty. The Roman had soon found that his young Greek slave was a painter. He had said to his steward:

“Let this boy work at the mill no longer. He shall paint the walls of my private room.”

So he had talked to Ariston about what the pictures should be. The Greek had found that this solemn, frowning Roman was really a kind man. Then hope had sprung up in his breast and had sung of freedom.

“I will do my best to please him,” he had thought. “When all the walls are beautiful, perhaps he will smile at my work. Then I will clasp his knees. I will tell him of my father, of Athens, of how I was stolen. Perhaps he will send me home.”

Now the painting was almost done. As he worked, a thousand pictures were flashing through his mind. He saw his beloved old home in lovely Athens. He felt his father's hand on his, teaching him to paint. He gazed again at the Parthenon, more beautiful than a dream. Then he saw himself playing on the fishing boat on that terrible holiday. He saw the pirate ship sail swiftly from behind a rocky point and pounce upon them. He saw himself and his friends dragged aboard. He felt the tight rope on his wrists as they bound him and threw him under the deck. He saw himself standing here in the market place of Pompeii. He heard himself sold for a slave. At that thought he threw down his brush and groaned.

But soon he grew calmer. Perhaps the sweet drip of the fountain cooled his hot thoughts. Perhaps the soft touch of the sun soothed his heart. He took up his brushes again and set to work.

“The last figure shall be the most beautiful of all,” he said to himself. “It is my own god, Apollo.”

So he worked tenderly on the face. With a few little strokes he made the mouth smile kindly. He made the blue eyes deep and gentle. He lifted the golden curls with a little breeze from Olympos. The god's smile cheered him. The beautiful colors filled his mind. He forgot his sorrows. He forgot everything but his picture. Minute by minute it grew under his moving brush. He smiled into the god's eyes.

Meantime a great noise arose in the house. There were cries of fear. There was running of feet.

“A great cloud!” “Earthquake!” “Fire and hail!” “Smoke from hell!” “The end of the world!” “Run! Run!”

And men and women, all slaves, ran screaming through the house and out of the front door. But the painter only half heard the cries. His ears, his eyes, his thoughts were full of Apollo.

For a little the house was still. Only the fountain and the shadows and the artist’s brush moved there. Then came a great noise as though the sky had split open. The low, sturdy house trembled. Ariston’s brush was shaken and blotted Apollo’s eye. Then there was a clattering on the cement floor as of a million arrows. Ariston ran into the court. From the heavens showered a hail of gray, soft little pebbles like beans. They burned his upturned face. They stung his bare arms. He gave a cry and ran back under the porch roof. Then he heard a shrill call above all the clattering. It came from the far end of the house. Ariston ran back into the private court. There lay Caius, his master’s little sick son. His couch was under the open sky, and the gray hail was pelting down upon him. He was covering his head with his arms and wailing.

“Little master!” called Ariston. “What is it? What has happened to us?” “Oh, take me!” cried the little boy.

“Where are the others?” asked Ariston.

“They ran away,” answered Caius. “They were afraid, Look! O-o-h!”

He pointed to the sky and screamed with terror.

Ariston looked. Behind the city lay a beautiful hill, green with trees. But now from the flat top towered a huge, black cloud. It rose straight like a pine tree and then spread its black branches over the heavens. And from that cloud showered these hot, pelting pebbles of pumice stone.

“It is a volcano,” cried Ariston.

He had seen one spouting fire as he had voyaged on the pirate ship.

“I want my father,” wailed the little boy.

Then Ariston remembered that his master was away from home. He had gone in a ship to Rome to get a great physician for his sick boy. He had left Caius in the charge of his nurse, for the boy’s mother was dead. But now every slave had turned coward and had run away and left the little master to die.

Ariston pulled the couch into one of the rooms. Here the roof kept off the hail of stones.

“Your father is expected home to-day, master Caius,” said the Greek. “He will come. He never breaks his word. We will wait for him here. This strange shower will soon be over.”

So he sat on the edge of the couch, and the little Roman laid his head in his slave’s lap and sobbed. Ariston watched the falling pebbles. They were light and full of little holes. Every now and then black rocks of the size of his head whizzed through the air. Sometimes one fell into the open cistern and the water hissed at its heat. The pebbles lay piled a foot deep all over the courtyard floor. And still they fell thick and fast.

