

CHAPTER IX

THE DISTINCTIVE PARK STREET CORNER



THE unusual prominence of monuments to ministers in Boston might, at first thought, be ascribed by some to the fact of this being a woman's city; but of course, as any Bostonian would at once tell you, it is really because of the unusual prominence of ministers in the development and life of the city. There is the memorial to Phillips Brooks beside his church, at a busy edge of Copley Square, he being set within a canopied marble niche, garbed in his bishop's robes, with an angelic figure behind him: and not far away, at the nearest corner of the Public Garden, there is niched, like a cinque-cento saint, the long-gowned figure of "William Ellery Channing. Entirely unlike both of these, in its exceedingly unsaintlike appearance, is the monument to another minister, Edward Everett Hale, at a Charles Street entrance to the Public Garden, for he stands in wait in the shrubs, just inside the gate, in every-day clothes and long loose overcoat, stooping, as if pausing for a moment in his walk, with



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his old-fashioned beaver hat in one hand and his cane in the other; a man honorably known to all Americans for his "Man without a Country."

To commemorate not only the clerical profession but the medical, there is within the Public Garden a monument that gave Holmes the inspiration for a brilliant bit of wit. The monument was designed to commemorate the discovery of Ether, the mastering of the whole problem of consciousness of pain in surgery, but while it was under construction a fierce and never-to-be-settled controversy arose as to which of two claimant physicians was really the discoverer, and so the monument was completed with the name of the man omitted, which led Holmes promptly to suggest, with that obviousness which marks all great wit, that it was not so much a monument to Ether as to Either.

There is an exceedingly prominent monument, the big equestrian of General Hooker, set up in front of the State House, which is also interesting on account of what is left off, for there is nothing but the single word "Hooker"; as if, one may fairly suppose, when they came to the matter of inscription, it was remembered that the only battle of consequence in which General Hooker commanded was the terrible defeat of Chancellorsville. It is sometimes delightfully wise to have brief inscriptions on statues. After all, New England was not fortunate in developing great military leaders in the Civil War, in spite of her prominence in the events and discussions preceding the struggle and in spite of the vast number of her men who gallantly went to the front; she developed no



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Grant or Thomas or Sherman; and already she has practically hidden, off on one side of the State House, statues of the never-prominent General Banks and General Devens. But monumenting in haste and repenting at leisure is something far older than America. And it is a favorite Boston belief, long held and often expressed, that if she should set up statues to all her distinguished sons there would be no room left in which people could move about.

Diagonally across from the Hooker monument, just away from the corner of Park and Beacon Streets, close to the altered Ticknor homestead, is a little house, tucked in among towering business buildings and faced by a great hotel: and this house, still a home, is filled with paintings collected years ago in Europe. It stood before the Revolution (its front has been changed), and about 1830 was the home of Chester Harding, the New England-born, backwoods artist who, after making his success in Paris—but it was a Paris in Kentucky—painted the great ones of America and of England, including judges and senators and some half dozen of the dukes, and then came back to Boston. For some time while in Boston he so eclipsed Gilbert Stuart that that great painter was wont to ask, looking at his own empty studio and knowing that Harding's was thronged, "How rages the Harding fever?"

Close by is the Athenaeum, most charming and delightful of libraries, full of serenity and repose and rich in its great collection of books. Not only does it possess the workable and readable books of recent



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years, but precious prints and books and manuscripts of the past, and such treasure as the greater part of the library of George Washington, each book, with his signature and bookplate, deposited here after its purchase in 1849 by "seventy gentlemen of Boston, Cambridge and Salem," who contributed fifty dollars each to obtain it. To the Bostonian of tradition, the Athenaeum still proudly represents the essence of the city; the building is admirably impressive outwardly, it is attractive and full of atmosphere within, and it is rich in the very spirit of the best of Boston. Its main entrance has a replica of Houdon's life-size statue of Washington, a replica, modeled by Houdon himself, of the original, which was made for the State of Virginia and is preserved at Eichmond; Houdon having come to America to make a statue of Washington, at the request of Franklin, who knew him in Paris.

The main reading-room, occupying the great upper floor, is of unusual architectural beauty, with its vaulted roof, its pillars and alcoves, its general fineness and comfort. The library is peculiarly fitted to the needs of the scholar, and membership in it, to be a "proprietor," as is the term, is highly esteemed.

The great rear windows of the Athenaeum look down into the ancient deep-shaded Granary Burying-Ground, and off at one side, also looking down into the burying-ground, are the windows of that monthly, the *Atlantic*, which is itself another of the treasured belongings of Boston: and especially is the bowed window noticeable when one learns that it is the window of the oval room in which James Eussell Lowell



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reigned as editor and where he still looks down benignantly from the wall, like a patron saint: and although one may do full honor to his memory and to his fine influence, the profuse and double-pointed whiskers do rouse the recollection of the little girl who asked: "But what are the points for?"

There are few more impressive burying-grounds in the world than the Granary, fronting out on busy Tremont Street and hemmed in on its other sides by towering business structures, by the phalanxed windows of the quiet Athenaeum, by the publishing buildings, and by the old Park Street Church. The Granary has impressiveness, it even has beauty, and it has an aloofness that comes from its being some three feet or so above the level of the thronging sidewalk that it adjoins.

