

## Where Suffered the Boston Martyrs

**E**XTRACT from the Diary of Caleb Cresson, of Philadelphia, who died in 1816, aged 74, giving an account of a visit to Boston, Massachusetts, in Seventh Month, 1791.<sup>1</sup>

2nd Day, 25th.—Had my horse shod, and chaise oiled and rubbed up by a coach-maker. Walked out to see the town, in company with Ebenezer Pope—first to Beacon Hill, which commands an extensive view of the town, the harbour, Castle Island (also many other islands in the bay within seven or ten miles), Gov. Hancock's house, Cambridge town and University, Bunker's Hill, where the bloody battle was fought between the British and Americans in the beginning of the late civil wars. A monument is erected on Beacon Hill, which must have cost a considerable sum, and on it are inscribed the memorable events of the distressing times we have of later years passed through.

We also viewed the Alms-house, Work-house, State house, Faneuil Hall, the Market, Long Wharf, and other public buildings and private dwellings, some of them stately and elegant. The duck<sup>2</sup> manufactory was a pleasing sight, and carried on to good advantage.

Our friend Ebenezer Pope informed me that he had made it a point to be particular in his inquiry, in order to ascertain the place where our Friends William Robinson and Marmaduke Stevenson were put to death, and he thought he could fix the spot within a few rods. The histories of Friends which mention the transaction are not explicit on that head—neither is it very material—yet when one is at Boston it seems quite natural to make some inquiry about it, tho' the inhabitants now show

<sup>1</sup> Copied by George Vaux, of Philadelphia, from a copy of the Diary in his possession. This Diary, comprising the years 1791 and 1792, was privately printed in 1877.

<sup>2</sup> Duck—a strong untwilled linen or cotton fabric, lighter and finer than canvas, used for small sails, men's outer clothing, etc. (*Standard Dictionary*, vol. i.)

rather an aversion to having the matter revived; and, indeed, Christian charity would forbid our making the children answerable for the misconduct of their forefathers, whose deeds they condemn, both in word and conduct. However, there can be nothing criminal in endeavouring to fix the place where the tragedy was executed.

Ebenezer Pope told me several circumstances tending to fix the spot, which he led me to, very nearly. Some of them, for my own satisfaction, I will set down here.

He says, one of our historians mentions a boat, with some sober people, coming from Nantasket, to see the bloody business, who sat therein, while it was performed, in a little creek near the gallows. The entrance of this creek is still visible near Boston Neck, and the remaining ground towards the opposite shore, a little more than a quarter of a mile over, is still low, tho' it has been filled up considerably for building.

He further says that old Friend Bagnel told him of a conversation which he had with an Old Woman at Charleston, who informed him she was about ten years old when the occurrence happened, and got leave of her parents to go and see the execution, and after crossing Penny Ferry, as it was then called, she ran along the beach until she came in view of the gallows—which, by the present situation of land and water, tends to fix the place somewhere near where our Friend Pope supposed it to be.

Add to this his account of a Public Friend from England, who when here was concerned to make inquiry on the subject, and walking out to the place, and leaning on the fence, after a solemn pause, said, "Here lie my dear Friends: I smell their bones."

Also, a sober neighbour of his, being near the spot during the late troubles, related to him (that is E. Pope) as follows:—Ruminating in his mind on the judgments which then hung over the land, and being deeply thoughtful and pensive of the cause, was made, as by a secret impulse, to stand still, and a voice as it were run through his mind—Here lie the innocent Quakers, and the very spot, or place, seemed pointed out to him in a very particular manner.

All these circumstances unite to render it almost certain that somewhere near the place he showed me, the affecting tragedy was performed.

Bishop tells us that when their lives were taken, they were denied burial, and their naked bodies cast into a hole, and not permitted to be covered; which was soon after overflowed with water, which probably might have been occasioned by the rising of the tide over the low grounds already mentioned.

I speak now of William Robinson and Marmaduke Stevenson, for as to Mary Dyer and William Leddra, Friends were permitted to take away their bodies.

This Friend Pope also related a conversation which lately passed between two of his neighbors—one of them grandson to Edward Rawson, who was Secretary to Governor Endicott, who spoke much in favour of the piety of the first settlers, and what godly people they were, compared to the present generation. “Say you so?” said his friend; “I am of a different mind:—so far from thinking them virtuous, good people, I look upon them to have been the veriest devils that ever existed in human shape, and, to be plain with you, your grandfather was no better than the rest of them.” “Why, what do you mean, sir?” said his neighbour. “I mean as I say, sir; that so far from being pious and godly, their cruelty and wickedness exceeded all example since the days of the Reformation from Popery. Have you never read the history of the Quakers’ sufferings in this country, sir?” No! “Then I will take care to furnish you with a sight of it, and I am persuaded from your uprightness and candour, you will join with me in utterly condemning the principles and practices of those who first settled in this country; who, fleeing from persecution in their native land, became far before their persecutors in England in point of hard-heartedness and barbarity.” So he furnished him with Besse’s *History of the Sufferings of our Friends in New England*.

After some weeks he called upon him again, and asked if he had read it. He said “Yes.” He then queried, “What was his opinion of their ancestors now?” “Why, sir,” he replied, “I stand informed of what I

never before was acquainted with, and may acknowledge, with the Queen of the South, that the one-half had not been told me. So I am compelled to be of your mind, sir, and allow that they were not the men I apprehended them to be."

This was the substance of their conversation, being two Presbyterians, and it may reasonably be supposed that few of those now upon the stage have much knowledge of the proceedings of those early times against our innocent brethren and sisters, only for bearing their testimony to the Truth; for it has, without doubt, been the earnest endeavour of the writers and leaders amongst them, to mutilate and suppress all accounts which have a tendency to criminate and set in an unfavourable point of view the conduct of their forefathers. But faithful and impartial history will still preserve the truth of those transactions which cast such a shade of infamy upon the high professors of the Christian name in that day.

And something remarkable and memorable it will be, if in future time, in the very midst of the country where the persecution raged the hottest, that is, between Boston and Salem, our Yearly Meeting for New England should be established, and a standard for the Truth, as held by us as a religious society, be erected.

And if the professors under our name were but in the possession of what they hold up to the world, and acted agreeably to the principles we maintain, no doubt there would be a gathering from many of those sects, who are groaning under their heavy task-masters, and ready to say, many seeking religious minds among them, at least, "Who will show us any good?" sensibly feeling in the secret of their own minds, a want, which nothing outward can satisfy—a deficiency, which outward worship, service and ceremonies can not supply.

For indeed, nothing can satisfy the immortal part but that which is really Divine and Spiritual—agreeably to that Scripture testimony, "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," that is, all who approach before Him in an acceptable manner.