

Tudors

MARTYRS BY NIGEL BRYANT

1550s. A prison cell in Oxford. A heavy door swings open, rattling locks and keys. As the Jailer pushes him inside, Christopher Gray, 20s, is praying fervently.

- CHRISTOPHER My shepherd is the living Lord,
Nothing therefore I need.
In pastures fair with waters calm
He sets me for to feed!
- JAILER In you go, martyr! And keep your psalms to yourself!
- CHRISTOPHER And in the presence of my foes
My table Thou shalt spread;
Thou shalt O Lord fill full my cup,
And sure, anoint my head!
- JAILER Someone to keep ye company, Jack!
- JACK [A vagrant, already in the cell, in chains] Oh, thank you kindly!
- JAILER Yeah! Good luck with this'un, Jack - been goin' on like this since he got here!
- FX *The door slams shut; rattling of keys in lock.*
- JACK So what brings you to this dee-lightful gaol?
- CHRISTOPHER Through all my life Thy favour is
So plainly showed to me -
- JACK Oh, glory be.
- CHRISTOPHER And in Thy house for evermore
My dwelling place shall be...
- JACK Not another martyr, surely? Not another man willin' to
die cos 'e thinks there's only one way to worship God?





- CHRISTOPHER *[suddenly angry]* There is! There is only one way - but it is not the way of the Catholic Church! That's the old way of Rome, of saints and superstition: it has no place in England and I'll not accept it!
- JACK Ah. An' when they gonna..?
- CHRISTOPHER Burn me? Tomorrow. But I will burn if I must. I'll not be forced to mass spoken in Latin - a language no common man can understand!
- JACK I'm sure God'd forgive ye.
- CHRISTOPHER What?
- JACK Why don't ye just...well, go along with it, like, and...worship him your own way in private?
- CHRISTOPHER You're asking me to...to be untrue?
- JACK Why not? Why should 'e mind? What would 'e be like if 'e let a "true believer" burn for the sake o' summin' so small?
- CHRISTOPHER Small? It's not small! What I do is for the good of all. They've arrested me and locked me here for bringing God's true word in the English tongue!
- JACK You what? What you on about?
- CHRISTOPHER You want to know what brought me here?
- JACK Aye. You're not from here in Oxford, I can tell.
- CHRISTOPHER No, I'm a Kentishman.
- JACK Kent's a long way.
- CHRISTOPHER On foot it is. And trouble is, being on foot made it clear that I'm no gentleman.
- FX *In the background, start to bring up the low hubbub inside a country inn with a fiddle playing, and the voices of Christopher and Jack move closer.*
- CHRISTOPHER I'd stopped at an inn for the night - it's not a good idea to get found in the open, sleeping rough.
- FX *In the background inn, a bowl clumps down on the table before Christopher.*
- CHRISTOPHER Thank you kindly.



CHRISTOPHER I had something to eat and drink...then a short time later I saw two men by the door...talking to the inn-keeper. They kept looking at me. Then they started coming over...

OFFICER Good even, sir. You're not from these parts, I fancy.

CHRISTOPHER True. I'm from Dartford. Christopher Gray, Master weaver at your service...

2nd OFFICER And you have a licence to travel?

CHRISTOPHER No, sir, I have not.

OFFICER You have no licence to leave your parish?

CHRISTOPHER No. Is it required?

2nd OFFICER Do you not know it is?

CHRISTOPHER I've had no cause to travel before - I've never left my county.

OFFICER Then I trust you have good cause to travel now. What's your purpose?

CHRISTOPHER I'm on my way to Oxford.

OFFICER And your reason?

CHRISTOPHER Why do you need to know?

OFFICER If you've no good reason, we'll arrest you as a vagrant and you'll be whipped.

2nd OFFICER What's in your bag?

CHRISTOPHER Only clothes.

OFFICER Let me see.

CHRISTOPHER This cannot be necessary.

2nd OFFICER Give me that bag, weaver!

CHRISTOPHER No, I...



