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## The Denials of Peter.

BY SIR W. M. RAMSAY, D.C.L., LL.D., Litt.D., D.D., EDINBURGH.

THE paper on 'Her that kept the Door'<sup>1</sup> in the February number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES by Lady Ramsay—which I may perhaps venture to call very interesting—suggests some further considerations with regard to the various narratives of the incident in question, which appear in the four Gospels. How many diverse original accounts by first-hand authorities lie behind the four narratives that are in our possession? What is the cause, and what the weight of the differences in respect of some details between these four narratives? These are important questions, and in attempting to answer them we shall find the proof that our knowledge of this incident rests on the highest plane of historical certainty.

The story is one of the most striking in the Gospels. It was certainly current in Christian circles from the day that the incident happened: about this there can be no doubt. Like all stories that are widely current in society, it was told in various forms differing a little in details; but the same moral and spiritual truth shines through all. This is characteristic of the East: the facts are secondary, the moral is of primary importance: the story lives for and through its spiritual quality. We of the West, however, while not neglecting the moral and spiritual, are also deeply interested in the details, partly for their own sake, partly because the discord in respect of the details has been held to throw discredit on this story and on the Gospels generally. The argument has taken the form that, if even in so simple a story as this discrepancies crept in, what shall we think about the Gospels as a whole?

A careful examination of the four narratives confirms their perfect trustworthiness, and explains the origin of the slight discord in respect of certain details. Moreover, it throws some light on the condition and the degree of knowledge that prevailed in the early Church in Judæa. It opens a page in history to us, not

<sup>1</sup> The word 'gate' will be used in the sequel in preference to 'door,' in order to keep clear in every reader's mind that what is meant is not the house door, but an outer gate admitting into a large precinct containing a courtyard as well as house.

indeed completely, but in a certain degree. There is no case known to me in all literature where a story so impresses its perfect truth on the attentive reader through the study and comparison of the different witnesses. There are, in most part of it, three traditions—that of John, that of Luke improving on Mark, and that of Mark and Matthew.

In the account given by John we have a narrative written by an eye-witness—perhaps in deference to the disciples of culture it would be polite to say, one who claims to be an eye-witness. That is not the case with any of the Synoptists. None of them saw or claim to have seen. Luke, who formally speaks of his authorities, claims to have heard from eye-witnesses. So doubtless would the others. We shall, however, take the narrative given in each of the four Gospels as it stands and investigate how far it justifies itself as a reasonable account of the action, not condemning beforehand any of the narratives, but bringing an open mind to bear on them. In order to understand the story of the denials of Peter, we must take it in its surroundings.

### I. THE ARREST OF JESUS.

Very early on the morning of March 18th, A.D. 29,<sup>2</sup> probably about two to three o'clock, when Jesus was still in the Garden of Gethsemane across the brook Kedron, there approached a company conspicuous in the rather dark night by reason of the gleaming, flickering lanterns and torches (which evidently left a lasting impression on the mind of John). They heralded to him the beginning of the most dread experience of his whole life. As the lights approached, the company turned out to be the cohort of Roman soldiers which was stationed in Jerusalem, together with a number of servants sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees. As the chief priests were practically all Sadducees, we have here a temporary union of the two great parties in the Jewish State, which

<sup>2</sup> On this point I accept the chronology of Mr. C. H. Turner: see Hastings' *D.B.*, art. 'Chronology of the New Testament.'

generally took opposite sides on almost all public questions.<sup>1</sup>

The disproportion between the numbers of the assailants and the friends of Jesus is almost ludicrous, and must have seemed so to the Roman Tribune, who had brought out the cohort<sup>2</sup> which he commanded under the impression evidently that an insurrection, which might become serious, ought to be met strongly in its early stage. Along with him there were, as Luke mentions, the chief priests and captains of the temple guard and elders; we can hardly suppose that this implies more than a proportion of the chief priests; and it indicates the anxiety of the Jewish chiefs in the present situation that any of them thought it necessary to come out at this hour. The presence of the Roman Tribune would require that the leaders of the Jewish people should also be represented: we can hardly imagine that a Roman cohort and a Tribune would go out at the suggestion of the Jewish chiefs, unless the latter showed by their presence that they considered the matter to be one of real importance. It is evident, from the narrative of the preceding events in all the Gospels, that nothing had occurred recently to justify any special anxiety in the mind of the Roman officials about the peace of Jerusalem. Their action was stimulated by the urgency of the Jewish leaders (in this case evidently of both parties, Pharisees and Sadducees), who warned them that a dangerous insurrection was going to break out, but that it might be most easily checked, if the Romans would consent to act at once. The Romans were always anxious about the peace of this stubborn people, whom they never understood; and the Tribune was guided by Jewish advice.

