

The Phosphorus Cycle

"For the purpose of erecting a suitable monument in memory of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, his private burial ground was searched for the graves of himself and his wife. It was found that everything had passed into oblivion. The shape of the coffins could only be traced by a black line of carbonaceous matter. The rusted hinges and nails, and a round wooden knot, alone remained in one grave; while a single lock of braided hair was found in the other. Near the graves stood an apple tree. This had sent down two main roots into the very presence of the confined dead. The larger root, pushing its way to the precise spot occupied by the skull of Roger Williams, had made a turn as if passing around it, and followed the direction of the backbone to the hips. Here, it divided into two branches, sending one along each leg to the heel, when both turned upward to the toes. One of these roots formed a slight crook at the knee, which made the whole bear a striking resemblance to the human form. There were the graves, but their occupants had disappeared; the bones even had vanished. There stood the thief, the guilty apple tree, caught in the very act of robbery. The spoilation was complete. The organic matter, the flesh, the bones, of Roger Williams, had passed into an apple tree. The elements had been absorbed by the roots, transmuted into woody fibre, had bloomed into fragrant blossoms; and more than that had been converted into a luscious fruit, which from year to year had been gathered and eaten. How pertinent, then, is the question, "Who ate Roger Williams?"

(Hartford newspaper article, as quoted in "A Fourteen Week Course in Chemistry" by Dorman J. Steele, New York, 1868.)