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FOXES' BOOK OF MARTYRS

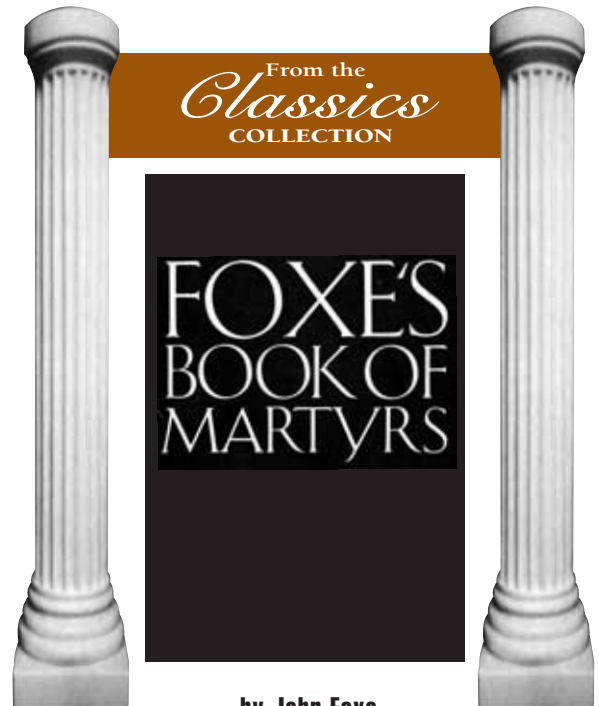
A Quick Focus

The Book's Purpose

- Showcase the courage of true believers who have willingly taken a stand for Jesus Christ throughout the ages, even if it meant death
- Demonstrate the grace of God in the lives of those martyred for their faith
- Expose the ruthlessness of religious and political leaders as they sought to suppress those with differing beliefs
- Celebrate the courage of those who risked their lives to translate the Bible into the common language of the people

The Book's Message

Throughout the history of the church, from the First Century onward, both pagan and religious political leaders have killed those with religious beliefs that differed from their own. The Roman Empire killed Christians because they refused to worship Roman Emperors as gods. The long-dominant Catholic Church in Europe martyred Protestants for their refusal to accept the Pope as God's Vice Regent on the earth. In Muslim countries, Christians were killed for being "infidels."



by John Foxe
(1517-1587)

Edited by W.B. Forbush

Writing in the mid-1500s, John Foxe was living in the midst of intense religious persecution at the hands of the dominant Roman Catholic Church. In graphic detail, he offers accounts of Christians being martyred for their belief in Jesus Christ, describing how God gave them extraordinary courage and stamina to endure unthinkable torture.



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The Earliest Christian Martyrs

Editor's Note: Due to the graphic nature of details included in this summary, parents should read it thoroughly before deciding whether it is suitable for younger family members.

The first martyr

after Christ's crucifixion was St. Stephen, who was stoned to death for his profession of faith. One by one, the Lord's apostles were martyred. James, the brother of John, was beheaded ten years after Stephen's death. Philip was crucified in A.D. 54; Matthew was slain in Nadabab in A.D. 60; James, the author of the Epistle called James, had his head crushed by the Jews.

Matthias was stoned in Jerusalem, and then beheaded; Andrew, the brother of Peter, was crucified; Mark was dragged to death in Alexandria; Peter was crucified upside down; Paul was beheaded; Jude, called Thaddeus, was crucified in Edessa in A.D. 72; Luke is alleged to have been hanged in Greece; Thomas was killed with a spear. Though he was tortured and burned in boiling oil, John was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.

The first major persecution of the Church as a whole took place in A.D. 67 under Nero. He set Rome aflame, played his harp, and then blamed the Christians for the nine-day fire. Nero sewed believers and wild dogs inside animal skin bags. He dressed other believers in shirts of stiff wax and set them on fire as torches to light his garden. During the course of Nero's rule, both Peter and Paul died.

Domitian, who began his rule in A.D. 81, killed his own brother and began a campaign against Christians. He passed a law that said, "No Christian, once brought before the tribunal, should be exempted from punishment without renouncing his religion." If famines, pestilences, or earthquakes afflicted the Roman provinces, these were blamed on the Christians. During Domitian's rule, Timothy was beaten to death for criticizing a pagan feast and parade that took place in Ephesus.