- 2nd OFFICER Ah! There we are! Now let's have a look. Got clothes in here, have you? Heaviest clothes I've ever come across! And no wonder: books, eh? Bibles. Oh, my word, look at this. They're English Bibles. Well, master weaver, you're in trouble now.
- We return to the present: Christopher with Jack the vagrant in the prison cell.*
- JACK You must'a known what the punishment would be.
- CHRISTOPHER I did.
- JACK An'...what? You were willin' to die for smugglin' English Bibles?
- CHRISTOPHER It is absurd, is it not, that Englishmen should be forbidden to read the Bible except in Latin. Every living soul should be able to read and understand God's word! Can you?
- JACK Oh, don't worry 'bout me! Keep your mighty matters to yourself!
- CHRISTOPHER They are mighty matters indeed! The Bishop himself has pressed me to admit my wrong!
- JACK The Bishop, eh? What an honour! When was that, then?
- CHRISTOPHER When they first brought me here...two days ago...the day before the burnings.
- FX Crossfade to a warmer, panelled room.*
- BISHOP Christopher Gray. Is that your name?
- CHRISTOPHER It is.
- BISHOP Where did you get these Bibles?
- CHRISTOPHER They're printed abroad - I don't know where.
- BISHOP But you felt obliged to help scatter them through England.
- CHRISTOPHER The word of God should be -
- BISHOP Her majesty Queen Mary has decreed that no Bibles translated into English may be -
- CHRISTOPHER Her own father, King Henry himself, gave permission for Bibles to be published in our own tongue!



- BISHOP Yes, but he changed his mind -
- CHRISTOPHER And his son King Edward changed it again, and encouraged us all to read the English Bible!
- BISHOP And now once more it is forbidden under Queen Mary! She has decreed that England shall return to the Catholic faith. And it is the duty of a subject to obey his queen.
- CHRISTOPHER No. My first duty is to God.
- BISHOP Then you will burn.
- CHRISTOPHER I am willing to die for my Protestant faith.
- BISHOP Are you sure? Two men are to burn here in the morning. I think you should watch, Christopher - it may persuade you to change your mind.
- CHRISTOPHER I have no fear! I am willing to die a martyr!
- BISHOP Tell me that tomorrow, once you've watched.
- FX Crossfade to a big, expectant crowd in a street.*
- JACK So what happened then?
- CHRISTOPHER The bishop took me on to Oxford's city wall the next day, to watch it all. Down below a...a vast crowd had gathered in the street. I could see two wooden stakes and great bundles of wood, ready for the burning.
- BISHOP Two fellow bishops of mine are being burned. Dear Ridley, bishop of London, and Latimer, bishop of Worcester, both refuse to accept the Catholic faith. I hope the wood is dry.
- CHRISTOPHER What do you mean?
- BISHOP When the Bishop of Gloucester was burned in February, the wood was damp from the rain and he took three quarters of an hour to die. Ah. Here come the dear bishops now. God have mercy on their souls.
- CHRISTOPHER I watched as the bishops said goodbye to their friends. Then they were bound to the stakes with coils of rope, and the bundles of wood were stacked around them, piled up to their waists. Then, at a sign from the sheriff...they were lit.
- FX Sounds of crackling and a response from the crowd.*



- CHRISTOPHER I could hear no cries from them - they seemed to be mouthing fervent prayers. Soon I could see nothing of Latimer: he was engulfed in smoke - and surely if he was breathing deep he'd have suffocated before the flames could burn him. A merciful death and he was safe with God! But Ridley's fire was burning slowly.
- BISHOP See now how he suffers, Christopher. He endures the fires of Hell on Earth! Imagine how it feels...
- CHRISTOPHER A man ran forward and piled on more wood. He was trying to end his suffering...
- BISHOP The fool! He's dampened down the flames - prolonged the agony!
- CHRISTOPHER It was true - and I could watch no more. When I looked back some minutes later, I saw the crowd had all reeled back - the blaze was now so great that no-one could go near.
- CHRISTOPHER God receive his spirit!
- BISHOP He may, and I pray he will. But are you truly willing to suffer that death? Are you, Christopher?
- JACK The bishop was tryin' to save you, man! He was givin' you a chance!
- CHRISTOPHER No! He was afraid of another martyr! Afraid of the example they show, the courage they give to others to stand up to tyranny!
- JACK So what did you say to 'im, then? When 'e'd shown you what it meant to burn?
- CHRISTOPHER I must hold to my faith!
- BISHOP Just admit you're wrong. Accept Queen Mary's decree and you needn't suffer this terrible death!
- CHRISTOPHER I know what I believe! And I will not accept Queen Mary's church!
- BISHOP You are a weaver. You may have taught yourself to read but you have no learning! You cannot understand the Bible even though you read it. That is why it's best kept in Latin - the language of the learned. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and the word of God in the hands of such as you is dangerous indeed! How I hate martyrs. You'll burn.
- FX *The fire gradually rises to the fore and blazes before fading.*