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Roger Williams:

APOSTLE OF SOUL-FREEDOM[1]

I.

THIS is a meeting of a *Baptist* Society, and that fact determines my line of approach. In the index of Ernst's remarkable book on Roger Williams I find a challenging line: "Roger Williams not a Baptist." Over against that summary statement I place this contention: that in his insistence upon the principle of soul-liberty and its application, our hero is a Baptist, standing in a definitely Baptist succession, expressing with clarity and cogency ideas which Baptists had already formulated. His debt to those predecessors has in this very year received new emphasis. The Baptist Historical Society of Britain is issuing *in facsimile* Thomas Helwys' book "The Mistery of Iniquity," probably printed in Holland and brought to England when the author returned in 1612 to found in London the earliest Baptist church on English soil. Helwys, you are aware, had been a fellow-refugee with John Smyth and others who, as Separatists from the Anglican established church, were driven to seek safety overseas in Amsterdam. There the question of baptism became a subject of discussion, and the group in which Smyth was the leader, with Helwys as his close friend and coadjutor, came definitely to reject infant baptism as a practice without scriptural warrant. On the basis of the New Testament, in which they re-discovered the principle of the baptism of believers only, they formed a new church fellowship, each accepting baptism after offering a confession of personal faith. Differences arose later, Smyth coming to doubt whether he ought not to have sought baptism from the Mennonite body, that Anabaptist remnant which Menno Simons had organised and which had received its name from him. Apart from his inability to follow Smyth on this issue, Helwys felt a call to return to England, whatever the risk, and there to bear his witness. So, in 1612, with about a dozen companions, back he comes, and the Baptist church finds a home in London. He brings with him his book, with the intention of presenting it personally to that singular pedant King James I. Whether he gained access to James is unknown, but the copy still exists in which in his own handwriting Helwys addresses the King:—

> "Heare o King, and dispise not ye counsell of ye poore, and let theire complaints come before thee.

[1] Address at a Tercentenary Celebration organised by the American Baptist Historical Society in Philadelphia.

"The King is a mortall man, and not God therefore hath no power over ye immortall soules of his subjects, to make lawes and ordinances for them, and to set spirituall Lords over them.

"If the King have authority to make spirituall Lords and lawes, then he is an immortall God, and not a mortall man.

"O King be not seduced by deceivers to sin against God whome thou oughtest to obey, nor against thy poore subjects who ought and will obey thee in all thinges with body life and goods, or else let their lives be taken from ye earth.

God Save ye King

Spittlefeild neare London" THO: HELWYS."

Rightly has Professor Wheeler Robinson said that "it was a fine insight into the spiritual nature of religion that made him (Helwys) the first in England to demand universal liberty for its exercise," and he vindicates the claim by citing the sentences:—

"Our Lord the King is but an earthly King, and he hath no aucthority as a King but in earthly causes, and if the King's people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all humane lawes made by the King, our lord the King can require no more; for men's religion to God is betwixt God and themselves: the King shall not answere for it, neither may the King be jugd betweene God and man. Let them be heretikes, Turcks, Jewes or whatsoever, it apperteynes not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure."

That is not the language of an indifferentist. Helwys is a fierce controversialist—as fierce as was afterwards Roger Williams himself. In his contention against what he regards as erroneous opinion, he handles his opponents "without gloves," and the last possible objection to his invective is that it lacks vigour! But he has grasped the clear distinction between the place of religious persuasion—even in the form of controversy—and of civil coercion, and he stands for the common human rights not only of his friends and comrades, but of those whose opinions he rejects and abhors. Of course King James had no answer to Helwys except to clap him into prison, where, it is believed, he died within two or three years.

So speaks Thomas Helwys—a quarter of a century before Roger Williams becomes "the New England firebrand." What is behind Helwys? John Smyth's "Confession of Faith,"

already prepared though not yet in print when Helwys wrote, contains this article :—

> "That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xiii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the King and lawgiver of the Church and conscience (James iv, 12)."

