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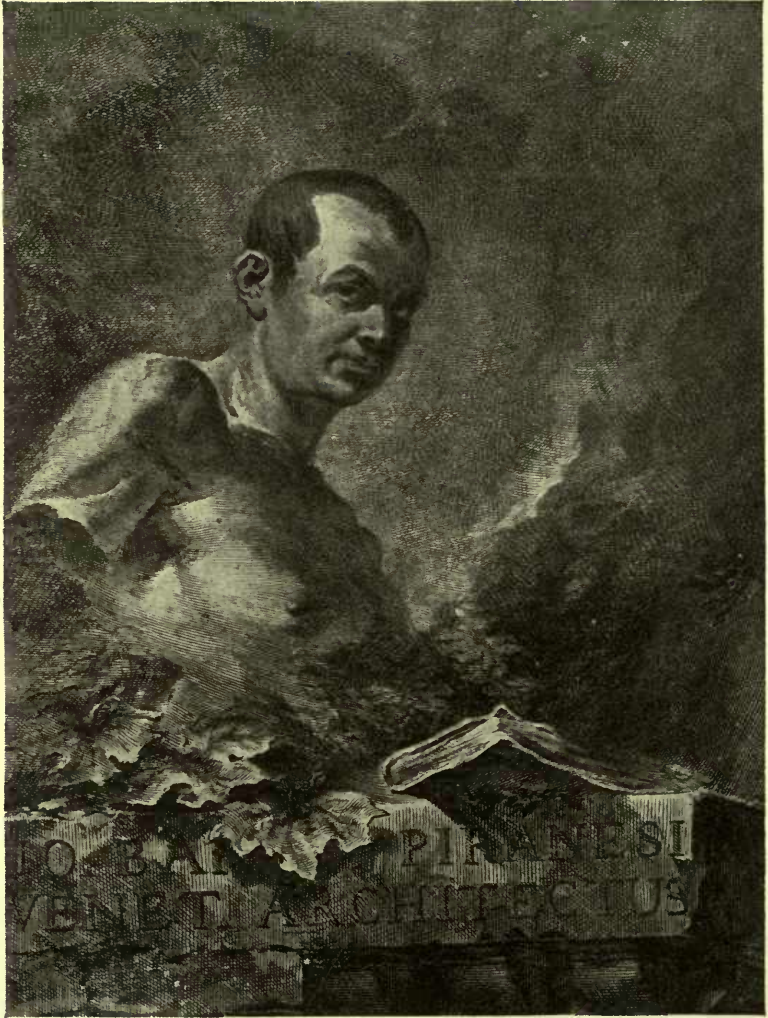


SELECTED ETCHINGS BY PIRANESI

SERIES I.



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Selected Etchings

by

PIRANESI

With an Introduction

by

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SERIES I.

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INTRODUCTION

ARCHITECTURALLY speaking, we live at a time somewhat similar to that in which the genius of Piranesi first made its impact upon English designers. In the latter half of the eighteenth century English architects and patrons were alike growing a little tired of pure Palladianism. The novelty and spirit of Inigo Jones's work had given place to the uninspired correctness of Campbell, Kent, and a host of lesser disciples. Restrained and elegant as the work of those architects appears to modern eyes, after the debauch of "free Classic" from which we are now emerging, it is nevertheless true that, at that time, the English Palladian formula was nearly exhausted. The circuses and crescents of Bath, with their unfluted columns and dull ornament, their endless repetitions of correct features, could not be indefinitely extended. The early Georgian houses, so comfortable in the country, began to look a little coarse and provincial in London streets, particularly to those who had taken the Grand Tour.

What more natural, then, that architects should turn again to the source and fountain-head from which Palladio had drawn his inspiration, to see whether it had anything fresh to yield?

The practising architect in England at the end of the eighteenth century required, however, a cicerone to the remains of the antique world just as much as his predecessor did in the seventeenth century. The seventeenth-century architect chose Palladio as his guide; the architect in the latter part of the eighteenth century chose Piranesi. Naturally, the lesson taught was somewhat different. The eighteenth-century architect was much further advanced in scholarship. Palladio gave the main proportions of the Orders and the principles of composition. He laid down definite rules and precepts suitable to beginners. His was the first-year work, to use a school simile. Piranesi takes the scholars of the later years and initiates them into all the mysteries of ornament and stylistic character. Offering no pedantic rules, he makes a direct appeal to the imagination of his students. He reveals to them not only the power but the intimate spirit of the Roman world. He offers them whole collections of vases and candelabra to use or not as

they like. He unlocks a treasure-house—a library full of fresh detail. The detail, too, is rich, complex detail, safe only in the hands of the discerning. But Piranesi's students in England at that time were fit to profit by such a master; among his more attentive scholars being Robert Adam, Chambers, Dance, and many other architects of the late eighteenth century, and through these he influenced the decorative designers from Chippendale to Pergolesi. Mr. Phené Spiers, not without a certain hyperbole, traces the Empire Style to Piranesi's designs for chimneypieces. At any rate it is safe to say that the new vigour and life which came into English architecture with the work of Chambers and Adam was derived from a more thorough and complete knowledge of Roman architecture, and that the chief source of that knowledge was the vast collection of thirteen hundred or more engraved plates which Piranesi etched and published at the marvellous rate of one a fortnight throughout a fairly long life.

Now, if any coherence at all can be seen in the trend of modern English architecture, we seem at the present moment to be just as dissatisfied with mere Palladianism as were the architects of the end of the eighteenth century. Like them, too, we are looking

for a more complete expression of the Classic spirit. To us, therefore, Piranesi may have a very similar lesson. The unfortunate thing, however, is that his etchings, a few years ago so easy to obtain, are daily becoming more rare and expensive. A collection of the best of those issued during the artist's lifetime could hardly be made to-day for less than a couple of hundred pounds. The Paris reprints which his son issued in 1815 might be obtained for half that sum, but to the ordinary practitioner this may be considered as half infinity. Even Mr. Keith Young's massive volume of reproductions costs several pounds. The days of Robert Adam were the days when architects were few and patrons were rich. Our own times are less happy in that respect, but they are nevertheless the days of unrivalled opportunity. Piranesi is the magician who can show what opportunities may become; more especially as the process block, albeit lacking in the marvellous gradations of tone and feeling of the original etchings, renders it possible to publish at small cost such a series as are comprised in this volume.

The following are the main facts of Piranesi's career as far as they are known:—

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, to give him his full name, was born in Venice in the year

1720. His father Angelo pursued the honourable calling of a stonemason, so suited to the progenitor of an architect. His mother was sister to an engineer and architect named Lucchesi, and it was to him that young Piranesi was articulated. In his early years he seems to have been something of an *enfant prodigue* and is reported to have been able to draw the architecture of Venice at the age of eight. At eighteen he persuaded his parents to send him to Rome, and ever after, although signing himself "Venetian Architect," he remained at work in that city. At first, in his desire to obtain a firm grasp on the technique of the graphic arts, he seems to have attached himself to various masters. The story is told that he threatened one of these masters, Vasi, with the loss of his life because he imagined that some secret in the process of etching was being withheld from him. Such a story, whether true or not, together with the later one that he saw for the first time and married his wife within the space of one week, fits in well enough with the impetuous temperament and fine fury of work which all the etchings exhibit. The numerous controversies in which he was engaged in later years, sometimes involving the erasure of names from dedication and title-pages, are all evidence

of the same characteristics—characteristics which may have made him, according to modern standards, a poor archæologist, but which were not without value to the artist and teacher of artists.

In 1741, when twenty-one years of age, Piranesi published his first etchings, four compositions of ruins, afterwards included in his *Opere Varie*, issued by Bouchard at Rome in 1750. In 1748 he published his *Antichità Romane de' Tempi della Repubblica e de' primi Imperatori, etc.*, containing thirty plates of triumphal arches, amphitheatres, and other ancient structures, mostly from places other than Rome. The price of this volume (Mr. Samuel informs us in his admirable book) was 16 paoli, or about 13s. 4d., which shows for how small a contemporary reward Piranesi had to work. In 1750 Bouchard published his *Opere Varie*, which contained a number of his imaginative designs for great halls, staircases and monuments, as well as his famous series of prison dreams—the *Carceri d'Invenzione*. From this time onwards followed in quick succession an immense number of etchings grouped somewhat irregularly in great folio volumes with varying engraved title-pages. The *Raccolta di Varie Vedute* (Rome 1751) contains ninety-three small views and includes work by Israel

Silvestre and other etchers. This volume must not be confused with the *Vedute di Roma*, in two volumes, containing large title-pages and one hundred and thirty-seven plates, thirty-four of which were published in 1751, under the title *Le Magnificenze di Roma le più remarcabili*.

Perhaps Piranesi's greatest work, in both size and importance, is *Le Antichità Romane*, in four volumes, containing a varying number of plates from 216-224. This was first issued in 1756.

In 1761, he etched four plates for Robert Adam illustrating the latter's design for Sion House, and in 1769 he published his *Diverse Maniere d'Adornare*, in which appear the ornate but very stimulating designs for chimneypieces, referred to above. Of his remaining works, perhaps the most important to architects is the *Vasi Candelabri Cippi Sarcofagi Tripodi Lucerne ed ornamenti Antichi*, to give it its full title, which was published in Rome in 1778—the year of his death. This contains a series of magnificent drawings of antiques, largely from his own collection. A great number of these drawings are dedicated to various English gentlemen, each described as "a lover of the fine arts," which is proof of the interest Englishmen were already taking in Piranesi and his work.

In addition to the foregoing, Piranesi published a number of monographs on special subjects illustrated with etchings. Among these are the volumes on Trajan's Column, the Theatre at Herculaneum, Hadrian's Villa, and the Temples at Pæstum, all of which are more noticeable for the boldness of the draughtsmanship than for the archæological views they set forth. It must not be imagined, however, because Piranesi was the interpreter of the romance of the Roman ruins, and through this very romance fired the imagination of Europe, that he was not when he liked an exact draughtsman. The cracks on the obelisk shown in the foreground of his etching of Santa Maria Maggiore tally with those shown in a photograph taken one hundred and fifty years later.

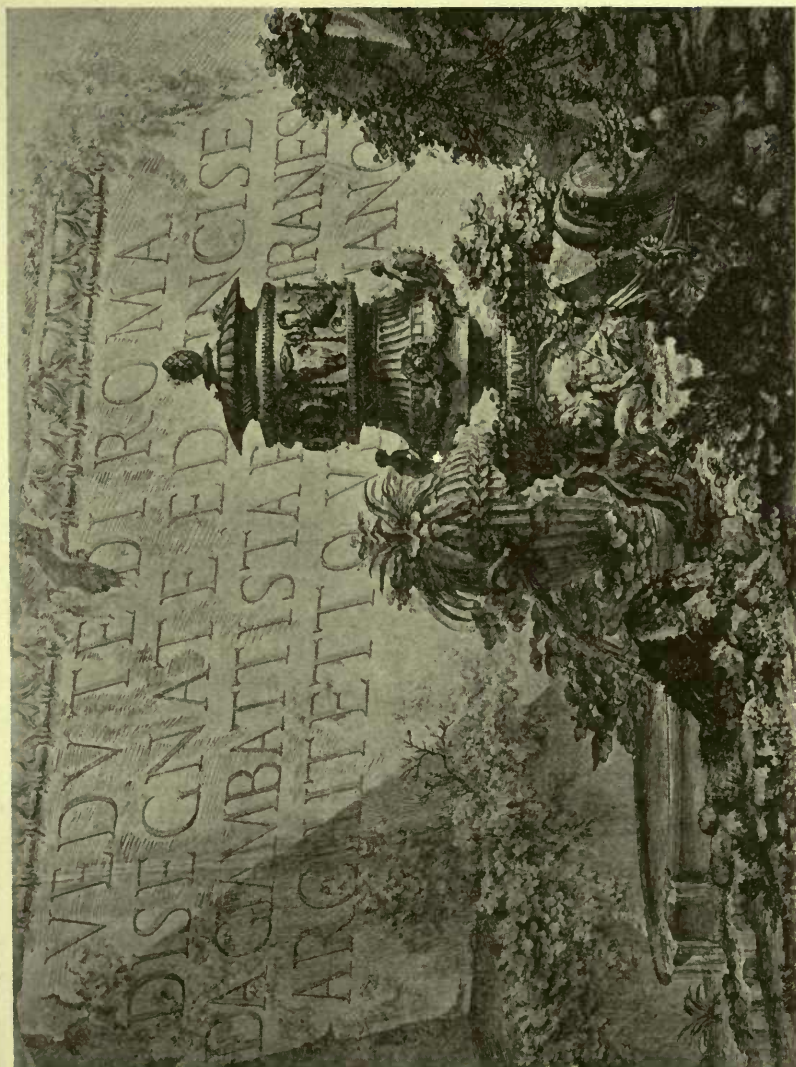
In April, 1757, Piranesi was elected an honorary Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, which is another proof of the esteem in which he was held in England. He was knighted by Pope Clement XIII. in 1767. He died in 1778, and is buried in the church of Santa Maria Aventina.