“Will it never stop?” thought Ariston.

Several times the ground swayed under him. It felt like the moving of a ship in a storm. Once there was thunder and a trembling of the house. Ariston was looking at a little bronze statue that stood on a tall, slender column. It tottered to and fro in the earthquake. Then it fell, crashing into the piled-up stones. In a few minutes the falling shower had covered it.

Ariston began to be more afraid. He thought of Death as he had painted him in his picture. He imagined that he saw him hiding behind a column. He thought he heard his cruel laugh. He tried to look up toward the mountain, but the stones pelted him down. He felt terribly alone. Was all the rest of the world dead? Or was every one else in some safe place?

“Come, Caius, we must get away,” he cried. “We shall be buried here.”

He snatched up one of the blankets from the couch. He threw the ends over his shoulders and let a loop hang at his back. He stood the sick boy in this and wound the ends around them both. Caius was tied to his slave’s back. His heavy little head hung on Ariston’s shoulder. Then the Greek tied a

pillow over his own head. He snatched up a staff and ran from the house. He looked at his picture as he passed. He thought he saw Death half rise from the ground. But Apollo seemed to smile at his artist.

At the front door Ariston stumbled. He found the street piled deep with the gray, soft pebbles. He had to scramble up on his hands and knees. From the house opposite ran a man. He looked wild with fear. He was clutching a little statue of gold. Ariston called to him, "Which way to the gate?"

But the man did not hear. He rushed madly on. Ariston followed him. It cheered the boy a little to see that somebody else was still alive in the world. But he had a hard task. He could not run. The soft pebbles crunched under his feet and made him stumble. He leaned far forward under his heavy burden. The falling shower scorched his bare arms and legs. Once a heavy stone struck him on his cushioned head, and he fell. But he was up in an instant. He looked around bewildered. His head was ringing. The air was hot and choking. The sun was gone. The shower was blinding. Whose house was this? The door stood open. The court was empty. Where was the city gate? Would he never get out? He did not know this street. Here on the corner was a wine shop with its open sides. But no men stood there drinking. Wine cups were tipped over and broken on the marble counter. Ariston stood in a daze and watched the wine spilling into the street.

Then a crowd came rushing past him. It was evidently a family fleeing for their lives. Their mouths were open as though they were crying. But Ariston could not hear their voices. His ears shook with the roar of the mountain. An old man was hugging a chest. Gold coins were spilling out as he ran. Another man was dragging a fainting woman. A young girl ran ahead of them with white face and streaming hair. Ariston stumbled on after this company. A great black slave came swiftly around a corner and ran into him and knocked him over, but fled on without looking back. As the Greek boy fell forward, the rough little pebbles scoured his face. He lay there moaning. Then he began to forget his troubles. His aching body began to rest. He thought he would sleep. He saw Apollo smiling. Then Caius struggled and cried out. He pulled at the blanket and tried to free himself. This roused Ariston, and he sat up. He felt the hot pebbles again. He heard the mountain roar. He dragged himself to his feet and started on. Suddenly the street led him out into a broad space. Ariston looked around him. All about stretched wide porches with their columns. Temple roofs rose above them. Statues stood high on their pedestals. He was in the forum. The great open square was crowded with hurrying people. Under one of the porches Ariston saw the money changers locking their boxes. From a wide doorway ran several men. They were carrying great bundles of woolen cloth, richly embroidered and dyed with precious purple. Down the great steps of Jupiter's temple ran a priest. Under his arms he clutched two large platters of gold. Men were running across the forum dragging bags behind them.

Every one seemed trying to save his most precious things. And every one was hurrying to the gate at the far end. Then that was the way out! Ariston picked up his heavy feet and ran. Suddenly the earth swayed under him. He heard horrible thunder. He thought the mountain was falling upon him. He looked behind. He saw the columns of the porch tottering. A man was running out from one of the buildings. But as he ran, the walls crashed down. The gallery above fell cracking. He was buried. Ariston saw it all and cried out in horror. Then he prayed:

"O Lord Poseidon, shaker of the earth, save me! I am a Greek!"

Then he came out of the forum. A steep street sloped down to a gate. A river of people was pouring out there. The air was full of cries. The great noise of the crowd made itself heard even in the noise of the volcano. The streets were full of lost treasures. Men pushed and fell and were trodden upon. But at last Ariston passed through the gateway and was out of the city. He looked about.

