

in Acts (compare chs. 8 : 26 ; 10 : 3 ; 12 : 7, 23 ; 27 : 23). The deliverance of the apostles was especially embarrassing to the Sadducees, who denied the existence of angel or spirit. The return of the apostles to the temple showed their boldness and the power of the Holy Spirit in daily life.

3. *The attitude of the Council.* Every movement betrays the deepening anxiety of the authorities. Note carefully the charges : (1) Disobedience to former court orders. (2) Attempt to make rulers responsible for the murder of Jesus. This is a high testimony to the zeal and fidelity of the apostles.

4. *Their reply is noteworthy.* They admitted the truth of the first count, but claimed that the authority of God was supreme and final for them. Regarding the second, they repeated their statement, and showed that Jesus holds supreme place as Saviour of Israel. They also state plainly that the Holy Spirit is the unseen Presence whose power is behind the new movement.

Note how this reply precipitated the crisis, though the authorities were temporarily restrained from extreme measures by Gamaliel. The apostles were beaten, but left rejoicing in sharing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, Phil. 3 : 10.

The Lesson is a call to heroism, and finds abundant illustration in practical Christian work. The fidelity of the early martyrs, the steadfastness of the Covenanters, the self-sacrifice of the modern missionary, all declare the blessedness of the Spirit-filled life, even in the very presence of death. The Golden Text teaches the blessedness of any who for righteousness' sake suffer. Every day affords the opportunity of heroic service. No true soldier should shrink from the pain of persecution.

For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

Very wonderful verses are vs. 12-16. Lead the scholars in a glance through them—many signs and wonders ; multitudes added to the Lord, both men and women ; crowds of the sick from Jerusalem and from the cities round about, healed ; Peter, the hero of it all ; the common people evidently uplifted with gratitude and expectation.

What about the rulers ? Discover this by questions on v. 17. Wherefore so indignant ? As rulers, evidently through jealousy of the apostles. As Sadducees (see Exposition), evidently because their bigotry was aroused (it was the risen Jesus, in whose name the miracles were wrought). What demons jealousy and bigotry are ! And then, to what folly these led, v. 18 ; as if, to stamp upon a burning brand does not scatter the fire, rather than quench it.

What about the prisoners ? Were they cast down ? Possibly.

"Oh, weary ones, ye may not see

Your helpers in their downward flight ;

Nor hear the sound of silver wings

Slow beating through the hush of night."

It was not a slow, but a swift, angel who was on his way to their help. Who he was, whence he came, and when, what he did, what he said : bring these all out. Heb. 1 : 14 is the classic passage on the ministry of the angels. The word angel occurs twenty times in the Acts. Those were days of peril and stress, and heaven was evidently deeply sympathetic. Verse 20 will yield richly to analysis. Every word of it is suggestive. It was the bugle call to renewed service and battle.

Was the call answered ? How promptly and nobly, the first sentence of v. 21 makes evident.

A strange situation. Bring it out stage by stage : (a) The gathering of the Great Council or Sanhedrin (see Exposition, and Light from the East) ; (b) The order of the august Court to bring up the prisoners ; (c) The fruitless quest of the officers (v. 22) ; Their awe-struck report (v. 23) ; (d) The bewilderment of the authorities, one and all (v. 26) ; (e) The new wonder (v. 25). The puzzle here is, not that there is too little teaching material, but too much. Therefore, economize the time, so as to have space for :

The re-arrest of the apostles. This time, without violence, v. 26. The "people" reasoned rationally : men who could work such wonders, and for whom such a wonder was wrought, must be true men, with God on their side.

The defence. Could anything be sillier than what the judges said to the prisoners ?