

It was Peter the wild, a fierce partisan, a man of wholly ungoverned passions, who had in early life committed some crime, for which he had tried to atone by penance and prayer; he dwelt in one of the caves, near Memphis, and only sallied out when his mind was under great excitement. He had become quite insane, particularly on religious subjects, and in the wild fury which sometimes animated him, he was terrible. But the people loved him; they looked upon him as one consecrated to God, and the ravings which fell from his lips were treasured as oracles. When Hypatia approached, he was holding high in the air, a cross, on which was rudely carved the bleeding form of the Saviour, and with outstretched arms, he was declaiming. As his eye glanced upon the chariot of Hypatia, his whole appearance changed. The white foam covered his lips, his eyes flashed, and a thousand demons seemed to possess him.

"There she comes! the woman of hell—the heathen, the contemner of our God—the pagan, and pestilent adviser of Orestes. Out upon her!" he shouted. "We will make her abjure her opinions, or she shall die. She shall kiss the cross, or I will sacrifice her an offering to the God she insults."

He sprang directly before the chariot, and the multitude closed around. For a moment there was a dead, an awful silence; the fearful calm, before the destroying hurricane. Then Peter, holding the cross before Hypatia, said:

"Woman! I charge thee to confess the name of Jesus of Nazareth, or thou diest. Thou shalt no longer pollute this earth with thy false philosophy, setting up Plato and Zeus, in the place of the true God. Say, wilt thou humbly kiss the cross, or shall we save thee from further sin, by taking thy life? be a Christian, or die!" With one hand he held the cross before her, and with the other he drew from his girdle, a small Damascus knife, which gleamed in the air, as he whirled it with frightful rapidity around his head.

"Be a Christian, or die!" was echoed by the crowd, first only by one or two, then swelling, till it sounded like a voice of thunder, and a hundred knives flashed forth.

Hypatia rose from her seat, and throwing aside her veil, she looked calmly upon the crowd. Her noble form seemed towering almost to the heavens, and her reposeful, soul-lit face, spoke a mind lifted above the turmoil that surrounded her. She bent her eyes upon Peter, and his demoniac spirit was for an instant quelled by the look—he shrank back. She looked upon the crowd, with that sad, but loving expression, and the knives were quickly buried in their sheaths,

the murmuring voices were hushed, and the crowd, by a spontaneous movement, pressed back.

"Men and brethren, what would you with me? What have I done, thus to incur your displeasure? I have ever sought your good, I have wished only to improve my native city, I have never interfered with your religion, I have only asked to be permitted to believe, as my conscience thought was right. Why then do you seek my life?"

While she had been speaking, the crowd had rallied, and one bold spirit shouted out:

"You lead others to worship false gods. You excite Orestes to wrong us."

"As the gods in Olympus hear me, it is not so. I have advised only for your good. Philosophy I have taught at the Academy, at the command of your wise men, and you, yourselves have heard me. Did I teach aught opposed to divine morality—aught that even your religion would condemn? That religion, so Synesius has told me, is peaceful and mild, it wars not against others, if so, it would not sanction this attack on one who interferes not with it?"

Peter had been at first quelled by her beauty and dignity, but the demon again rose within him; he saw the influence she was having upon the people, and cried out:

"Her words are a reproach to our blessed religion, she shall not live to utter such." And springing upon the chariot, he once more held the cross before her. "Once more I give thee a chance for life and salvation. Wilt thou abjure thy false gods, and worship Christ, in the place of all others. Do so, and thou livest; refuse, and thy last breath is numbered."

"I can never be false to myself," replied Hypatia, calmly putting aside the cross, which he had pressed almost to her lips. "My heart leads me not to thy God, and I will die sooner than perjure my conscience. But beware what you do. This deed will be registered. I am a woman—alone, defenceless—you are men. On your death-bed will not the form of her you have sacrificed to a blind bigotry come accusingly before you?"

"Shame! let her go—hinder her no farther," was uttered by some among the crowd. But the very fiends had possession of the enraged Peter.

"She shall die!" he muttered between his clenched teeth. And throwing his arms around Hypatia, he plucked her up as if she had been only a delicate flower.

"Into the church with the evil spirit," he shouted. The crowd opened, he passed through, ascended the steps, entered the church, strode on through the long dark aisles; when he reached the altar, he laid her before it.