Helwys follows John Smyth in this essential matter. What of others? Leonard Busher, another Baptist, publishes two years after Helwys' return "Religion's Peace," for which it has been claimed that it is the earliest book printed in England to plead for complete religious liberty. (Helwys' book, we noted, though written in English, was probably printed in Holland). Then comes John Murton in 1615 with "Objections answered," and in 1620 when, like Helwys a few years before, he was a prisoner in Newgate gaol, Murton writes a further book, "An Humble Supplication." Principal Wheeler Robinson, president of the (British) Baptist Historical Society, tells how he wrote it :—

> ". . . using milk as an invisible ink which became visible when scorched; the paper on which it was written formed the stoppers of the bottles of milk brought in to the prisoner for his support. This picturesque fact is told us by Roger Williams, who was moved by Murton's book to write his own, 'The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution.'"

Principal Robinson adds :—

> "To us, at least in Great Britain and America, the truth of which these men were the pioneers has become a commonplace—that religion has the right to full freedom apart from civil or moral offence. We forget to-day not only the arduous path by which that right has been won, but the men who first led the way, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys. None of their English contemporaries, even among the Separatists, was willing to grant such universal liberty; *they were the lonely pioneers of a great achievement.*"[2]

There is then conclusive evidence for the proposition that in his insistence upon the principle of soul-liberty and its application Williams is a Baptist, standing in a Baptist succession, expressing ideas which men of that community had already

[2] Italics mine. J.H.R.

formulated. There, at any rate, he demonstrably belongs with them, and in his strongest utterances he echoes the thought and often the very words of his forerunners.

II.

Next, let us turn to the question whether, for a time at any rate, and in what sense, Roger Williams was on other grounds entitled to the designation "Baptist." I confess myself quite unconvinced by the somewhat peremptory assertion of Ernst: "Roger Williams never joined the Baptist church." It appears to rest upon the disappearance of certain early records, upon a singular tendency in the writer to discredit definite statements in favour of pure suppositions, and perhaps also upon a desire to relieve his hero of responsibility for a somewhat startling and abrupt change of front. The negative evidence, as Ernst presents it, is singularly unconvincing:—

> "Hugh Peters of Salem wrote on July 1, 1639, to the Dorchester Church that 'Roger Williams and wife' and others 'have wholly refused to hear the church, denying it and all the churches in the Bay to be true churches and, except for two, were re-baptized, had the great Censure passed upon them'" (i.e. were excommunicated).

Then Ernst inserts the strange sentence: "The 'except for two' were Roger Williams and his wife, who had not joined the Baptist church." One asks what is the basis of that statement. Peters lays such stress on Williams as the leading spirit that it would be natural to name him as an exception if he were such, and to make the point that he was from the outset unable to agree even with his fellow-rebels. Nor is Ernst's statement supported by citing a passage from a Williams' letter of 1649:—

> ". . . at Seekonk a great many have lately concurred with Mr. Clark of Newport and our Providence men about the point of a new baptism and manner of dipping." "I believe" (Williams adds) "their practice comes nearer to the first practice of religion, and yet I have not satisfaction, neither in the authority by which it is done nor in the manner, nor in the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ's Kingdom after the desolation of Rome, etc."

That letter has a bearing on a historical issue which once was fiercely discussed, but whose relative unimportance has now come home to us. There are really two questions to be answered: (1) "Was Roger Williams re-baptized"? (2) "If so, in what mode"? It appears clear—and in these enquiries our only concern should be truth—that Williams was not baptized by

immersion; if he had been, how could he, ten years after the event, write of "a new baptism and manner of dipping"? On the other hand, how is the testimony of Governor Winthrop to be set aside, who in the summer of 1639 writes:—

> "Mr. Williams and many of his company a few months since were in all haste re-baptized and denied communion with all others, and now he has come to question his second baptism."

