



The Early Jesuit Missions in North America
William Ingraham Kip (1846)

William Kip was a white New Yorker and an Episcopal priest. The Early Jesuit Missions in North America was a collection, prepared by Kip, of letters that French Jesuit missionaries had written during the 1600s and early 1700s while working among indigenous peoples of North America. In these excerpts from the collection's preface, Kip lauds the Jesuits as pioneers and martyrs; but he then goes on to hail British and American missionaries of the 1800s as equal to the Jesuits in heroism and superior to them in results. As an Episcopalian, Kip identifies particularly with Anglican missionaries working in British possessions in Asia and the Pacific. Less than a decade after publishing this book, Kip himself became the Episcopal Church's missionary bishop in California.

There is no page of our country's history more touching and romantic than that which records the labors and sufferings of the Jesuit missionaries. In these western wilds, they were the earliest pioneers of civilization and faith. The wild hunter or the adventurous traveler who, penetrating the forests, came to new and strange tribes often found that, years before, the disciples of Loyola had preceded him in that wilderness. Traditions of the "black robes" still lingered among the Indians. On some moss-grown tree, they pointed out the traces of their work; and in wonder he deciphered, carved side by side on its trunk, the emblem of our salvation and the lilies of the Bourbons. Amid the snows of Hudson's Bay; among the woody islands and beautiful inlets of the St. Lawrence; by the council fires of the Hurons and the Algonquins; at the sources of the Mississippi, where, first of the white men, their eyes looked upon the Falls of St. Anthony and then traced down the course of the bounding river as it rushed onward to earn its title of "Father of Waters"; on the vast prairies of Illinois and Missouri; among the blue hills which hem in the salubrious dwellings of the Cherokees; and in the thick canebrakes of Louisiana—everywhere were found the members of the "Society of Jesus." Marquette, Joliet, Brebeuf, Jogues, Lallemand, Rasles, and Marest^a are the names which the west should ever hold in remembrance.

But it was only by suffering and trial that these early laborers won their triumphs. Many of them, too, were men who had stood high in camps and courts and could contrast their desolate state in the solitary wigwam with the refinement and affluence which had waited on their early years. But now all these were gone. Home, the love of kindred, the golden ties of relationship—all were to be forgotten by these stern and high-wrought men, and they were often to go forth into the wilderness without an adviser on their way, save their God. [...] Mighty forests were to be threaded on foot, and the great lakes of the west passed in the feeble bark canoe. Hunger and cold and disease were to be encountered, until nothing but the burning zeal within could keep alive the wasted and sinking frame. But worse than all were those spiritual evils which forced them to weep and pray in darkness. They had to endure the contradiction of those they came to save, who, often after listening for months with apparent interest, so that the Jesuit began to hope

^a The full names of these individuals, as customarily spelled today are: Jacques Marquette, Louis Jolliet, Jean de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, Gabriel Lalemant, Sébastien Rale, and Joseph Marest. All but Jolliet were Jesuits who worked in the St. Lawrence–Great Lakes watershed or the upper Mississippi River valley sometime during the 1600s to early 1700s. (Jolliet began studying to be a priest but became a fur trader instead; he accompanied Jacques Marquette on an exploratory mission along the Mississippi River.)

they would soon be numbered with his converts, suddenly quitted him with cold and derisive words and turned again to the superstitions of their tribe.

Most of them, too, were martyrs to their faith. [...] Some, like Jogues and du Poisson and Souel,^b sunk beneath the blows of the infuriated savages, and their bodies were thrown out to feed the vulture, whose shriek, as he flapped his wings above them, had been their only requiem. Others, like Brebeuf and Lallemand and Senat,^c died at the stake, and their ashes “flew no marble tells us whither,” while the dusky sons of the forest stood around and mingled their wild yells of triumph with the martyrs’ dying prayers. Others again, like the aged Marquette, sinking beneath years of toil, fell asleep in the wilderness, and their sorrowing companions dug their graves in the green turf, where, for many years, the rude forest ranger stopped to invoke their names and bow in prayer before the cross which marked the spot.

But did these things stop the progress of the Jesuits? The sons of Loyola never retreated. The mission they founded in a tribe ended only with the extinction of the tribe itself. Their lives were made up of fearless devotedness and heroic self-sacrifice. [...] “Nothing”—wrote Father Le Petit^d after describing the martyrdom of two of his brethren—“nothing has happened to these two excellent missionaries for which they were not prepared when they devoted themselves to the Indian missions.” [...] “*Ibo, et non redibo,*”^e were the prophetic words of Father Jogues when, for the last time, he departed to the Mohawks. When Lallemand was bound to the stake, and for seventeen hours his excruciating agonies were prolonged, his words of encouragement to his companion were, “Brother! we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.” When Marquette was setting out for the sources of the Mississippi, and the friendly Indians who had known him wished to turn him from his purpose by declaring, “Those distant nations never spare the strangers,” the calm reply of the missionary was, “I shall gladly lay down my life for the salvation of souls.” And then the red sons of the wilderness bowed with him in prayer; and before the simple cross of cedar and among the stately groves of elm and maple which line the St. Lawrence, there rose that old chant which the aged man had been accustomed to hear in the distant cathedrals of his own land—

*Vexilla Regis prodeunt;
fulget Crucis mysterium.*

The banners of heaven’s King advance,
the mystery of the Cross shines forth.