Of his five children, Francesco (b. 1748) and Laura (b. 1750) etched in their father's manner and assisted him in his work. After his death, however, they took to print-selling

rather than creative work, though Francesco still etched plates on his own account. In 1798 he packed up his father's copper-plates and took them to Paris. During an adventurous journey they fell into the hands of an English Admiral, who, however, knowing the fame of the father, unfortunately restrained his first impulse to throw the plates overboard. It was unfortunate because on arrival in Paris Francesco was able, with the help of the French Government, to republish from the old plates a new edition of his father's work, which, from the state of the plates, for many years did considerable damage to Piranesi's fame as an etcher. The plates exist at the present day, and it is believed that prints are still occasionally struck from them. Now, however, the difference between the original Roman impressions and the later Paris ones is well understood, and Piranesi's renown never stood higher than it does to-day. His son died in 1810.

The plates here reproduced are from the author's collection, with the exception of the designs for chimneypieces, which have been kindly lent by Mr. Batsford.

C. H. REILLY.

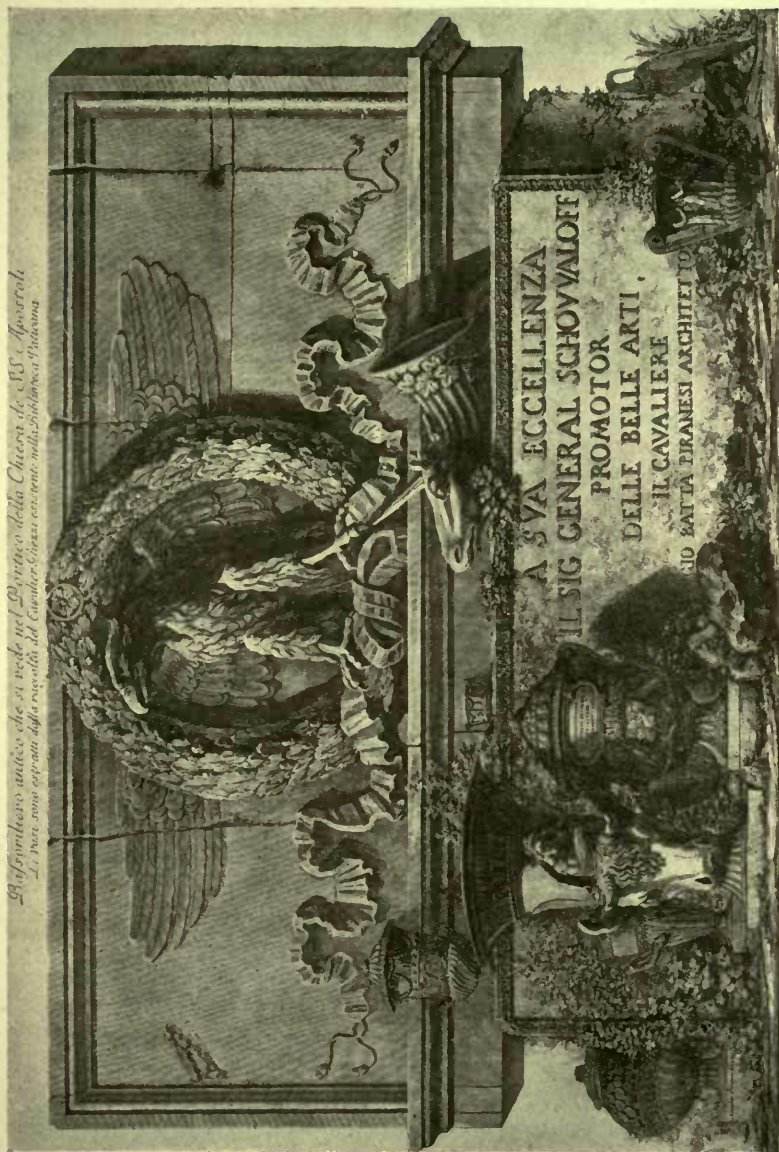


Title-page to the "Vedute di Roma." (Pub. Rome 1751.)



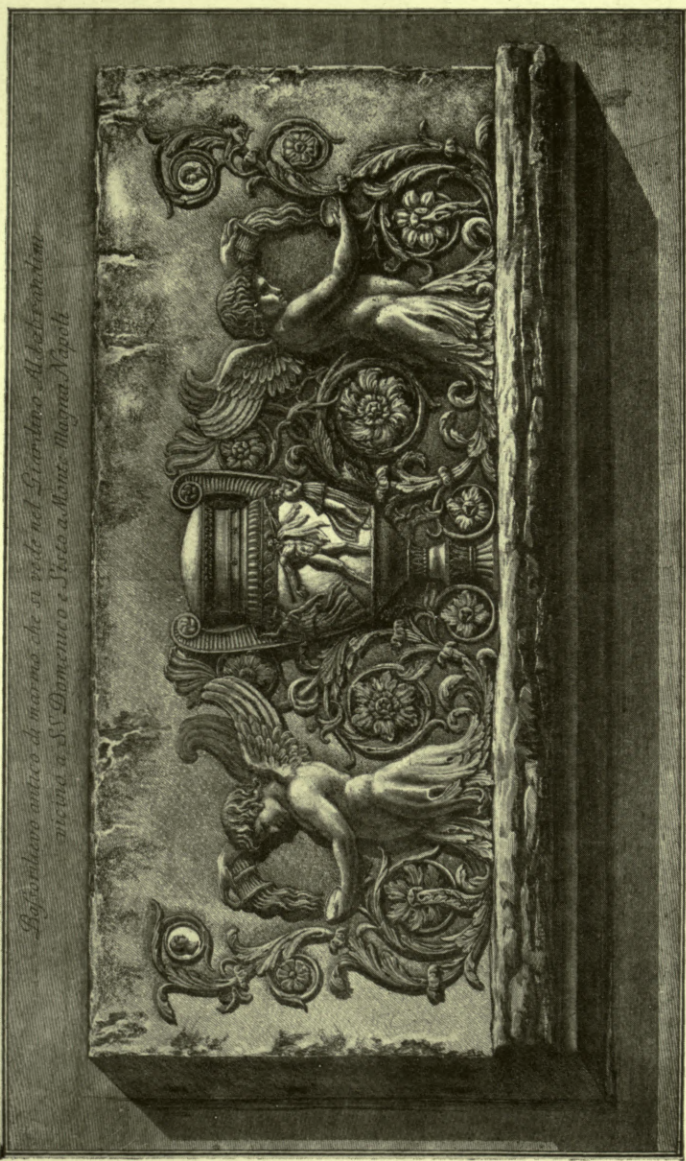
Composition of Ruins.

*Bas-relief in bronze, which is visible in the Portico of the Church of S. S. Apollinare
L. P. 1800, executed by the sculptor del Cavaliere Gioanni Battista Piranesi.*



Bas-relief from the Portico of the Church of the Apostles, Rome.

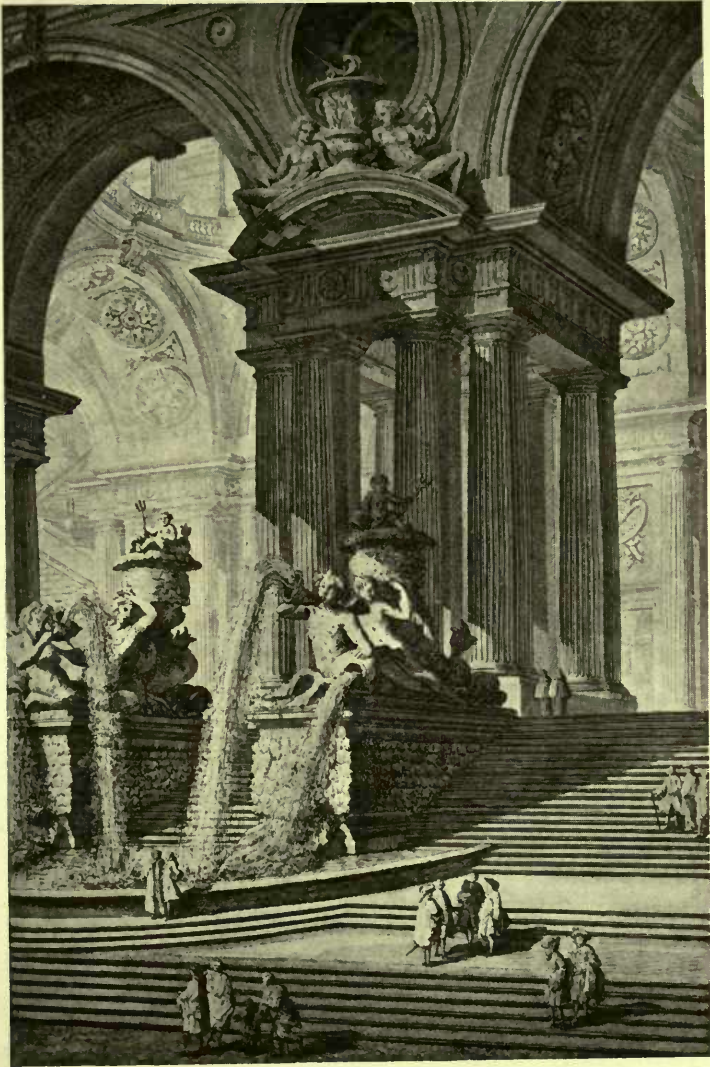
*Bas-relievo antico di marmo che si vede nel Gianicolo. M. de' Medici
vicino a S. Domenico e Foto a Mont. Magna Napoli*



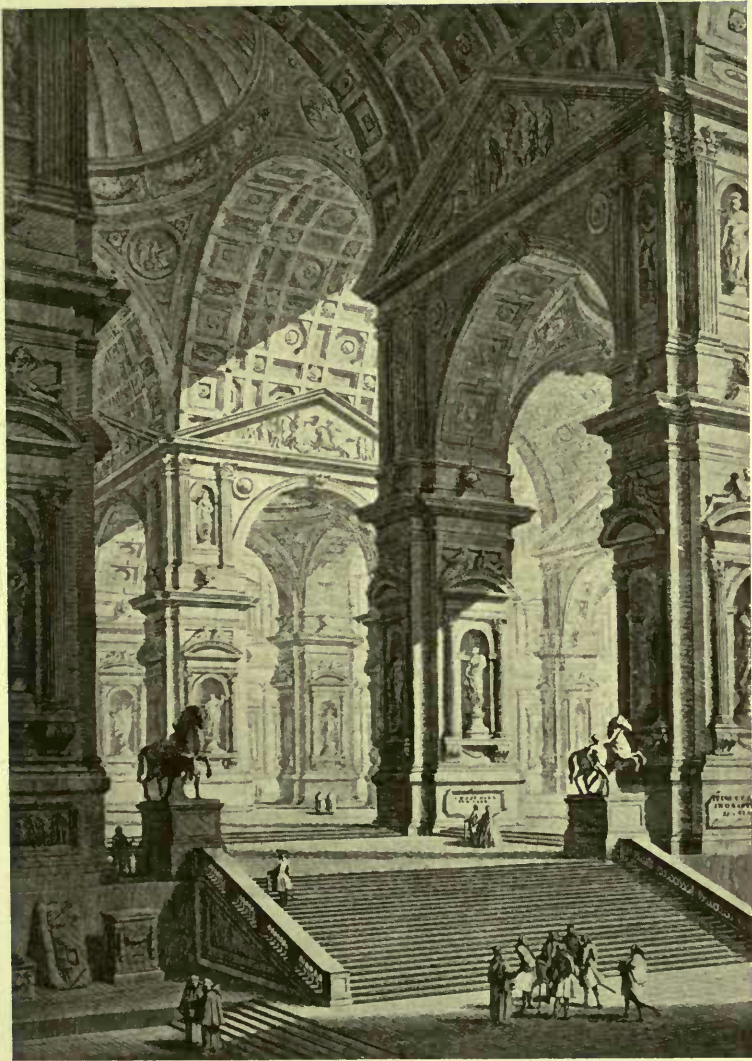
Antique bas-relief from Naples.



Trophy of Arms.



Design for a Grand Staircase.