Of the incidents of this night and of this arrest, one of the most striking is the method of betrayal of Jesus. One of His twelve followers had agreed to guide the soldiers and the Jewish leaders to the place where Jesus was likely to be found.<sup>3</sup> Judas knew the ways of Jesus and His custom of going at night to the Mount of Olives: he either guessed or

<sup>1</sup> Even when they patched up a brief agreement, it was easy to stir dissension between them, as Paul did (Ac 22).

<sup>2</sup> John speaks of 'the cohort,' and this need not be whittled down to a few soldiers (as is often done by modern commentators). The Tribune would not go out in person, unless considerable force was employed.

<sup>3</sup> It is argued in a little book called the *Education of Christ* by the present writer, page 74 f., that Jesus, who

had some reason, not recorded in the Gospels, for knowing with certainty that the Lord would be in the olive orchard of Gethsemane; and, expecting to find Jesus and the eleven all together, he had arranged that he would show the one man of whom the Jews were in dread, by saluting Him with a kiss. Matthew and Mark both mention that 'Judas kissed his Lord.' John does not mention the incident; and the only allusion that he makes to the action of Judas is to say that 'Judas which betrayed him was standing with them.' The word 'them' must mean the leaders of the assailants, for it is obvious that Jesus did not speak vaguely to such a large company, but directed His opening words, 'Whom seek ye?' to the persons that He judged to be the leaders. With these leaders Judas was standing. It is unlikely that a person of humble rank like Judas would be permitted to stand close to the Tribune and chief priests, unless his presence was necessary for some urgent purpose. In the dark night his action could not be clearly seen unless he were close. But for one reason or another John shrinks from telling about the kiss, and he rather implies that Jesus gave Himself up, saying, 'I am he whom ye seek,' when they had told Him that they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth.

There is here a slight discrepancy, so small that it need hardly be taken into account, but it is an interesting point that the narrative of Luke takes an intermediate position between the two types of story. According to Luke, Judas came near Jesus to kiss Him, but Jesus said unto him, 'Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?' Luke almost implies that the kiss never was actually given: Jesus could not permit His person to be soiled even now. But, on the other hand, it is equally clear that Judas came so close to Him that his intention was evident to all who stood around, and the disciples generally thought that the kiss was actually given.<sup>4</sup> There are two possible interpretations of the authorities: either the kiss was accomplished, and John, with the tradition transmitted by Luke, shrunk from sullyng the page with it; or it was rejected at the last moment by was in the habit, during His visits to Jerusalem, of retiring at night to the Mount of Olives, must have had His talk with Nicodemus there; and that the reference to the wind was natural when they were in the open air with the wind blowing round them.

<sup>4</sup> Presumably, they all gathered together close to Jesus after He had awakened them.

the Lord, though Judas approached so close that his intention was evident to all, and was generally believed to be accomplished.

The kiss exchanged between friends meeting at the present day in Turkey (as I have seen it) does not take the form of osculation: the parties put their arms round each other, one arm over and one under the shoulder, and thus each looks over the shoulder of the other; then they reverse the arms, and each looks over the other shoulder of his friend: the mouth plays no part in the process, and even the cheeks hardly touch. If this was the form of the kiss of Judas, there could be no mistake about whether such a 'kiss' had been accomplished or not, so far as Judas was concerned. He threw his arms round his Master. But it by no means follows that Jesus responded with an embrace. Luke expressly says that He did not, but that He rebuked Judas for his treachery, in words which (we can well believe) made Judas shrink away in shame. Thus all the four accounts are justified: the kiss was given, and yet it was not completed.

Another point may also be noticed. In the kiss, as now practised, the person who throws his arms round the other can keep him safe and prevent him escaping or resisting. Perhaps this was part of the plan. The Jewish leaders had arranged that this 'dangerous criminal,' as they would call Him when inviting the co-operation of the Roman officers, should be seized and held fast by the betrayer, who would in this way at once indicate and secure Him. This part of the plan at least was foiled, as we see from Luke and infer from the silence of John, as interpreted through Luke's account. It is implied that Judas shrunk away ashamed.

Three distinct authorities at least are evidently concerned in this part of the story—(1) John; (2) the authority to whom Mark (followed by Matthew) goes back; (3) the authorities by whom Luke corrected and completed Mark's account (which he had before him). Luke's narrative is here excellent; he tells the story from the mouth of a man who had seen everything, and he enables us to see that John is entirely in agreement with Mark.