"It is no better," he sobbed to himself.

The air was thicker now. The shower had changed to hot dust as fine as ashes. It blurred his eyes. It stopped his nostrils. It choked his lungs. He tore his chiton from top to bottom and wrapped it about his mouth and nose. He looked back at Caius and pulled the blanket over his head. Behind him a huge cloud was reaching out long black arms from the mountain to catch him. Ahead, the sun was only a red wafer in the shower of ashes. Around him people were running off to hide under

rocks or trees or in the country houses. Some were running, running anywhere to get away. Out of one courtyard dashed a chariot. The driver was lashing his horses. He pushed them ahead through the crowd. He knocked people over, but he did not stop to see what harm he had done. Curses flew after him. He drove on down the road.

Ariston remembered when he himself had been dragged up here two years ago from the pirate ship.

“This leads to the sea,” he thought. “I will go there. Perhaps I shall meet my master, Tetreius. He will come by ship. Surely I shall find him. The gods will send him to me. O blessed gods!”

But what a sea! It roared and tossed and boiled. While Ariston looked, a ship was picked up and crushed and swallowed. The sea poured up the steep shore for hundreds of feet. Then it rushed back and left its strange fish gasping on the dry land. Great rocks fell from the sky, and steam rose up as they splashed into the water. The sun was growing fainter. The black cloud was coming on. Soon it would be dark. And then what? Ariston lay down where the last huge wave had cooled the ground. “It is all over, Caius,” he murmured. “I shall never see Athens again.”

For a while there were no more earthquakes. The sea grew a little less wild. Then the half-fainting Ariston heard shouts. He lifted his head. A small boat had come ashore. The rowers had leaped out. They were dragging it up out of reach of the waves.

“How strange!” thought Ariston. “They are not running away. They must be brave. We are all cowards.”

“Wait for me here!” cried a lordly voice to the rowers.

When he heard that voice Ariston struggled to his feet and called.

“Marcus Tetreius! Master!”

He saw the man turn and run toward him. Then the boy toppled over and lay face down in the ashes.

When he came to himself he felt a great shower of water in his face. The burden was gone from his back. He was lying in a row boat, and the boat was falling to the bottom of the sea. Then it was flung up to the skies. Tetreius was shouting orders. The rowers were streaming with sweat and sea water.

In some way or other they all got up on the waiting ship. It always seemed to Ariston as though a wave had thrown him there. Or had Poseidon carried him? At any rate, the great oars of the galley were flying. He could hear every rower groan as he pulled at his oar. The sails, too, were spread. The master himself stood at the helm. His face was one great frown. The boat was flung up and down like a ball. Then fell darkness blacker than night.

“Who can steer without sun or stars?” thought the boy.

Then he remembered the look on his master’s face as he stood at the tiller. Such a look Ariston had painted on Herakles’ face as he strangled the lion.

“He will get us out,” thought the slave.

For an hour the swift ship fought with the waves. The oarsmen were rowing for their lives. The master’s arm was strong, and his heart was not for a minute afraid. The wind was helping. At last they reached calm waters.

“Thanks be to the gods!” cried Tetreius. “We are out of that boiling pot.”

At his words fire shot out of the mountain. It glowed red in the dusty air. It flung great red arms across the sky after the ship. Every man and spar and oar on the vessel seemed burning in its light. Then the fire died, and thick darkness swallowed everything. Ariston’s heart seemed smothered in his breast. He heard the slaves on the rowers’ benches scream with fear. Then he heard their leader crying to them. He heard a whip whiz through the air and strike on bare shoulders. Then there was a crash as though the mountain had clapped its hands. A thicker shower of ashes filled the air. But the rowers were at their oars again. The ship was flying.

So for two hours or more Tetreius and his men fought for safety. Then they came out into fresher air and calmer water. Tetreius left the rudder. "Let the men rest and thank the gods," he said to his overseer. "We have come up out of the grave."

When Ariston heard that, he remembered the Death he had left painted on his master's wall. By that time the picture was surely buried under stones and ashes. The boy covered his face with his ragged chiton and wept. He hardly knew what he was crying for—the slavery, the picture, the buried city, the fear of that horrid night, the sorrows of the people left back there, his father, his dear home in Athens. At last he fell asleep. The night was horrible with dreams—fire, earthquake, strangling ashes, cries, thunder, lightning. But his tired body held him asleep for several hours. Finally he awoke. He was lying on a soft mattress. A warm blanket covered him. Clean air filled his nostrils. The gentle light of dawn lay upon his eyes. A strange face bent over him.