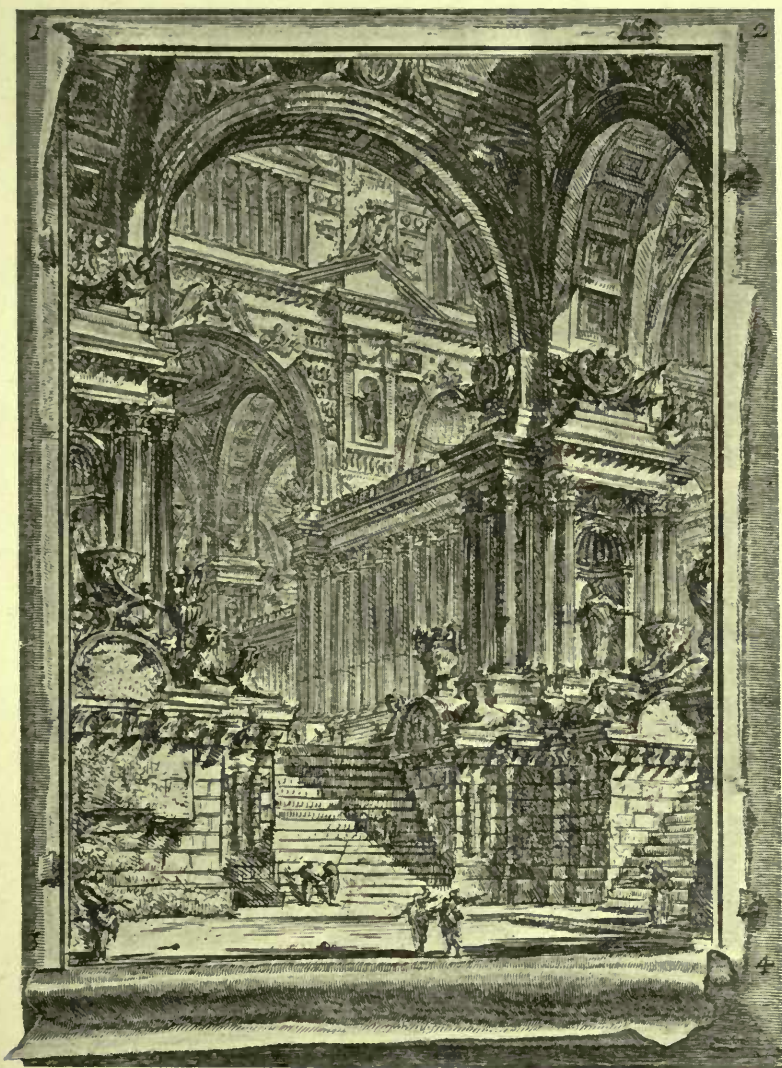


Design for a Sculpture Gallery.

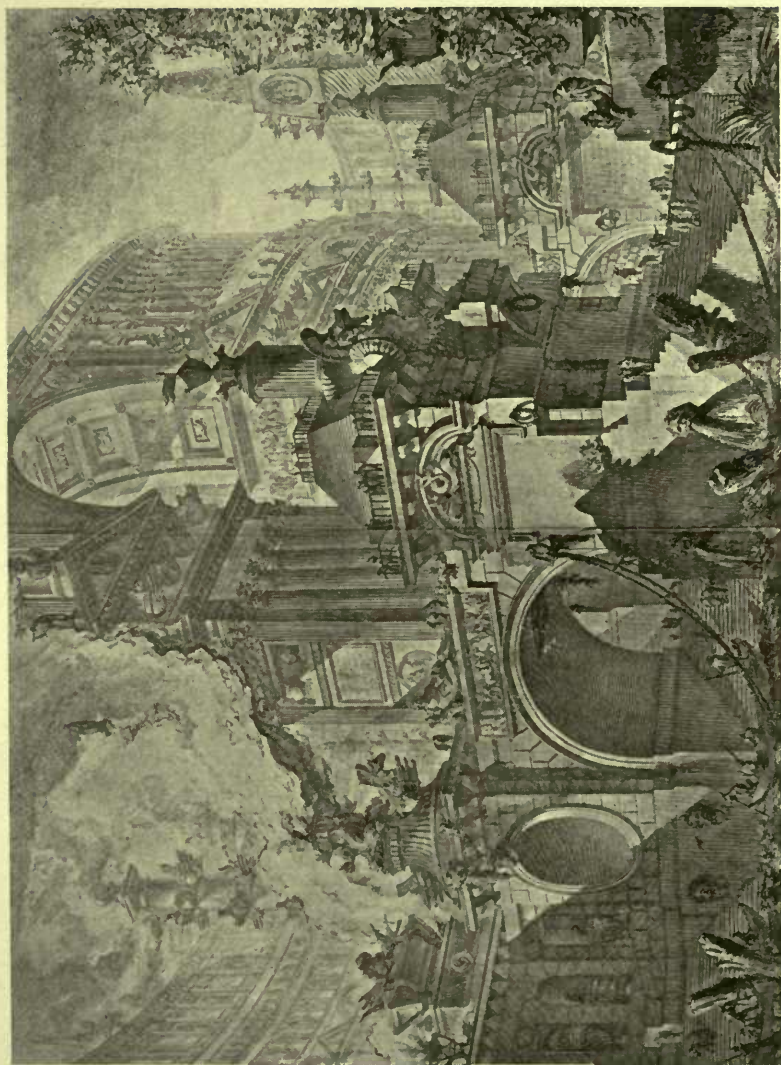


Design for the Mausoleum of a Roman Emperor.

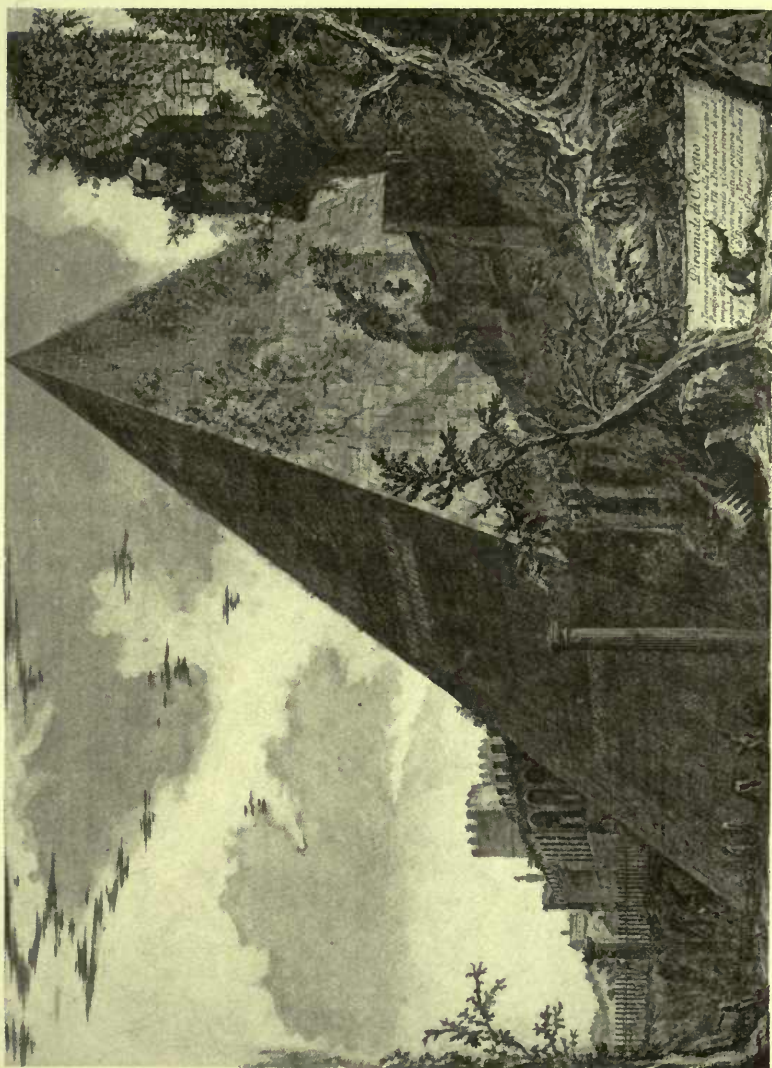




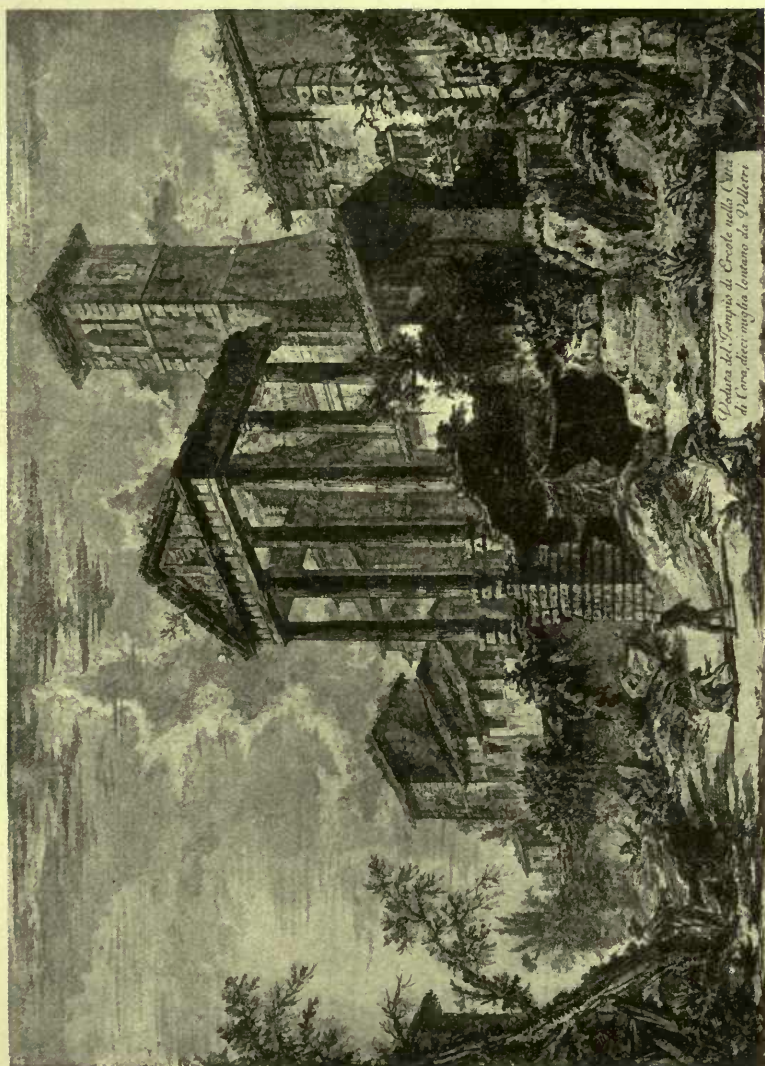
Sketch Design.



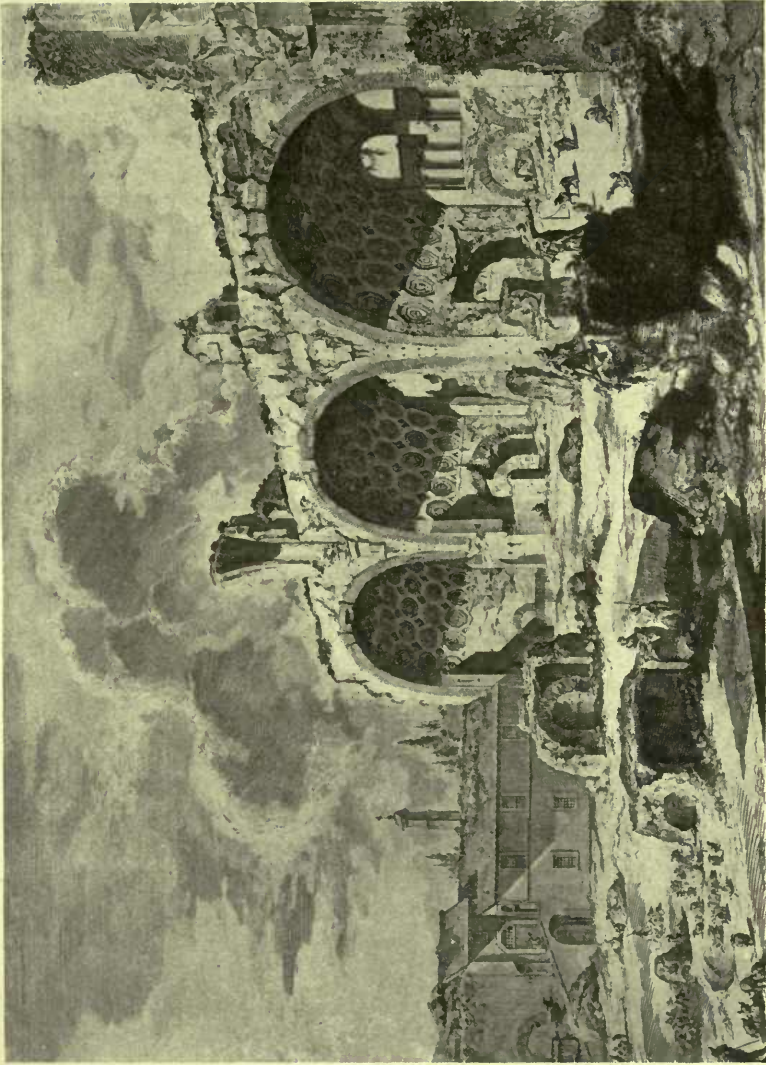
Composition.



