

Otis James

Under the Liberty Tree: A Story of The 'Boston Massacre'



James Otis

**Under the Liberty Tree: A
Story of The 'Boston Massacre'**

«Public Domain»

Otis J.

Under the Liberty Tree: A Story of The 'Boston Massacre' / J. Otis —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I.	6
CHAPTER II.	12
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	15

Otis James

Under the Liberty Tree: A Story of The 'Boston Massacre'

"Your Lordship must know that Liberty Tree is a large, old Elm in the High Street, upon which the effigies were hung in the time of the Stamp Act, and from whence the mobs at that time made their parades. It has since been adorned with an inscription, and has obtained the name of Liberty Tree, as the ground under it has that of Liberty Hall. In August last, just before the commencement of the present troubles, they erected a flagstaff, which went through the tree, and a good deal above the top of the tree. Upon this they hoist a flag as a signal for the Sons of Liberty, as they are called."

Extract from a letter written by Governor Bernard to Lord Hillsborough under date of June 18, 1768.

"The world should never forget the spot where once stood Liberty Tree, so famous in your annals."

The Marquis de Lafayette, in a speech delivered in Boston during his last visit to America.

CHAPTER I. THE LIBERTY TREE

It was on the evening of February 21, 1770, in the city of Boston, that a party of boys, ranging in age from ten to eighteen years, were assembled at what was known as "Liberty Hall," which was not a building, but simply the open space sheltered by the wide-spreading branches of the "Liberty Tree."

Although General Gage's troops occupied the city, and patrols of the "bloody backs," as the red-coated soldiers had been called in derision, paced to and fro at regular intervals along the streets, these boys spoke openly of their desire, and even of their intention, to avenge the wrongs under which the colonists were suffering, believing from past experience that the troops would not dare proceed to extremities with the citizens, more especially since Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson "doubted his authority to order the soldiers to fire upon the populace."¹

These boys had shown several times in the vicinity of this same so-called Liberty Hall of what acts they were capable, and there was not one of them but that looked forward to the time when it should be possible to do something more than simply vent his displeasure in words.

They had been among the throng who, in open defiance of the law, had made prisoner of Giles Hendricks; tarred and feathered, and then carried him in a cart through the principal streets of the city to the Liberty Tree, because he had given evidence regarding the smuggling of wine from Rhode Island. Here under the old elm he had been forced to swear he would never be guilty of a like crime in the future, and only then was allowed to go free, wearing his closely fitting and decidedly uncomfortable garment of tar.

The gathering on this particular night at Liberty Hall was, in the opinion of those participating, of great importance.

Several shopkeepers had failed to keep the promise not to import British goods, made in January, and on the afternoon of this day, Hardy Baker, who was apprenticed to Master Piemont, the barber, had learned that Theophilus Lillie, whose shop was on Hanover Street, near the New Brick Church, had not only broken his agreement, but openly declared it was his intention to sell whatsoever he pleased.

"He boasts he will sell even tea, if it so be his customers wish to buy," Master Baker said, in concluding his story of the shopkeeper's iniquities.

"How did you learn this?" Amos Richardson asked, quite sharply, for the barber's apprentice was noted rather for his imaginative powers than a strict adherence to the truth.

"I heard it when I went to the Custom House this morning."

"But what were you doing there? How long is it since you have been hobnobbing in that quarter?"

"Am I accused of being friendly with the 'bloody backs'?" Hardy asked, indignantly. "Can't I go anywhere in the town but that suspicions are aroused?"

"It will be well for you to show anger only after you have explained why you were at the Custom House."

"There is no reason why I should be forced to do so. The part I took in bringing Hendricks to the Liberty Tree is enough to show that the 'bloody backs' can expect no favour from me."

"Yet your master has among his customers many who wear coats of red, and you shave some of them."

