

John Glover and others earnestly exhorted Lewes to forfeit the money he was bound in, rather than subject his wife to certain death; but he was deaf to the voice of humanity, and delivered her over to the bishop, who soon found sufficient cause to consign her to a loathsome prison, whence she was several times brought for examination. At the last time the bishop reasoned with her upon the fitness of her coming to mass, and receiving as sacred the sacraments. “If these things were in the Word of God,” she said, “I would with all my heart receive, believe, and esteem them.” The bishop, with the most ignorant and impious effrontery, replied, “If thou wilt believe no more than what is warranted by Scripture, thou art in a state of damnation!” Astonished at such a declaration, this worthy sufferer declared that his words were as impure as they were profane.

Being condemned, she remained twelve months in prison, the sheriff not willing to put her to death in his time, though he had just been chosen. When her death warrant came from London, she said smilingly, “As for death, I think but lightly of it. When I know that I shall behold the amiable countenance of Christ my dear Savior, the ugly face of death does not much trouble me.”

The evening before she suffered, two priests were anxious to visit her, but she refused both their confession and absolution, when she could hold a better communication with the High Priest of souls. About three o’clock in the morning, Satan began to shoot his fiery darts, by putting into her mind to doubt whether she was chosen to eternal life, and Christ died for her. Her friends readily pointed out to her those consolatory passages of Scripture which comfort the fainting heart, and treat of the Redeemer who taketh away the sins of the world.

About eight o’clock the sheriff announced to her that she had but an hour to live; she was at first cast down, but this soon passed away, and she thanked God that her life was about to be devoted to His service. As she was led to the place of execution, from its distance, her great weakness, and the press of the people, she nearly fainted. Three times she prayed fervently that God would deliver the land from popery and the idolatrous mass; and the people for the most part, as well as the sheriff, said “Amen.”

When she had prayed, she took the cup, (which had been filled with water to refresh her,) and said, “I drink to all them that truly love the gospel of Christ, and wish for the abolition of popery.” Her friends, and a great many women of the place, drank with her.

When chained to the stake, her countenance was cheerful, and the roses of her cheeks were not abated. In the midst of the flames, her hands were extended toward heaven, until the fire rendered them powerless, when her soul was received into the arms of Christ her Savior.

The duration of her agony was but short, as the sheriff, at the request of her friends, had prepared such excellent fuel that she was in a few minutes overwhelmed with smoke and flame. The case of this saintly martyr drew a tear of pity from everyone who had a heart not callous to humanity.□

MRS. CICELY ORMES MARTYRED 1557

CICELY ORMES was the wife of Edmund Ormes, of St. Lawrence, Norwich. It was at the recent martyrdom of Simon Miller and Elizabeth Cooper that this young martyr, age twenty-two, pledged that she would drink of the same cup they drank of. For these words she was brought before the chancellor, who would have discharged her upon promising to go to church, and to keep her beliefs to herself. As she would not consent to this, the chancellor said that he had shown more leniency to her than any other person, and was unwilling to condemn her, because she was an ignorant woman; to this she replied, (perhaps with more shrewdness than he expected,) that however great his desire might be to spare her sinful flesh, it could not equal her inclination to surrender it up unto Christ. The chancellor then condemned her, pronouncing the fiery sentence, and September 23, 1557, she was brought to the stake, at eight o’clock in the morning.

After declaring her faith to the people, she laid her hand on the stake, and said, “Welcome, thou cross of Christ.” Her hand was sooted in doing this, (for it was

the same stake at which Miller and Cooper were burnt only a few weeks before,) and she at first wiped it; but then welcomed and embraced it as the “sweet cross of Christ.” After the tormentors had kindled the fire, she said, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Savior.” Then crossing her hands upon her breast, and looking upwards with the utmost serenity, she stood the fiery furnace. She uttered no sigh of pain, but yielded her life, an emblem of that celestial paradise in which is the presence of God, blessed forever.

It might be said that this martyr voluntarily sought her own death, as the chancellor scarcely exacted any thing from her other than she keep her beliefs to herself; yet it should seem in this instance as if God had chosen her to be a shining light, for twelve months before this, she had recanted; but she was miserable until the chancellor was informed, by letter, that she repented of her recantation from the bottom of her heart. As if to compensate for her former apostasy, and to convince the Catholics that she meant no more to compromise for her personal safety, she boldly refused his offer to keep quiet. Her courage in such a cause deserves commendation—the cause of Him who said, “Whosoever is ashamed of me on earth, of such will I be ashamed in heaven” (*Mark 8:38*).□

MRS. PREST MARTYRED 1558

MR. PREST for some time lived about Cornwall, where she had a husband and children, who compelled her to frequent the abominations of the Church of Rome. But resolved to act as her conscience dictated, she quitted them, and made a living by spinning. After some time, returning home, she was accused by her neighbors, and brought before the Catholic bishop.