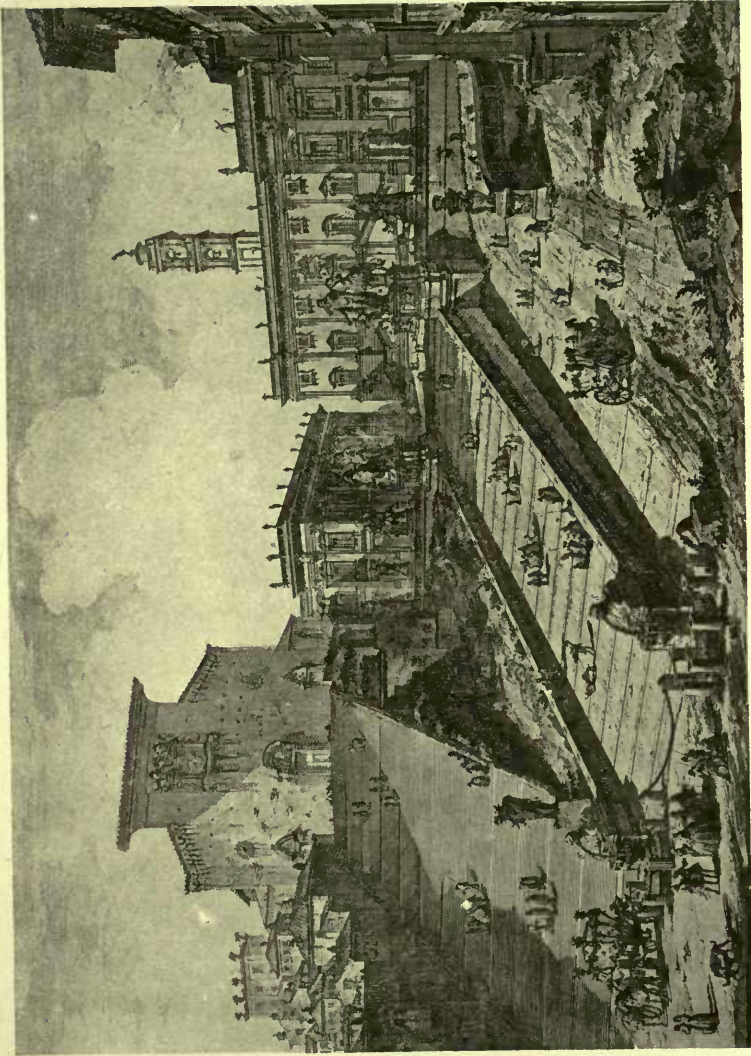
Pyramid of C. Cestius, Appian Way.



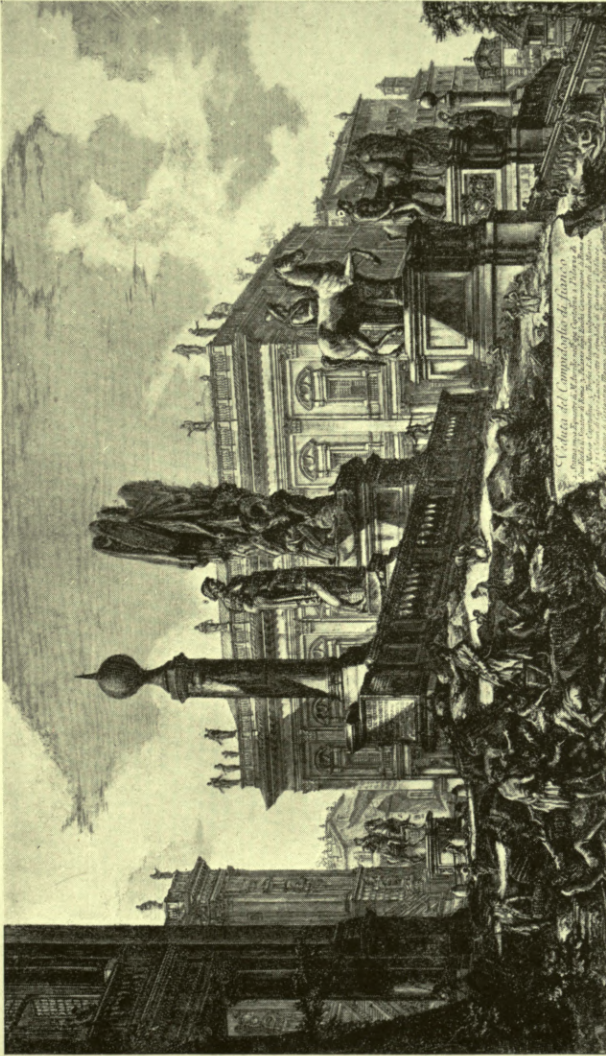
Temple of Hercules, Cora.



Basilica of Maxentius, Rome.

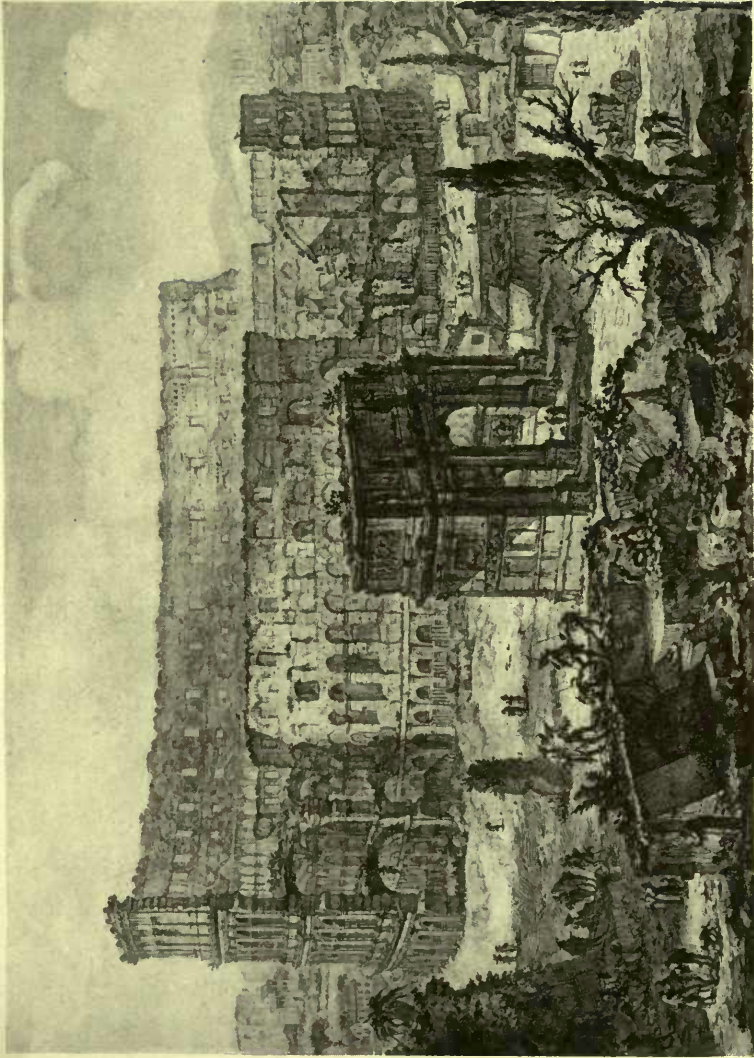


The Capitol, Rome.

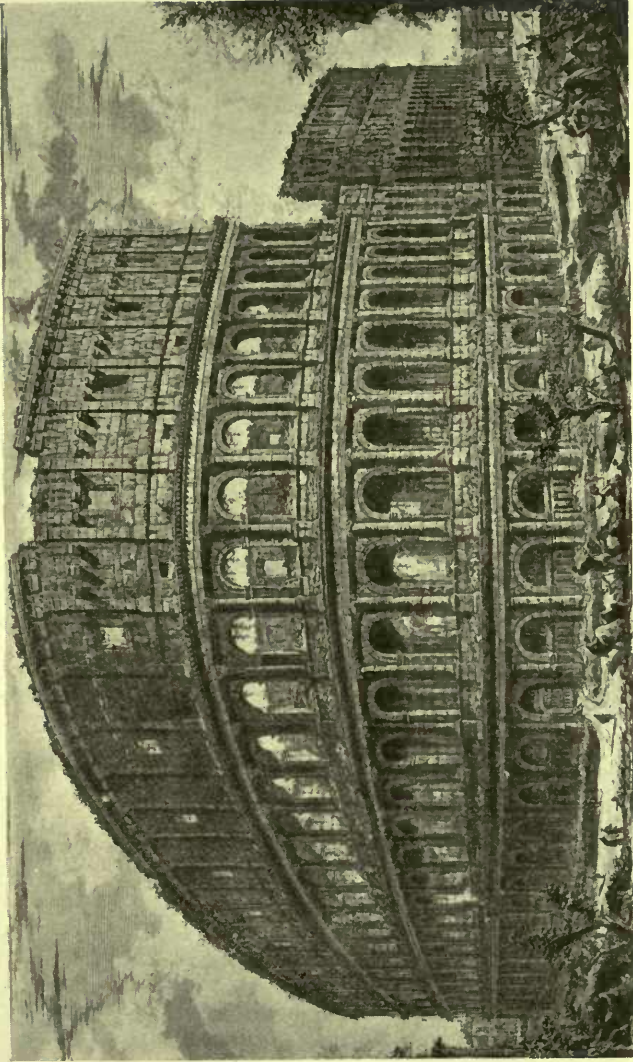


Il Campidoglio del Campidoglio di Firenze
Disegnato dall'Architetto M. G. Caselli, e Inciso da G. B. Caselli, e P. Caselli.

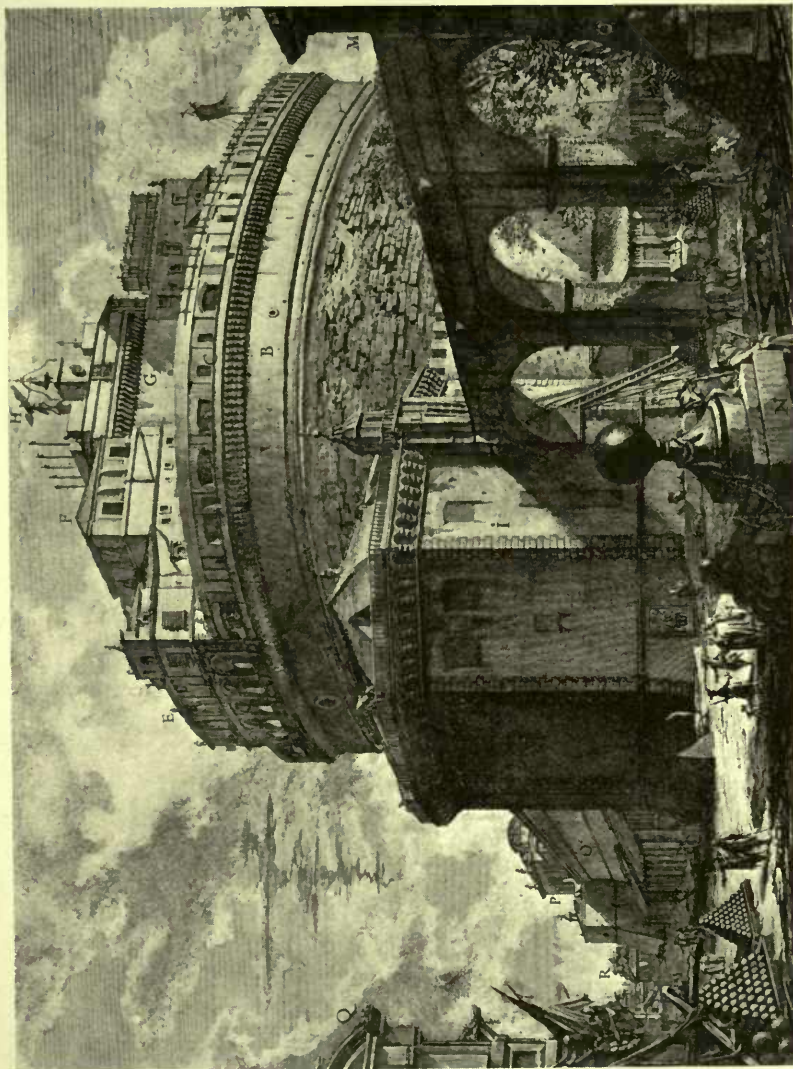
The Capitol.