This is in line with the evidence of Robert Scott:—

> "I walked with him (Williams) in the Baptists' way about three or four months, in which time he broke from the society and declared at large the ground and reasons of it."

"Walked with him in the Baptists' way" is fully consistent with "shared in the fellowship of the Baptist church," and "broke from the Society" is the natural language in which Scott, who had afterwards become a Quaker, would describe separation from the Church.

To me the question of the form of Williams' "baptism" appears not at all difficult. In the early seventeenth century we are confronted with a determined effort on the part of a group of earnest men to re-discover amid the confusions of the time the true character of the Christian church. They cannot find it in the parish assembly which counts all as church members who have been christened in infancy, and so they separate themselves. In their separation the question arises of the validity of the "baptism" which they had received as infants, and they reach the conviction that the subjects of baptism must be believers. Therefore, upon confession of faith, they are re-baptized, as their opponents say, or truly baptized for the first time, as themselves maintain. They have laid hold of the vital principle that baptism is for believers only, and in this respect they belong with all who to-day would name themselves Baptists. But they did not at a single step reach the precise position now generally held by Baptists. They assumed without enquiry that sprinkling or affusion, the custom in the churches they had left, was the true *form* of baptism. After a generation or less, the question of the form is raised, and for the first time examined in the light of the New Testament. Within a relatively short period after this further question has come up it is decisively and unanimously answered; both General Baptists and Particular Baptists are all immersionists. To them it was not a question of more or less water, but of conformity to the will of the Lord to whom their lives were committed, and beyond question they were right that no form except immersion expresses adequately

the symbolism of Rom. vi: "buried with Him . . . that like as Christ was raised . . . we also might walk in newness of life."

What happened in the case of Roger Williams is reasonably clear. He was "re-baptized" on confession of faith in the mode that was then common. The question of whether that mode conformed to the New Testament, or adequately symbolised the Christian experience, had not yet arisen. He was for a time—not for long—a member of a church which like all other Baptist churches afterwards became fully and definitely immersionist![3]

III.

Two points we have made: (i) Roger Williams in his claim for soul-liberty stands in the direct line of Baptist witness; (ii) he was for a few months a member of a Baptist community of the type found in his day. Baptists cannot relinquish their claim upon him, even if he is in some respects rather a troublesome possession.

For Roger Williams did unmistakably renounce the fellowship of the church at Providence a short time after its formation, and became a "Seeker." It is very difficult to follow his mental process. He is profoundly religious, but his exaggerated individualism makes him, in the Scottish phrase, "gey ill to live wi'," and causes him to find others, so far as concerned church fellowship, not only "gey ill to live wi'," but even impossible. It would not be inaccurate to describe him as *lacking in church consciousness*. We do not accept the idea of the church as an organised institution with a supernatural existence and quality of its own, independently of the character and life of its members. The Church is continually built up of living members. The company of Christ's faithful constitutes it. In this sense the Church is essential. Wesley was right when he quoted and endorsed the words spoken to him in his early days by "a serious man": "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember that you cannot serve Him alone. You must, therefore, find companions or make them. The Bible knows nothing

[3] It seems reasonable to allow the name of "Baptist" to those who before a final and clear understanding as to the form had been reached were not only certainly antipaedobaptists, but held firmly to spiritual experience and confession as pre-requisites of baptism. Differences exist to-day among Baptists in some parts of the world. There are close fellowship and close communion churches; there are close fellowship churches with open communion; there are "open" churches in which the question of the acceptance or non-acceptance of baptism is left to the conscience of the individual: but *I do not know anywhere in the world any churches claiming to be Baptist which hold any other definition of baptism except that it is the immersion of believers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*—J.H.R.

of a solitary religion." It perplexes us to find a close student of the scriptures such as Williams insensitive to the κοινωνία which is characteristic of the early Christians, and unable to discover such links of common conviction and aspiration as ensure to a company of Christians the sense of oneness which underlies the familiar hymn :—

> "Blest be the tie that binds
> Our hearts in Christian love :
> The fellowship of kindred minds
> Is like to that above."