"It is only weariness," a kind voice was saying. "He needs food and rest more than medicine."

Then Ariston saw Tetreius, also, bending over him. The slave leaped to his feet. He was ashamed to be caught asleep in his master's presence. He feared a frown for his laziness.

"My picture is finished, master," he cried, still half asleep.

"And so is your slavery," said Tetreius, and his eyes shone.

"It was not a slave who carried my son out of hell on his back. It was a hero." He turned around and called, "Come hither, my friends."

Three Roman gentlemen stepped up. They looked kindly upon Ariston.

"This is the lad who saved my son," said Tetreius. "I call you to witness that he is no longer a slave. Ariston, I send you from my hand a free man."

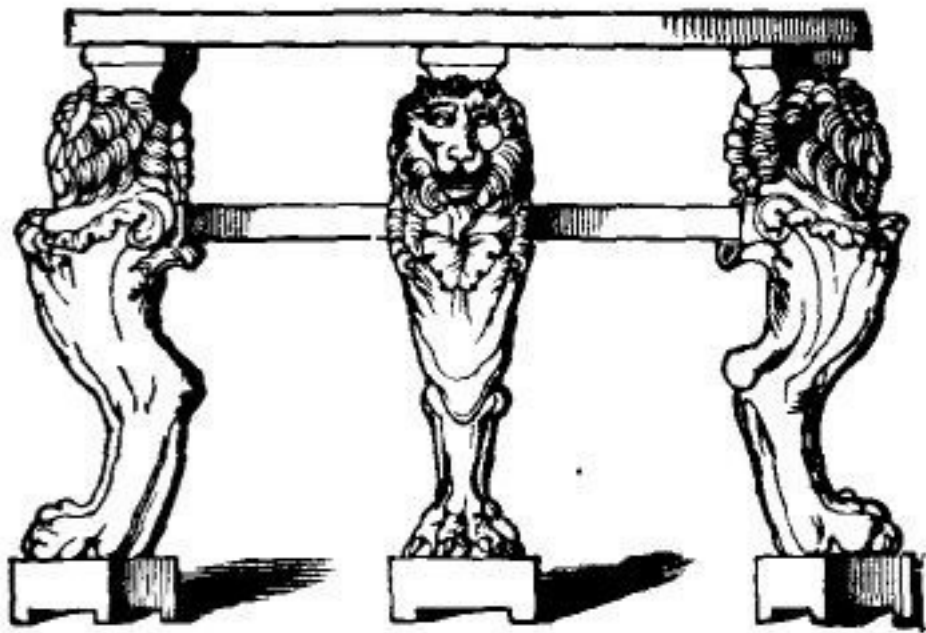
He struck his hand lightly on the Greek's shoulder, as all Roman masters did when they freed a slave. Ariston cried aloud with joy. He sank to his knees weeping. But Tetreius went on.

"This kind physician says that Caius will live. But he needs good air and good nursing. He must go to some one of Aesculapius' holy places. He shall sleep in the temple and sit in the shady porches, and walk in the sacred groves. The wise priests will give him medicines. The god will send healing dreams. Do you know of any such place, Ariston?"

The Greek thought of the temple and garden of Aesculapius on the sunny side of the Acropolis at home in Athens. But he could not speak. He gazed hungrily into Tetreius' eyes. The Roman smiled.

"Ariston, this ship is bound for Athens! All my life I have loved her—her statues, her poems, her great deeds. I have wished that my son might learn from her wise men. The volcano has buried my home, Ariston. But my wealth and my friends and my son are aboard this ship. What do you say, my friend? Will you be our guide in Athens?" Ariston leaped up from his knees. A fire of joy burned in his eyes. He stretched his hands to the sky.

"O blessed Herakles," he cried, "again thou hast conquered Death. Thou didst snatch us from the grave of Pompeii. Give health to this Roman boy. O fairest Athena, shed new beauty upon our violet crowned Athens. For there is coming to visit her the best of men, my master Tetreius."



A Marble Table: The lions' heads were painted yellow.
You can see a table much like this in the garden pictured later.