"True; but it is not every one over whose face my razor passes, that I call a friend. Since you are so suspicious, Amos Richardson, I will explain my going to the Custom House," Hardy added,

¹ Gilman's "Story of Boston."

only after noting the fact that several of those standing nearest were gazing at him sternly. "You must know that many of the Britishers who come to Master Piemont's shop to be served pay for the work at the end of every three months, instead of doing so each day or week. Now, among these redcoats who hold on to their money as long as possible, is one Lieutenant Draper, whom I attend. When it was learned that he intended to let his account run until three months had passed, Master Piemont told me the bill should be mine in consideration of my strict attention to duty. Master Piemont knows a good workman when he sees one, and I have been in his shop a long while."

"But you are not a workman yet," a member of the party shouted. "You are only an apprentice, Hardy."

"Well, and if I am? I may be as good as a journeyman for all that. If I wasn't, it is hardly likely Master Piemont would have made me so generous an offer, and of his own free will."

"Perhaps he thought it was the only way by which he could induce you to attend to your work," some one shouted, laughingly, and Amos said, sharply:

"We have not come here to make sport. Let him explain, without interruption, why he was at the Custom House this morning, and then we will decide how we can best bring Master Lillie to realise that he must keep the agreement made with the other shopkeepers. What has Lieutenant Draper and his account to do with your visit, Hardy?"

"It has everything to do, since I was there attending to my own business. The officer's quarterly bill should have been paid last Thursday, and, knowing he was on duty at the place, I went there in the hope of getting my money. Does that seem reasonable?"

Amos looked around inquiringly at his companions, and Chris Snyder, a German lad only eleven years of age, but who was allowed a voice in the meetings beneath the Liberty Tree because of his staunch loyalty and unfailing good nature, cried, impatiently:

"Let him tell his story. I am certain he has spoken nothing but the truth, for he said to me last night that he had twice asked for the money, and was going this morning for the third time."

"Did you get it, Hardy?" some one asked, and Master Baker replied, angrily:

"I did not; but the next time I demand it he will pay, for I shall treat him with no more ceremony than I would one of the pirates."

"Be careful you don't feel the flat of his sword across your back, my old barber."

"He dares not strike me, for he knows how much influence I have in this town."

"And how much have you? When did you become of great public importance?"

"When I showed what should be done to reformers like Hendricks."

"And are you the one who is responsible for that lesson?"

"But for me it might never have been given, for I pointed out the man when it was not believed he was in the city."

"We are wasting our time," Amos cried, impatiently, raising his voice above the uproar, for now many had begun to deride Hardy's pretensions. "Let him explain how he knows that Master Theophilus Lillie has declared he will sell British goods."

The barber's apprentice was prompt to make reply, for the taunts of his comrades were not at all to his liking.

"While waiting in the guard-room at the Custom House, I heard the 'bloody backs' talking among themselves about the spirit which Theophilus was showing in declaring he would conduct his business to please himself. There was among the soldiers one who had heard him announce his decision to no less a person than Master Samuel Adams; but in order to make more certain of the truth, I went to the shop as if I had been sent by Master Piemont, and asked for tea. It was Theophilus Lillie himself who told me he had it. Do you want stronger proof than that?"

Although Hardy Baker was not noted for strict loyalty to the truth, there was no one among the party who doubted his statement, and immediately the question arose as to what should be done to bring the offending shopkeeper to a full realisation of the enormity of his offence.

While the bolder spirits were discussing among themselves as to whether the general public would look with favour upon their treating the merchant as they had the informer, and the more timid ones were arguing that their elders might not countenance an act of violence against a merchant occupying such a prominent position in the mercantile world as did Master Theophilus Lillie, James Gray, a lad small of stature but fertile in expedients, as had been shown many times under similar circumstances, made a suggestion which met with the unqualified approval of all.

"I have at home the figurehead of the old sloop *Faith and Prudence*. It is the image of a man, with a nose not unlike the one Master Lillie carries on his face. Let us saw the head off, nail it to a pole, and set it up in front of his shop with a notice attached warning all honest citizens against trading with him."

"Hurrah for Jim Gray's plan!" a member of the party cried, and heartily the others responded, causing one of two old gentlemen, who chanced to be passing at that moment, to say, with many an ominous shake of his white head:

"If the children are allowed to display signs of disloyalty thus publicly, it is not difficult to say how treasonable must be their parents. Governor Hutchinson shows far too mild a spirit, or some of these young sparks would be adorning the pillory. It was not so when I was a boy."

