

English Teacher's Notes.

The apparent discrepancies in the four accounts of Peter's denials are easily explained, if we bear in mind that the three denials were not each a single sentence addressed to one accuser. On each occasion there might well be reiterated charges and reiterated denials.

(a) All four Evangelists agree that the first denial was elicited by a maid, Mark and Luke adding that it occurred by the fire, and John stating that she was the portress, who recognized Peter as having come in with him.

(b) From Matthew and Mark we learn that the second denial took place in the "porch." Matthew says "another maid;" Mark, that it was "the maid," (not "a maid," as in our version,) that is, the same who spoke before; Luke, that it was "another," the word being masculine, and Peter replying, "Man, I am not;" while John combines the three statements by relating that "they said unto him."

(c) Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree that the third denial was provoked by the allusions to Peter's provincial dialect; Luke adding that it occurred "after about an hour." John here relates a different, but, no doubt simultaneous incident, the recognition of Peter by a kinsman of Malchus.

St. Mark, who alone relates (xiv. 30) that Jesus had predicted that the denials should take place before the cock crowed "twice," alone mentions the first crowing. Probably Peter did not then notice the sound, but the fact that it had fallen on his ear came back to him after the second crowing.

In Luke xxii. 55, 56, the word "fire" is rendering for two different Greek words, *pur* and *phos*. The latter is properly *light*, and is always translated so elsewhere; and it evidently implies that Peter was recognized through the fire-light falling on his face: "A certain maid beheld him as he sat by the light."

These preliminary notes may be useful to some teachers. But now, how may the subject be most effectively applied?

It will be well to go right through the narrative, making the successive pictures as vivid as possible; and then to go back and ask, How could it be that such a man as Peter should fall into such a sin, and that after receiving such a warning and professing such faithfulness? The answer is twofold:

1. It was the devil's work. "Satan hath desired to have thee," said Jesus but a few hours before. See, therefore, the malice and power of the great enemy. And remember the warning which Peter himself, prompted by his own experience, wrote years after: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Pet. v. 8.

2. But these very words of Peter suggest another part of the answer: "*Seeking* whom he may devour." His power is limited. If the sheep only *keep in the fold*, not one need be devoured. But let one *stray outside*, and the prowling lion will seize him at once. This was how Peter fell. He got away from humble dependence on his Master's strength, and then he was helpless. Mark the steps of his fall: (a) Self-confidence, ver. 29, 31; (b) sloth, ver. 37; (c) dangerous company, see John xviii. 18; (d) "ashamed of Jesus!" No wonder he afterward wrote, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary," etc.; and again, "Watch unto prayer" (1 Pet. iv. 7)—the very thing he did not do in Gethsemane.

The wonder is not that he fell. "Satan desired to sift him as wheat," or, rather, to send such a blast upon him that the grain should be blown away as well as the chaff; and if only such a blast be strong enough, what strength is there in the grain to resist it? No, the wonder is that he was not utterly and finally blown away. Why was it? Christ gave the explanation: "*I have prayed for thee.*"

If we would be secure, here is our security. We are not safe from the vilest sin, from the basest ingratitude to our Master, if we trust in our own goodness, and say, like Hazael, (2 Kings viii. 13), "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Peter tells us to "resist" the devil, but he does not stop there; for how can we resist one so much stronger than we? This he says—"Whom resist steadfast in the faith," that is, in trust in another's strength, the strength of the Holy Spirit obtained for us by the intercession of Christ.

For Senior Scholars.

1. THEMES FOR BIBLE READINGS.

1. WANT OF TRUTHFULNESS. Prov. xii. 19; Jer. ix. 5; Hos. iv. 1; Acts v. 3.

2. FEAR OF MAN. Deut. vii. 17, 18; Psa. iii. 6; Prov. xxix. 25; Matt. x. 28; 1 John iv. 18.