VESUVIUS

So a living city was buried in a few hours. Wooded hills and green fields lay covered under great ash heaps. Ever since that terrible eruption Vesuvius has been restless. Sometimes she has been quiet for a hundred years or more and men have almost forgotten that she ever thundered and spouted and buried cities. But all at once she would move again. She would shoot steam and ashes into the sky. At night fire would leap out of her top. A few times she sent out dust and lava and destroyed houses and fields. A man who lived five hundred years after Pompeii was destroyed described Vesuvius as she was in his time. He said:

“This mountain is steep and thick with woods below. Above, it is very craggy and wild. At the top is a deep cave. It seems to reach the bottom of the mountain. If you peep in you can see fire. But this ordinarily keeps in and does not trouble the people. But sometimes the mountain bellows like an ox. Soon after it casts out huge masses of cinders. If these catch a man, he hath no way to save his life. If they fall upon houses, the roofs are crushed by the weight. If the wind blow stiff, the ashes rise out of sight and are carried to far countries. But this bellowing comes only every hundred years or thereabout. And the air around the mountain is pure. None is more healthy. Physicians send thither sick men to get well.”

The ashes that had covered Pompeii changed to rich soil. Green vines and shrubs and trees sprang up and covered it, and flowers made it gay. Therefore people said to themselves:

“After all, she is a good old mountain. There will never be another eruption while we are alive.”

So villages grew up around her feet. Farmers came and built little houses and planted crops and were happy working the fertile soil. They did not dream that they were living above a buried city, that the roots of their vines sucked water from an old Roman house, that buried statues lay gazing up toward them as they worked.

About three hundred years ago came another terrible eruption. Again there were earthquakes. Again the mountain bellowed. Again black clouds turned day into night. Lightning flashed from cloud to cloud. Tempests of hot rain fell. The sea rushed back and forth on the shore. The whole top of the mountain was blown out or sank into the melting pot. Seven rivers of red-hot lava poured down the slopes. They flowed for five miles and fell into the sea. On the way they set fire to forests and covered five little villages. Thousands of people were killed.

Since that time Vesuvius has been very active. Almost every year there have been eruptions with thunder and earthquakes and showers and lava. A few of these have done much damage. [Footnote: In this year, 1922, Vesuvius has been very active for the first time since 1906. It has been causing considerable alarm in Naples. A new cone, 230 feet high, has developed.—Ed.] And even on her calmest days a cloud has always hung above the mountain top. Sometimes it has been thin and white—a cloud of steam. Sometimes it has been black and curling—a cloud of dust.

Vesuvius is a dangerous thing, but very beautiful. It stands tall and pointed and graceful against a lovely sky. Its little cloud waves from it like a plume. At night the mountain is swallowed by the dark. But the red rivers down its slopes glare in the sky. It is beautiful and terrible like a tiger. Thousands of people have loved it. They have climbed it and looked down its crater. It is like looking into the heart of the earth. One of these travelers wrote of his visit in 1793. He said:

“For many days Vesuvius has been in action. I have watched it from Naples. It is wonderfully beautiful and always changing. On one day huge clouds poured out of the top. They hung in the sky far above, white as snow. Suddenly a cloud of smoke rushed out of another mouth. It was as black as ink. The black column rose tall and curling beside the snowy clouds. That was a picture in black and white. But at another time I saw one in bright colors.

“On a certain night there were towers and curls and waves and spires of flames leaping from the top of the mountain. Millions of red-hot stones were shot into the sky. They sailed upward for

hundreds of feet, then curved and fell like skyrocket. I looked through my telescope and saw liquid lava boiling and bubbling over the crater's edge. I could see it splash upon the rocks and glide slowly down the sides of the cone. The whole top of the mountain was red with melted rock. And above it waved the changing flames of red, orange, yellow, blue.

“On another night, as I was getting into bed, I felt an earthquake. I looked out of my window toward Vesuvius. All the top was glowing with red-hot matter. A terrible roaring came from the mountain. In an instant fire shot high into the air. The red column curved and showered the whole cone. In half a minute came another earthquake shock. My doors and windows rattled. Things were shaken from my table to the floor. Then came the thunder of an explosion from the mountain and another shower of fire. After a few seconds there were noises like the trampling of horses' hoofs. It was, of course, the noise of the shot-out stones falling upon the rocks of the mountainsides eight miles away.