As this martyr was accounted of inferior intellect, we shall put her in competition with the bishop, and let the reader judge which had the most of that knowledge conducive to everlasting life. The bishop bringing the question to issue, respecting the bread and wine being flesh and blood, Mrs. Prest said, “I will

demand of you whether you can deny your creed, which says, that Christ doth perpetually sit at the right hand of His Father, both body and soul, until He come again; or whether He be there in heaven our Advocate, to make prayer for us unto God His Father? If He be so, He is not here on earth in a piece of bread. If He be not here, and if He does not dwell in temples made with hands, but in heaven, what! shall we seek Him here? If He offered His body once for all, why do you make a new offering? If with one offering He made all perfect, why do you with a false offering make all imperfect? If He is to be worshipped in spirit and truth, why do you worship a piece of bread? If He is to be received spiritually by faith, if His flesh does not profit, why do you say you make His flesh and blood, and say it is profitable for body and soul? Alas! I am a poor woman, but rather than to do as you do, I would live no longer. I have said, Sir.”

BISHOP. You are a jolly Protestant. In what school have you been brought up?

MRS. PREST. I have upon Sundays visited the sermons, and there have I learned such things as are so fixed in my breast, that death shall not separate them.

BISHOP. O foolish woman, who will waste his breath upon such as thou art? How was it that you went away from thy husband? If you were an honest woman, you would not have left thy husband and children, and run about the country like a fugitive.

MRS. PREST. Sir, I labored for my living; and as my Master Christ counselleth me, when I was persecuted in one city, I fled into another.

BISHOP. Who persecuted thee?

MRS. PREST. My husband and children. For when I would have them to leave idolatry, and to worship God in heaven, he would not hear me, but he with his children rebuked me, and troubled me. I fled not for whoredom, nor for theft, but because I would be no partaker with him and his of that foul idol the mass.

BISHOP. Do you think you are a good housewife to fly from your husband and the church?

MRS. PREST. My housewifery is but small; but God gave me grace to go to the true church.

BISHOP. The true church, what do you mean?

MRS. PREST. Not your popish church, full of idols and abominations, but where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, to that church will I go as long as I live.

BISHOP. Then you have a church of your own. Let this mad woman be put in prison until we send for her husband.

MRS. PREST. No, I have but one husband, who is here already in this city, and who shall be in prison with me, from whom I will never depart.

Some persons present convinced the bishop she was not in her right senses, so she was permitted to depart. The keeper of the bishop's prisons took her into his house, where she either spun worked as a servant, or walked about the city, speaking to persons about the true gospel. Her husband was sent for to take her home, but this she refused while the cause of Christ could be served. She was too active to be idle, and her conversation excited the attention of several Catholic priests and friars. They teased her with questions, until she answered them angrily, and this excited a laugh at her warmth.

"Nay," said she, "you have more need to weep than to laugh, and to be sorry that ever you were born, to be the chaplains of that whore of Babylon. I defy him and all his falsehood. You would have me follow your doings; I will first lose my life."

"Why, thou foolish woman," they said, "we come to thee for thy profit and soul's health." To which she replied, "What profit ariseth by you, that teach nothing but lies for truth? How save you souls, when you preach nothing but lies, and destroy souls?"

"How can you prove that?" they asked.

"Do you not destroy souls, when you teach the people to worship idols, stocks, and stones, the work of men's hands? and to worship a false god of your own making of a piece of bread, and teach that the pope is God's vicar, and hath power to forgive sins? and that there is a purgatory, when God's Son hath by His passion purged all of our sins? and you make a god and sacrifice it, when Christ's body was a sacrifice once and for all? Do you not teach the people to number their sins in your ears, and say they will be damned if they confess not all; when God's Word saith, Who can number his sins? Do you not promise them souls for masses, and sell your prayers for money, and make them buy pardons, and trust to such foolish inventions of your imaginations? Do you not altogether act against God? Do you not teach us to pray upon beads, and to pray unto saints, and say they

can pray for us? Do you not make holy water and holy bread to fray devils? Do you not do a thousand more abominations? And yet you say, you come for my profit, to save my soul. No, no, one hath saved me. Farewell, to you and your salvation."

