

easily be beaten with rods. No care was taken of the garments on these occasions, but they were suddenly and with violence rent open and stripped from them that they might be scourged upon their naked backs. The phrase, "the magistrates rent off their clothes," does not mean that they rent their own garments as the Jewish high priest in the case of the utterance of blasphemy in his presence. The phrase used by the court according to the custom would be, "Go, lictors; strip off their garments; let them be scourged."

Verse 21 says the charge against them was that they introduced customs not lawful. The Roman magistrate had power to forbid all foreign religious rites and to punish all who attempted to introduce them. This case was not tried by the magistrates, but they ordered the imprisonment of Paul and Silas after the men had been beaten by the rod bearers, sheriffs, or constables called "lictors," who carried a bundle of rods as their ensign of office, or bore rods and axes as implements for scourging and beheading. The magistrates were guilty of two violations of Roman law. First, in allowing no trial, and, secondly, in condemning Paul, who was a Roman citizen, and thereby exempt from stripes and punishments only visited upon slaves.

Verse 24. The Roman prison usually had three distinct parts; in the upper one the prisoners had light and fresh air; in the middle one they were shut off by iron gates with strong bars and locks; and the third was a dungeon, a place rather for execution of the prisoners than for mere imprisonment. Sometimes the prisoner was tortured in a wooden machine bound with iron in which the arms and head were confined, but more frequently, as in this case, the legs and the feet, the latter being severely bruised by it. The legs sometimes were distended painfully as the prisoner lay on his bare back, in this case sore with the scourging, on the hard or dusty ground.

Verse 27. Dr. Clarke says every jailer was made responsible for his prisoner under the same penalty to which the prisoner himself was exposed, and that it was customary among the heathen when they found death inevitable to take away their own lives; a custom which was applauded by their philosophers and sanctioned by some of their greatest men. This is a custom quite common also among the Chinese. When the Emperor of China has determined upon the execution of a man he sometimes gives him the alternative of taking his own life. The jailer under the Roman law was to undergo the same punishment which the malefactors who escaped by his negligence were to have suffered, hence he chose to die by his own hand rather than at the hands of the public executioner, just as it is recorded in *Niebuhr's Lives*, that the majority of the proscribed who survived the battles of Philippi put an end to their own lives, as they despaired of being pardoned.

By Way of Illustration.

Verses 22-24. The Acts of the Apostles are quite generally followed by the acts of the people. Indignation and quick violence are often the response to the plain message of the Gospel or to the humane deeds of its messengers.—*D. S. Clark.*

Verse 25. O, the gladness of Christian service! The Bible compares it to a banquet. The night after the battle of Shiloh, when there were thousands of wounded on the field, one Christian soldier lying there dying under the starlight began to sing, "There is a land of pure delight," and when he came to the next line there were scores of voices singing, "Where saints immortal reign." The song was caught up all through the fields among the wounded until it was said there were at least ten thousand wounded men uniting in the triumphant closing verses of that beautiful hymn. He giveth songs in the night to his children.—*Talmage.*

Our Lord within an hour of Gethsemane held a song service with his disciples, and we know what they sang. It was Psalm 118, a hallelujah chorus of triumph, and under the very shadow of the cross.

Verses 26 and 27. Our work is to use the omnipotent power which comes through consecration and faith in the Holy Spirit. There is a difference between influence and power. Influence is our relation to each other; power is our relation to God. The word "influence" occurs but once in the whole Bible, and that is where Jehovah is talking with the patriarch Job, and speaks of "the sweet influences of the Pleiades." The word that pulsates with the warmth of God's heart is the New Testament word "power." Jesus Christ was not a man of influence. He made himself of no reputation. The early disciples were not men of influence, with one exception, the apostle Paul, and he lost all he had the day he was converted, and had to rely on power. Paul and Silas on one occasion did not have enough influence to keep out of jail, but after they were put into jail they had power enough to shake the doors open and walk out.—*A. C. Dixon.*

Verse 31. A Hindu woman who had gone from shrine to shrine, who had endured every penance and bodily infliction and suffering to earn salvation, heard of Jesus. And when the missionary said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," she fell on her face and cried, "Is that all? Is that all? Jesus, I take thee; I trust thee forever; thou art mine." Such is the simplicity of the Gospel!

Heart Talks on the Lesson.

This is one of the times when Paul learned the power of Christ to bless and to keep; a time when he learned by experience that his grace is sufficient for all circumstances. Let us read what he says in