

Story Synopsis

In the year 1838 Dr. Robert Kalley, a Scottish minister and physician, arrived at the island of Madeira and discovered that the people were suffering from poverty, illiteracy, and poor health. In response, Dr. Kalley created both clinics and schools, teaching people to read, using the Bible as the primary text.

The local church officials were initially grateful to Dr. Kalley for the medical care he was providing, but they soon took a different attitude when the newly Biblically literate Madeirans began questioning the priests and leaving the church. The priests began calling them “Bible readers” and “Kalley Converts”. A campaign of harassment of the Bible readers began with declarations, excommunications and in some cases working with the local authorities to charge and imprison followers of Dr. Kalley.

Eventually the church commanded the townspeople themselves to turn on the Bible readers. The townspeople persecuted them with public humiliation, beatings, and even arson, setting the Bible reader’s houses on fire on several different occasions. This disturbing situation went on for some time until the faithful in Madeira decided they had had enough and began planning their escape.

After a severe riot on August 9, 1846, which forced hundreds of Madeiran faithful into hiding in the hills, two British transport ships in the harbor began firing their cannons intermittently to intimidate the rioters and let them know that the British would protect themselves at all costs, providing Dr. Kalley’s faithful cover to find their way onto the ships.

On August 23, 1846, the British ship, the "William of Glasgow", began her voyage to Trinidad with two hundred eleven passengers. This was followed in the weeks and months ahead by other converts seeking refuge. All in all, approximately 2000 Madeiran Exiles left for Trinidad, Antigua, St Kitts, Demerara and Jamaica. A thousand of those eventually came to central Illinois, having been invited and hosted by the people there.