^b Isaac Jogues was killed in the mid-1600s, in present-day New York, by Mohawks hostile to French colonialism. Paul du Poisson and Jean Souel were killed in the early 1700s, in present-day Mississippi, during military campaigns launched against French colonists by the Natchez and Yazoo peoples.

^c Jean de Brébeuf and Gabriel Lalemant were killed in the mid-1600s by Mohawks at war with the Hurons, with whom the missionaries were living. Antony Senat was killed in the early 1700s, in present-day Mississippi, during a war between the French and the Chickasaws.

^d Maturin Le Petit was a missionary among the Choctaw and Natchez nations, in the lower Mississippi River valley, during the early 1700s.

^e In Latin: “I will go, and I will not return.”

[...] It has ever been, through life, the object of the writer to reverence goodness wherever seen and by whatever name it may be called, and therefore he is willing to pay his tribute to the fearless devotedness of these men. His heart can respond with joy to the triumphs they won for the Cross when the wild tribes of the west bowed to the emblem of our common faith, even though he differs widely from them in their theology [...]

But let not any carry this feeling too far or, from admiration of the romance which gathers around the labors of the Jesuits, feel as if the claim of devotedness was to be confined to them alone. Our own church has equally her *Acta Sanctorum* [...] The annals of no church give a loftier picture of self-sacrifice than that furnished by Henry Martyn,^f when he abandoned the honors of academic life and exchanged his happy home at Cambridge for the solitary bungalow at Dinapore, the daily disputes with his moonshee and pundit, or the bitter opposition of the Mahommedans at Shiraz. And nowhere do we read of a nobler martyrdom than his, when he lay expiring at Tocat without a friend to close his eyes or a sympathizing voice to address him. So too it was when Heber^g left the peaceful retreat of Hodnet to suffer and die under the burning heats of India, or Selwyn^h in our day consecrated himself to this cause among the wild savages of New Zealand. But the time would fail us were we to speak of Buchanan, or Thomason, or Middleton, or James, or Corrieⁱ —“these all died in the faith”—or of Wilson, and Spencer, and Broughton, and Carr,^j who in this generation went out to distant heathen lands, “not knowing the things which should befall them there.” Many a humble missionary, indeed, who is now suffering from poverty and an unhealthy climate in our own western wilds and whose record is written only in heaven, is “dying daily” and enduring as true a martyrdom for the gospel’s sake as any Jesuit whose history is given in this volume.

There is one thought, however, which has constantly occurred to us in the preparation of these letters, and which we cannot but suggest. Look over the world and read the history of the Jesuit missions. After one or two generations, they have always come to naught. There is not a

^f Henry Martyn was an Anglican missionary who, in the 1800s-1810s, traveled to British-held India, Qajar Iran, and the Ottoman empire. He died of illness in Tokat, in present-day Turkey.

^g Reginald Heber was an Anglican priest who started his ministerial career in an English village called Hodnet. In the 1820s, he was appointed bishop of Calcutta (now Kolkata), India, but he died of illness after just three years there.

^h Just a few years before Kip wrote this, George Selwyn had traveled from England to serve as the first Anglican bishop of New Zealand, where he oversaw missions to the Māori people and indigenous Melanesians.

ⁱ Claudius Buchanan, Thomas Thomason, Thomas Middleton, John Thomas James, and Daniel Corrie all worked as Anglican missionaries in India sometime between the 1790s and 1830s. All had died by the time Kip wrote this.

^j John Alexander Wilson and Seymour Mills Spencer were Anglican missionaries in New Zealand; Spencer was US-born but had joined the London-based Church Missionary Society. William Broughton was the first Anglican bishop of Australia; Thomas Carr, the first Anglican bishop of Bombay (now Mumbai). All were working in those mission fields at the time Kip wrote this.

recorded instance of their permanency or their spreading each generation wider and deeper, like our own missions in India. Thus it has been in China, Japan, South America, and our own land. For centuries, the Jesuit foreign missionaries have been like those “beating the air.” And yet, greater devotion to the cause than theirs has never been seen since the apostles’ days. Why, then, was this the result? If “the blood of the martyrs be the seed of the church,” why is this the only instance in which it has not proved so? Must there not have been something wrong in the whole system—some grievous errors mingled with their teaching, which thus denied them a measure of success proportioned to their efforts?

Source: William Ingraham Kip, *The Early Jesuit Missions in North America* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1846), vii-xiv, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044009804840>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. An English translation from Latin that, in the source publication, appeared as a footnote has been integrated into the main text. Spelling, punctuation, and the formatting of a block quotation emended in line with modern American conventions, except that the spelling of names and foreign words replicates the source. Latin phrases converted to italics. Capital letters at the beginning of poetic lines converted to lowercase for readability.

The lowercasing of the racial labels *white* and *red* reproduces the usage of the source publication; so does the capitalizing of *Regis*, *Crucis*, and *Cross*. In Kip’s translation from Latin, the English word *king*, lowercase in the source, has been capitalized here to match the source’s capitalization of *Regis*. However, a number of religious terms capitalized in the source have been downcased here for the sake of modernization and readability: *missionaries*, *missions*, *black robes*, *cathedrals*, *emblem* (inconsistently capitalized in the source), *church*, *heaven*, *gospel*, and *apostles*. The word *west*, capitalized in the source, has been downcased to match the source’s lowercasing of *western*. The foreign terms *moonshee* (= *munshi*) and *pundit* (= *pundat*) have been downcased to match the downcasing of Christian terms and to clarify for readers unfamiliar with those terms that they are not names.

These edited excerpts from Kip’s book are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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