It was under the Emperor Trajan that Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, because of his faith was eaten by wild beasts. Before his death, he wrote a letter to the Church in Rome asking them not to use any means to deliver him from his martyrdom. As he was being prepared for death, he said, "I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread."

"I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread."

~Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch

Christians also suffered under Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the stoic philosopher. When Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, was brought to trial and commanded to denounce Christ, he answered his accusers, "Eight and six years I have served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?" Polycarp was then tied and nailed to a stake and burned; a soldier then pierced his body with a sword and great quantities of blood flowed out.

It has been said that the lives of the early Christians consisted of "persecution above ground and prayer below ground" in the catacombs. The early church might well be called the Church of the Catacombs. The most common Christian symbols discovered on the walls of the catacombs include the good shepherd with a lamb on his shoulder, a ship under full sail, harps, anchors, crowns, vines, and fish.

Diocletian, who ruled in A.D. 303, launched the tenth major

Roman persecution against Christians. During this time, the homes of many Christians were set on fire and a common means of killing believers was to tie large stones around their necks and cast them into the sea.

Constantine the Great became Emperor of Rome in A.D. 306 and ruled until his death in 337. In A.D. 334, he confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and made Christianity a lawful religion. Due to his efforts, Christians experienced a thousand years of relative peace from persecution until the time of John Wickliffe in England.

Persecution of Various Religious Groups

Under Catholic rule, various religious sects experienced persecution. Around 1000 A.D., the Waldenses in France were subjected to papal attacks. In the 1600s, the Albigenses were persecuted for wanting the laity to be allowed to read the Bible in their own language. A persecution of Protestants broke out in Paris in 1572, resulting in the Bartholomew Massacre. Soldiers were told to spread out through the city and kill every man, woman, and child who claimed to be a Protestant. Bodies were thrown into the river and blood ran through the streets with a strong current. In a week's time, more than 100,000 Protestants were killed.

"The dearest friends of nearest kindred could not, without danger, serve any one who was imprisoned on account of religion. To convey to those who were confined, a little straw, or give them a cup of water, was called favoring of the heretics, and they were prosecuted accordingly. No lawyer dared to plead for his own brother, and their malice even extended beyond the grave; hence the bones of many were dug up and burnt, as examples to the living." 

An Account of the Inquisition

The Catholic Court

of Inquisition was first established in 1231 to find and prosecute heretics. The first Inquisitor was Dominic, who founded the Dominicans in 1215. Courts of Inquisition were established in several countries, but the Spanish Inquisition became the most powerful and the most dreaded of any. The Pope gave the Dominicans and Franciscans almost unlimited power to find, judge, and sentence to death anyone thought to be a heretic.

The power of the Inquisition was strengthened in 1244 when Emperor Frederic II published an edict that all heretics should be burned at the stake.

When a heretic was condemned, he would be whipped, tortured, sent to work on a galley ship, or killed.

Galileo, one of the most eminent men of science and philosophy, did not escape the eye of this cruel despotism. This famous scientist was condemned in the Inquisition for his belief that the earth moves around the sun and is not the center of the universe. He, to save his life, admitted he was wrong and swore, "For the future, I will never more say, or assert, either by word or writing, anything that shall give occasion for a like suspicion." Immediately after saying this, he reportedly whispered to a friend, "The earth moves, for all that."

Some 32,000 non-Catholics were killed in the Spanish Inquisition. Of the Inquisition, Foxe notes, "Tyranny is of three kinds: that which enslaves the person, that which seizes the property and that which prescribes

the dictates of the mind. The first two are civil tyranny. The third sort may be called ecclesiastical tyranny; this is the worst kind because it includes the other two. The Romish clergy not only torture the body and seize property, they take the lives, torment the minds and tyrannize over the souls of their unhappy victims."

"Tyranny is of three kinds: that which enslaves the person, that which seizes the property and that which prescribes the dictates of the mind."



The Persecution of Protestant Leaders

In the 1300s, John

Wickliffe attacked the Catholic Church and the Pope (whom he called the Antichrist) and worked to translate the Bible into English. He was brought to trial and condemned as a heretic for his attacks against papal authority. Wickliffe finally went into hiding and died a natural death in 1384. Forty-one years after his death, however, Catholics removed his body from his grave, burned it, and threw the ashes into a river to destroy any memory of his work.

