

The Denial of St. Peter

At the moment when Jesus uttered the words, 'Thou hast said it,' and the High Priest rent his garment, the whole room resounded with tumultuous cries. Peter and John, who had suffered intensely during the scene which had just been enacted, and which they had been obliged to witness in silence, could bear the sight no longer. Peter therefore got up to leave the room, and John followed soon after. The latter went to the Blessed Virgin, who was in the house of Martha with the holy women, but Peter's love for Jesus was so great, that he could not make up his mind to leave him; his heart was bursting, and he wept bitterly, although he endeavoured to restrain and hide his tears. It was impossible for him to remain in the tribunal, as his deep emotion at the sight of his beloved Master's sufferings would have betrayed him; therefore he went into the vestibule and approached the fire, around which soldiers and common people were sitting and talking in the most heartless and disgusting manner concerning the sufferings of Jesus, and relating all that they themselves had done to him. Peter was silent, but his silence and dejected demeanour made the bystanders suspect something. The portress came up to the fire in the midst of the conversation, cast a bold glance at Peter and said, 'Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean.' These words startled and alarmed Peter; he trembled as to what might ensue if he owned the truth before his brutal companions, and therefore answered quickly, 'Woman, I know him not,' got up, and left the vestibule. At this moment the cock crowed somewhere in the outskirts of the town. I do not remember hearing it, but I felt that it was crowing. As he went out, another maid-servant looked at him, and said to those who were with her, 'This man was also with him,' and the persons she addressed immediately demanded of Peter whether her words were true, saying, 'Art thou not one of this man's disciples?' Peter was even more alarmed than before, and renewed his denial in these words, 'I am not; I know not the man.' He left the inner court, and entered the exterior court; he was weeping, and so great was his anxiety and grief, that he did not reflect in the least on the words he had just uttered.



The exterior court was quite filled with persons, and some had climbed on to the top of the wall to listen to what was going on in the inner court which they were forbidden to enter. A few of the disciples were likewise there, for their anxiety concerning Jesus was so great that they could not make up their minds to remain concealed in the caves of Hinnom. They came up to Peter, and with many tears questioned him concerning their loved Master, but he was so unnerved and so fearful of betraying himself, that he briefly recommended them to go away, as it was dangerous to remain, and left them instantly. He continued to indulge his violent grief, while they hastened to leave the town. I recognised among these disciples, who were about sixteen in number, Bartholomew, Nathaniel, Saturninus, Judas Barsabeas, Simon, who was afterwards bishop of Jerusalem, Zacheus, and Manahem, the man who was born blind and cured by our Lord. Peter could not rest anywhere, and his love for Jesus prompted him to return to the inner court, which he was allowed to enter, because Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had, in the first instance, taken him in. He did not re-enter the vestibule, but turned to the right and went towards the round room which was behind the tribunal, and in which Jesus was undergoing every possible insult and ignominy from his cruel enemies. Peter walked timidly up to the door, and although perfectly conscious that he was suspected by all present of being a partisan of Jesus, yet he could not remain outside; his love for his Master impelled him forward; he entered the room, advanced, and soon stood in the very midst of the brutal throng who were feasting their cruel eyes on the sufferings of Jesus. They were at that moment dragging him ignominiously backwards and forwards with the crown of straw upon his head; he cast a sorrowful and even severe glance upon Peter, which cut him to the heart, but as he was still much alarmed, and at that moment heard some of the bystanders call out, 'Who is that man?' he went back again into the court, and seeing that the persons in the vestibule were watching him, came up to the fire and remained before it for some time. Several persons who had observed his anxious troubled countenance began to speak in opprobrious terms of Jesus, and one of them said to him, 'Thou also art one of his disciples; thou also art a Galilean; thy very speech betrays thee.' Peter got up, intending to leave the room, when a brother of Malchus came up to him and said, 'Did I not see thee in the garden with him? Didst thou not cut off my brother's ear?' Peter became almost beside himself with terror; he began to curse and to swear 'that he knew not the man,' and ran out of the vestibule into the outer court; the cock then crowed again, and Jesus, who at that moment was led across the court, cast a look of mingled compassion and grief upon his

Apostle. This look of our Lord pierced Peter to the very heart,—it recalled to his mind in the most forcible and terrible manner the words addressed to him by our Lord on the previous evening: ‘Before the cock crows twice, thou shalt thrice deny me.’ He had forgotten all his promises and protestations to our Lord, that he would die rather than deny him—he had forgotten the warning given to him by our Lord;—but when Jesus looked at him, he felt the enormity of his fault, and his heart was nigh bursting with grief. He had denied his Lord, when that beloved Master was outraged, insulted, delivered up into the hands of unjust judges,—when he was suffering all in patience and in silence. His feelings of remorse were beyond expression; he returned to the exterior court, covered his face and wept bitterly; all fear of being recognised was over;—he was ready to proclaim to the whole universe both his fault and his repentance. What man will dare assert that he would have shown more courage than Peter if, with his quick and ardent temperament, he were exposed to such danger, trouble, and sorrow, at a moment, too, when completely unnerved between fear and grief, and exhausted by the sufferings of this sad night? Our Lord left Peter to his own strength, and he was weak; like all who forget the words: ‘Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.’