“I decided to ascend the volcano and see the crater from which all these interesting things came. A few friends went with me. For most of the way we traveled on horses. After two or three hours we reached the bottom of the cone of rocks and ashes. From there we had to go on foot. We went over to the river of red-hot lava. We planned to walk up along its edge. But the hot rock was smoking, and the wind blew the smoke into our faces. A thick mist of fine ashes from the crater almost suffocated us. Sulphur fumes blew toward us and choked us. I said,

“‘We must cross the stream of lava. On the other side the wind will not trouble us.’

“‘Cross that melted rock?’ my friends cried out. ‘We should sink into it and be burned alive.’

“But as we stood talking great stones were thrown out of the volcano. They rolled down the mountainside close to us. If they had struck us it would have been death. There was only one way to save ourselves. I covered my face with my hat and rushed across the stream of lava. The melted rock was so thick and heavy that I did not sink in. I only burned my boots and scorched my hands. My friends followed me. On that side we were safe. We climbed for half an hour. Then we came to the head of our red river. It did not flow over the edge of the crater. Many feet down from the top it had torn a hole through the cone. I shall never forget the sight as long as I live. There was a vast arch in the black rock. From this arch rushed a clear torrent of lava. It flowed smoothly like honey. It glowed with all the splendor of the sun. It looked thin like golden water.

“‘I could stir it with a stick,’ said one of my friends.

“‘I doubt it,’ I said. ‘See how slowly it flows. It must be very thick and heavy.’

“To test it we threw pebbles into it. They did not sink, but floated on like corks. We rolled in heavier stones of seventy or eighty pounds. They only made shallow dents in the stream and floated down with the current. A great rock of three hundred pounds lay near. I raised it upon end and let it fall into the lava. Very slowly it sank and disappeared.

“As the stream flowed on it spread out wider over the mountain. Farther down the slope it grew darker and harder. It started from the arch like melted gold. Then it changed to orange, to bright red, to dark red, to brown, as it cooled. At the lower end it was black and hard and broken like cinders.

“We climbed a little higher above the arch. There was a kind of chimney in the rock. Smoke and stream were coming out of it. I went close. The fumes of sulphur choked me. I reached out and picked some lumps of pure sulphur from the edge of the rock. For one moment the smoke ceased. I held my breath and looked down the hole. I saw the glare of red-hot lava flowing beneath. The mountain was a pot, full of boiling rock.”

Another man writes of a visit in 1868, a quieter year.

“At first we climbed gentle slopes through vineyards and fields and villages. Sometimes we came suddenly upon a black line in a green meadow. A few years before it had flowed down red-hot. Further up we reached large stretches of rock. Here wild vines and lupines were growing in patches where the lava had decayed into soil. Then came bare slopes with dark hollow and sharp ridges. We walked on old stiff lava-streams. Sometimes we had to plod through piles of coarse, porous cinders.

Sometimes we climbed over tangled, lumpy beds of twisted, shiny rock. Sometimes we looked into dark arched tunnels. Red streams had once flowed out of them. A few times we passed near fresh cracks in the mountain. Here steam puffed out.

“At last we reached a broad, hot piece of ground. Here were smoking holes. The night before I had looked at them with a telescope from the foot of the mountain. I had seen red rivers flowing from them. Now they were empty. Last night’s lava lay on the slope, cooled and black. I was standing on it. My feet grew hot. I had to keep moving. The air I breathed was warm and smelled like that of an iron foundry. I pushed my pole into a crack in the rock. The wood caught fire. I was standing on a thin crust. What was below? I broke out a piece of the hard lava. A red spot glared up at me. Under the crust red-hot lava was still flowing. I knew that it would be several years before it would be perfectly cool.”

So for three centuries people have watched Vesuvius at work. But she is much older than that—thousands of years older—older than any city or country or people in the world. In all that time she has poured out millions of tons of matter—lava, huge glassy boulders, little pebbles of pumice stone, long shining hairs, fine dust or ashes. All these things are different forms of melted rock. Sometimes the steam blows the liquid into fine dust; sometimes it breaks it into little pieces and fills them with bubbles. At another time the steam is not so strong and only pushes the stuff out gently over the crater’s edge. Many different minerals are found in these rocks—iron, copper, lead, mica, zinc, sulphur. Some pieces are beautiful in color—blue, green, red, yellow. Precious stones have sometimes been found—garnets, topaz, quartz, tourmaline, lapis lazuli. But most of the stone is dull black or brown or gray.

