

THE MIDNIGHT SONG.

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It is well known there have been many "songs in the night," but there was one sung at midnight by a couple of suffering Christians, in an old Roman prison, which we would like to have heard. We have read the story repeatedly, and always with thrilling interest.

They were Christian Jews, earnest and warm-hearted in their attachment to their new faith and its Lord, and were putting to the test their professed readiness to suffer for His sake. It was in the ancient Philippi, proud in its dignity, as to all intents and purposes a part of Rome itself, where the person of a man should have been a sacred thing. Yet these men, despite their Roman citizenship, had been dragged into the forum, with a mob at their heels, as the disturbers of the peace by their new religion; and without a hearing, without the examination of a single witness, and without the chance of a word in self-defence or explanation, their garments were torn from them by the enraged magistrates, and such a scourging inflicted upon their naked flesh as only Roman wrath knew how to administer. The law, thus twice trampled on, was a third time violated in sending them without trial to the public prison, where their inhuman jailer thrust them, wounded and bleeding, into a dungeon, from which escape was, by any power of their own, impossible; and then most brutally, because without shadow of necessity, fastened them immovably in the stocks. Before them was only the prospect of certain death; hours of weariness were passed in this painful position, with increasing torture from the stocks and their wounds, until it would seem that their condition had become unendurable. And then it was, in the depth of midnight, that they were so lifted up with holy joy, and so filled with the glory of God, that, with souls triumphing over their pain, they broke forth into loud songs of praise to God.

What words they sung, no man can tell; but they were Jews, and knew the old Hebrew psalms. It might have been this: "He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness—such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and iron. They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses; He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" Or, it might have been one of the early and more specially Christian hymns, a fragment of which has come down to us: "If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we shall deny Him, He will also deny us; if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." But they sung lustily, and with such unction that the prisoners in other and remote parts of the prison heard them. And Another heard them, and honored their faith. Their Lord, as if indignant at the barbarities inflicted upon His servants, arose, and by an earthquake shook those massive prison walls to their very foundation—shook till bolts sprung back, bars fell out, the doors flew open, the stocks released their victims, and every fetter fell off. Paul and Silas glorified Him, and now Jesus glorifies them. Their midnight hour was their hour of triumph, and it became their hour of deliverance.

Triumphant suffering marks the centuries of the Church's history. Not always does deliverance come, and sometimes the light seems almost to go out