"But it may be they are bent only on some youthful frolic, Friend Johnson, and we gray-heads must make allowance for young blood."

"The only allowance they should have is a dozen strokes of the whip. They are indulging in treasonable practices, otherwise the meeting-place would not be under what is already known throughout the colony as the Liberty Tree. I shall speak with Governor Hutchinson to-morrow, and if he still insists upon faint-hearted measures, word must be sent to his majesty. Unless this lawless spirit is speedily checked, trouble will follow. The fathers of these young scoundrels may prudently contrive to keep themselves from publicly committing any overt act against the laws; but they can be taught a lesson through their sons."

Before the old gentlemen were beyond sight of the Tree, the meeting had noisily adjourned to Jim Gray's home on Cross Street, the entire party marching with something approaching military precision through the streets, as if fancying this semblance of order was necessary to give proper dignity to what they knew would be a riotous act.

The figurehead of the sloop had been long exposed to the weather in the rear of the house, and perhaps no one save Jim and his assistants could have traced a resemblance in the roughly-hewn contour of the face to that of the prosperous merchant. They, however, were well satisfied with the instrument which might bring Master Lillie to a realisation of his offence, and Hardy Baker was positive no citizen of Boston could look upon the wooden face without seeing in it a strong resemblance to the trader who had broken his agreement.

The head was severed from the trunk and affixed to the mast of Amos Richardson's sailboat, which spar was willingly sacrificed for that purpose by its owner.

The majority of the party appeared to think that the head in itself would serve as a menace to Master Lillie; but Jim Gray was not satisfied with so mild a warning, and proceeded, after his own fashion, to add to its supposed terrors.

He found in the wood-house a piece of planed board, three feet long and fifteen or sixteen inches in width, on which he inscribed, after much labour, with paint composed of lampblack and fish-oil, the name of each of the merchants who had been guilty of breaking their agreement regarding the sale of British goods.

This he nailed on the spar within a few feet of the head, affixing it so firmly that it could not readily be wrenched off, and the instrument of warning was held erect a few moments that the young conspirators might observe the general effect.

"Master Lillie will quake in his boots when he sees that," Hardy Baker said, in a tone of conviction. "Nothing could be better, unless we had his name with the others."

"But the head is there," Jim replied, "and even Master Lillie himself must see that the face is like to his."

"Unless he is over-fond of looking in a mirror, he may make a mistake," Hardy persisted. "Can't you put his name on the board with the others?"

Jim was not disposed to add to what he considered almost a work of art, lest he should detract from its merits in some degree, and after a brief pause he said, as a happy thought occurred to him:

"This will look better, and there can be no mistake if the spar is put up with the board set in the proper direction."

As he spoke he painted a rude hand with the dexter finger pointing.

"Now we have only to place it so that this shows the way into the shop, and if Master Lillie makes any mistake in regard to its being intended for him, he has a thicker skull than his neighbors credit him with."

It appeared to the party assembled as if nothing was wanting to make this symbol of warning full of meaning and menace, and it only remained to place it in position.

Hardy Baker proposed to set out at once to complete the work, regardless of the fact that the citizens were yet astir, and that the moon illumined the streets almost brilliantly, thereby preventing secrecy of movement.

Amos Richardson insisted that it might be fatal to the success of the scheme if they were discovered by Master Lillie before the pole had been set in place, and suggested that a certain number be selected to perform the work at an hour when all good people were supposed to be asleep.

The only difficulty in acting upon this suggestion was that every member of the party was desirous of doing a portion of the work; but Amos held firm to the idea that they might defeat their purpose by allowing too large a body of workmen to take part, and that the smallest number needed to perform the task would have greater chance of success.

Therefore it was that Jim, who was entitled to a place on the "committee" because of having designed the symbol; Amos, owing to the fact that he was looked upon by his comrades as their leader; Hardy Baker, because he had a personal grievance against the British and, consequently, against British goods, through his unsatisfied claim against the lieutenant, and little Chris Snyder were finally selected as the boys to perform the more delicate portion of the task.