"...But these and all others must know that, as there is no counsel against the Lord, so there is no keeping down of verity, but it will spring up and come out of dust and ashes, as appeared right well in this man; for though they dug up his [Wickliffe's] body, burned his bones, and drowned his ashes, yet the Word of God and the truth of his doctrine, with the fruit and success thereof, they could not burn."

John Huss, a minister in Bohemia in the 1300s, was a follower of Wickliffe and spread his teachings; he, too, was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake. As he was being chained to the stake, he smiled and said, "My Lord Jesus Christ was bound with a harder chain than this for my sake, and why then should I be ashamed of this rusty one?" Huss sang hymns as he burned to death.

"My Lord Jesus Christ was bound with a harder chain than this for my sake, and why then should I be ashamed of this rusty one?"
~John Huss

Martin Luther was also persecuted for opposing the Catholic Church's teachings; on October 31, 1517, he nailed 95 propositions to the door of the church in Wittenberg, challenging the teachings of the Catholic Church. Charged with heresy, he told his council of accusers, "... my conscience is so bound and captivated in these Scriptures and the Word of God, that I will not, or may not revoke any manner of thing; considering it is not godly or lawful to do anything against conscience. Hereupon I stand and rest: I have not what else to say. God have mercy on me."

German Protestants experienced immense cruelties at the hands of Roman Catholics. Count Tilly in Saxony subjected Protestants to such tortures as rolling sharp wheels over their fingers and toes, pinching their thumbs in a vice, tying cords around their necks until blood gushed from

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PERSECUTION OF PROTESTANT LEADERS continued from page 3

their eyes, baking them in ovens, and placing gun powder in their mouths and igniting it—causing their heads to explode.

William Tyndale, the first person to translate the New Testament into English, was driven into exile for his work; during his exile, a secret agent of the Catholic Church befriended him and had him arrested. Tyndale, after a mock trial, was tied to a stake and burned.

"Lord! Open the king of England's eyes," Tyndale shouted as he died.



Martyrdom Under Queen "Bloody" Mary

Queen Mary came to the throne in England in 1553 and immediately began a campaign of persecution against Protestants. One of the first martyrs under her rule was Lady Jane Gray, who had briefly been Queen of England. Climbing the scaffold to face a beheading, she told her audience, "I pray you all, good Christian people, to bear me witness, that I die a good Christian woman, and that I do look to be saved by no other means, but only by the mercy of God in the blood of His only Son Jesus Christ." She lay her head down on the block and said her final words, "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." She was 17.

John Hooper, Bishop of Worcester and Gloucester was one of Mary's next victims. He preached sermons against sin and iniquity in the world and against the corrupt abuses of the

"Touching the condemnation of this pious lady, it is to be noted that Judge Morgan, who gave sentence against her, soon after he had condemned her, fell mad, and in his raving cried out continually to have Lady Jane taken away from him, and so he ended his life."

Catholic Church. Hooper was falsely imprisoned for 18 months, then condemned to die for heretical teachings. Thousands gathered in the streets on February 9, 1555, to watch him burn at the stake. The wood around him burned slowly and had to be rekindled three times before the flames consumed him; before dying, he cried out, "For God's love, good people, let me have more fire." Taking his last breaths, he beat his chest so violently that one of his arms fell off.

Bishops Ridley and Latimer were also martyred during Bloody Mary's campaign against Protestants. The night before Ridley knew he was going to die [in the morning], he told one of his keepers, "Though my breakfast will be somewhat sharp, my supper will be more pleasant and sweet."

Ridley and Latimer were tied to the same stake, and each had a pouch of gunpowder tied to his neck. When the lighted flame was laid at Ridley's feet, Latimer said, "Be of good cheer, Ridley; and play the man. We shall this day, by God's grace, light up such a candle in England, as I trust, will never be put out." The fire on Ridley's side did not burn brightly and he cried out, "Let the fire come upon me, I cannot burn." The flames finally reached his head, the gunpowder exploded and he stirred no more.

Queen Mary also persecuted and briefly imprisoned her sister, Elizabeth, because she was a Protestant. While Mary reigned for five years and four months, her sister eventually succeeded to the Crown and reigned more than 40 years.



Protestantism in Ireland and the Massacre of 1641

The introduction of Protestantism into Ireland may be attributed to George Browne, an Englishman, who was made archbishop of Dublin in March of 1535—he had formerly been an Augustine friar. During Browne's service in Dublin, the Pope sent a letter to his leaders in Ireland telling them that all who opposed the Catholic Church should be excommunicated, condemned, and their estates confiscated.