Why did this man stand apart? He had so much in common with the general outlook of the Baptists of his day. His appeal like theirs was to the scriptures. His use of the Bible, according to the generally prevailing fashion of the time, overstressed the letter, so that he sometimes misses its spirit. His controversies are wearisome reading; but after all he shares a defective method with the mass of his contemporaries, and it is a little puzzling that one who in secular life could recognise that even an unbeliever may be a good citizen should be unable to enter into fellowship with those who reverenced his God, his Christ, and his Bible, because of differences in details of interpretation. He held to the prevailing Calvinistic outlook of his time, with some modifications due to Lutheran influence. He believed in a regenerate Church membership, and found in the New Testament the norm of Church order. Yet he soon breaks loose from the Baptists with whom he shared these ideas. Why? We are constrained to grant to Williams in full measure the appreciation which John Morley concedes to the religious leaders of Scotland and England belonging to the same age :—

> "It is not their fanaticism, still less is it their theology, which makes the great Puritan chiefs of England and the stern Covenanters of Scotland so heroic in our sight. It is the fact that they sought truth and ensued it, not thinking of the practicable nor cautiously counting minorities and majorities, but each man pondering and searching 'so as ever in the Great Taskmaster's eye'."

Each man pondering and searching; yes, but each man also ready to recognise that in his pondering and searching he is not alone, and, therefore, to give due weight to the experiences and convictions of other searchers. The Puritans and the early Separatists (especially, I think, the Baptists) are predisposed to religious fellowship. Williams is not : he is an arch-individualist. Conscience is regal indeed, and for loyalty to conscience a man should be finally ready to break with all other loyalties. It is the voice of God *as he hears it.* But the hearing may be defective :

prejudice, mental limitation, or subconscious self-interest, may distort the divine word. To use other terms, conscience is the sense of agreement or difference between what we know as right and what we desire or will or do. Its deliverances depend upon the light which the person possesses, and a supreme duty of every man is to seek for larger light or as Christians would say the light of the Holy Spirit, in which the voice of conscience shall become ever more clearly trustworthy. Now Roger Williams, with all his vagaries, is curiously tenacious of any theory he has once formulated. His theory of soul-liberty, how firmly he held it! How clearly he had understood the bounds of the authority of the magistrate! That theory so governed his thinking that amid the changes of a turbulent life I do not discover that he ever swerved into inconsistency in this matter, or that his judgment and conscience were not steadily concordant in sustaining a position which to-day commands general respect in the English-speaking world, and in considerable sections outside. Soul-liberty was to him a fixed *dogma*—and it is well to realise that "dogma" means opinion, and an opinion may be true! But this is not the only dogma that holds Williams, and when a fixed opinion happens to be misleading, the saying of George Meredith may be recalled: "There is nothing like a theory for blinding the wise." Let me quote Ernst:—

> "He was unable to find a true ministry of the Word extant in the world. 'In the poor span of my life, I desired to have been a diligent and constant observer, and have myself many ways been engaged in city, in country, in court, in schools, in universities, in churches, in Old and New England, and yet cannot in the holy presence of God bring in a result of a satisfying discovery that either the begetting ministry of the Apostles or messengers to the nations, or the feeding and nourishing ministry of pastors and teachers according to the first institution of the Lord Jesus are yet restored and extant . . . I prejudice not an external test and call which was at first and shall be again in force at the Resurrection of the churches.'"[4]

No covenant of those professing faith in Christ, or consciousness of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, suffices. Williams would see a ministry validated by "an external test and call." This is the theory which blinds him, and keeps him conscientiously apart. This conception of an external test and call appears curiously mechanical, no less lacking in spiritual value than the theory that "apostolic succession" in a priesthood is necessary to validate sacraments and to certify the genuineness of the

[4] Ernst, p. 84.

church. A strange and perverse "crankiness," however honestly the position was held! Yet we must render Roger Williams the justice of recognising that he held to it, as to all his convictions, at considerable cost. He protests that if only he could regard any of the organised groups he knew as truly constituting a church of Christ he would join with them. His failure leaves him a lonely soul.

