

HOUSE....No. 100.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, March, 1851.

The Committee on the Militia, to whom was referred the petition of William C. Nell and others, for an appropriation of fifteen hundred dollars, to erect a monument to Crispus Attucks, submit the following

R E P O R T:

The petitioners ask the appropriation, on the ground that Crispus Attucks, a colored man, who was killed in the Boston Massacre, on the 5th of March, 1770, was the *first martyr* to the struggle which terminated in the separation of the American colonies from the mother country.

We learn from the memoirs of Hewes, who was present at the massacre, that the affray originated in a quarrel at Gray's ropewalk, the facts respecting which are detailed as follows, in a report of a committee of the town of Boston:—

“A brawl having sprung up, on the second of the month, (Friday,) between a soldier and a man belonging to it, the soldiers challenged the ropemakers to a boxing match. The challenge was accepted by one of them, and the soldier worsted. He ran to the barrack in the neighborhood, and returned with several of his companions. The fray was renewed, and the

soldiers were driven off. They soon returned with recruits, and were again worsted. This happened several times, till at length a considerable body of soldiers was collected, and they were also driven off, the ropemakers having been joined by their brethren of the contiguous ropewalks. By this time, Mr. Gray, being alarmed, interposed, and, with the assistance of some gentlemen, prevented any further disturbance. To satisfy the soldiers, and punish the man, who had been the occasion of the first difference, and as an example to the rest, he turned him out of his service; and waited on Col. Dalrymple, the commanding officer of the troops, and with him concerted measures for preventing further mischief."

This transaction exasperated the troops, and it is stated that they determined on some retaliatory measures, on the night of the fifth. We quote again from the memoir of Hewes:—

"A disturbance arose, about nine o'clock, near 'Murray's Barracks,' so called, where the 14th [regiment] were many of them quartered. This was a large building, or two, in Brattle street, directly opposite the little alley, then called Boylston's, leading from the bottom of Market street. It is said, a sentinel, as a matter of precaution, was stationed here. One was also standing in King (State) street. A rencounter sprang up here. Considerable noise was made, rough language used, blows dealt, and wounds given. People were attracted by the tumult. The town's people, unarmed chiefly, were dispersed for a time. Some say that they next gathered in Dock square, and were harangued by a 'tall man in a red cloak and white wig,' and that they then gave three cheers, huzzaed for the 'main guard,' and made the best of their way, by various avenues, into King street.

"A party of the Brattle street soldiers, after the brawl at the alley, made a rush into King street, in a highly excited condition, crying out, 'Where are the cowards!' 'Where are the scoundrels!' etc. There were, just then, very few people there. Some of these dispersed. But a bell was rung,—the bell of the old brick church, opposite the head of the street. The tumult increased. The streets began to be noisy. Fire was cried in various quarters. Some of the engines turned out. The people came rushing in,—many of them armed with sticks and stakes, wrenched out of the stalls in the market and elsewhere, and a

large proportion of them, undoubtedly, as much disposed to enjoy a *row* as the soldiers themselves. ATTUCKS, the colored man who was killed, according to all accounts, figured pretty largely among them. Only ten minutes before that event, one of the witnesses, at least, swore that he saw him at the head of twenty or thirty sailors, in Cornhill, with a cord-wood stick in his hand. Mr. Pierce, who stood, about this time, at the corner of Royal Exchange Lane (now Exchange street) and King street, where the sentinel was on guard in front of the King's Custom House, remembers Attucks distinctly, though he never saw him before. He remembers, also, that he had a large stick in his hand, and that he saw him, early in this tumult, *harassing and abusing the sentry*, poking him rather severely with the stick, and calling him '*lobster*,'—a popular reproach,—and swearing that he would have off one of his *claws*. Pierce thought the soldier would hurt him, and advised him to refrain. But Attucks, who, he says, was a *Nantucket Indian*, belonging on board a whaleship of Mr. Folger, then in the harbor, (and he remembers distinctly the peculiar noise of a *frightful war-hoop* which he yelled,) declined, though he crawled back a little, muttering, and still swearing he '*would have one of his claws off*.' "

These are the circumstances immediately preceding the massacre, as detailed in the memoir of Hewes. The sentry soon after fired, whether with or without orders does not distinctly appear, and Crispus Attucks, Samuel Gray, and James Caldwell, were killed on the spot, and several others wounded, two mortally. Attucks received two balls through the breast.

