

A NOTE ON COCKCROW

The biblical interest of cockcrow arises chiefly from St Peter's denials ; but both have to be taken into account in the attempt to determine the time-table of the Passion. In general it may be said that wherever there are cocks there is presumably a crowing of cocks at dawn. Certainly it is so in Palestine. It is the first light that usually sets them going, though other causes may also produce the same effect, such as the noise of planes or other atmospheric disturbances. Indeed when I was at Jerusalem, having read different accounts of the matter in different books, I asked a Dominican father of the Ecole Biblique, what was the real truth, and he replied with a smile that he would be prepared to produce cockcrow at any time desired. All that was needed was to go out with a lighted lantern.

Thus there is a more or less standard time for cockcrow, fixed by sunrise, but very little is needed to start an individual cock, which may in turn start the whole band. When indeed the first cock will start, cannot be determined with certainty. This has some relevance for our Lord's prophecy of Peter's denials, for obviously He was referring to the first cockcrow, which could not be foretold by natural means with any exactness. Hence the crowing of the cock immediately after Peter's denials (Mk. xiv.72, Mt. xxvi.74, Lk. xxii.60, Jn. xviii.27) was the fulfilment of what was beyond doubt a prophecy, though this might also have been said of it even had the time of cockcrow been absolutely fixed and uniform.

Père Lagrange in his work *L'Evangile de Jésus Christ* (Paris 1946, p. 542, n. 6) remarks that he has often watched for the first cockcrow at the beginning of April and that it varies much in time, but that 2.30 a.m. seems the earliest time for it. Elsewhere (*Evangile selon St Marc*, 1947, p. 385, n.30) he writes that at Jerusalem at the end of March and the beginning of April the cock can be heard very early but especially perhaps about 3 a.m. and 5 a.m. It seems best to adopt the earlier time, about 3 a.m., as the most likely ; it squares best with the 2.30 a.m. already mentioned, and at the same time allows for it being already night when Judas leaves the supper room (Jn. xiii.30).

This was at an early stage of the Last Supper, which must have lasted rather a long time, as did likewise the Agony in the Garden and the trial before the Sanhedrin, although our Lord may have been kept a prisoner for some time by the latter before being taken to Pilate in the morning. When Pilate finally delivered Him up to be crucified it was about the sixth hour (Jn. xix.14), that is about midday

—earlier rather than later, in the light of Mk. xv.25, which shows that 'the Way of the Cross' cannot have taken long.

The late Israel Abrahams, at the end of his article "Time" in Hastings's *Dictionary of the Bible*, remarks that although the Jewish division of the night into three watches continued into post-Roman times the Roman division into four watches was also known, and he cites Mk. xiii.35 (evening, midnight, cockcrow, morning). One gets the impression from the names that the real midnight fell inside the midnight watch and not at its end, and similarly that cockcrow fell inside the cockcrow watch; for if this last began at midnight, it might be too early even for the first cock. What all the evangelists insist on is that Peter denied our Lord thrice before the cock crow. Only Mark mentions that the cock crew twice (Mk. xiv.30, 72)—one of those little details which he probably learnt from Peter (*cf.* iii.5, vv.3-5).

It was probably from the New Testament that cockcrow came into ecclesiastical use. Ducange (*Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, ed. Henschel, Paris 1845) quotes from an early Gospel text, *Tertio pullo ter me negabis*, and elsewhere *circa pullorum cantum extinctum est lumen candelae*; and there are other such quotations. *Plygain* in Welsh is translated in Spurrell's dictionary "cockcrow, daybreak, dawn, matins"—this last word showing the ecclesiastical influence at work. The corresponding word in Breton, I have read somewhere, is *pelgent*. Both stand for *pulli cantus*.

In the Gospel accounts the first and third denials of Peter are fairly definite. The first (Mk. xiv.66-68a; Mt. xxvi.69; Lk. xxii.56-57; Jn. xviii.17-18) to a maidservant (Mk. xiv.66, Mt. xxvi, 69, Lk. xxii.56) who was the portress (Jn. xviii.17). The third (Mk. xiv.70b-71, Mt. xxvi.73-74, Lk. xxii.59-60, Jn. xviii.26) embraces a more general attack on Peter by the bystanders, partly based upon his Galilean pronunciation (Mk. xiv, Mt. xxvi, Lk. xxvi.69) and supported by Malchus's relatives (Jn. xviii.26). The second denial is more indeterminate, and seems to be rather a group of denials, including one to the same maidservant (Mk. xiv.69-70a), to another maidservant (Mt. xxvi. 71-72) and to the "other person" of Lk. xxii.53, who may have been the relative of Malchus (Jn. xviii.26).

Luke places about an hour's interval (xxii.59) between the second and the third denial. This may be due to his reckoning the "hour" from the one particular incident which he has mentioned as the second denial. But in general we must remember that the reckoning of time in the New Testament period was far vaguer than in our own. Nowadays we may find somebody concerned because his watch is just a few minutes out; one is tempted to say that in New Testament times it

was the hour rather than the minute that mattered. St Paul writes in Gal. ii.5, "Not for an hour did we yield to them" where we should be more likely to say "Not for a minute", or even "Not for a second". Indeed Moulton and Milligan (*The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, 1930) under ὥρα ("hour") say "As the hour was the shortest period of time known to ancients, ὥρα came to be used much as we use 'in one second', 'instantly'."

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