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PREFACE

HENDRICKSON CHRISTIAN CLASSICS EDITION

John Foxe
(1517–1587)

When sentence was read, condemning [Mrs. Prest] to the flames, she lifted up her voice and praised God, adding, “This day have I found that which I have long sought.” When they tempted her to recant, “That will I not (said she), God forbid that I should lose the life eternal, for this carnal and short life. I will never turn from my heavenly husband to my earthly husband; from the fellowship of angels to mortal children; and if my husband and children be faithful, then am I theirs. God is my father, God is my mother, God is my sister, my brother, my kinsman; God is my friend, most faithful.”

—JF, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*

It was the earliest days of the Church; the Spirit of God was moving, empowering the apostles and the community of believers, gathering to itself followers of the risen Jesus. What authorities had intended as an end to a problem instead exploded into a movement so large, so powerful, that followers of this backwater rabbi threatened to disrupt every part of society. Conflict was inevitable, and, with conflict, came persecution for Christians.

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The word *martyr* comes directly from the Greek, meaning “witness.” In those early days of the Church, many followers of Jesus Christ took their witness to Him, and the power of his resurrection, to the point of sacrificing their own lives. The first martyr was Stephen, stoned to death by an angry mob for teaching the claims of Jesus. The New Testament records the persecutions of early believers, including the execution—martyrdom—of James, the brother of John.

Over the next three centuries, Christians all over the Roman Empire were subjected to persecution and martyrdom. Peter and Paul were crucified in Rome by Nero. Martyrdom became the oft-cited good example of the early Church, energizing its rapid spread throughout the known world. The second-century theologian Tertullian wrote, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

The stories of these early martyrs—the accounts of their courage and faith in the face of death—are woven tightly into the fabric of our faith, essential to our common religious imagination. Consider the accounts of Christians martyred in the amphitheaters at the hands of gladiators or torn apart by wild animals. Or the silent witness of the Roman catacombs, where Christians hid to bury the martyred and, later, to worship. The stories of these heroes were recorded and recounted, the days of their martyrdom celebrated as memorials, their words and actions considered models of Christ Himself.

Martyrdom followed the Gospel wherever it went, wherever it conflicted with local custom or practice. Sometimes the clash could be characterized as pagan versus Christian. Other times, sadly, the clash was Christian versus Christian. The Reformation was just such a time: the Church seemed mired in falsehood and deceit, and visionaries believed that restorative transformation was necessary.

Godly men—men committed to faith in Jesus Christ—called for change. It’s not surprising that these challenges were unwelcome. What began as an attempt to reform from within, ultimately became a bloody schism. The Church authorities attempted to silence the reformers, eventually resorting to force. Many reformers, also known as Protestants, faced their own martyrdom—death by fire, by hanging, by strangulation, by beheading.

Into this time of political, social, and spiritual upheaval, John Foxe was born in Boston, England, in 1516. (Consider that only one year after Foxe’s

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birth, Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg.) During Foxe's lifetime, England was torn apart with violence motivated as much by politics as by religious conviction. The year that John Foxe went to Oxford to study (1534), Henry VIII declared himself the head of the Church of England, separating from the authority of Rome.

Until his death thirteen years later, Henry used religious piety to justify his political aspirations, rocking the country with conflict and upheaval. Despite his break from Rome, Henry VIII considered himself Catholic, and was not sympathetic to Protestant views and opinions. In spite of the dubious political motivations of the king, and his heavy-handed means of dealing with anyone who crossed him, the Reformation found willing hearts in England, due in large part to the availability of William Tyndale's Bible, in English. One of those willing hearts belonged to John Foxe, a gifted scholar who is said to have counted martyrs Dean Nowell, Hugh Latimer, and William Tyndale among his intimate friends and correspondents. John Foxe eventually resigned (some say, was forced to resign) his fellowship at Oxford in 1545 because of his Protestant beliefs. A short time later, he married Agnes Randall of Coventry, a woman who shared his faith. He spent many years underemployed, mostly as a tutor in private households, serving on the wrong side of the ongoing religious war.

