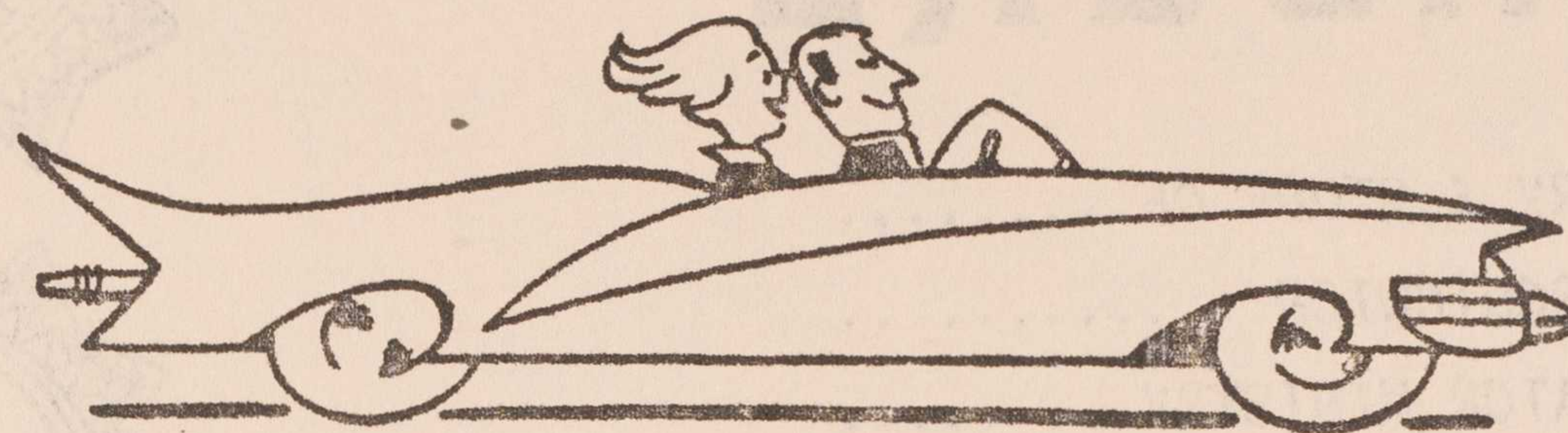


WHO ARE THESE?



When I read of the tortures inflicted upon the martyrs of the dark ages past; and contemplate upon their lot...In my spirit I seem to be with them in all their bitter trials.

I seem to see them now as they are staked upon the sands of the sea, and there to be drowned by the incoming tide. I seem to be with them as they rot away in distant dungeons, vainly listening with dying ears for footsteps of relief and freedom.

I am with them as their fingernails are torn out and as red hot needles are driven into the bloody quick. I am with them as great pieces of skin are pulled with red hot pincers from their quivering backs, and as their feet have been cruelly crushed with heavy planks...

I am there as they have been torn asunder, limb from limb by teams of horses; or, as they have been taken to the inquisition chambers and there broken on the wheel, or twisted and crippled by torture racks. All the while white-faced religionists hypocritically bend over them gloating over their every agony.

Why all this intense suffering, pain and agony?

It is simply because these brave souls knew tribulation unto the last full measure of devotion. They chose to trust the Lord Jesus Christ alone for their salvation instead of the religious dictations of priestcraft and the state.

I am there---with them as they are rudely snatched from home and fire-side; from the side of their moaning wives and weeping children and dragged through the streets to the stake at Smithfield. I am there as the faggots are piled high about their feet and then kindled with the fire of an unholy fervor....

I am there as flames leap up about their bodies; now causing every nerve and fibre of body to pulse with pain...fire burning at their eyes until scorched into blindness. I have heard the bedlam of that accursed mob standing about who seizing upon the ashes of those faithful ones only for the purpose of scattering them into the face of the four winds of heaven with all the hands of hate---so that decent burial cannot be given them...Then I have seen them quickly cry aloud for another victim for such awful sport.

It seems Martyrdom came into the world early; for the first man that died died for religion.