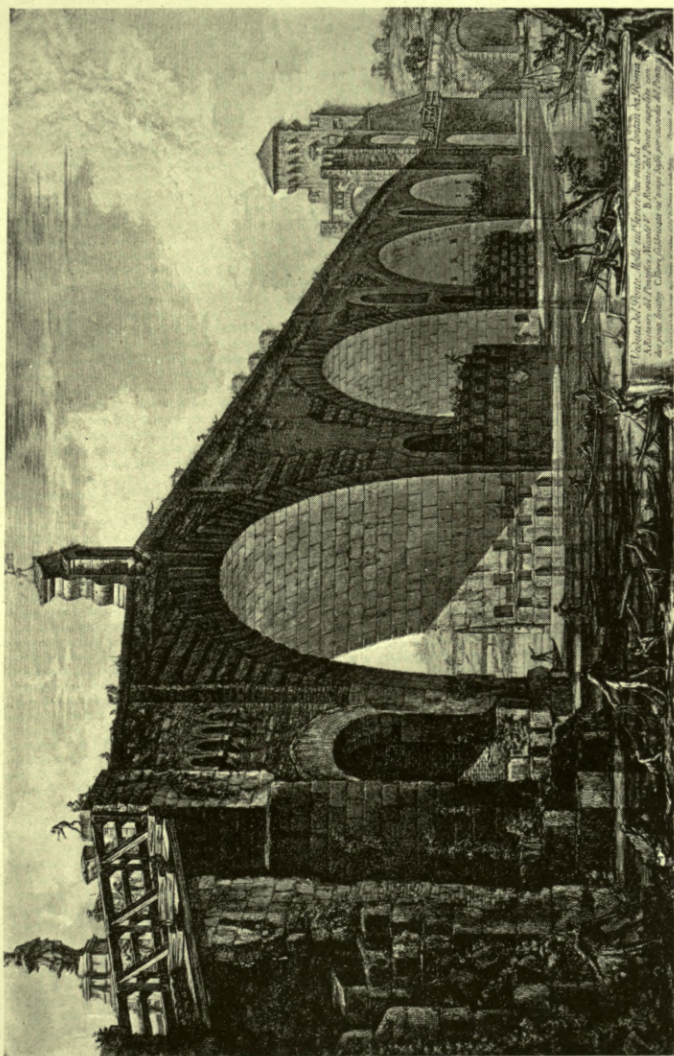
The Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine, Rome.



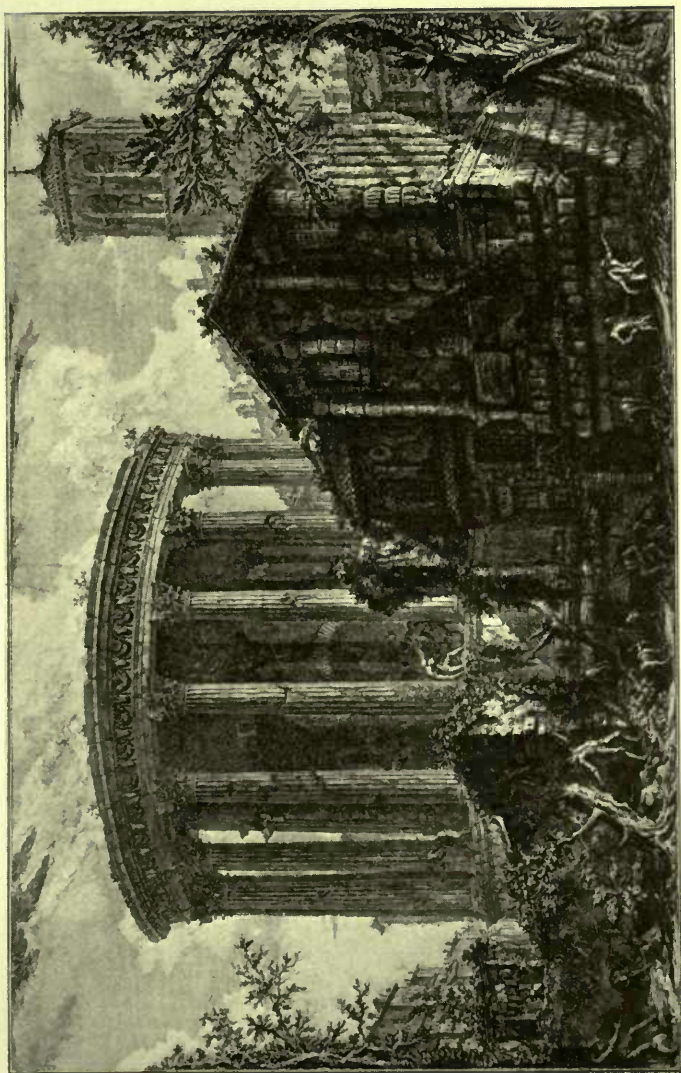
The Colosseum.



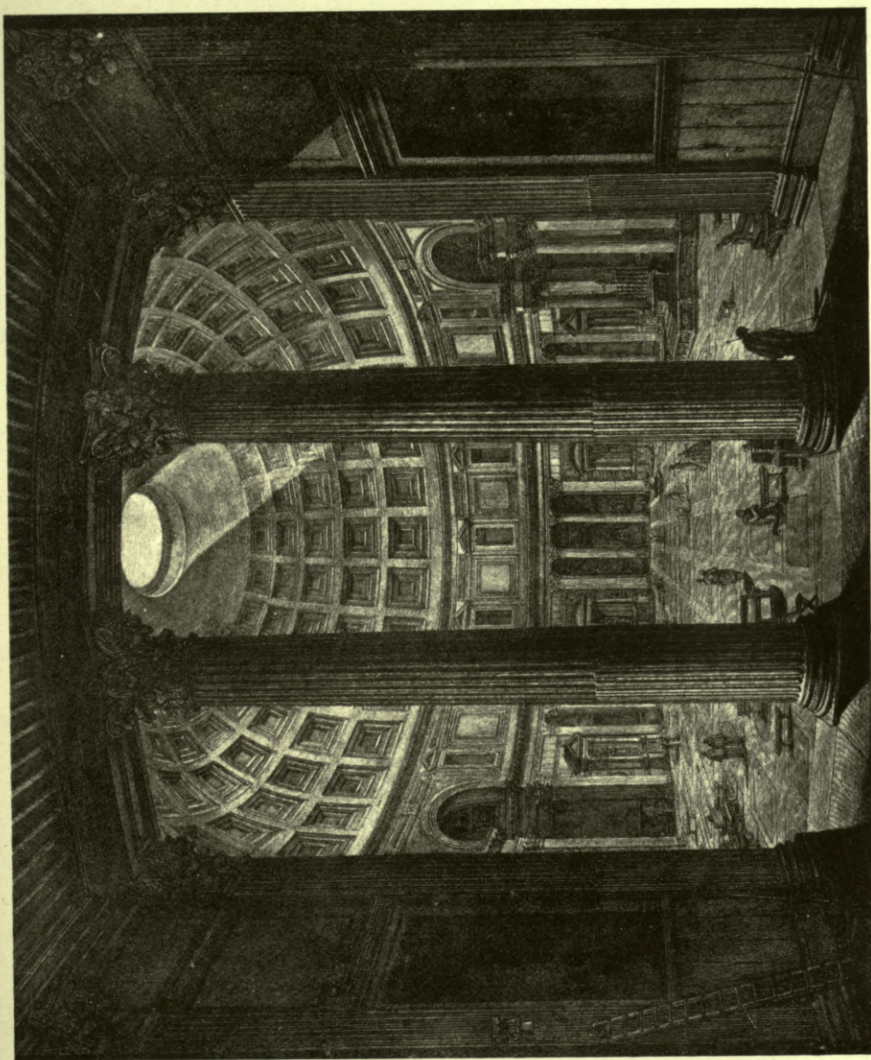
Tomb of Hadrian (Castle of St. Angelo).



Ponte Mollè, Rome.



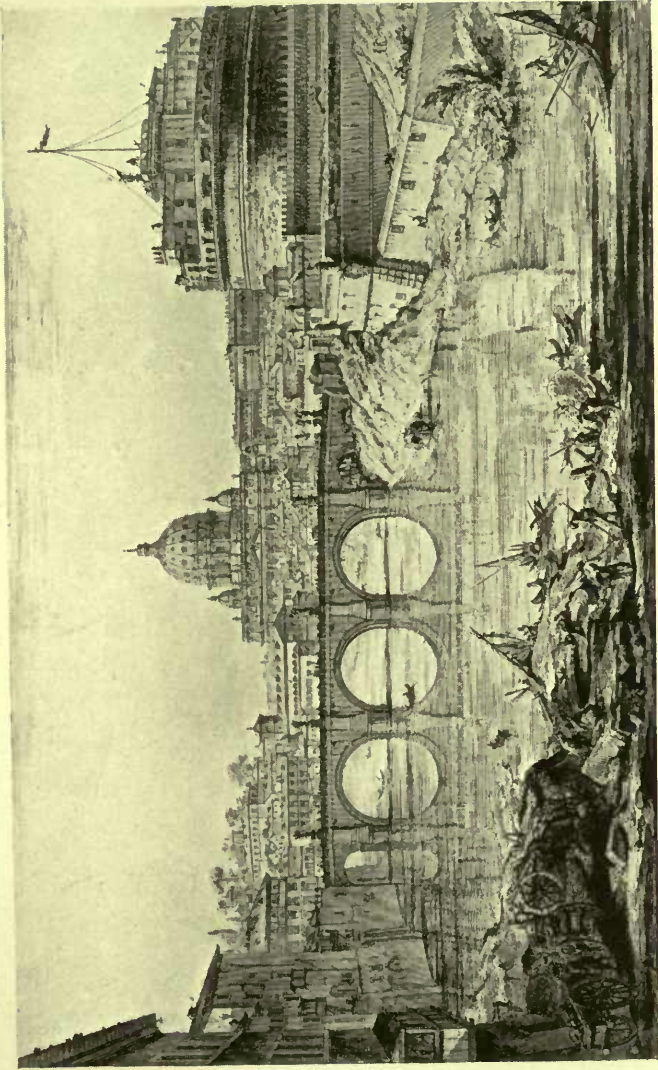
The Temple of Vesta at Tivoli.



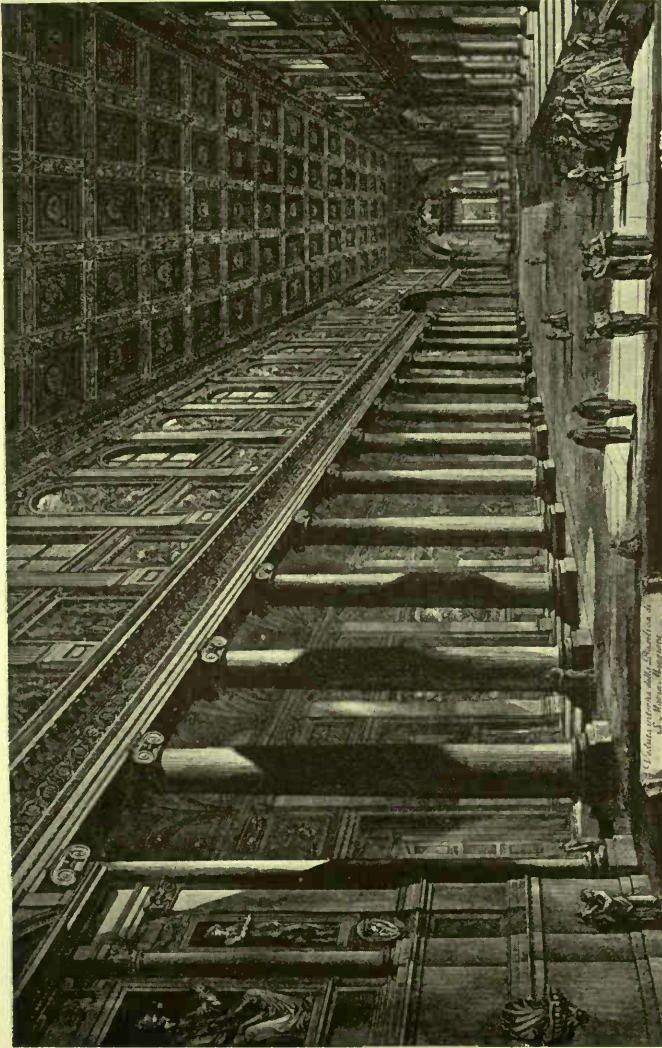
Interior of the Pantheon.