In the reign of Henry's son Edward VI (1547–1553) the Reformation blossomed in England. Leaders such as Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, and Hugh Latimer gave voice and form to the ideas and the energies of change. The distinctions between the Church of England and the Church of Rome were magnified, thanks in no small part to the increased publication of religious books and tracks in the English language and through the liturgy in English as set forth by Cranmer in his *Book of Common Prayer*, published in 1549.

But this Reformation surge screeched to a halt in 1553, when Mary Tudor succeeded her brother to the throne. To Mary, a devout Catholic, Protestantism represented her father Henry VIII's shameful divorce of her mother. Determined to avenge past offenses, Mary committed herself to restoring Roman Catholic England. And she did so with a vengeance. Protestants fled England for the Continent, to find safety in the Protestant communities in Germany, Switzerland, and France. Many, including John Foxe and his family, settled in and around Geneva. Foxe found a new career in

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publishing, becoming a printer's proofreader. And during this time he took more and more interest in collecting stories about those who had been martyred. Foxe published an early draft of these stories in 1554, soon after he arrived in Europe.

One can imagine the impetus to gather and record such stories: Foxe himself had experienced persecution, having been forced to take his family and flee his home. Men and women he regarded as great Christians were being tortured and executed. Graphic accounts of the trials and executions must have swirled through the exiled English Protestant community in Europe, prompting Foxe to write down the stories of martyrs, reaching back to the early-church accounts, moving forward to include the current persecution on the Continent and the several hundred Protestants martyred under Mary's reign. He included the stories of the people of rank and influence—Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, Bishops Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, and John Hooper—as well as everyday folks.

The brutality of Mary's reign came to an end when Elizabeth was crowned in 1558. In 1559 the first complete edition of Foxe's work was published in Latin (the common language of scholars). It wasn't until 1560 that Foxe returned to England, as poor as when he'd left. He was ordained shortly after returning. Although he served at Salisbury Cathedral and preached regularly, he never seemed to be comfortable in his role as a cleric.

His true calling was his book, and he continued working on his collection of stories, this time writing them in English. Foxe understood through first-hand experience the power of the printed word, and the importance of books in the common language. The English version of his book was finally published in 1563, titled *Actes and Monuments of These Latter Perillous Dayes, Touching Matters of the Church*. These "acts" (accounts) and "monuments" (documents) comprised a work said to be about eighteen hundred pages long—a huge accomplishment by any standard. Certainly posterity can be forgiven for eventually shortening the title to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* and creating edited editions for popular use. Foxe continued to work on his book—revising, correcting, editing—eventually publishing three more editions in his lifetime.

There is a saying that history is written by the winners. It can be argued that in this case, the history writer created the winners. The importance of this book to the efforts of the English Reformation is incalculable. Foxe, not

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surprisingly, told these stories with considerable editorial bias. He had a theological, political, and social point of view that framed these accounts, which he colored liberally to prove his point of view. He intended to celebrate the lives and martyrdoms of English Reformers, and, like any good storyteller, he knew the value of a good villain—a role capably filled in this case by Mary Tudor and, farther away, the pope and the Church of Rome.

Foxe's perspective made this book especially useful to Elizabeth, who ordered a copy to be placed in the "common halls of archbishops, bishops, deans, etc., and in all the colleges and chapels throughout the kingdom." Some accounts state that the bishops ordered it placed in every cathedral church, where it was often chained to a lectern (as were Bibles) to allow access by the public. Imagine these vivid stories of persecution and execution read aloud in services. Imagine the power of hearing accounts of villainy recounted again and again. It is no wonder that the brutality of Mary was never softened by history—her reputation was fully drawn and kept alive by means of one book: *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.

Foxe's last revision ended with the reign of Elizabeth, whom Foxe characterized as one who had been called to establish the true Christian faith in God's "elect nation" (i.e., England). After his death in 1587, his book continued to go through editorial revisions, some better than others. This edition, edited by William Byron Forbush (1868-1927), contains Foxe's original material as well as some later additions (see chapters 5, 6 & 10 particularly).

