

## Shadows of Boston Gallows

MANY of us in America, in connection with the Tercentenary in 1961 of the first known General Meeting of Friends in New England, have been hearing or reading again about those early days. Though the extant minutes begin only later, this is certainly the Yearly Meeting of the longest continuous history. The year 1661 marks also the last of the Quaker hangings. They were stopped partly by local public opinion, partly by royal prohibition from Old England, though other forms of persecution continued, as it did in England. Mary Hoxie Jones in her new book, *The Standard of the Lord Lifted Up*,<sup>1</sup> has given the high lights of the history down to 1700. I may therefore, while the memory is fresh, present as footnotes a few bits of information, quite new to me, though easily accessible, which I have gleaned of late—too late to be used otherwise.

They have come chiefly from two sources. One is the Journals of later Friends, mostly collected in fourteen volumes in *Friends Library*,<sup>2</sup> and now conveniently indexed by Pendle Hill. The other is the registers of marriages and of births and deaths of Rhode Island Monthly Meeting. A few weeks after Fox's visit in 1672 two books were bought for this purpose<sup>3</sup> and entries made, some of them for the preceding thirty years. They have been re-arranged and transposed to modern and non-Quaker calendar and printed by at least two removes (I hope accurately) in James N. Arnold's *Vital Records of Rhode Island*.<sup>4</sup> For example, they include the deaths at Boston of the four Friends hanged, though the date given for the first two is 20th October, 1659, the date of their sentence, instead of 27th October, when they were executed. This error could easily have been made by misreading the primary printed source, George Bishop's *New*

<sup>1</sup> *The Standard of the Lord Lifted Up*. A history of Friends in New England from 1656-1700, commemorating the first Yearly Meeting held in 1661. By Mary Hoxie Jones. Foreword by Henry J. Cadbury. Privately printed under the auspices of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1961, xiv, 161, map.

<sup>2</sup> Philadelphia: printed by Joseph Rakestraw, 1837-1850.

<sup>3</sup> *Bulletin of Friends Historical Society*, i, 1906, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. 7, *Friends and Ministers*, Providence, R.I., 1895.

*England Judged*, 1661. Evidently these registers have not been employed to the extent to which English records of the same sort have been used by Norman Penney and other Quaker historical editors. The addenda here given deal with echoes of the Boston martyrs or survivors of the like persecution.

John Taylor's Journal is often quoted where he describes having met Mary Dyer at Shelter Island shortly before her execution: "She was a comely woman and a grave matron, and even shined in the image of God." Now John Richardson's Journal supplies for another of the four martyrs a somewhat different testimonial, perhaps less to our taste. Once as a lad, when he was arguing with his anti-Quaker stepfather, Richardson mentioned these martyrs, and his mother to his surprise reported that

she lived a servant with Edward Wilberforce an honest Quaker in Skipton where Marmaduke Stephenson was a day laborer about the time he had his call to go to New England. . . . She said he was such a man as she never knew, for his very countenance was a terror to them, and he had a great check upon all the family: if at any time any of the servants had been wild, or any way out of the Truth, if they did but see him, or hear him coming, they were struck with fear and were all quiet and still. And if but one of the children came into the house where he labored, and he would not have it to come, these were his words, "Go thy way" or "go home lest I whip thee," and they were subject and quiet.

Evidently this testimonial "had some reach" on the poor boy's unfriendly step-parent.

Sometimes the echoes are far removed in time and place, as when in 1797 William Savery in the Channel Island of Jersey found several descendants of Mary Dyer living there, including an elderly "grand-daughter." We had known that in 1740 the Massachusetts legislature wished to make amends to such descendants as could be found,<sup>1</sup> and we are told (perhaps by Thomas Shillitoe) that her grandson, Samuel Dyer, was living then on her former farm at Newport.<sup>2</sup> Joan Vokins, at a Friends' meeting in Boston in 1680, says, "There was a lawyer that had a hand in the suffering of our Friends that were put to death, and he was very solid all the while." Thomas Chalkley on the other hand in 1698 was greeted in Boston with the remark, "Oh what pity it was that

<sup>1</sup> *Friends Intelligencer*, 29.iv.1945, vol. 102, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal F.H.S.*, xiv (1917), 43.

all of your Society (MS: 'all the Quakers') were not hanged with the other four."

