

0. MARY'S PROTESTS GET HER KILLED - Story Preface

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When Mary Dyer returned to Boston, protesting the harsh laws against the Quakers, she was arrested again. Once more, she was sentenced to hang.

On the morning of her execution - June 1, 1660 - Mary was led to the great elm tree amidst armed guards and beating drums. Captain Webb, charged with overseeing the process, told her:

Mary Dyer, you are here under sentence pronounced upon you by the General Court. It is my duty to carry out your execution upon order of the court. Justice, however, is not without mercy. In their wisdom the court has instructed me to inform you that even now you may give assurance of your repentance and intention to leave and remain outside this jurisdiction. Upon such assurance you shall be permitted to descend from where you now are and save your life. (See To Try the Bloody Law: The Story of Mary Dyer, pages 4-5.)

Mary would not give in to the demands of the colony's leaders. Captain Webb continued:

You have been here before, Mary Dyer. You have been banished upon pain of death. In returning you have broken the law, as you have done several times before. If you force us to carry through the order of the court, it is you, and you alone, who are guilty of spilling your own blood. (To Try the Bloody Law, page 5.)

Ignoring all commands, including an order from her former pastor (John Wilson) to repent, Mary said:

I do only what the Lord God requires of me. Do not mourn my passing, for I am filled with happiness. I am already in Heaven. (To Try the Bloody Law, page 6.)

This time, there was no reprieve for Mary Dyer. She was hanged from the great elm. She was buried the next day in an unmarked grave on the Common. Her statue now stands in front of the state house, across the street from the place of execution. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote about Mary Dyer in his 1840 story, Grandfather's Chair.

In one of the first acts of civil disobedience on American soil, Mary Dyer was hanged because she believed God spoke directly to those who trust in him. Although happily married, with children, she refused to give in to the dictates of the Bay Colony's leaders. Her conscience would not allow her to endorse beliefs she did not personally accept.

Although she died, her demand - that people be freely allowed to follow their own religious persuasions - was ultimately incorporated into the structure of American government.

Puritans of the day had shown no mercy for Mary, but her death led to protests against the anti-Quaker laws. Not long after her execution, Charles II, who still controlled the American colonies, forbade any further executions of Quakers. Mary Dyer had not died in vain.

In the words of General Atherton, one of her persecutors,

Mary Dyer did hang as a flag for others to take example by

but it was the Puritans themselves who had to learn the lesson of tolerance. Before the end of the century, the Puritan way of life was over for ever. Their control of Massachusetts had lasted a mere sixty years.

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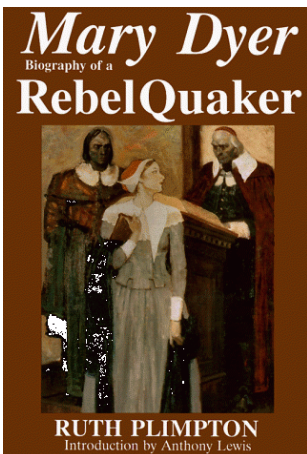
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No Reprieve for Mary Dyer

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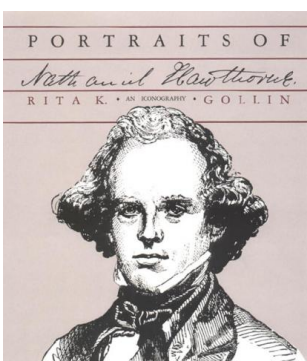


Mary Dyer: Biography of a Rebel Quaker - by Ruth Plimpton

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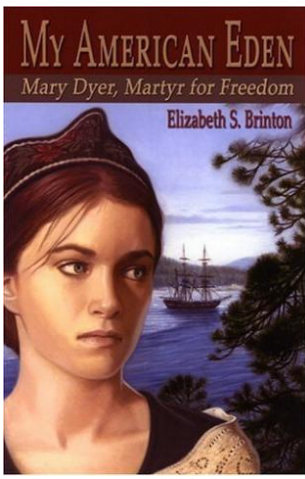


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