One might be tempted to regard *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* as merely a curiosity or an oddity, full of stories that have no relevance today. God forbid that the day returns when Christians torture and kill Christians over theological disputes. (Though Foxe does not mention it, let us remember that in other decades and under different circumstances, the Reformers worked their own brand of violence on Catholics and other dissenters.) That said, this book serves as a vivid reminder of the courage of conviction. Although it may be tempting to consider martyrdom as only a historical phenomenon, it is important to remember that for many Christians throughout the world today, faith is a life-and-death issue. By some estimates, nearly 65 percent of all Christian martyrs in all time have met their fates in the twentieth century. Foxe created a martyrology that not only honored the faithful of the early church and of the Reformation, but also encouraged its

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readers to remain steadfast and true. These stories, and the stories of others who have since sacrificed their lives, taking a stand for their Christian faith, offer us rare glimpses into the Kingdom of God. And they illustrate graphically the observation made by twentieth-century martyr Jim Elliot: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."



CHAPTER I

History of Christian Martyrs to the First General Persecutions Under Nero

Christ our Savior, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, hearing the confession of Simon Peter, who, first of all other, openly acknowledged Him to be the Son of God, and perceiving the secret hand of His Father therein, called him (alluding to his name) a rock, upon which rock He would build His Church so strong that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. In which words three things are to be noted: first, that Christ will have a Church in this world. Secondly, that the same Church should mightily be impugned, not only by the world, but also by the uttermost strength and powers of all hell. And, thirdly, that the same Church, notwithstanding the uttermost of the devil and all his malice, should continue.

Which prophecy of Christ we see wonderfully to be verified, insomuch that the whole course of the Church to this day may seem nothing else but a verifying of the said prophecy. First, that Christ hath set up a Church,

needeth no declaration. Secondly, what force of princes, kings, monarchs, governors, and rulers of this world, with their subjects, publicly and privately, with all their strength and cunning, have bent themselves against this Church! And, thirdly, how the said Church, all this notwithstanding, hath yet endured and holden its own! What storms and tempests it hath overpast, wondrous it is to behold: for the more evident declaration whereof, I have addressed this present history, to the end, first, that the wonderful works of God in His Church might appear to His glory; also that, the continuance and proceedings of the Church, from time to time, being set forth, more knowledge and experience may redound [accrue] thereby, to the profit of the reader and edification of Christian faith.

As it is not our business to enlarge upon our Savior's history, either before or after His crucifixion, we shall only find it necessary to remind our readers of the discomfiture of the Jews by His subsequent resurrection. Although one apostle had betrayed Him; although another had denied Him, under the solemn sanction of an oath; and although the rest had forsaken Him, unless we may except "the disciple who was known unto the high-priest"; the history of His resurrection gave a new direction to all their hearts, and, after the mission of the Holy Spirit, imparted new confidence to their minds. The powers with which they were endued emboldened them to proclaim His name, to the confusion of the Jewish rulers, and the astonishment of Gentile proselytes.

1. St. Stephen

St. Stephen suffered the next in order. His death was occasioned by the faithful manner in which he preached the Gospel to the betrayers and murderers of Christ. To such a degree of madness were they excited, that they cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. The time when he suffered is generally supposed to have been at the Passover which succeeded to that of our Lord's crucifixion, and to the era of his ascension, in the following spring.

Upon this a great persecution was raised against all who professed their belief in Christ as the Messiah, or as a prophet. We are immediately told by St. Luke, that "there was a great persecution against the church which

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was at Jerusalem”; and that “they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

About two thousand Christians, with Nicanor, one of the seven deacons, suffered martyrdom during the “persecution that arose about Stephen.”