Very reluctantly the others took their departure, leaving the four to complete the work after their own fashion, and promising to be in front of Master Lillie's shop at an early hour next morning.

Being thus left to their own devices, the "committee" took refuge in the wood-shed, for the night seemed uncomfortably cold, save when a fellow was indulging in plenty of exercise, and there they remained, looking out of the open door at the result of Jim's handiwork ten minutes or more without speaking, when Chris Snyder broke the silence by asking, in his thin, piping voice:

"What are you fellows waiting here for? Why don't we carry the thing up to Master Lillie's shop at once? It won't be a hard job for four of us, and I must be getting home. Mother says a boy of my age ought not to be out-of-doors after nine o'clock."

"And that's where your mother is right, Chris," Amos replied, with a laugh. "We shall all get the reputation of being very dissolute lads if the meetings at the Liberty Tree are continued many weeks longer. As a matter of fact, I think you had best go home now."

"Why? I am one who was chosen to help place this warning in front of Master Lillie's shop."

"You wasn't selected with the idea that you would be of very much assistance, Chris. I think the other fellows wanted to confer an honour upon you, even though you are the youngest of the party. That's what comes of always being good-natured, and ready to do a comrade a friendly turn. We shall get this pole into position without your help, and you might find yourself in trouble at home by remaining out-of-doors as long as I think it will be necessary for us to stay."

"Aren't you going to work at once?"

"I don't think it will be safe until one o'clock," Amos replied, decidedly, and Hardy Baker exclaimed, petulantly:

"That's foolishness! It is after ten now, and we sha'n't see a dozen people between here and Hanover Street. Are you afraid, Amos?"

"Do you think it?"

"I asked the question, that's all."

"If I thought you really meant it I should have a little task to perform now, before we set about Master Lillie's business, in giving you a warning against letting your tongue run away with your wits."

"I was only in sport, Amos," Hardy hastened to say, as he understood that his friend was angry. "Of course I didn't suppose for a moment you were afraid; but it seems to me as if we might get through with the work at once, rather than wait around here all night. The 'bloody backs' won't dare touch us so long as we are simply walking through the streets, even though we *are* carrying a pole."

Jim Gray appeared to be of the same opinion, and Amos, understanding that his companions did not recognise the necessity for so much prudence, gave way.

"If we wait till past midnight there will be no mistake about doing as we wish, while to set out now may bring us into trouble," he said, thoughtfully. "However, if you are of the mind that we should go on with the work at this hour, taking all the chances of failure, I am ready."

"Come on, then!" Jim shouted, as he seized one end of the pole. "I want to do my share of the work, and at the same time, slip into bed before daylight."

"How are we to fasten it when we get there?" Chris asked.

"The best way will be to dig a hole, and set it down so far that it cannot be pulled over without considerable labor," Hardy suggested, and Jim added:

"There's a spade in the woodhouse. Let Chris bring that along, and the rest of us will carry the pole."

"Something more than that will be necessary, because the ground is frozen. Look around for an axe; we shall be obliged to work our way through the frost," Amos cried.

Chris found the necessary implements without difficulty, and, desirous of having the spar affixed so firmly there could be no question of overturning it readily, Hardy thrust into his pocket a piece of stout Manilla rope.

Thus equipped, the party set out.

Contrary to Amos's anticipations, they met no person during the walk from Cross Street to Hanover, near the New Brick Church, where was situated Master Theophilus Lillie's shop.

This quarter of the city appeared to be deserted, and the boys, working noiselessly but rapidly, soon had such an excavation, despite the frozen ground, as permitted of setting the spar at least two feet below the surface, and within a couple of yards of the shopkeeper's door. Then, by packing the clods of frosty earth around it, the symbol of warning was soon as firm as could have been desired.

"Now help me to climb up there," Hardy whispered to Amos, as he took the rope from his pocket and pointed to the top of the spar.

"What are you going to do?"

"Tie the pole to a limb of that tree, and then Master Lillie may dig around the bottom as much as he pleases, for he will not be able to dislodge it unless he does as I am about to do."

