CHAPTER XXIII

THE THEATRE COLONNADE, USED AS BARRACKS FOR GLADIATORS

'Behind the stage,' says Vitruvius (V. ix.), speaking of the arrangements of the theatre, 'colonnades should be built, that shelter may be afforded to spectators in case of rain and a place provided for making preparations for the stage.'

This maxim of ancient architects was applied at Pompeii in a generous way; in connection with the theatres there was an extensive system of colonnades. To understand their use it will be necessary first to view them as they were in the earlier time, and then to take account of later changes.

In the Oscan Period, and afterwards to the end of the Re-
public, when a performance in the Large Theatre was interrupted by a shower, the spectators in the upper seats could take refuge under the colonnade of the Forum Triangulare; those below found shelter under the rectangular colonnade at the rear, which was obviously built for the purpose, and may be called, by way of distinction, the Theatre Colonnade (Fig. 71). It contained seventy-four Doric columns, and enclosed a large open area. The main entrance (2) was near the northeast corner. The entrance hall on the side of the colonnade was supported by three Ionic columns. It was connected at the north end with a short colonnade on the east side of the area back of the stage of the Theatre; this led to the large door at the east end of the stage and the corresponding parados of the orchestra; the wall at 4 on our plan is a later addition. The Theatre Colonnade must have been used also as a promenade on days when there was no performance; it was connected by a broad passage (1) with Stabian Street.

This colonnade seems too far away to have served as a place for making preparations for the stage; another was erected for that purpose. At the northwest corner a broad stairway leads down from the Forum Triangulare (5; cf. Fig. 65); from the foot a small and inconvenient flight of steps leads into the area at the rear of the stage. A line with the stairway is a series of small rooms opening toward the south. These do not belong to the original structure. In their place there was once a colonnade, which faced the north and connected the large stairway with the short colonnade, the remains of which are still to be seen on the east side of the area; the back of it was at the same time the back of the north division of the Theatre Colonnade. There was thus a covered passage extending from the foot of the stairway along two sides of the area to the east entrance of the stage and of the orchestra, which would answer very well to the second part of Vitruvius's dictum; but it had also another important use.

The portico of the Forum Triangulare, as we have seen, was at the same time the monumental entrance of the Theatre, and the large doorway at the left was used only for the ceremonious admission of the city officials, who with their retinue formed a procession in the Forum and wended their way hither in festal attire in order to open the performance—a formality that may be compared with the parade with which the Roman games were opened at Rome.

The route of such a procession, after entering the Forum Triangulare, is now clear. It passed along under the colonnade adjoining the Theatre, beyond the entrances to the upper portion of the cavea; turned and descended the broad stairway (5), proceeded under the colonnade along the south and east sides of the area behind the stage, and finally came upon the stage through the wide doorway at the east end. It was indeed possible to pass beyond the stage entrance and proceed through the parados directly to the seats of the orchestra and the lowest section of the cavea; but it is more in accordance with the fondness of the ancients for display to suppose that the procession moved across the stage, receiving as it passed the plaudits of the great audience, and emerged from the entrance opposite that by which it came in, disbanding in the court, whence the members could go to their respective seats. We need not here raise the question whether the procession passed upon the stage behind the triangular side screens (periactoi), or whether these were set in place only after it had already passed.

When the colonnade on the south side of the court had been replaced by rooms, and the Theatre Colonnade itself had been transformed into barracks, this route of the processions was blocked. They could still pass down the street in front of the temple of Isis, turn into Stabian Street, and reach the stage through the passage at the rear of the Small Theatre; but it does not seem probable that they followed this course, for the reason that there are three large stepping stones in the street before one comes to the entrance of the passage; these would have proved a serious obstruction, and would undoubtedly have been removed had the processions gone this way.

We may rather believe that before the usual route was closed the processions themselves had been given up. They were still in vogue, however, when the Small Theatre was built; otherwise the purpose of the wide entrances at the ends of the stage and of the room back of it is not clear. Moreover the sidewalk
in front of the Small Theatre, on Stabian Street, is of an altogether unusual width, and was apparently covered by a portico. We infer that the procession to this theatre entered at the west end of the stage, and passed out at the east end; since it could not disperse on the street, it would turn where the sidewalk was broadest, go back through the room at the rear of the stage into the court, and there disband.

The discontinuance of the processions must then be assigned to the period between the building of the Small Theatre and the changing over of the Theatre Colonnade into barracks, which, to judge from the masonry and the remains of the decoration, did not take place before the time of Nero. The processions were abandoned either in the troubled period of the Civil Wars, or in the early years of the Empire; if in the latter period, their discontinuance may have been due to legislation connected with the reorganization of the Empire under Augustus, or to the overshadowing of them by more imposing ceremonies introduced in connection with the religious festivals.

Our information in regard to the later use of the Theatre Colonnade is indeed meagre; not a single inscription bearing upon it has been found. Yet when we take into account the changes that were made in it, and the objects found there, the supposition that it was turned into barracks for gladiators in the time of the Early Empire, and so used till the destruction of the city, is seen to harmonize with almost all the facts.