It appeared at first that there was some prospect of resistance. The eleven followers of Jesus stood their ground, until the other party approached so close that Peter was able to strike off the ear

of the slave of the high priest. In the light of the lamps and torches the features of Peter were illumined; and two or three hours later he was recognized by a bystander, a kinsman of the slave whom he had struck.

Stress must be laid on the phrase, 'the slave'; the definite article is used to denote the personal attendant of the high priest (*i.e.* Annas, as we learn later). Such an immediate body-servant (a slave always) was, as a rule, in close attendance on every respectable citizen. As he must have been close to his master, Peter evidently struck at the leaders, and nearly wounded Annas himself.

Jesus, however, forbade all resistance. Then a sudden panic seized the disciples, and they all turned and fled, leaving Jesus alone with His enemies. Such panic is not uncommon among raw soldiers at their first engagement, who afterwards turn out staunch and brave. In the case of the Eleven it took just fifty days to change them from runaways into soldiers of unsurpassed courage.

We learn explicitly from the Synoptists that the command to offer no resistance was made to the whole body of the disciples. In the narrative of John (see 18<sup>11</sup>) the order not to resist is given to Peter alone; but as Peter had made himself the most prominent in offering resistance, it was natural that any prohibition should be addressed specially to him, though it was obviously of general import, and was so understood by the whole body.

John in v.<sup>3</sup> implies that the night was dark, so that lanterns and torches were necessary. We ask how this is to be reconciled with the fact that it was the night before the full moon. Unless the moon had already set (though there was still a considerable part of the night remaining), the weather evidently must have been dark and stormy, so that a thick pall of clouds obscured the moon. This fact, if it be correctly conjectured, would throw an interesting light on the statement of the Synoptists that on this same day there was darkness [like that] of an eclipse from noon till 3 p.m.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The statement of hours given in the Synoptists is not so reliable as that of John. As has been pointed out by others and by the present writer in an article in *Hastings' Dict. Bib.* v. p. 476 ff., the ancients possessed no reliable means of estimating the lapse of time, and slight differences in the estimate and memory of time of day is natural and inevitable. Such differences are as old as the events. If each of the Eleven that was present at the Crucifixion had written an independent account the same evening, such variations

Luke actually calls this phenomenon an eclipse, but astronomical reasons show that this cannot be literally correct. Probably he had not caught exactly an expression used in the oral tradition which he heard at Jerusalem, that the darkness was 'like an eclipse.' It is unusual, and has often been thought miraculous, that there should be such darkness occurring in the sunny land of Syria at noon, but this was the month of March, and stormy weather usually occurs in some part of that month.<sup>1</sup> For example, in the middle of March 1899 we were detained at Beyrout for two or three days, because a great fall of snow had stopped the trains; and when we were able to travel to Damascus, the walls of snow on each side of the cutting were higher than the tops of the railway carriages.

Darkness like this I cannot give any example of in Asia Minor or Palestine, though I have seen it farther north; but during the thirty-five years that I have known the character of Western Asia, I have been familiar with accidents of weather which were unique in the experience of all the inhabitants, even the oldest. Freaks in the way of storm occur to a degree that is beforehand pronounced by the oldest inhabitants impossible in this climate. For example, in the winter of 1879-1880, all the orange trees at Smyrna were killed by frost. No such event, I think, has occurred since, or was known to any resident there. It was fixed in my memory by the fact that we, arriving in 1880, were often told that we should not see the beautiful gardens at their best, as it would be years before the trees, which were all cut down to the ground, would grow up.

Again, in January 1911, there occurred a blizzard in Constantinople which might fairly be compared with some of the worst that occur in New York. But one might live in Constantinople for fifty years and never see another so severe. Once more, in the spring of 1907, the winter lasted so late that the loss of the vast flocks of sheep and goats which pasture on the great Anatolian plains was extraordinarily severe. Estimates given to us of the total number of deaths varied between 60

would appear among them. The day, as we know, was dark, and the usual means of guessing noonday, namely, the position of the sun, was not available.

<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem at the Temple platform is 2460 feet above sea-level, and at that altitude very severe storms may occasionally occur.

and 80 per cent. It must be confessed the Turks are not very accurate as arithmeticians, but the men who gave these estimates had to live by the number of their flocks, and whatever be the exact percentage, we can vouch for one thing: neither before nor since that year have we ever seen in Asia Minor a dead stork. But as we were going up in the train towards Iconium, Lady Ramsay pointed them out to me by fives and tens here and there, expressing her astonishment. They had come as usual, and found that the country was covered with snow for many weeks after their arrival, so that they gradually perished in numbers for want of food.