During the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, Ireland was almost constantly agitated by rebellions and insurrections, though not always stemming from religious disagreements. Conflicts between the English and Irish were aggravated by priests who attacked the legitimacy of the English government.

By 1629, English rulers forbade the public exercise of Catholic rites, but Catholics began to plot a massacre against the Protestants. The design of this conspiracy was that a deadly insurrection would take place throughout Ireland on October 23, 1641, the feast of Ignatius Loyola. Although the conspiracy was discovered a few hours before the insurrection took place, it was too late to stop it. All over Ireland, Protestant men, women, and children were killed. Women were stripped to their waists, had their right breasts cut off with shears, and then were allowed to bleed to death; other women were hung naked in trees with their bodies cut open. Husbands were forced to watch as their wives were tortured and killed.

An estimated 150,000 Protestants died during this massacre. Peace came only when 10,000 Scottish troops were sent to Ireland to protect the remaining Protestants. According to Foxe, "... the Irish, who formerly led an unsettled

and roving life, have since become quiet and civilized. ... They taste the sweets of English society and the advantages of civil government. They are also received into English families and treated with great humanity among Protestants."



The Persecution of the Quakers

Several writers have treated Quakers disrespectfully, but they did not deserve such treatment. The name Quaker was applied to them as a term of reproach because of their habit of convulsing when they delivered their sermons. The first leader of the Quakers was George Fox, who left the Church of England in 1646. Beginning in 1647, he traveled from town to town preaching to those who would listen. He taught them to turn to the light of Christ within them, to feel the power of God in their hearts. His followers learned that they should not remove their hats to anyone, that they should neither give nor accept titles of respect or honor, and that they should not call anyone "master" on earth. They placed the basis of religion on an inward light and an extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit.

Quakers were eventually fined and imprisoned for not taking an oath, for refusing to pay tithes to the national church, for disturbing public assemblies, and for meeting in the streets.

In 1661, they petitioned the House of Lords for a toleration of their religion and for a dispensation from taking oaths, but their petition was rejected. Instead, an act was passed that "fined" or "imprisoned" those who refused to take an oath; more than 4,000 were thrown into prison as a result.

The Quakers began to enjoy rest from their troubles when James II came to power and granted liberty to these religious dissenters.

Many of these Quakers eventually went to Pennsylvania, where William Penn had invited them. A universal liberty of conscience was granted in Pennsylvania and the natural rights of man were established there.

Although Quakers were granted freedom of religion in Pennsylvania, they still suffered in other colonies.

The Quakers were nonconformists. They believed:

- Christians should assemble publicly for the worship of God
- Christians should not tithe
- Wars and fighting are against the laws of Christ
- It is unbiblical to swear an oath
- They should not pay taxes for houses of worship of which they did not approve
- They must use "thou" and "thee" in public discourse

The Pilgrims in Massachusetts persecuted Quakers because of these beliefs. In a 1656 Boston court proceeding, the judges ruled that the Quakers were "a cursed sect of heretics," who should be fined or cast into prison for their beliefs. Two years later, a Boston court condemned Quakers for altering the customs of the nation by refusing reverence to those in authority, undermining civil government, and destroying order in churches; they were condemned to be banished.

Foxe observes that while no Christian can justify the behavior of the Pilgrims for their persecution of the Quakers, "... we also cannot condemn them without mercy for not acting upon principles of religious freedom that were unacknowledged and unknown at the time throughout all of Christendom. Every government then in existence assumed to itself the right to legislate in matters of religion. The fault of our fathers was the fault of the age. Though this cannot justify their behavior, it does furnish an explanation of their conduct. As imperfect as were their views on the rights of conscience, they were nonetheless far in advance of the age to which they belonged. It is to them, more than to any other class of men on earth, that the world is indebted for the more rational views that now prevail on the subject of religious and civil liberty."



John Bunyan's Trials

John Bunyan was born the same year the Pilgrim's landed at Plymouth. His father was an itinerant tinker and brought John up in the same trade. As a child, while playing with a cat, Bunyan says he heard a voice from heaven say to him, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven, or have thy sins and go to Hell?" At about this same time, he heard three women talking about the new birth and the work of God in their hearts.

As a young man, Bunyan spent a year in the parliamentary army. When one of his friends was killed next to him, he began

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to ponder spiritual matters and in time repented of his sins and became a devout believer; by the age of 30, he was a leading Baptist preacher in the area.