First, rooms were built on all sides behind the colonnade; on the north side they took the place of the south arm of the colonnade in the area back of the stage. They were in two series, one above the other; the upper rooms were entered from a low wooden gallery accessible by three stairways. They could not have been intended for shops; they were too small, measuring on the average hardly more than twelve feet square, and the doors were too narrow. There were no doors opening from one room into the other. Both lower and upper rooms, we may conclude, were used for men's quarters.

In the middle of the south side a large room was left, with the front open toward the area, an exedra (6). On the east side was a still larger room the front of which is divided off
by pillars; other rooms open from it, and among them is one (10) with several hearths, evidently intended for a mess kitchen, if the hearths are ancient; they may be modern. Over these rooms was a second story, reached by a broad stairway (9).

The immediate connection of the colonnade with the area behind the stage was now cut off by a wall (4); there was left only a small door in the corner, which could be readily fastened. The entrance from the passage leading to Stabian Street (2) was provided with doors and placed under the control of a guard, for whom a special room was built at one side (3). There was a third entrance, narrow and easily closed, at the northwest corner, where a flight of steps connected the foot of the broad stairway (5) with the landing of the stairs leading to the wooden gallery.

Thus a complete transformation was effected. The promenade for theatre-goers had become barracks, with a great number of cell-like rooms, a mess kitchen, and narrow, guarded entrances. Soldiers, however, could not have been kept here; in the period to which the rebuilding belongs, garrisons were not stationed in the cities of Italy except the Capital. On the other hand, gladiatorial combats in Pompeii were so frequent, and on so large a scale, that a special building for the housing and guarding of gladiators would seem to have been a necessity; such a building would naturally have been erected by the city and placed at the disposal of those who gave the games. As early as the time of Augustus, Aulus Clodius Flaccus brought forward forty pairs of gladiators in a single day, and on various occasions afterwards as many as thirty pairs were engaged. How well the colonnade was now suited for gladiators' quarters may be seen from a glance at the plan. The area would serve as a practice court, the exedra on the south side (6), protected from the sun, as the station for the trainers and lounging room for men awaiting their turn; the mess room would be the large apartment adjoining the kitchen (11), while the quarters of the chief trainer, lanista, and his assistants, would be in the second story, reached by the broad stairway (9).

The small rooms were poorly decorated, in the fourth style. There were better paintings only in the exedra. On the rear
wall of this room was the oft repeated group of Mars and Venus; on the side walls, gladiatorial weapons were represented, piled up in heaps, after the manner of trophies, about eight feet high. The reference to the purpose of the building, as in the case of the paintings in the Macellum, is obvious. The columns about the area were originally white; after the rebuilding the unfluted lower part was painted red, the upper part yellow. Four columns, however, two at the middle of the east side, and the two opposite them on the west side, were painted blue, probably to serve as bounds in marking off the area for athletic exercises.

The objects found in the barracks are recorded in the journal of the excavations. They indicate that at the time of the eruption the rooms were occupied. Everything of value was removed from those on the north side by the survivors, but the south half was apparently left undisturbed, and has yielded a rich harvest.

In ten rooms the excavators found a great quantity of weapons of the kinds used by gladiators, including fifteen helmets, a shield, greaves (Fig. 72), several broad belts trimmed with metal, and a couple of armlets; there were more than a hundred scales of horn belonging to a coat of mail, and a half dozen shoulder protectors, *galeri*, which the net fighter, *retiarius*, who carried no shield and was armed only with a net and a trident, wore on his left shoulder. The weapons were mostly for defence, but remains of a few offensive weapons were found, as the head of a lance, a sword, and a couple of daggers. In the same room with the daggers and the sword (perhaps 7) were the remains of two wooden chests containing cloth with gold thread; this may have been used in gladiators’ costumes.

The helmets are characteristic (Fig. 73). They are furnished with a visor, and part of them have a broad rim, richly ornamented with reliefs; their shape corresponds exactly with that of the helmets seen in paintings and reliefs representing gladiatorial combats. The shield, which is round and only about sixteen inches in diameter, would have been quite useless in military service. In a room under the stairs the skeleton of a horse was found, with remains of trappings richly mounted with bronze; one class of gladiators, the equites, fought on horseback.

One of the small rooms on the west side (8) was used as a guard room. Here were the stocks, the remains of which are shown in Fig. 74; they were fastened to a board. At one end of the under piece was a lock, by which the bar passed through the rings could be made secure. The men confined had the choice of lying down or sitting in an uncomfortable position. The four persons whose skeletons were found in this room, however, were not in the stocks at the time of the eruption. That such means of discipline should be employed in controlling gladiators is entirely consistent with ancient methods.

Besides these finds, there were others not so easily explained. In the two rooms in which the spearhead and the other offensive weapons were found, there were eighteen skeletons, among them that of a woman richly adorned with gold jewelry; she had a necklace with emeralds, earrings, and two armbands, besides rings and other ornaments, and in a casket a cameo, the elaborate setting of which is in part preserved. In a room near
the southwest corner the bones of a new-born infant were found
in an earthen jar. A number of weights also were discovered,
and vessels of terra cotta and glass; in three rooms there were
more than six dozen small saucers. Were the barracks wholly
given up to gladiators at the time of the eruption, or were some
other persons allowed to have quarters here, perhaps some of
those whose houses had been destroyed by the earthquake of 63
and had not been rebuilt? A certain conclusion cannot be
reached.