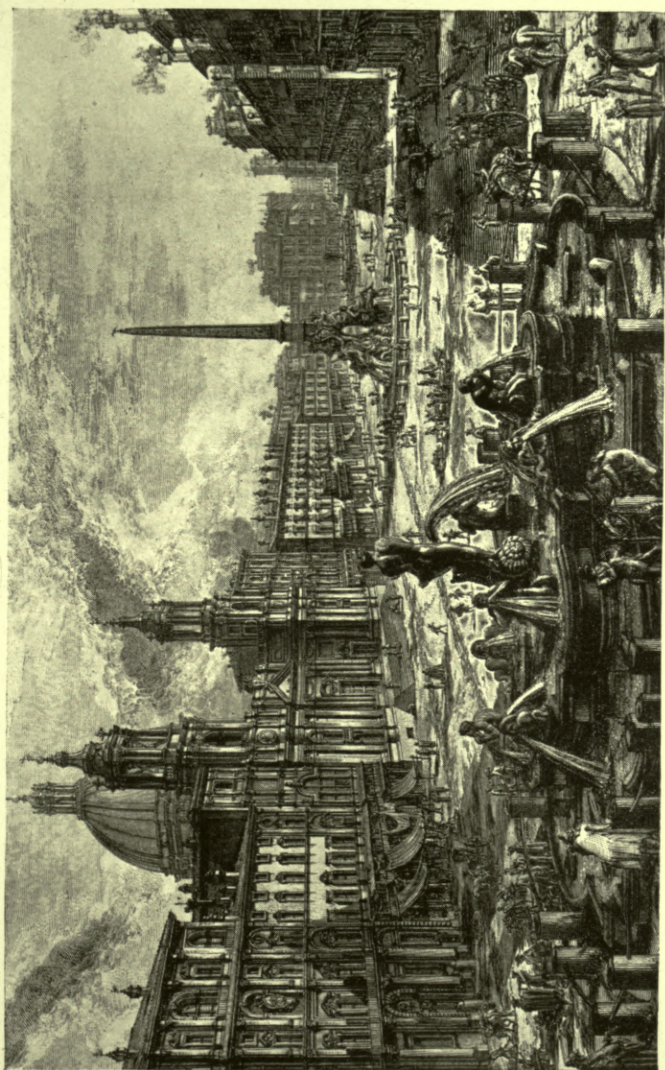
Gallery in Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli.



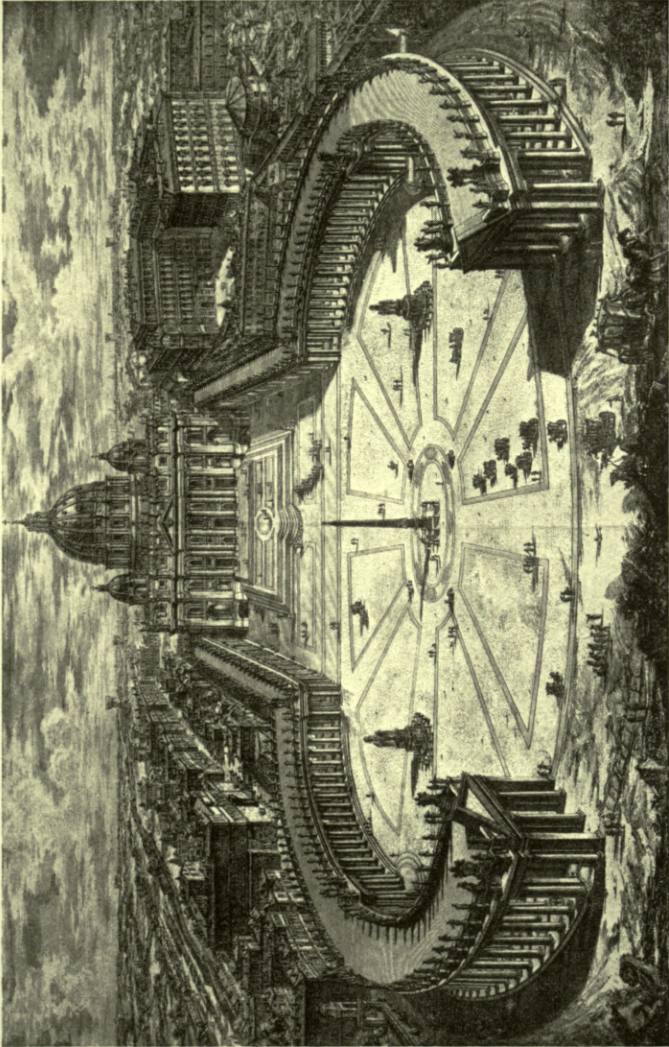
Ponte St. Angelo.



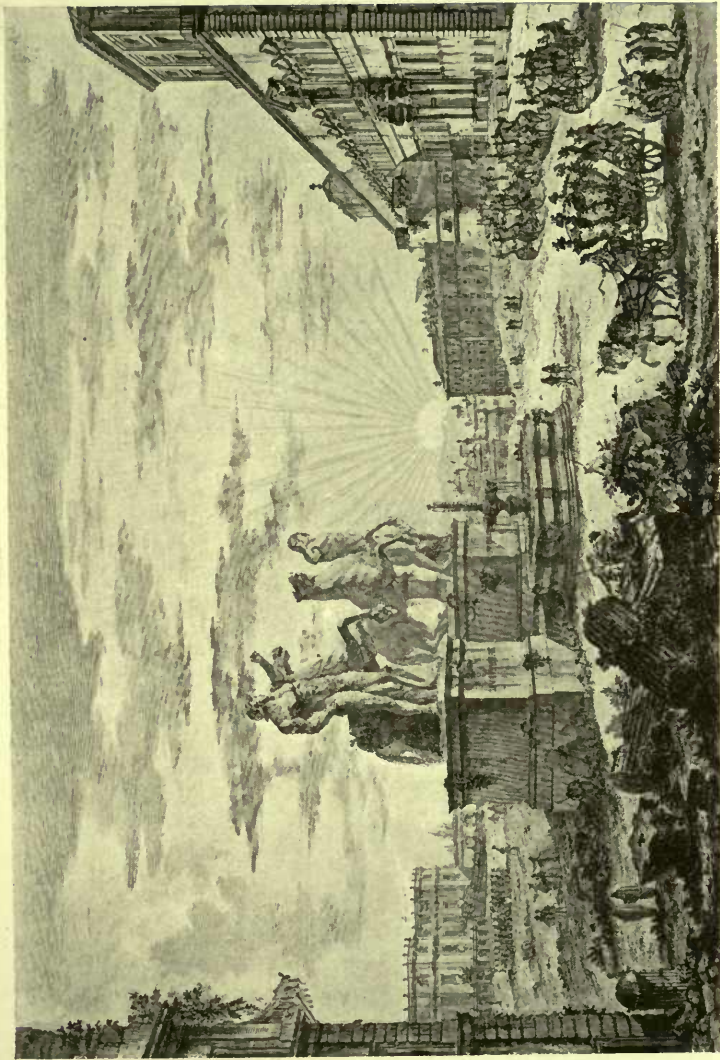
Interior of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.



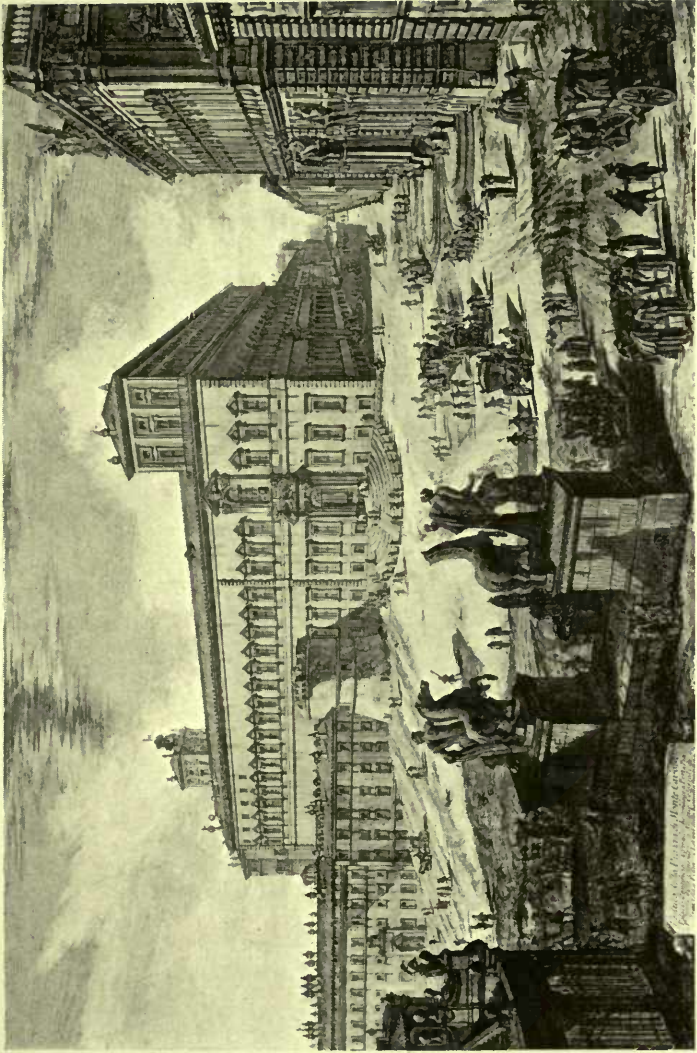
Piazza Navona, Rome.



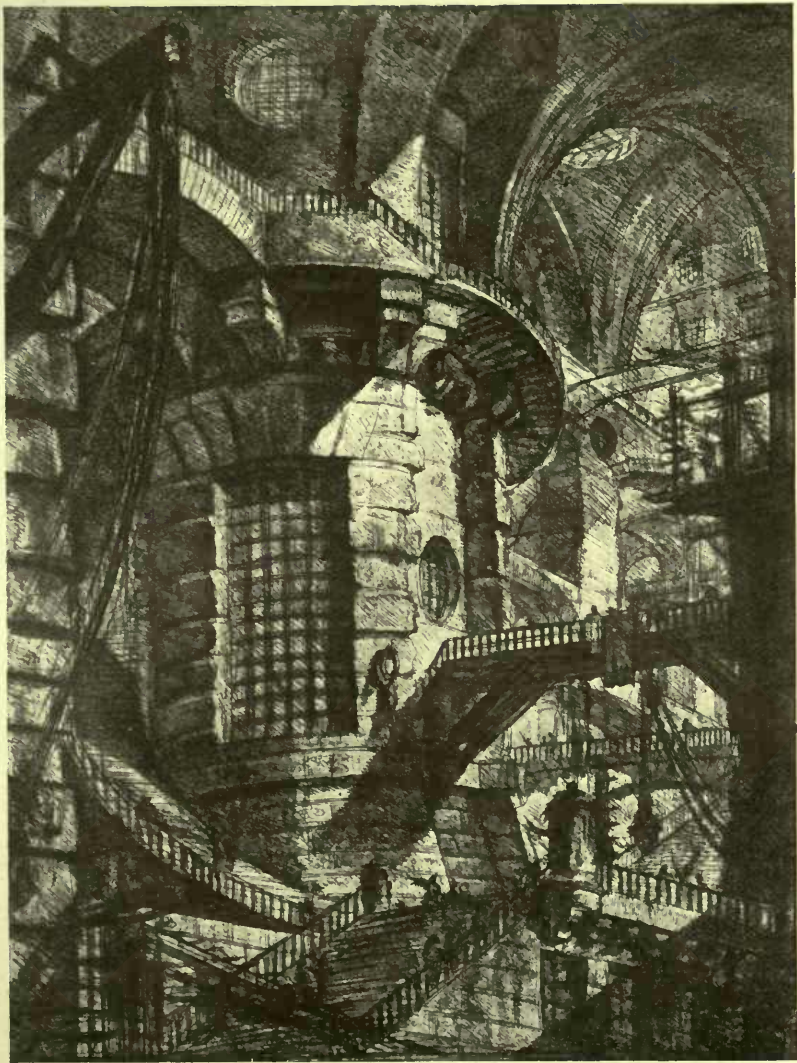
Piazza of St. Peter's, Rome.



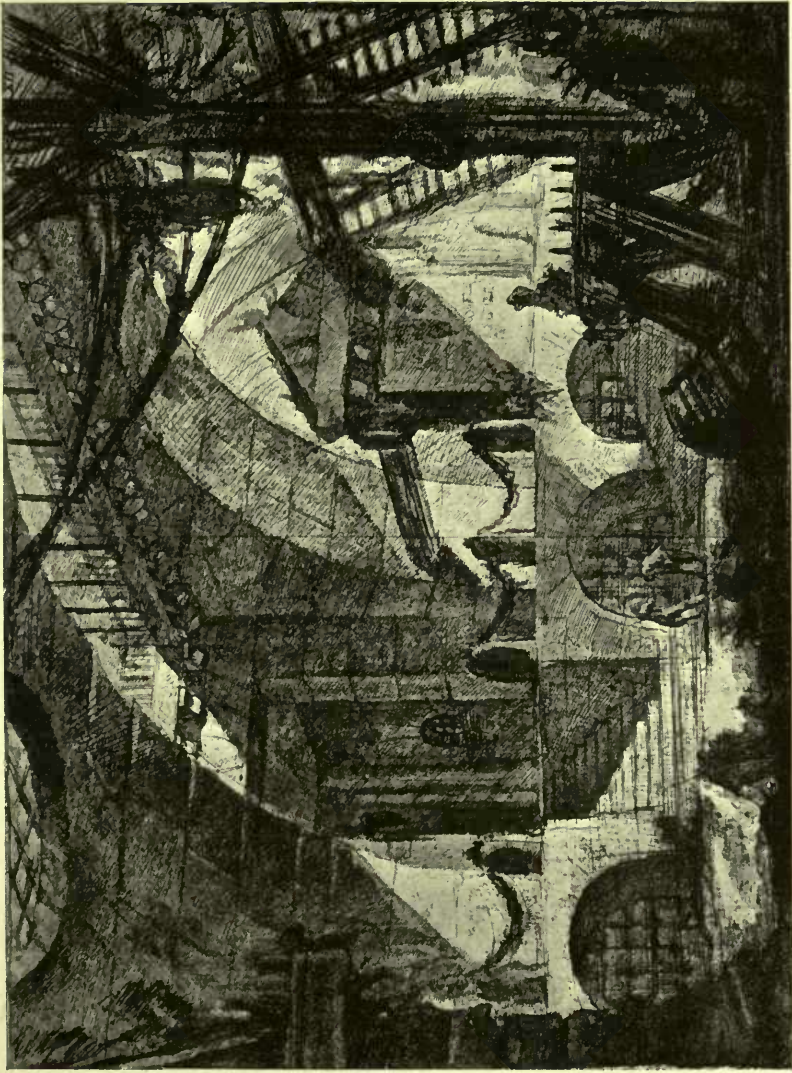
Antique Equestrian Statues (Castor and Pollux) on the Quirinal, Rome.