Bunyan's experience with religious persecution began early when he was arrested for preaching without a license. He took two books with him to prison: The Bible and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. While in prison, he also began writing books; his most immortal was *Pilgrims' Progress*, at first criticized by his Puritan friends as just another addition to worldly literature. However, it was not long before his book was treasured by the very people who criticized it. It was perhaps two centuries before literary critics began to realize that this story, rich in meaning and modeled upon the King James Bible, is one of the glories of English literature.

After being released from prison, Bunyan spent his remaining years as a pastor and preacher and became a national leader in non-conformist pulpits in London. He died in August 1688, after being exposed to the elements on a journey.

**"Before I went down to the justice, I begged of God that His will be done; for I was not without hopes that my imprisonment might be an awakening to the saints in the country. Only in that matter did I commit the thing to God. And verily at my return I did meet my God sweetly in the prison."
~John Bunyan**



The Life of John Wesley

John Wesley was the fifteenth of 17

children born to Charles and Suzanna Wesley. Suzanna, a woman of deep piety, spent time telling her children Bible stories in front of the nursery fireplace. Charles became a leader at Oxford and was a founder of the "Holy Club," an organization of serious-minded students. After coming under the influence of the writings of Martin Luther, Wesley entered into the full riches of the Gospel.

What John Wesley accomplished during his life borders on the incredible and at the ripe age of 85, he was as vigorous as ever. He gave God the glory for his ability to sleep soundly, rise at 4 a.m., and for 50 years preach a sermon at 5 a.m. He preached as many as four times a day and every year traveled 4,500 miles on horseback to deliver his sermons. During the last 52 years of his life, it is estimated that he preached 40,000 sermons.

Wesley's preaching was met frequently with hostility, stonings, and peltings~attempts to wound and kill him.

In addition to preaching, Wesley was also a writer of church history, universal history, and natural history; he published various theological works as well.

Preaching the justifying and renewing of the soul through belief on Christ, Wesley lifted many thousands of the humbler classes in England from their ignorance and evil habits and helped make them earnest and faithful Christians.



Persecutions of the French Protestants in Southern France

After several years of safety, French Protestants again faced persecution when Louis XVIII became the King of France. As the attacks began in southern France, many of the Catholic zealots began screaming, "We will wash our hands in Protestant blood, and make black puddings of the blood of Calvin's children." Others cried out, "All the Huguenots must be killed; this time their children must be killed, that none of the accursed race may remain."

If Protestants were not killed, they were treated cruelly. Protestant children could not play with Catholic children and could not appear in public without their parents.

In the town of Nismes, Protestants were massacred and their homes were pillaged; at one Protestant farmhouse, Catholics shot the man of the house, lit a fire with straw and boards, and threw him into the fire~they then sat down to eat salads and omelets. Catholics also desecrated the graves of Protestants by dragging the coffins out of their resting places and scattering the contents on the ground.

Paul Heraut, a silk weaver, was cut to pieces in front of his wife and four children; the plunderers left his corpse and stole all of his valuables.

The Catholics also committed monstrous outrages against the Protestant women of Nisme who washed their clothes in fountains or on the banks of streams. The

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PERSECUTIONS OF THE FRENCH PROTESTANTS IN SOUTHERN FRANCE continued from page 6

Catholic rabble would pull the women's petticoats over their heads to expose them and then drive nails into pieces of wood used to beat these women until blood streamed from their bodies and they screamed to die.

"The cries of the sufferers, the streams of blood, the murmurs of indignation which were suppressed by fear... nothing could move them."

The surgeons who examined the bodies of these women attested to the agonies they must have suffered.

Those Protestants who remained in the area were deprived of all civil and religious rights. Protestant deacons, who were helping the poor, were driven away by armed bandits.

Pushed to extremes by the Catholics, the Protestants finally felt that they had to choose the manner in which they would be killed. They determined that they would die fighting in their own defense.

When this attitude became known to their adversaries, everything immediately changed. Those, who had for a period of four years filled Protestants with terror, now felt it was their turn; they trembled at the force of the men who had formerly been resigned to persecution. The Protestants then armed themselves in the same way as their enemies; by being willing to fight back, the Protestants gained the pardon of an enemy who now trembled before them.