Prior to the hanging of Friends the extreme punishment in Boston had been cropping an ear. Forty years later at Chuckatuck, Virginia, Thomas Story says he met "our ancient Friend, John Copeland," and found he was "one of the first of those who had their ears cut . . . in New England for the testimony of Truth, in the first publishing thereof . . . and at my request he showed me his right ear."

Of the many Friends in prison and sentenced to execution but released in 1661 we have scattered information. Wenlock Christison would have been the next to die. As Rufus Jones says, he "had sat in the shadow of Boston gallows." He turns up later a respected and well-provided citizen and Friend on the eastern shore of Maryland. Another, Elizabeth Hooton of Skegby, an early convert of George Fox, is well known. After repeated later visits to Boston she travelled with Fox to the West Indies and died "like a lamb" in Jamaica.

Many other names either of Quaker missionaries or of converts can be partly traced. Some unhappily "lost their condition" as Fox would say, and became apostates or worse. Some died untimely. Several of them apparently drowned in American waters, thus reversing the proverb to read: "he that's born to be drowned will never be hanged." Others lived on as faithful workers, and, again in Fox's words, "died in the Truth." Joseph<sup>1</sup> and Jane Nicholson were one of the few English couples who travelled together in the ministry while having a family. One can trace their travels by the dated register of births already mentioned, for their children's birthplaces are successively England, Salem, Barbados, Martinique, Rhode Island. Robert Malins of Bandon, Ireland, and Ann Clayton, of Swarthmoor Hall, had come to America in the same party as Marmaduke Stephenson. From the record of Rhode Island marriages we learn that each of them married into the Newport Quaker family of Easton, one to Patience Easton in 1674, the other to Governor Nicholas Easton in 1671.

We learn from the Death Registers that Alice Cowland died in 1666, Nicholas Davis was drowned in 1672, Ann Bull, *née* Clayton, widow of two Rhode Island governors, died in

<sup>1</sup> See his letters to Margaret Fell, Nuttall, *Early Quaker letters*, no. 520, 536, and M. R. Brailsford, *Quaker Women*, Chap. 7.

1708, aged 80 years. Katharine Scott, wife of Richard Scott and sister of Anne Hutchinson, and perhaps the first Quaker of Rhode Island, died 2nd May, 1687, aged 70. Her daughters, Mary and Patience, remarkable women, married Friends in the early 60's and long predeceased her.

Perhaps the longest to survive was Daniel Gould, a fellow prisoner with the first Friends hanged. Forty years later he was entrusted with the task of collecting for publication all the papers from them that he could find. These were published about 1700: *A Brief Narrative*, etc. In 1704 Thomas Story, according to his Journal, visited him, "an ancient Friend of the primitive sort, beaten gold, well refined, having been persecuted in times past by the Presbyterians and Independents of New England and now confined by lameness and other infirmities of age." According to the register he died at Newport, 26th March, 1716, aged near 90 years. In the same year on 16th December, died Edward Wanton of Scituate, aged about 87 years. The register records: "He was among the first who embraced Friends' principles in New England, was a sheriff in Boston when Mary Dyer was hanged, and convinced while under the gallows with her, and afterwards became a minister in the Society and suffered much for the testimony of Truth."

Particular interest attaches to George Rofe and his two companions. He writes that it was they who had called the General Meeting in Rhode Island of 1661. They had travelled in a fourteen-foot canoe from Chesapeake Bay where a few years later George was drowned. In fact they were capsized and nearly drowned as they approached Rhode Island. I believe I have identified the other two correctly as Robert Stage and Robert Hodgson and have connected the former with a sufferer in Maryland.<sup>1</sup> His name is given also as Stake, Stack and perhaps Stoake. The latter "was one of the famous Quaker Argonauts who sailed to America on the ship *Woodhouse* in 1657." Now I have further word about each. Henry Fell wrote in 1666 from Barbados to Margaret Fell,<sup>2</sup> "I suppose thee have heard of J. P. [John Perrot's] death at Jamaica before this time. Here is one R. Stacke now in the island who came hither lately from Virginia. His work is like the former and [his] end will be the same." This is an

<sup>1</sup> *Friends Intelligencer*, 22.viii, 1953, vol. 110, p. 455.

Barbados, 20.iv.1666, Thirnbeck MSS. 4, *Journal F.H.S.*, ix (1912), 95.