2. James the Great

The next martyr we meet with, according to St. Luke, in the History of the Apostles' Acts, was James the son of Zebedee, the elder brother of John, and a relative of our Lord; for his mother Salome was cousin-german [first cousin] to the Virgin Mary. It was not until ten years after the death of Stephen that the second martyrdom took place; for no sooner had Herod Agrippa been appointed governor of Judea, than, with a view to ingratiate himself with them, he raised a sharp persecution against the Christians, and determined to make an effectual blow, by striking at their leaders. The account given us by an eminent primitive writer, Clemens Alexandrinus, ought not to be overlooked; that, as James was led to the place of martyrdom, his accuser was brought to repent of his conduct by the apostle's extraordinary courage and undauntedness, and fell down at his feet to request his pardon, professing himself a Christian, and resolving that James should not receive the crown of martyrdom alone. Hence they were both beheaded at the same time. Thus did the first apostolic martyr cheerfully and resolutely receive that cup, which he had told our Savior he was ready to drink. Timon and Parmenas suffered martyrdom about the same time; the one at Philippi, and the other in Macedonia. These events took place A.D. 44.

3. Philip

Was born at Bethsaida, in Galilee and was first called by the name of “disciple.” He labored diligently in Upper Asia, and suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, A.D. 54.

4. Matthew

Whose occupation was that of a toll-gatherer, was born at Nazareth. He wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, which was afterwards translated into Greek by James the Less. The scene of his labors was Parthia, and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd in the city of Nadabah, A.D. 60.

5. James the Less

Is supposed by some to have been the brother of our Lord, by a former wife of Joseph. This is very doubtful, and accords too much with the Catholic superstition, that Mary never had any other children except our Savior. He was elected to the oversight of the churches of Jerusalem; and was the author of the Epistle ascribed to James in the sacred canon. At the age of ninety-four he was beat and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.

6. Matthias

Of whom less is known than of most of the other disciples, was elected to fill the vacant place of Judas. He was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

7. Andrew

Was the brother of Peter. He preached the Gospel to many Asiatic nations; but on his arrival at Edessa he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's Cross.

8. St. Mark

Was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi. He is supposed to have been converted to Christianity by Peter, whom he served as an amanuensis,

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and under whose inspection he wrote his Gospel in the Greek language. Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria, at the great solemnity of Serapis their idol, ending his life under their merciless hands.

9. Peter

Among many other saints, the blessed apostle Peter was condemned to death, and crucified, as some do write, at Rome; albeit some others, and not without cause, do doubt thereof. Hegesippus saith that Nero sought matter against Peter to put him to death; which, when the people perceived, they entreated Peter with much ado that he would fly the city. Peter, through their importunity at length persuaded, prepared himself to avoid. But, coming to the gate, he saw the Lord Christ come to meet him, to whom he, worshipping, said, "Lord, whither dost Thou go?" To whom He answered and said, "I am come again to be crucified." By this, Peter, perceiving his suffering to be understood, returned into the city. Jerome saith that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was.

10. Paul

Paul, the apostle, who before was called Saul, after his great travail and unspeakable labors in promoting the Gospel of Christ, suffered also in this first persecution under Nero. Abdias declareth that under his execution Nero sent two of his esquires, Ferega and Parthemius, to bring him word of his death. They, coming to Paul instructing the people, desired him to pray for them, that they might believe; who told them that shortly after they should believe and be baptized at His sepulcher. This done, the soldiers came and led him out of the city to the place of execution, where he, after his prayers made, gave his neck to the sword.

11. Jude

The brother of James, was commonly called Thaddeus. He was crucified at Edessa, A.D. 72.

12. Bartholomew

Preached in several countries, and having translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India, he propagated it in that country. He was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by the impatient idolaters.

13. Thomas

Called Didymus, preached the Gospel in Parthia and India, where, exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.

14. Luke

The evangelist was the author of the Gospel which goes under his name. He traveled with Paul through various countries, and is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece.

15. Simon

Surnamed Zelotes [Zealot], preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and even in Britain, in which latter country he was crucified, A.D. 74.

16. John

The "beloved disciple," was brother to James the Great. The churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira, were founded by him. From Ephesus he was ordered to be sent to Rome, where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle, without injury. Domitian afterwards banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Nerva, the successor of Domitian, recalled him. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.

17. Barnabas

Was of Cyprus, but of Jewish descent, his death is supposed to have taken place about A.D. 73.



And yet, notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the apostles and of men apostolical, and watered plentifully with the blood of saints.