

Description of Pilate's Palace and the adjacent Buildings

The palace of the Roman governor, Pilate, was built on the north-west side of the mountain on which the Temple stood, and to reach it persons were obliged to ascend a flight of marble steps. It overlooked a large square surrounded by a colonnade, under which the merchants sat to sell their various commodities. A parapet, and an entrance at the north, south, east, and west sides alone broke the uniformity of this part of the market-place, which was called the forum, and built on higher ground than the adjacent streets, which sloped down from it. The palace of Pilate was not quite close, but separated by a large court, the entrance to which at the eastern side was through a high arch facing a street leading to the door called the 'Probatice,' on the road to the Mount of Olives. The southern entrance was through another arch, which leads to Sion, in the neighbourhood of the fortress of Acre. From the top of the marble steps of Pilate's palace, a person could see across the court as far as the forum, at the entrance of which a few columns and stone seats were placed. It was at these seats that the Jewish priests stopped, in order not to defile themselves by entering the tribunal of Pilate, a line traced on the pavement of the court indicating the precise boundary beyond which they could not pass without incurring defilement. There was a large parapet near the western entrance, supported by the sides of Pilate's Praetorium, which formed a species of porch between it and the square. That part of Pilate's palace which he made use of when acting in the capacity of judge, was called the Praetorium.

A number of columns surrounded the parapet of which we have just spoken, and in the centre was an uncovered portion, containing an underground part, where the two thieves condemned to be crucified with our Lord were confined, and this part was filled with Roman soldiers. The pillar upon which our Lord was scourged was placed on the forum itself, not far from this parapet and the colonnade. There were many other columns in this place; those nearest to the palace were made use of for the infliction of various corporal punishments, and the others served as posts to which were fastened the beasts brought for sale. Upon the forum itself, opposite this



building, was a platform filled with seats made of stone; and from this platform, which was called Gabbatha, Pilate was accustomed to pronounce sentence on great criminals. The marble staircase ascended by persons going to the governor's palace led likewise to an uncovered terrace, and it was from this terrace that Pilate gave audience to the priests and Pharisees, when they brought forward their accusations against Jesus. They all stood before him in the forum, and refused to advance further than the stone seats before mentioned. A person speaking in a loud tone of voice from the terrace could be easily heard by those in the forum. Behind Pilate's palace there were many other terraces, and likewise gardens, and a country house. The gardens were between the palace of the governor and the dwelling of his wife, Claudia Procles. A large moat separated these buildings from the mountain on which the Temple stood, and on this side might be seen the houses inhabited by those who served in the Temple. The palace of Herod the elder was placed on the eastern side of Pilate's palace; and it was in its inner court that numbers of the Innocents were massacred. At present the appearance of these two buildings is a little altered, as their entrances are changed. Four of the principal streets commenced at this part of the town, and ran in a southerly direction, three leading to the forum and Pilate's palace, and the fourth to the gate through which persons passed on their way to Bethsur. The beautiful house which belonged to Lazarus, and likewise that of Martha, were in a prominent part of this street. One of these streets was very near to the Temple, and began at the gate which was called Probatia. The pool of Probatia was close to this gate on the right hand side, and in this pool the sheep were washed for the first time, before being taken to the Temple; while the second and more solemn washing took place in the pool of Bethesda, which is near the south entrance to the Temple. The second of the above-mentioned streets contained a house belonging to St. Anna, the mother of the Blessed Virgin, which she usually inhabited when she came up to Jerusalem with her family to offer sacrifice in the Temple. I believe it was in this house that the espousals of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin were celebrated.

The forum, as I have already explained, was built on higher ground than the neighbouring streets, and the aqueducts which ran through these streets flowed into the Probatia pool. On Mount Sion, directly opposite to the old castle of King David, stood a building very similar to the forum, while to the south-east might be seen the Cenacle, and a little towards the north the tribunals of Annas and Caiphas. King David's castle was a deserted fortress, filled with courts, empty rooms, and stables, generally let to travellers. It

had long been in this state of ruin, certainly before the time of our Lord's nativity. I saw the Magi with their numerous retinue enter it before going into Jerusalem. When in meditation I behold the ruins of old castles and temples, see their neglected and forlorn state, and reflect on the uses to which they are now put, so different from the intentions of those who raised them, my mind always reverts to the events of our own days, when so many of the beautiful edifices erected by our pious and zealous ancestors are either destroyed, defaced, or used for worldly, if not wicked purposes. The little church of our convent, in which our Lord deigned to dwell, notwithstanding our unworthiness, and which was to me a paradise upon earth, is now without either roof or windows, and all the monuments are effaced or carried away. Our beloved convent, too, what will be done with it in a short time? That convent, where I was more happy in my little cell with my broken chair, than a king could be on his throne, for from its window I beheld that part of the church which contained the Blessed Sacrament. In a few years, perhaps, no one will know that it ever existed,—no one will know that it once contained hundreds of souls consecrated to God, who spent their days in imploring his mercy upon sinners. But God will know all, he never forgets,—the past and the future are equally present to him. He it is who reveals to me events which took place so long ago, and on the day of judgment, when all must be accounted for, and every debt paid, even to the farthing, he will remember both the good and the evil deeds performed in places long since forgotten. With God there is no exception of persons or places, his eyes see all, even the Vineyard of Naboth. It is a tradition among us that our convent was originally founded by two poor nuns, whose worldly possessions consisted in a jar of oil and a sack of beans.

On the last day God will reward them for the manner in which they put out this small talent to interest, and for the large harvest which they reaped and presented to him. It is often said that poor souls remain in purgatory in punishment for what appears to us so small a crime as not having made restitution of a few coppers of which they had unlawful possession. May God therefore have mercy upon those who have seized the property of the poor, or of the Church.