Anciently a granary actually stood here, but the place long since came to be a crowded human granary instead; and what a roll of fascinating old-time names might be called here! Hancock, Sewall, Bellingham, Faneuil, Samuel Adams, Franklin (the parents of Benjamin Franklin are buried here), Cushing, Phillips, Otis, Eevere! There are royal governors, patriot governors, signers of the Declaration, orators, leaders among the citizens—it would be a long, long roll! And there would be a strange unexpectedness if responses should come, for many of the stones in this graveyard were long ago indiscriminately changed about. At one time they were even tidied and set in rows to meet the landscape-gardening and grass-mowing proclivities of a city official! There was some



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mild objection to this, but nothing was done to check or correct the changing, and when, long afterwards, people began to speak strongly about it, it was too late, for records had not been kept.

I Although Boston thinks a great deal of the people of the past, they would seem to have acquired somewhat careless habits of caring for their remains. Gilbert Stuart was mislaid. Major Pitcairn was lost, and it was probably a substitute body that was sent back to England as his, to rest in Westminster. The stones on Copp's Hill were changed about or used for doorsteps. And here in the Granary the municipal idiosyncrasy has been even more striking. It was Oliver Wendell Holmes who remarked of this graveyard, that the stones really tell the truth when they say "Here lies."

But although this carelessness of the past needs to be known it does not affect the dignity, the solemnity, the impressiveness of the place. It merely means that the visitor must be content to honor these worthies of the past in mass rather than in detail. They are all there. They all lie somewhere within the broad enclosure. Upon their confused resting-places the tall office buildings look down, and beside them the public go hurrying along the crowded sidewalk. They are somewhere here, beneath the shade of the thickly clustered horse-chestnuts and honey locusts, and it really is not worth while to try and pick out the still properly marked graves from the mistaken ones.

One of the two young duellists of whom Holmes wrote, who fought to the death on the Common, is



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buried here, and it is curious that this seems to be better remembered, by most people, than does the fact that here were buried so many great and famous folk, although that young duellist has no claim to fame except that of dying in a duel which seized upon the imagination of the man whose personality permeates all Boston.

A high, open, iron fence standing on a low, dark retaining wall, separates the burying-ground from the street, and the entrance is through a black and gloomy stone arch, with a suggestion of the Egyptian in style, flanked at either end of the wall by a black stone pillar.

It is pleasant to notice that with such a great area of office buildings looking down into this resting place of American dead, there is scarcely a business sign to be seen, although the opportunity and temptation are so great. It is a fine example of business restraint. Indeed, one at first thinks that there is absolutely no sign at all, for it is only by carefully looking for them that two or three very little ones are found.

From the Athenaeum itself, from a little high-perched coign of vantage there, a little outside summer reading-place which fairly overhangs the back of the Granary graveyard, the most striking of all views of the inclosure may be had, for from this point one looks down through the treetops on curving lines of little dull-colored headstones, standing shoulder to shoulder on the green dark grass, under the gloomy trees, like gloomy spirits of New England consciences forever looking out, with drooping shoulders, through



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the great iron fence, upon the passing of their descendants and successors.

The Granary burying-ground antedates the church beside it, the fine old building, with Christopher Wren-like steeple, known as the Park Street Church. And one is tempted to think of this church as, on the whole, the most typically Bostonian building of Boston. On its prominent corner at the foot of the slope leading up to the State House, and with its windows looking out on one side over the Common, and on the other one the Granary ground, it seems as if it had grown there, so natural it is, so easy, so graceful, so felicitous, standing there in so sweet a pride.

The delightful spire is notable, not only for the perfection of its upper proportions but also in not rising from the building itself but, instead, forming the extension of a tower that itself rises from the ground, church and tower being connected by pillared curves, quadrant-like, which architecturally unite them into an indivisible whole, with no sign of separation. There could not be a more charmingly picturesque corner, for the Common, than is made by this so charming and picturesque a church.

For many year, the building was painted, and even in its dull drab was attractive, but it has recently been vastly improved, as a number of other old Boston buildings have similarly been improved, by the cleaning of all the paint from the brick and by the painting anew of all the wood; thus restored to its original design the church now positively sparkles in its white paint and mellow red brick.



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Park Street Church is not so old as are several others in Boston, for it dates back only to a little more than a century ago, but in its short life it has not been without claims to distinction; the first public address of William Lloyd Garrison was delivered in this building, and here for the first time the hymn "America" was publicly sung.

Beneath the church are a gay-looking flower-shop and picturesque tea-rooms, and they seem pleasantly Bostonian in their churchly location, for until recent years a bookstore was quartered in the basement of the Old South Church, and I have noticed a furniture-packing shop beneath a church at the foot of Beacon Hill, and it used to be, when the Hollis Street Church was standing, that its pastor, a powerful advocate of prohibition, used to deliver attacks on drink at the same time that the vaults beneath his feet were rented by three pillars of his church, distillers, for the storage of casks, giving rise to the still-remembered epigram:

"Above, the spirit Divine,
Below, the spirits of wine."

The corner where stands so felicitously the altogether attractive Park Street Church has itself given rise to a flash of real wit, especially notable as showing that Holmes did not utter every witty Boston saying. For this came from a certain long-ago Appleton, brother-in-law of Longfellow, famed as a humorist and *bon vivant*, a man of wealth and family but whose humor, still remembered reiteratively, usually



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took some such form as sailing for Europe, without telling any one, on the very day that he was expected to be host or guest at a dinner. However, the corner beside Park Street Church really inspired him to one excellent jest. For it is a very windy corner, one of the windiest in all Boston, and Appleton dryly remarked one day that there really ought to be a shorn lamb tethered there!

