

they were not concerned about doing justice. *Let us . . . threaten them.* The rulers were afraid of an agitation amongst the people that would set the Romans against them.

Vs. 19-21. *Whether it be right*; the apostles were to be ruled, not by the bidding of the rulers, but by their sense of duty. *In the sight of God*; to whom judges and prisoners were alike responsible. *We cannot but speak . . . things . . . seen and heard.* So Socrates said to his Athenian judges: "If you would . . . give me my life on condition that I should no more teach my fellow citizens, sooner than agree to your proposal, I would die a thousand deaths." In v. 21 the rulers repeat their threat.

Peter and John, being released, return to their fellow disciples. The church, in its joy, turns to God in prayer, and receives, as an evidence of his having heard them, special manifestations of his Spirit. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Vs. 23-31.

### Light from the East

1900 years ago men had strange theories about sickness and healing. They thought, for example, that a great number of bodily

ailments as well as nervous and mental disorders, such as epilepsy, hysteria and paralysis, were due to malicious demons who took up their residence in the patients and enslaved them body and soul. To cure such an infirmity, the method was to cast out the demon. Each kind of demon was supposed to yield to a certain magical form of words. What such a patient needed, therefore, was not a physician who used medicines, but an exorcist,—one skilled in the use of magical formulas. A solemn charge in the name of the deity seems actually to have been effectual in many cases. Jesus cast out all demons "by the spirit of God" or "by the finger of God." Sometimes symbolical actions were performed. Babylonian patients were sprinkled or washed with water from a sacred river, or fire was brought near to drive off the spirit. Even to-day, the same views survive. The Greek church built, recently, an asylum for the insane south of Bethlehem. When a patient arrives, his feet are thoroughly beaten by a stout negro, apparently on the principle that what hurts the patient ought to make the demon glad to get away.

### THE LESSON APPLIED

The lesson that lies on the surface is this, that once the human heart is filled with the divine Spirit all fear vanishes, and weak men become invincible. Compare Peter, afraid, cowardly, and denying his Master, with Peter now bold as a lion and careless about results. Other examples of extraordinary courage may be noted in the Bible. Moses facing Pharaoh is a classical illustration. Jeremiah was tried for heresy and his life hung in the balance. Did he cringe? Not he. Rather he declared with fresh power that he was the mouthpiece of God, and reiterated his message. Amos too. With what superb boldness he confronted the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Israel, and challenged the high priest Amaziah.

One of the most thrilling biographies one can read is that of Savonarola, the Florentine reformer who lived in the fifteenth century. He denounced the vices of Rome and stood in the great cathedral of Florence as the uncompromising witness for Christ in the midst

of the shameless laxity which was encouraged by the Pope. At last his enemies had him in their power. Day after day he was subjected to the most cruel torture. Under the strain of the frightful tortures, he uttered words which appeared to indicate an acknowledgment of blame. He cried out before the magistrates of the city: "O God, grant that I may repent for having denied thee for fear of torture." Then the suffering was renewed. Nothing of importance was wrung from him. He recovered his strength and sublime faith. The moment before his execution, the bishop took Savonarola by the arm and stammered out: "I separate thee from the church militant—and triumphant." "Militant," rejoined Savonarola in correction, "not triumphant; that is not in your power." A long list of heroes who were made strong through faith is given in Hebrews, ch. 11.

The next lesson is the *tragedy of mistaken and immoral leadership*. What harm is wrought by leaders who stand in the place