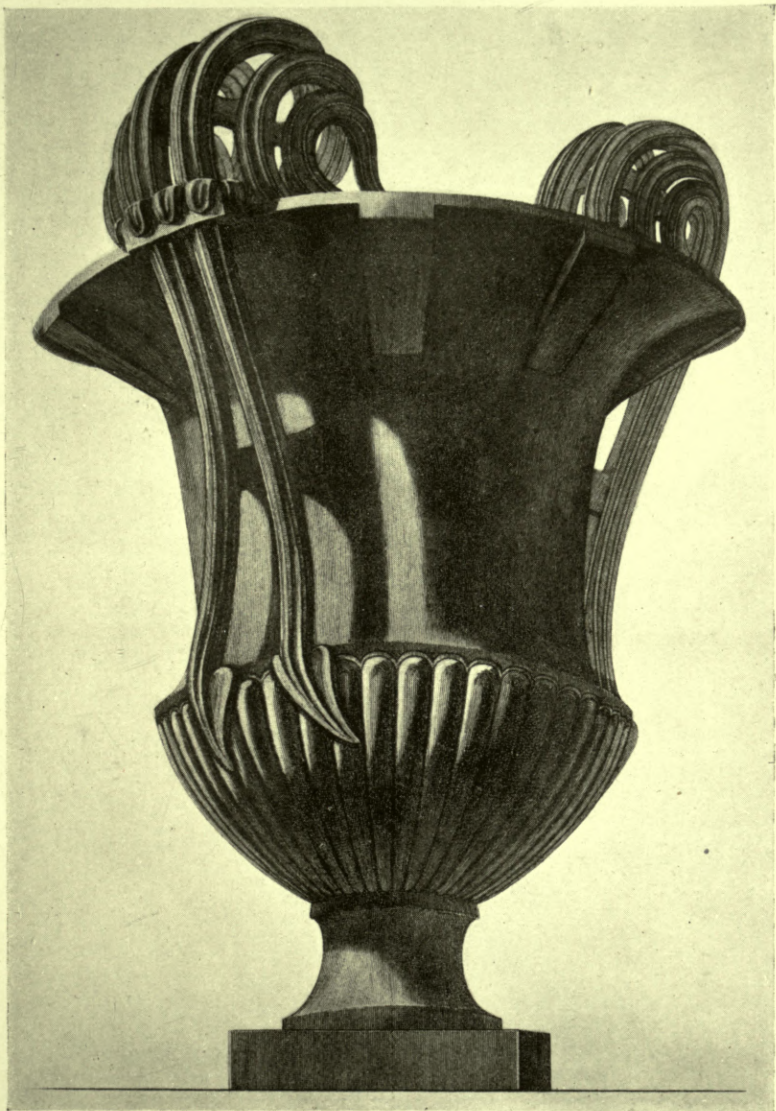
The Quirinal, Rome.



Etching from the Series of Imaginary Roman Prisons.



Etching from the Series of Imaginary Roman Prisons.



Vase from the "Vasi Candelabri."



Vase from the "Vasi Candelabri."



Vase from the "Vasi Candelabri."



Vase from the "Vasi Candelabri."



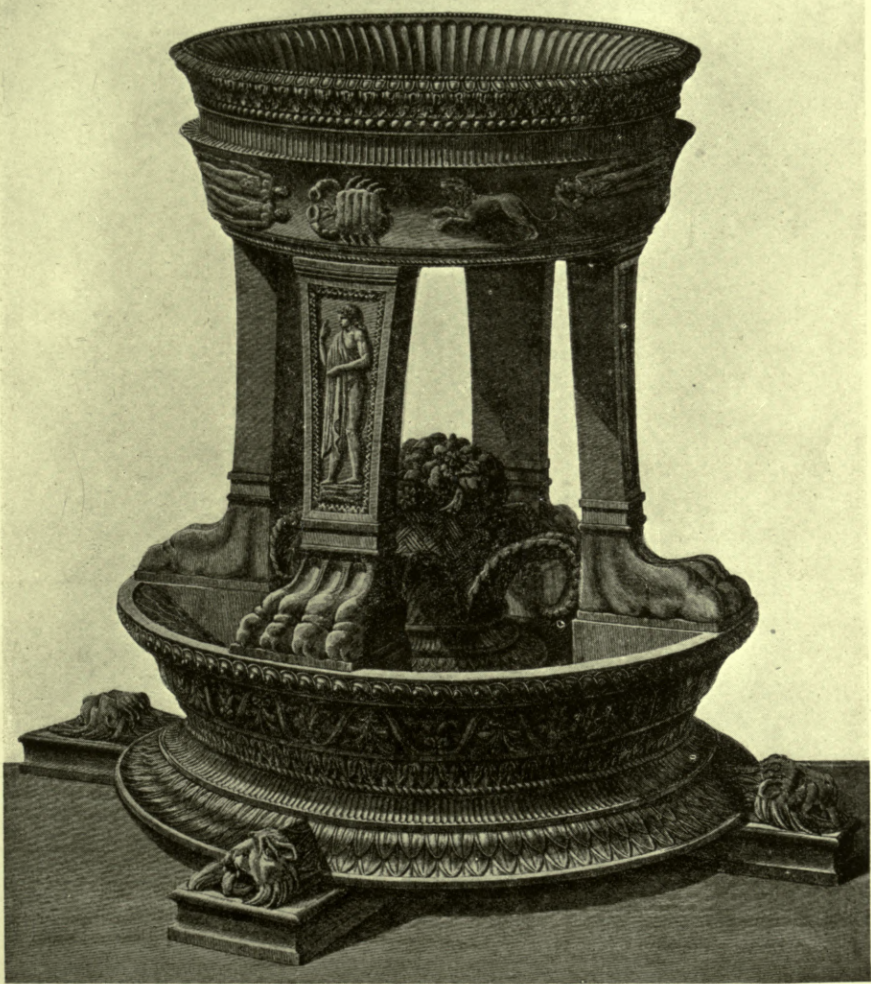
In Inghilterra presso il Signor Dalton Cavaliere Inglese

Vase and Tripod from the "Vasi Candelabri."



Vase and Pedestal from the "Vasi Candelabri."

Altra veduta in prospettiva dello stesso Tripode



Tripod from the "Vasi Candelabri."

*Al Sig.^a Cavaliere Edward Walter amatore delle Belle Arti
 In atto d'Uffizio il Cavaliere Gio. Batt. Piranesi D.D.D.
 Tripode antico di marmo che si conserva nel Museo Capitolino. Si può apporre che fosse dedicato a Baccho
 per gl'intrecci di Viti che si vedono nei Pilastrelli di esso.*



Tripod and bas-relief from the "Vasi Candelabri etc."



Tripod from the "Vasi Candelabri."

A SUA ECCELLENZA
Monig^o D. GIOVAMBATISTA REZZONICO Nipote e Maggiordomo della Santità di N.S. PAPA CLEMENTE XIII
e Gran Priore in Roma della Sacra Religione Gerarchica
Disegno di un'Opera del Sig. Cavalier G. B. Piranesi scult. dell'Acc. Inc.



Lamp from the "Vasi Candelabri."

*Al Signor Giovanni Taylor Cavaliere Inglese
amatore delle belle arti
In atto d'obsequio il Cavaliere
Gio. Battista Piranesi DDD.*

*Monumento antico che si
vede in Inghilterra
presso il Sig. Giorgio Austrore
nella sua Villa*

*vede in Inghilterra
Cavaliere Inglese
a Chelsea*



*In Inghilterra presso Sua Eccellenza
Milord Palmerston*

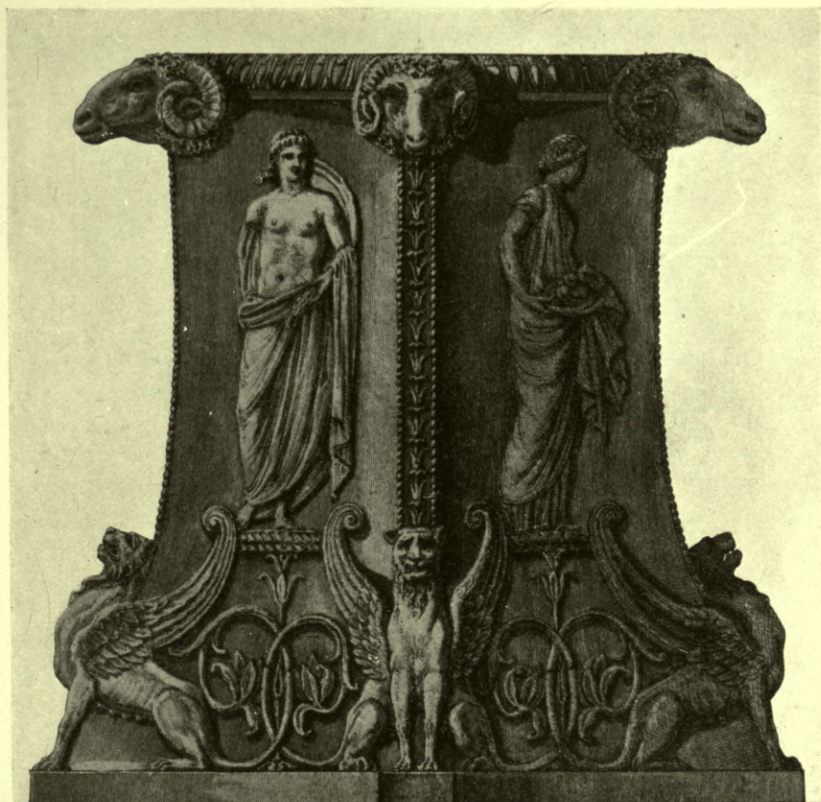


*In Inghilterra presso Sua Eccellenza
Milord Palmerston*



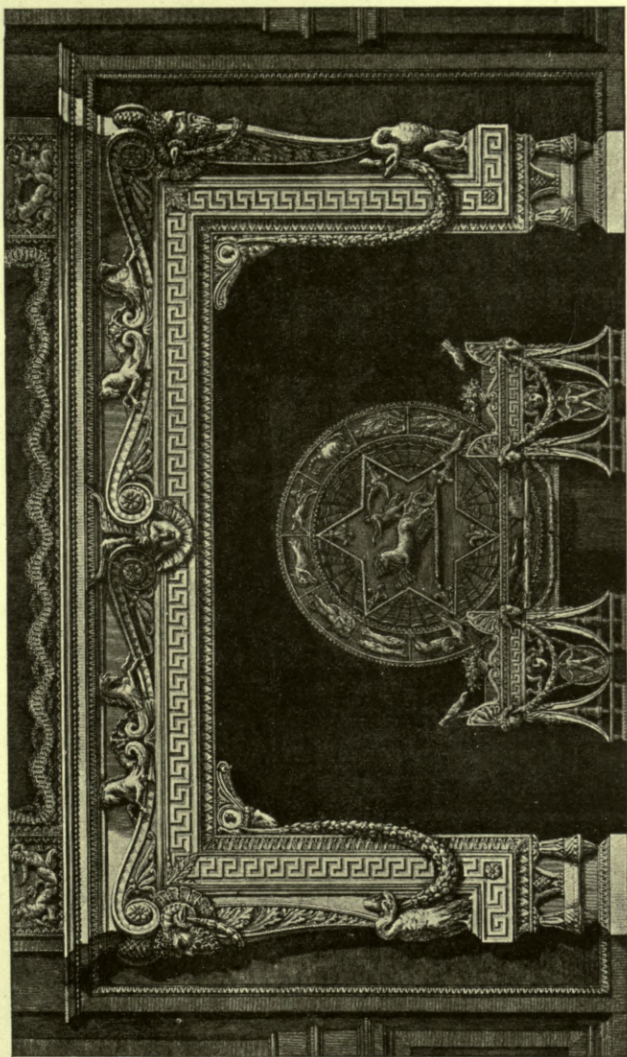
*F. MANLIO
D. DECVRION. LVCVDVM
NENSIVM*

Vases from the "Vasi Candelabri."