The mere fact that this darkness is quite unusual and exceptional does not necessarily prove it to be miraculous. There must always be some storm which is the worst on record. And I see no reason to think that when Deborah sang 'The stars in their courses fought against Sisera,' she was implying that anything miraculous had occurred in the heavens on the occasion of his death, but she had an idea in her mind of Divine power working in harmony with nature.<sup>2</sup> The impression made by the whole narrative is that the night and the day were dark, and that the darkness became exceptionally dense about mid-day (as described by the Synoptists). John does not mention the latter fact, but he shows that the night remained in his memory as dark, lit up only at the terrible moment by the gleam of torches and lamps. In mid-March such a storm is more likely to occur than in early April, at which date the Passover fell in 30 and 33 A.D. This affords incidentally some confirmation of Mr. Turner's chronology.

Residents in the country will tell you that such great storms never occur; and then one does occur. People are prone to assert that phenomena which they have never seen are impossible. You may live fifty years in a country, and gather up the experience of the preceding generation, and then the incredible happens. Such an exceptional and yet not abnormal event happened on the day of the Crucifixion. But is it not part of the universal plan and harmony of nature?<sup>3</sup>

The contrast between the small party on one side and the great number on the other must be

<sup>2</sup> See *Bearing of Research on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, p. 301.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

kept in mind by those who wish to understand the impression made on John's mind by this scene in the dark night with the flaring lights.<sup>1</sup> It is quite intelligible that slightly different conceptions should be gathered by those even who were standing quite close to Jesus. In fact, it would be hardly possible that absolutely honest witnesses should give exactly the same account of such circumstances. The conclusion of the scene is, I think, not quite correctly expressed either in the Authorized or in the Revised Version, or in any of the commentators whom I have seen. There is, I think, a distinct intention in Mt 26 to draw the contrast between one party and the other. The Eleven left Jesus alone and fled, while the others led Him away to be judged by Caiaphas. These two sentences complete the picture, and it is wrong to make the second the beginning of a new paragraph.

John says that Jesus was fettered before He was led away; and there can be no doubt that he is right. Prisoners were usually bound at arrest by Roman custom, for the guards were responsible with their life for the safe custody of the person arrested. The Synoptists do not mention the fettering; but the omission of such a slight detail does not constitute a discrepancy. One narrative completes the others. The matter would not deserve note, were it not that it plays a part later in the action.

John alone mentions that Roman soldiers arrested Jesus, and Luke alone states that Jewish leaders were present at the scene. The other Synoptists mention only that Judas brought a multitude armed with swords and clubs, who came at the orders of the chief priests and scribes and elders.<sup>2</sup> John and Luke go more into detail, and show the true nature of the act; but the others contribute something to the picture. All the details that are mentioned fit in with one another; there is no discrepancy, and yet each writer has selected different facts to record.<sup>3</sup> John mentions the most important points, and Luke's account is here next in excellence; but John alone has anything that suggests the eye-witness. All four lay

<sup>1</sup> The lamps or lanterns were, of course, small; but a number of small lamps and torches make a great effect.

<sup>2</sup> So Mark: Matthew omits the scribes.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew is almost identical with Mark: Luke states some different and important facts in addition to Mark (whom he knows).

great stress on the presence of Judas with the leaders of the multitude: from the Synoptists<sup>4</sup> one might at first gather that Judas was the only leader of the multitude; but Luke incidentally mentions afterwards the presence of the Jewish chiefs.

The multitude whom Judas led, armed with swords and clubs, consisted of—(1) Roman soldiers led by the commanding officer of the cohort in person; (2) part of the Levite guard of the Temple led by their proper officers; these must have been sent by Caiaphas as the legal high priest, and Matthew mentions the occasion in 26<sup>a</sup>; Annas, the titular high priest, was actually present (as we have seen), but it was unseemly (see section III.) for Caiaphas to take part, as he was about to act as judge; (3) the house-slaves and servants of the chief priests and elders generally; among them were at least two slaves of Annas.