IV.

George Fox found Roger Williams "a wild Ishmael, his hand against every man," and when we read the story of Williams' difficulties with the Quakers, such a judgment is not surprising. They too were rebels; and on the whole the Society of Friends, which stands in high honour to-day, was in its earlier representatives even more disorderly, aggressive, and disturbing than the man who was described by a contemporary as a "minter of exorbitant novelties."

Roger Williams is in any case a superbly honest man. His scrupulosity in matters which appear to ourselves non-vital always compels the respect due to sincerity and disinterestedness. Take as an example his objection to oaths. He and his brother are defrauded of their shares in an inheritance. The brother secures a favourable decision from an English court; Roger fails, because he will not fulfil the legal requirement of swearing a statement in support of his claim. The defects of Williams are in part his own. It is difficult to acquit him of a certain intellectual arrogance and an angularity that provoke the resentment of a present-day reader, and assuredly were still more provocative to his immediate victims. In the main, however, his faults are *errores temporum,* the defects of his age from which not even the man who transcends it can entirely escape. The bitter speech of his controversial pamphlets may be counted among such errors—yet who that has read on my side of the water, and on yours, reports of certain political outbursts which (though they seem almost incredible) we are constrained to believe authentic, will hastily condemn seventeenth-century manners in public discussion? Not a count in any indictment of Roger Williams' personal integrity is sustained by trustworthy evidence, and even the charge of exceptional inconsistency and instability of opinion appears exaggerated. His developments are not unnatural: the ordained preacher of the Anglican church becoming a Separatist, first in principle and later in practice; the man who in England had seen the bitter persecution under Charles I and Laud, and had fled in haste overseas, becoming the outspoken opponent of the New England theocracy which was but a manifestation of similar tyranny; even the brevity of

his sojourn in the Baptist fellowship while moving towards Seekerdom—all are characteristic of the man who already in England was described as *passionate* and *precipitate* and *divinely mad*. The fact that he held his position as a "Seeker" for over forty years does not accord with the fundamental instability charged against him; and on the other hand, his unwavering, pertinacious, wholehearted advocacy of his distinctive principle of soul-liberty, alike against conservative tyrants and radical perverters, is evidence of such grasp of principle, patience, and insight, as must command the unqualified admiration of those who now realise that he was indeed contending for the most precious jewel in the treasury of a coming age. Cromwell refused to allow the painter of his portrait to ignore the disfiguring wart on his face. Roger Williams may likewise be presented, "warts and all"; he remains strong enough, good enough, great enough to bear the most searching scrutiny. He has left mankind for ever his debtor by his supreme service to the cause of freedom, religious and civil.

Observe in certain particulars how Williams transcends the generality of his time: and how all through he appears as one with a deep reverence for human personality and its regal claims.

(1) We find in his *attitude to the Indians* an example of his love of justice and of an outlook far more fair and generous than that which marked the bulk of the settlers in New England. He had no illusions regarding the Indians, and many of his descriptions insist upon the squalor and the treachery of the native tribes; but these people are fellow-men with their indefeasible rights. Indeed at many points the settlers are no better than the savages:

"When Indians hear the horrid filth
Of Irish, English men;
The horrid oaths and murders late,
Thus say these Indians then:

"'We wear no clothes, have many gods,
And yet our sins are less:
You are barbarians, pagans wild,
Your land's the Wilderness.'

"Oft have I heard the Indians say,
'These English will deceive us:
Of all that's ours, our lands and lives,
In the end they will bereave us.'"