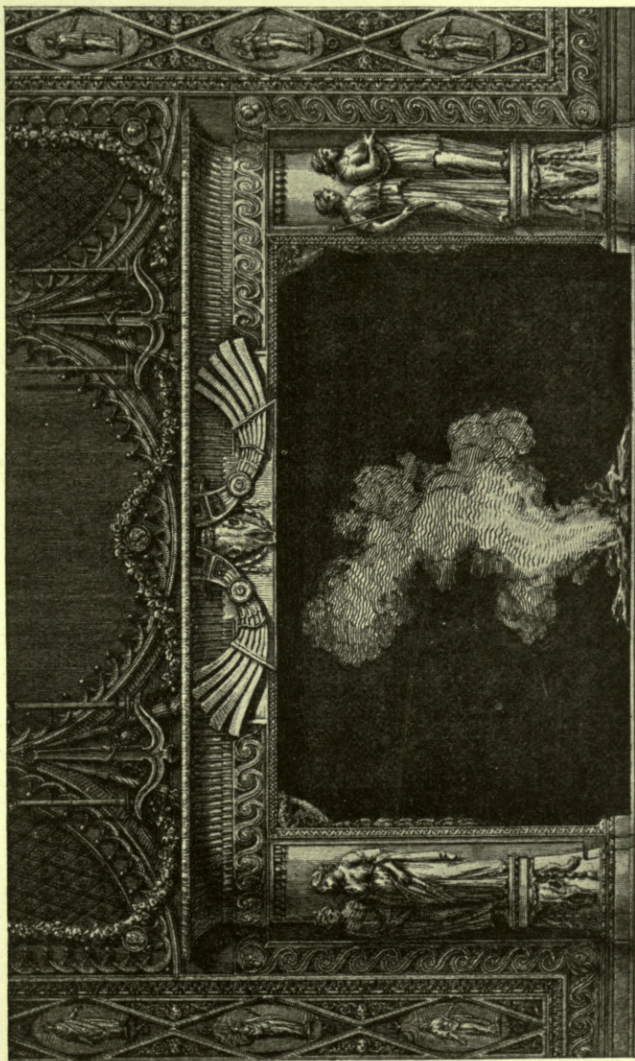


*Ara antica di marmo ornata di finissimi
intagli, e sculture. Si vede nel Palazzo
detto la Farnesina alla Longara.*

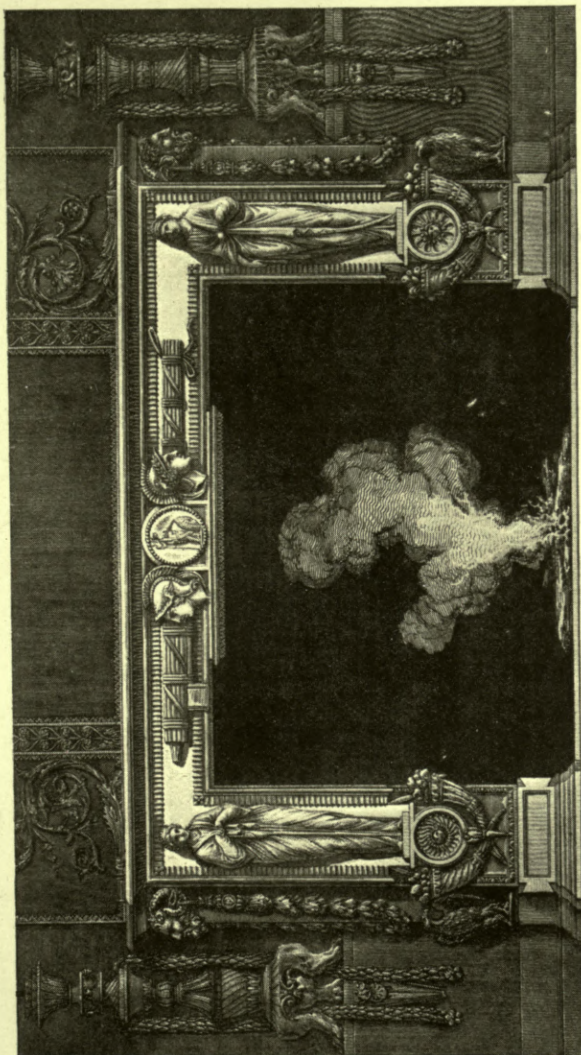
Altar from the "Vasi Candelabri."



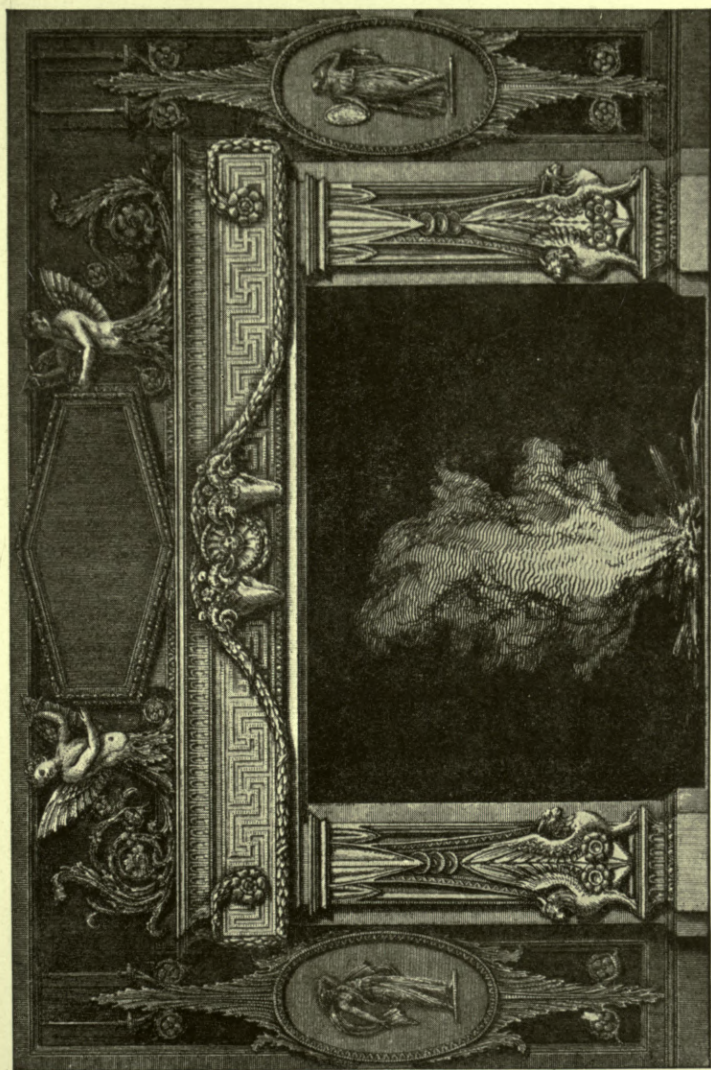
Design for Chimneypiece and Grate from the "Diverse Maniere."



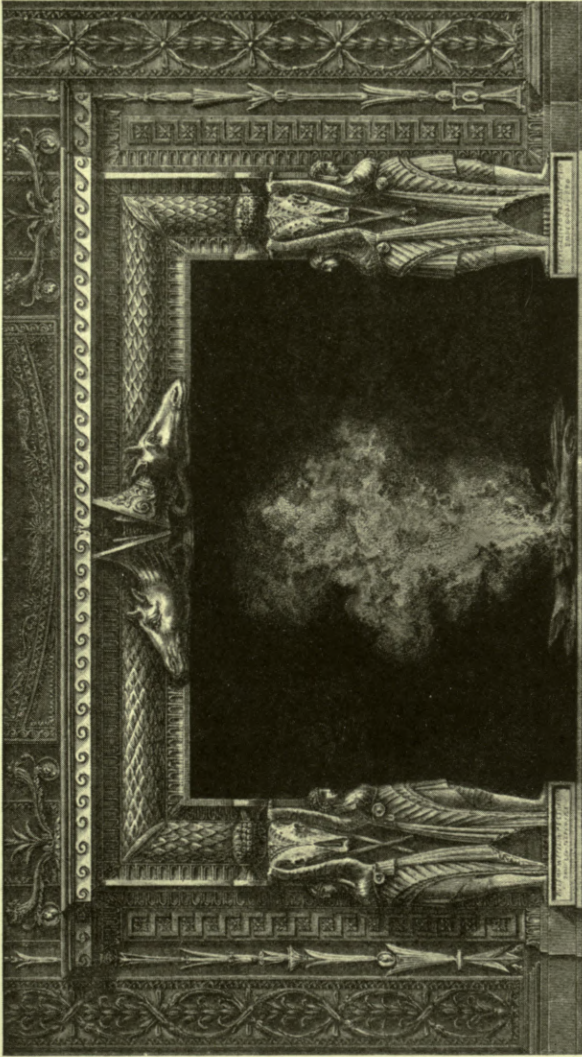
Design for Chimney-piece from the "Diverse Maniere."



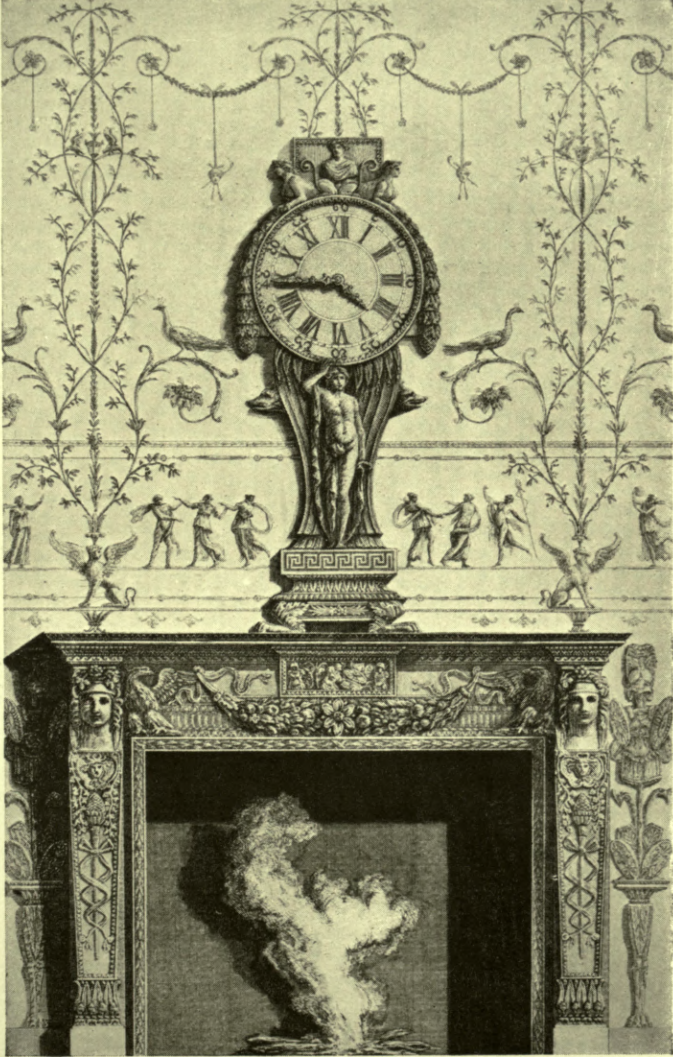
Design for Chimneypiece from the "Diverse Maniere."



Design for Chimneypiece from the "Diverse Maniere."



Design for Chimneypiece from the "Diverse Maniere."



Design for Chimneypiece and Clock from the "Diverse Maniere."

SOME INTERESTING PUBLICATIONS
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Publishers' Note.

IN presenting this list the Publishers would draw attention to the distinctive character of the works which are described. These cover a wide field, being of interest not only to those who are professionally concerned with architecture and building, but also to those who have a general non-technical interest in such subjects. Thus, the volume giving an illustrated historical survey of Mediæval and Renaissance architecture in England, and the volumes dealing with English domestic and ecclesiastical architecture, garden city houses, and domestic interior details, appeal alike to the educated layman and to the architect in practice.

"THE PRACTICAL EXEMPLAR OF ARCHITECTURE" and "STANDARD DETAILS," though also of strictly professional interest, are of totally different character, giving, as they do, carefully measured drawings and photographs of some of the finest examples of architecture in the kingdom; while those who are specially concerned with architectural education from the standpoint of design will find in "THE LIVERPOOL SKETCH BOOK" a notable collection of students' drawings.

'WHO'S WHO IN ARCHITECTURE' should be warmly welcomed as a work occupying a mid-position between the biography and the directory. As its name implies, it gives biographical particulars of all the leading men in the profession, and furnishes as well a complete list of architects in practice.

In addition, particulars are given of "THE ARCHITECTS' AND BUILDERS' JOURNAL"—the most up-to-date, the best illustrated, and most widely read of the architectural and building weeklies—and "THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW," which, in its new form, has achieved the distinction of being the finest of all current publications devoted to the art of architecture.

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