During the liberty granted her by the bishop, before-mentioned, she went into St. Peter's Church, and there found a skillful Dutchman, who was affixing new noses to certain fine images which had been disfigured in King Edward's time; to whom she said, "What a madman art thou to make them new noses, which within a few days will all lose their heads?" The Dutchman accused her. And she said to him, "Thou art accursed, and so are thy images." He called her a whore. "Nay," she said, "thy images are whores, and thou art a whore-hunter; for God doth say, 'You go a whoring after strange gods, figures of your own making.' And thou art one of them." After this she was ordered to be confined, and had no more liberty.

During the time she was in prison, many visited her; among these was one Daniel, a great preacher of the gospel in the days of King Edward, but because of the grievous persecution, he had fallen off. Earnestly did she exhort him to repent with Peter, and to be more constant in his profession.

Mrs. Walter Rauley and Mr. William and John Kede, persons of great respectability, bore ample testimony of her godly conversation, declaring, that unless God were with her, it were impossible she could have so ably defended the cause of Christ. Indeed, to sum up the character of this poor woman, she united the serpent and the dove, abounding in the highest wisdom joined to the greatest simplicity. She endured imprisonments, threatenings, taunts, and the vilest epithets, but nothing could induce her to swerve. Her heart was fixed; she had cast anchor; nor could all the wounds of persecution remove her from the rock on which her hopes were built. Even when offered money, she rejected it, "because," she said, "I'm going to a city where money bears no mastery, and while I'm here God has promised to feed me."

When sentence was finally read, condemning her 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, she said, "I will never turn from my heavenly husband to my

earthly husband. God is my father, my mother, my sister, my brother, my kinsman, my friend, most faithful."

Being delivered to the sheriff, she was led by the officer to the place of execution, where again the superstitious priests assaulted her. While they were tying her to the stake, she continued earnestly to exclaim, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Patiently enduring the devouring flames, she was consumed to ashes, and thus ended a life which in unshaken loyalty to the cause of Christ, was not surpassed by that of any preceding martyr. □

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev 12:11)

These stories are actual and historical accounts of Christian suffering taken from the famous *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Born in 1516, John Foxe of England, professor of Oxford University, wrote his book to document the persecution against Christ's Church by pagans and by those who called themselves Christians but were not. It's a book about God's grace and Christian faithfulness. First published in English in 1563, Foxe's book has endured for over four-hundred years as a memorial to the martyrs, and a legacy of inspiration and courage to the true Church of Jesus Christ.

Before he died in 1587, Foxe had the joy of seeing four large editions of his book published. The Council of Bishops ordered it placed in every cathedral church in England, and like the Bible, it was often chained to the pulpit.

Eventually there came a time, not only in England, but all over the English-speaking world, when a home wasn't considered to be Christian unless it openly displayed a Bible and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Years later, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, published in 1678, had the honor of being included with those two books as basic and essential Christian reading. □

3 WOMEN MARTYRS

"And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev 17:6)

MRS. JOYCE LEWES MARTYRED 1557

JOYCE LEWES was one of the many godly martyrs who suffered during the brief but "bloody" reign of Queen Mary (1553-1558). She had received the Roman Catholic religion as true, until the burning of that pious martyr, Lawrence Saunders, at Conventry in 1555. Understanding that his death arose from a refusal to receive the mass, she began to ask questions about this, and her conscience, as it was soon enlightened, became alarmed and uneasy.

In this restlessness, she resorted to John Glover, who lived near, and requested that he would unfold those rich sources of gospel knowledge he possessed, particularly upon the subject of transubstantiation. He easily succeeded in convincing her that the mummery of popery and the mass were at variance with God's most holy Word, and honestly reproved her for following too much the vanities of a wicked world. It was to her indeed a word in season, for she soon became weary of her former sinful life and resolved to abandon the mass and idolatrous worship. Though compelled by her husband's violence to go to church, her contempt of the holy water and other ceremonies was so manifest, that she was accused before the bishop of despising the sacraments.

A citation, addressed to her, immediately followed, which was given to her husband, who, in a fit of passion, held a dagger to the throat of the officer, and made him eat it, after which he caused him to drink it down, and then sent him away. The bishop summoned Mr. Lewes and his wife; the former readily submitted, but the latter resolutely affirmed, that she had not offended God nor any part of His Word. She was sent home for a month, her husband being bound for her appearance.