Thus, in simple rhyme, Williams offers a blunt comment which is not without its application to the clash of advanced and backward races in our own day. He had the courage to condemn even a royal patent, in so far as the King of England claimed to dispose of the lands of the natives. A permit to trade he

regarded as legitimate, and in his view the English rulers might lay down conditions for the administration of colonies, but the land itself should be acquired from its holders by honest purchase. In dealing with the Indians he strove to win their confidence, and in large measure succeeded, so that he was on several occasions able to turn the tribes from their purpose of war; and if his spirit had prevailed, some sad chapters concerning the relations between white man and red would not mar the story of New England.

(2) Take again *his attitude to the Quakers.* Persecuted elsewhere, these people find a refuge where his principle of soul-freedom prevails, and in his relations with them the fundamental idea is brought into clear relief that the freedom on which he insists in civil matters is not to be confused with approval of the particular tenets whose holders enjoy the freedom. In fact, Williams detests many or most of the peculiarities of the Quakers. *"George Fox digg'd out his Burrows" is a fierce* onslaught, and those who care to do so may wade through the story of his debate with them. But persecute he would not; he was one of those who "held, if a man's belief be bad, 'twill not improve by burning"—or by hanging or jailing or other civil penalty. The miseries of the Quakers in Britain following the Stuart restoration reveal how far ahead of his time was the Providence pioneer.

(3) It is worth while to devote a word to Williams' *attitude towards women.* He actually counted woman a responsible person, and this when the legal systems of the world and the general outlook of religious men conceded little to her. The record of his defence of the right of Venn's wife to differ from the religious practice of her husband, and to hold out against the husband's coercion, reveals the spirit of a later age.

(4) Equal honour belongs to Williams in connection with his *attitude towards the Jews.* That great and so often unhappy people, still victimised in many lands of the earth, had from the days of Edward I been excluded from England. Jews who came over to America found that not even the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam would allow them to worship God in their own way; in Providence they were not only unhindered but welcomed. Nor is Williams' concern for them limited to New England; his close ties with the English dissenters who had overthrown Charles I enabled him to lend his influence to induce Oliver Cromwell—easily persuaded in such a matter—to admit to Old England the race that had for centuries been banished from her shores.

These are but specific examples of Williams' policy which rested on *the idea of a society in which equality of civil rights*

and a democratic government should prevail. I make no attempt to trace the details of administrative and constitutional development during his lifetime and afterwards. The civil compact which formed the basis of the body politic in Providence after his flight from the theocracy, and before any charter or recognition had been obtained from England, contained the vital clause :—

> " We whose names are hereunder written . . . do with free and joint consent promise each unto other that for our common peace and welfare (until we hear further of the King's royal pleasure concerning ourselves) we will from time to time subject ourselves in active and passive obedience to such orders and agreements as shall be made by the greater number of the present householders, and such as shall hereafter be admitted by their consent into the same privilege and covenant in our ordinary meeting . . . only in civil things."

V.

This Tercentenary of Roger Williams is celebrated in a land wherein his principles have triumphed. A new and strong tyranny might have been established west of the Atlantic if there had not appeared the " minter of exorbitant novelties," the bold revolutionary who put the blunt question to the theocratic leaders :

> " What true reason of justice, peace, or common safety of the whole, can be rendered to the world why Master Cotton's conscience and ministry must be maintained by the civil sword? "

and added :—

> " I affirm it lamentably to be against the testimony of Christ Jesus for the civil state to impose upon the souls of the people, a religion, a worship, a ministry " . . . Instead the state should give " free and absolute permission of conscience to all men in what is merely spiritual . . . and provide for the liberty of the magistrate's conscience also."