All this heavy matter drops close to the mountain. And on calm days the ashes, also, fall near at home. Indeed, the volcano has built up its own mountain. But a heavy wind often carries the fine dust for hundreds of miles. Once it was blown as far as Constantinople and it darkened the sun and frightened people there. Some of the ashes fall into the sea. For years the currents carry them about from shore to shore. At last they settle to the bottom and make clay or sand or mud. The material lies there for thousands of years and is hard packed into a soft fine grained rock, called tufa. The city of Naples to-day is built of such stone that once lay under the sea. An earthquake long ago lifted the ocean bottom and turned it into dry land. Now men live upon it and cut streets in it and grow crops on it.

So for many miles about, Vesuvius has been making earth. Her ashes lie hundreds of feet deep. Men dig wells and still find only material that has been thrown out of the volcano. When this matter grows old and lies under the sun and rain it turns to good soil. The acids of water and air and plants eat into it. Rain wears it away. Plant roots crack the rocks open. The top layer becomes powdered and rotted and mixed with vegetable loam and is fertile soil. So the country all around the volcano is a rich garden. Tomatoes, melons, grapes, olives, figs, cover the land.

But Vesuvius alone has not made all this ground. She is in a nest of volcanoes. They have all been at work like her, spouting ashes and pumice and rocks and lava. Ten miles away is a wide stretch of country where there are more than a dozen old craters. Twenty miles out in the blue bay a volcano stands up out of the water. A hundred miles south is a group of small volcanic islands. They have hot springs. One has a volcano that spouts every five or six minutes. At night it is like a lighthouse for sailors. One of these Islands is only two thousand years old. The men of Pompeii saw it pushed up out of the sea during an earthquake. A little farther south is Mt. Aetna in Sicily. It is a greater mountain than Vesuvius and has done more work than she has done. So all the southern part of Italy seems to be the home of volcanoes and earthquakes.

There are many other such places scattered over the world—Iceland, Mexico, South America, Japan, the Sandwich Islands. Here the same terrible play is going on—thunder, clouds, falling ashes, scalding rain, flowing lava. The earth is being turned inside out, and men are learning what she is made of.



Bronze lampholder: Five lamps hung from the branches of this bronze tree. It was twenty inches high.

POMPEII TO-DAY

Years came and went and changed the world. The old gods died, and the new religion of Christ grew strong. The old temples fell into ruins, and new churches were built in their places. Instead of the old Roman in his white toga came merchants in crimson velvet and knights in steel armor and gentlemen in ruffles and modern men in plain clothes.

Among all these changes, Pompeii was almost forgotten. But after a long while people began to be much interested in ancient Italy. They read old Roman books, and learned of her wonderful cities. They began to dig here and there and find beautiful statues and vases and jewels. They read the story of Pompeii in an old Roman book—a whole city suddenly buried just as her people had left her!

“There we should find treasures!” they said. “We should see houses, temples, shops, streets, as they were seventeen hundred years ago. We should find them full of statues and rich things. Perhaps we should find some of the people who lived in ancient days. But where to dig?”

Their question was answered by accident. At that time certain men were making a tunnel to carry spring water from the hills across the country to a little town near Naples. The tunnel happened to pass over buried Pompeii. They dug up some blocks of stone with Latin inscriptions carved on them. After that other people found little ancient relics near the same place.

“This must be where Pompeii lies buried,” the wise men said.

They began to excavate. That was about two hundred years ago. Ever since that time the work has gone on. Sometimes people have been discouraged and have given up. At other times six hundred men have been working busily. Kings have given money. Emperors and princes and queens have visited the excavations. Artists have made pictures of the ruins, and scholars have written books about them. But it is a great task to uncover a whole city that is buried ten or twelve feet deep. The excavation is not yet finished. Perhaps when you are old men and women the work will be completed, and a whole Roman city will be open to your eyes.

But even as it is to-day, that ghost of a city is among the world’s wonders. There is the thick stone wall that goes all about the town. On its wide top the soldiers used to stand to fight in ancient days. Now the stones are fallen; its towers are broken; its gates are open. Yet there the battered little giant stands at its task of protecting the town. Out of its eight gates stretch the paved streets.

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