

Memoir of Captain Paul Cuffee, Liverpool Mercury

MEMOIR OF CAPTAIN PAUL CUFFEE

Written for the Liverpool Mercury

"On the first of the present month of August, 1811, a vessel
"arrived at Liverpool, with a cargo from Sierra Leone, the
"owner, master, mate, and whole crew of which are free
"Negroes. The master, who is also owner, is the son of an
"American Slave, and is said to be very well skilled both in
"trade and navigation, as well as to be of a very pious and
"moral character. It must have been a strange and ani-
"mating spectacle to see this free and enlightened African
"entering, as an independent trader, with his black crew,
"into that port which was so lately the nidus of the Slave
"Trade." — Edinb. Review, August, 1811.

We are happy in having an opportunity of confirming the above account, and at the same time of laying before our readers an authentic memoir of Capt. Paul Cuffee, the master and owner of the vessel above referred to, who sailed from this port on the 20th ult. with a licence from the British Government, to prosecute his intended voyage to Sierra Leone.

THE father of Paul Cuffee, was a native of Africa, whence he was brought as a Slave into Massachusetts.—He was there purchased by a person named Slocum, and remained in slavery a considerable portion of his life.— He was named Cuffee, but as it is usual in those parts took the name of Slocum, as expressing to whom he belonged. Like many of his countrymen he possessed a mind superior to his condition, and although he was diligent in the business of his Master and faithful to his Interest, yet by great industry and economy he was enabled to purchase his personal liberty.

At this time the remains of several Indian tribes, who originally possessed the right of soil, resided in Massachusetts; Cuffee became acquainted with a woman descended from one of those

tribes, named Ruth Moses, and married her. — He continued in habits of industry and frugality, and soon afterwards purchased a farm of 100 acres in Westport in Massachusetts.

Cuffee and Ruth has a family of ten children. — The three eldest sons, David, Jonathan, and John are farmers in the neighborhood of Westport, filling respectable situations in society, and endowed with good intellectual capacities. — They are all married, and have families to whom they are giving good educations. Of six daughters four are respectably married, while two remain single.

Paul was born on the Island of Cutterhunkker, one of the Elizabeth Islands near New Bedford, in the year 1759; when he was about 14 years of age his father died leaving a considerable property in land, but which being at that time unproductive afforded but little provision for his numerous family, and thus the care of supporting his mother and sisters devolved upon his brothers and himself.

At this time Paul conceived that commerce furnished to industry more ample rewards than agriculture, and he was conscious that he possessed qualities which under proper culture would enable him to pursue commercial employments with prospects of success; he therefore entered at the age of 16 as a common hand on board of a vessel destined to the bay of Mexico, on a Whaling voyage. His second voyage was to the West Indies; but on his third he was captured by a British ship during the American war about the year 1776: after three months detention as a prisoner at New York, he was permitted to return home to Westport, where owing to the unfortunate continuance of hostilities he spent about 2 years in his agricultural pursuits. During this interval Paul and his brother John Cuffee were called on by the Collector of the district, in which they resided, for the payment of a personal tax. It appeared to them, that, by the laws of the constitution of Massachusetts, taxation and the whole rights of citizenship were untied.—If the laws demanded of them the payment of personal taxes, the same laws must necessarily and constitutionally invest them with the rights of representing, and being represented, in the state Legislature. But they had never been considered as entitled to the privilege of voting at Elections, nor of being elected to places of trust and honor. —Under these circumstances, they refused payment of the demands.—The Collector resorted to the force of the laws, and after many delays and vexations, Paul and his brother

deemed it most prudent to silence the suit by payment of the demands. But they resolved, if it were possible, to obtain the rights which they believed to be connected with taxation.

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