The Beginning of American Foreign Missions

In 1806, Samuel J. Mills and four fellow college students from Williams College were overtaken by a thunderstorm and took refuge in the shelter of a haystack. They passed the time in prayer for the salvation of the world and resolved to go as missionaries if the opportunity presented itself. This "haystack meeting" has become a historic occasion.

These men later went to Andover Theological Seminary and petitioned the Massachusetts Congregational Association to send them out as missionaries. In response to their request, the association helped form the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

In 1812, the first missionaries of the American Board left for the Orient. Dr. and Mrs. Judson arrived in Burma in 1813 to conduct missionary work. In 1824, however, war broke out between the British East India Company and the Burmese emperor. Dr. Judson was imprisoned for several months, while his wife attempted to pay off Burmese soldiers to lessen his tortures.

In May 1826, Mrs. Judson wrote a letter to her husband's brother explaining the trials they had endured during her husband's torture and imprisonment. She was in despair over her husband's arrest and told his brother, "I retired into my room, and endeavored to obtain consolation from committing my case to God, and imploring fortitude and strength to suffer whatever awaited me." She then destroyed all of her writings to avoid disclosing to the

authorities that she and her husband had informed friends in England of everything that was happening to them.

The following morning, she learned from a messenger that all white foreigners were being held in a death prison, each shackled with three pairs of iron fetters and fastened to a long pole to hold them still.

On the third day of her husband's captivity, she sent a message to the governor of the city asking to see him. She was allowed to visit him, but was told that she and her husband's future comfort in the city depended upon the gifts she would give him; he wanted a hundred dollars, two pieces of fine cloth, and two handkerchiefs.

She was eventually permitted to visit the prison. According to Mrs. Judson, "There were above a hundred prisoners shut up in one room, without a breath of air excepting the cracks in the boards. I sometimes obtained permission to go to the door for five minutes, but my heart sickened at the wretchedness exhibited. The white prisoners, from incessant perspiration and loss of appetite, looked more like the dead than the living." She was allowed to visit the prison each day.

While doing her best to care for her husband and two sick daughters, Mrs. Judson was stricken with smallpox; she hovered at the brink of death for two weeks.

"If ever I felt the value...of prayer, I did at this time...I could only plead with the [One] who has said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will hear...'"
~Mrs. Judson

In due time, Mrs. Judson recovered, Dr. Judson was released from

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THE BEGINNING OF AMERICAN FOREIGN MISSIONS
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prison, and a treaty was signed between the British East India Company and Burma.

All throughout Dr. Judson's imprisonment, he managed to hide a manuscript that translated the New Testament into the Burmese language; he had hidden it in a bag fashioned into the hard pillow that he used in prison.

One of Dr. Judson's fellow prisoners—an Englishman who had benefited from Mrs. Judson's generosity, wrote a letter of tribute to her that was published in a Calcutta newspaper. He said, in part, "...the overflowings of grateful feelings, on behalf of myself and fellow prisoners, compel me to add a tribute of public thanks to that amiable and humane female, who, though living at a distance of two miles from our prison, without any means of conveyance, and very feeble in health, forgot her own comfort and infirmity, and almost every day visited us, sought out and administered to our wants,

and contributed in every way to alleviate our misery."

Epilogue to the Original Edition of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs

"And now to conclude, good Christian readers, this present tractation, not for the lack of matter, but to shorten rather the matter for largeness of the volume. In the meantime the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ work with thee, gentle reader, in all thy studious teachings. And when thou hast faith, so employ thyself to read, that by reading thou mayest learn daily to know what which may profit thy soul, may teach thee experience, may arm thee with patience, and instruct thee in all spiritual knowledge more and more, to thy perfect comfort and salvation in Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be glory in secula seculorum. Amen."



"After the Bible itself, no book so profoundly influenced early Protestant sentiment as the Book of Martyrs. Even in our own time it is still a living force. It is more than a record of persecution. It is an arsenal of controversy, a storehouse of romance, as well as a source of edification."

~James Miller Dodds

To read or download a free copy of Foxe's Book of Martyrs, log on to Leadership University (a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ) at www.leaderu.com or Christian Classics Ethereal Library (a ministry of Calvin College) at www.ccel.org.

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The author: John Foxe (1517-1587) was a professor at Oxford, then a minister in London, before being forced to flee to Europe when Queen Mary came to power. While in Europe, he wrote this classic and published it after returning to England when Queen Elizabeth took the throne.

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