Amos realised the wisdom of Hardy's plan, and, giving him the required "leg up," the warning was speedily attached to a limb of the tree in such a manner that considerable labour would be necessary in order to overthrow it.

Then the boys walked to the opposite side of the street and surveyed the result of their toil, after which Amos said, in a whisper:

"Now then, lads, we must get under cover. I don't fancy Master Lillie would attempt to make any serious trouble, even if he knew who put the ornament into position; but it is just as well that he and every one else is kept in ignorance of our share in the work. I shall be here as soon after

daylight as possible, and reckon by that time there will be a bigger crowd around the shop than has been seen for many a day."

Then the conspirators separated, each going to his own home, and there was not in the minds of a single member of the party the slightest forebodings of the terrible tragedy which was to follow their attempt to teach Master Theophilus Lillie his duty.

CHAPTER II. FIRST FRUITS

On the morning following the assembly at Liberty Hall, which resulted in the warning given to Master Theophilus Lillie, Hardy Baker, regardless of the fact that Lieutenant Draper's account had been given him in consideration of strict attention to duty, went from his home directly to Hanover Street, instead of to the hair-dressing establishment of Master Piemont, as he should have done.

Once on Hanover Street, all thought of duty was forgotten as he viewed, with no slight degree of pride, that scene of excitement, in the cause of which he had assisted.

The pole, surmounted by the mutilated figurehead of the sloop and decorated with the names of the merchants who had been faithless to their agreement, was yet in position, as he and his companions had left it a short time previous, and, although the new day was but half an hour old, the throng in front of Master Lillie's shop was so great as to entirely block the street.

The first passerby, after the darkness of night was so far dissipated that the object could be readily distinguished, had stopped several moments to read the inscription – a difficult task, owing to the faint light. While deciphering, with no slight amount of labour, the result of Jim Gray's work as a painter, the man had been joined by one and another, until the walk directly in front of the shop was crowded to overflowing with the curious, the throng swelling far out into the street, and added to each moment, until, when Hardy Baker arrived, it had become a mob – a good-natured, careless gathering, but yet a mob, which needed but slight provocation to render it unmanageable and dangerous.

It filled Hardy Baker's sensation-loving heart with joy to see the result of the labour in which he had assisted.

For the moment he forgot that the idea of this symbol of warning was Jim Gray's, and took upon himself all the credit of having thus aroused the populace.

"Could Lieutenant Draper know I have been able to do so much he would be more ready to settle his account, I fancy," Hardy muttered. "If he thinks a barber's apprentice has no influence, he should look at this scene. There are nearly as many people here as saw the informer tarred and feathered, and I have had considerably more than a finger in both pies. This should show the good people of Boston what I can do. Hello, Chris! Both Christophers, eh?"

This salutation was addressed to little Chris Snyder, who was early abroad according to the agreement made on the night previous, and his companion, Christopher Gore,² a lad whom Master Snyder had brought to the scene under promise of showing him something rare.

"Has Master Lillie seen that yet?" Snyder asked, gleefully, as he motioned with his thumb toward the pole.

"I can't say. I have been here only a few moments, and when I came the throng was as great as you see it now."

"It isn't reasonable to suppose the shopkeeper doesn't know what has caused so great a gathering," Chris Gore said, placidly, and added, with a meaning look at Hardy, "If I had taken any part in raising that warning I should be careful to keep the fact a secret."

"Why?" Hardy asked, quickly, and looking just a trifle disturbed.

"Because more may come of it than in the case of the informer. Master Theophilus Lillie, although he may not be loved by some of us, is patronised by Governor Hutchinson."

"Well, and what then? He made an agreement, only to break it before the words were cold, and should suffer for it," Hardy replied, defiantly.

"I am not defending him, but simply gave words to my thoughts."

² In 1809 this same Christopher Gore became Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

"And you believe trouble will come to those who put that up?"

"I said not so, yet I believe it will be well if those who have thus advised Master Lillie keep the fact that they were concerned in the work a secret. Who is that now coming from the house?"