Evidently the Roman cohort did not go all the way in charge of this prisoner. The soldiers had been wanted to cope with possible resistance; the chief priests and leaders were afraid lest the people might take the part of Jesus; but, when the midnight arrest was successfully effected, there was no further need of the soldiers, and the prisoner was put into the hands of the Jews to be examined before the High Council, and treated as it should determine. The soldiers were marched back to their barracks in the castle Antonia, while the Jews were left to keep guard over Jesus. The fact that the cohort was not present at these proceedings in Jerusalem, and that soldiers do not reappear until Pilate the Roman Procurator appears on the scene, probably formed the reason that their action at the arrest was forgotten in the general tradition, and recorded only by John, the eye-witness who had seen them.

The Tribune must have made his report to Pilate. This may be assumed as certain, and it must have had some effect on his mind. He personally had heard nothing of any dangerous movement, and the officer who arrested the supposed leader could only report that the whole story seemed to be a fiction flatly contradicting the facts. We understand, therefore, why Pilate three times<sup>5</sup> declared positively that Jesus was innocent.

It must be added in the interest of accuracy that commentators and writers on the New Testament

<sup>4</sup> See the preceding note.

<sup>5</sup> So Luke alone: John mentions two acquittals: the others one.

frequently make wrong statements about the cohort which John mentions. They speak of it as a cohort of a legion. If that were so, John would be guilty of a gross inaccuracy; there were no legionary troops in Jerusalem. The nearest point to Jerusalem where a legion was ever stationed was Caparcotnæ, amid the hills over the southern edge of the Plain of Megiddo.<sup>1</sup> A legion might be familiar in the north of Palestine and east of the Jordan (as is seen in the story of the swine); but a legion or a cohort of a legion in Jerusalem was impossible. This cohort was an auxiliary cohort, an independent regiment, not a part of a legion, raised and recruited among some conquered people (such as Ituraei, Brittones, Batavi, etc.), and containing in its rank no Roman citizens. In a legion all the soldiers were *cives Romani*. There was one auxiliary cohort stationed at Jerusalem in the castle Antonia, guarding the Temple. It contained cavalry (Ac 22) and (as Schürer infers acutely and with great probability)<sup>2</sup> it was there-

<sup>1</sup> This is not in Schürer, *Gesch. d. Jud. Volkes*, etc. I mention this merely to caution the disciples of culture not to quote him in disproof of my statement. It is a more recent discovery than Schürer's excellent work.

<sup>2</sup> It is rather odd that Schürer, who had such contempt

for *miliaria equitata*;<sup>3</sup> but its name is not known.

I have sometimes wondered whether the *στρατηγοὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ* (Lk 26) might not be the officers of the cohort stationed in the castle. From the castle steps led down to the Temple platform, and the cohort guarded the Temple. But this interpretation cannot be supported, and the agreement which it would establish with John is not to be maintained.

The first of the disciples to recover from the panic which had caused their flight were Peter and John. Peter followed at a distance, desirous of seeing what would happen to the Lord. The distance, according to John, was not great, for these two disciples accompanied Jesus. In the dark morning followers would lose sight of the company, unless they were fairly near: the lights were in front. John reached the house of Annas almost at the moment when the whole party arrived there, and entered with it. Peter was excluded till John observed his absence and went back to introduce him.

for the credibility of Luke should quote him as sufficient authority when it comes to a matter of hard fact (*Gesch. i. p. 387*, 2nd ed.).

<sup>3</sup> Schürer has not, however, seen that it must have been *miliaria*, only that it was *equitata*.

## Literature.

### FORERUNNERS AND RIVALS OF CHRISTIANITY.

*FORERUNNERS and Rivals of Christianity* is the title which has been given by Mr. F. Legge, F.S.A., to his *Studies in Religious History* from 330 B.C. to 330 A.D. (Cambridge: At the University Press; 2 vols., 25s. net). What is the author's purpose?

'The following pages,' he says, 'are a modest attempt to bring before the public certain documents of great importance for the understanding of the growth and development of the Christian religion. They are not new, almost all of them having been translated at one time or another into English, French, German, or Italian; but they are all practically unknown save to scholars, are all fragmentary, and with hardly an exception, are difficult to understand without a running com-

mentary. In these circumstances, I have ventured to follow, not for the first time, the advice given by Sir Gaston Maspero to his pupils in one of his luminous lectures at the Collège de France. "If," said in effect that great master of archaeology, "you find yourselves in the presence of scattered and diverse examples of any monument you cannot understand—funerary cones, amulets of unusual form, hypocephali, or anything else—make a collection of them. Search museums, journals of Egyptology, proceedings of learned societies, until you think they have no more novelties of the kind to offer you. Then put those you have collected side by side and study them. The features they have in common will then readily appear and in a little time you will find that you will perceive not only the use of the objects in question, but also the history of their development, their connexion with each other, and their