



The Wessaguscus Hanging

Charles Skinner

North American

Intermediate
2 min read

Among the Puritans who settled in Wessaguscus, now Weymouth, Massachusetts, was a brash young fellow, of remarkable size and strength, who, roaming the woods one day, came on a store of corn concealed in the ground, in the fashion of the Indians. As anybody might have done, he filled his hat from the granary and went his way. When the red man who had dug the pit came back to it he saw that his cache had been levied on, and as the footprints showed the marauder to be an Englishman he went to the colonists and demanded justice. The matter could have been settled by giving a pennyworth of trinkets to the Indian, but, as the moral law had been broken, the Puritans deemed it right that the pilferer should suffer.

They held a court and a proposition was made and seriously considered that, as the culprit was young, hardy, and useful to the colony, his clothes should be stripped off and put on the body of a bedridden weaver, who would be hanged in his stead in sight of the offended savages. Still, it was feared that if they learned the truth about that execution the Indians would learn a harmful lesson in deceit, and it was, therefore, resolved to punish the true offender. He, thinking they were in jest, submitted to be bound, though before doing so he could have “cleaned out” the court-room, and ere he was really aware of the purpose of his judges he was kicking at vacancy.

Butler, in "Hudibras," quotes the story, but makes the offence more serious—

"This precious brother, having slain,
In time of peace, an Indian,
Not out of malice, but mere zeal,
Because he was an infidel,
The mighty Tottipotimoy
Sent to our elders an envoy
Complaining sorely of the breach Of league."

But the Puritans, having considered that the offender was a teacher and a cobbler,

"Resolved to spare him; yet, to do
The Indian Hoghan Moghan, too,
Impartial justice, in his stead did
Hang an old weaver that was bed-rid."

The whole circumstance is cloudy, and the reader may accept either version that touches his fancy.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com