Snow, in his History of Boston, says the sentinel was stationed in Boylston's Alley as a measure of precaution, and this very circumstance led to the quarrel which terminated in the massacre. He states, that "three or four young men, who were disposed to go through the alley, about nine o'clock, observed the sentinel brandishing his sword against the walls, and striking fire for his own amusement. They offered to pass him, and were challenged, but persisted in their attempt, and one of them received a slight wound in the head." This rencounter drew together quite a number of people. After the address in Dock square, by the "man with the red cloak and white wig," the crowd proceeded to the custom house, where they found a sentinel stationed at the door. The sentinel gave the alarm,

and a serjeant and six men were sent to his relief. The guard formed a semicircle around the steps.

"By this time," says Snow, "the bells were set to ringing, and the people flocked from all quarters, supposing there was a fire. The soldiers were soon surrounded; many of those nearest to them were armed with clubs, and crowded close upon them; those at a distance began to throw sticks of wood and snowballs and pieces of ice at them, while from all sides they were challenged to *Fire, fire if you dare!* At last they thought they heard the order given, and they did fire, in succession, from right to left." The result was as before stated.

Botta, in speaking of the scenes of the 5th of March, says: "The people were greatly exasperated. The multitude, armed with clubs, ran towards King street, crying, '*Let us drive out these ribalds; they have no business here!*' The rioters rushed furiously towards the custom house; they approached the sentinel, crying, '*Kill him, kill him!*' They assaulted him with snowballs, pieces of ice, and whatever they could lay their hands upon." The guard were then called, and, in marching to the custom house, "they encountered," continues Botta, "a band of the populace, led by a mulatto named Attucks, who brandished their clubs, and pelted them with snowballs. The maledictions, the imprecations, the execrations of the multitude, were horrible. In the midst of a torrent of invectives from every quarter, the military were challenged to fire. The populace advanced to the points of their bayonets. The soldiers appeared like statues; the cries, the howlings, the menaces, the violent din of bells still sounding the alarm, increased the confusion and the horrors of these moments; at length the mulatto and twelve of his companions, pressing forward, environed the soldiers, and striking their muskets with their clubs, cried to the multitude: '*Be not afraid, they dare not fire; why do you hesitate, why do you not kill them, why not crush them at once!*' The mulatto lifted his arm against Captain Preston, and having turned one of the muskets, he seized the bayonet with his left hand, as if he intended to execute his threat. At this moment, confused cries were heard: '*The wretches dare not fire!*' Firing succeeds. Attucks is slain. Two other discharges follow. Three were killed, five severely wounded, and several others slightly."

These are the facts, preceding and connected with the Boston Massacre, as given by the historians quoted.

The petitioners claim that Attucks was the *first martyr* to the revolutionary struggle between the mother country and the colonies. This does not appear to be historically correct. CHRISTOPHER SNIDER was the first person who fell a victim to that controversy.

The merchants of Boston entered into an agreement not to import British goods. Theophilus Sillie disregarded the agreement. On the twenty-second of February, 1770, some persons erected, near Sillie's store, a large wooden head, fixed on a pole, on which the faces of several who imported British goods were carved. One Ebenezer Richardson, who had acquired the odium of an *informer*, endeavored to persuade some country teamsters to break down the post with their carts, but they declined. Richardson then seized the bridle of the horses, and endeavored to force a team against the post but failed. On this the boys set up a shout, which being resented by Richardson, they pelted him with dirt, until they drove him into his own house. Hard words passed between Richardson and some of the multitude; stones were thrown on both sides, until at length Richardson discharged a musket at random from his door, and another from his window. One young man was severely wounded, and Christopher Snider, about eleven years of age, received a mortal wound in the breast.

The boy died in the course of the evening. All the friends of liberty were invited to attend the funeral "of this little hero, and FIRST MARTYR to the noble cause." This lad was announced as "the *first* whose life had been a victim to the cruelty and rage of oppressors. Young as he was *he died in his country's cause*, by the hand of one, directed by others, who could not bear to see the enemies of America made the ridicule of boys."

In view of the foregoing facts, the committee can see nothing in the circumstances attending the death of Attucks, which would justify the Legislature in appropriating money to erect a monument to his memory. The committee therefore recommend, that the petitioners have leave to withdraw their petition.

For the Committee,

W. A. HAWLEY, *Chairman*.