But if Williams' principle, his definite separation of the functions of Church and state, and his claim of rights for human personality as transcending and limiting the claims of the state, is accepted in English-speaking lands, it is by no means unchallenged in our day. The theory of the " totalitarian state " is asserted and applied in Russia, in Germany, and elsewhere. Russian Communism has in principle no place for the free human personality. All literature and art, every cultural movement or organisation, must express the will of the State. The

same is true of the National Socialism of Germany, and it is instructive to observe that the resistance which Nazism has encountered in its effort to regiment the entire life of a people springs from the same root as that of Roger Williams—the root of religious conviction, the belief in God as the final judge and lawgiver of the conscience. It was as a religious man that Williams did his mighty work for the liberation of the human spirit. I see nowhere any force that can in our age effectively resist the enslavement of the human spirit save in the Christianity which holds firmly to its basic character as the revelation of God in history, and derives its authority from the Christ of the Gospels, interpreted to each age by His living Spirit. What gives the human soul even in the humblest its claim to freedom? What but the Incarnation? What but the Cross? Atheism, scepticism, subjective speculation, are all tolerant of mechanisation and regimentation. Destroy belief in the fact of revelation, and there is no firm hold against the enslaving tendency of the age. Russia proclaims that in terms that all may read. Germany through a Rosenberg sets to work to discredit the historic character of the Christian revelation, for, if this can be disposed of, the way is open for the Nordic myth and the Nordic heathenism in which the reign of force shall be established. Religion itself may then take any arbitrary form which makes it useful to the all-dominant State. It is not a matter of indifference whether our New Testament is substantially true or not, and the slighting use of the word "Biblicism" not infrequently covers an attitude of mind that, cutting men loose from historic fact, casts them adrift without chart or compass in mazes of speculation and conflicting theories with none but pragmatic tests of truth. Democracy will not endure without religious certainty: why should it? A dictatorship may *work* better, and often does. But once acknowledge the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and like Roger Williams, when his experiment seemed discredited by wild men who confused liberty with licence, we shall stand fast in and for the freedom with which Christ makes free. Liberty has inconveniences, but it is not on that account to be sacrificed. Decapitation may be a sure cure for headache, but the sane man will prefer to treat the headache rather than sacrifice the head! Roger knew the worth of freedom as vital to the dignity of man, on no condition to be yielded or diminished.

Like Moses he beheld from afar the Promised Land and pointed to it. Like Moses he lies in an unknown grave, but he is one of those to whom the great, simple word of Ecclesiasticus applies: "Their name liveth for ever." Hail, great pioneer! Thy day's work was nobly done. Thy challenge still

rings down the corridors of time! It may be that in some dark day, amid the floundering and hesitation and doubt and cowardice of our later age, we shall be constrained to cry: "Arise, Roger Williams! Come forth once again with thy true and deathless word, thy sublime courage; come forth to lead the army of those who shall defend even unto death the dignity and freedom of the soul of man!"

J. H. RUSHBROOKE.

RICHARD WRIGHT was an ardent preacher, coming into notice in 1780 at the age of 16 when expelled by an Independent church for village preaching on week nights. Methodists let him speak, till a secession in Norwich declared themselves General Baptist, and Dan Taylor ordained Wright their pastor on 29th September, 1785. They worshipped in Ber Street for ten years; then joined the ancient General Baptist church in Priory Yard, then a constituent of the Assembly; here Wright ranked as an Elder. He made friends with Samuel Fisher, pastor of the Johnsonian Baptists at Norwich and Wisbech, and aided him, becoming assistant in 1787, and five years later remaining at Deadman's Lane as pastor. In 1797 he met William Vidler, the Universalist Baptist, and each converted the other. With 1803, the two friends joined the Assembly, which against all precedent ignored a minority vote, so that Dan Taylor and all the evangelicals made formal protest and withdrew. With 1806, he became Home Missionary for the Unitarians, and after four years resigned his pastorate at Wisbech. He brought many Baptist churches into fellowship with Unitarians, as at Long Sutton; settled again as pastor at Conigre in Trowbridge, and then at Kirkstead in Lincolnshire; ending a vigorous life in 1836.