"Ebenezer Richardson, the informer, and Amos's uncle. Surely you should know him."

"I never saw him before, but have heard much of his doings."

"And so have others," Hardy replied, in a significant tone. "If he is wise he will stay in the house this day, for there yet remains in the city of Boston plenty of tar and feathers."

"And you think he may get a new coat?"

"It won't be long coming," the barber's apprentice replied, in a meaning tone, as if his especial mission in life was to correct the shortcomings of others. "Now that this work has been begun by the boys of Boston, it will be continued by them."

"You said that this Richardson is a relative of our friend Amos?"

"An uncle, but Amos has cast him off long since," and Hardy's assumption of importance was almost comical. "He is reading the names now; perhaps thinks he is called upon to protect Master Lillie. As I said before, he had best remain hidden from view. How Amos would rage if he could see his uncle at this moment!"

"Then he has no love for him?"

"As much as a frog has for a red rag."

The mob, who had been in the best possible humour, now began to show signs of anger as the informer made himself conspicuous, and half-muttered words soon became loudly-spoken threats.

"The informer himself should hang from that pole!"

"Where are the feathers? He needs a new coat!"

"Down with the informer!"

Richardson turned toward the mob an instant, as if to defy it, and then, as the threats grew louder, entered the house.

"Whoever did that bit of work should be well paid for it," some one in the crowd said, sufficiently loud for Hardy to hear, and the latter looked triumphantly toward Chris Snyder. "I'll wager it came from under the Liberty Tree."

"You're right, my friend," the barber's apprentice said, in a loud tone, and in another moment he would have revealed that which should be kept a secret, had not the arrival of several British officers given him, in his opinion, an opportunity of yet further distinguishing himself.

"There is Lieutenant Draper," he said, sufficiently loud for all in the immediate vicinity to hear, "and this time he shall listen to what I have to say, unless he is willing to settle his account."

"Are you going to speak to that officer?" Chris Gore asked, as he detained Hardy for an instant by stepping in front of him.

"Why not? He should pay that which he owes."

"But this is not the proper time to speak of business affairs. No man would listen to a barber's apprentice in public, like this."

"He shall listen to me," Master Piemont's assistant replied, loftily. "It is to me he owes the money, and I do not intend to be defrauded."

Before his companion could check him, the valiant Hardy stepped quickly up to Lieutenant Draper, who was in company with two brother officers, and said, in an offensive tone:

"I was at the Custom House yesterday to see you, sir."

"And pray, why did you take it upon yourself to go there?" the lieutenant asked.

"Because I wanted the money you owe Master Piemont for dressing your hair, and I went where I was most likely to find you."

The lieutenant's face grew pale with anger, and he made a motion as if to strike the impudent boy, but one of his companions said, in a warning whisper:

"Be careful what you do, Draper. An injudicious word or act now might arouse this apparently peaceable assemblage into an unruly mob!"

Glancing around him, the officer realised the truth of the remark, and would have turned away but that Hardy stepped yet nearer, and, in a louder voice, cried:

"Will you give me the money now, or shall I visit the Custom House again?"

"Hark you, lad," Lieutenant Draper said, angrily, but speaking so low that only those in the immediate vicinity could hear the words, "if you dare present your barber's account to me in public, I'll have you punished for an insolent cur. When I am ready to pay your master, I will call at his shop."

"The account belongs to me. It has been turned over by Master Piemont, and the money must be paid."

"Be careful of your words, my fine fellow, or they will lead you into trouble!"

The lieutenant was now almost beside himself with anger, and, understanding that he might do something rash, his brother officers literally forced him to accompany them up the street, while the barber's apprentice, not wishing to leave the scene of what he considered his triumph, hurled insolent epithets after the soldiers.

"What are you doing, Hardy Baker? Do you want to bring about a riot?"

Turning quickly, Master Piemont's assistant saw his friend Amos, who had just come up, and he retorted:

"I am attending to my own affairs."

"It is better you should do that in private. You have no right to brawl in the streets, even though your debtor be an enemy."

"I have the right to do that which I please, and it will become you better to turn your attention to the informer, who is at the same time your relative."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.