

**ROGER WILLIAMS:
THE PIONEER OF
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

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Roger Williams: the pioneer of religious liberty by Oscar S. Straus

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OSCAR S. STRAUS

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THE PIONEER OF
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

ROGER WILLIAMS

11. May, 1625. 4. Naxxon. May, with heads to self, with family
most humble, though most unworthy, servant
Roger Williams.

FACSIMILE OF THE SIGNATURE OF ROGER WILLIAMS, PHOTOGRAPHED FROM THE THIRD LETTER TO MRS. SADLER [1652-53],
IN LIBRARY OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

Rogerus Williams

FACSIMILE OF THE SIGNATURE OF ROGER WILLIAMS,
PHOTOGRAPHED FROM THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY SUBSCRIPTION
BOOK [1626].



FACSIMILE OF THE SEAL OF
ROGER WILLIAMS.

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ROGER WILLIAMS

THE PIONEER OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

BY

OSCAR S. STRAUS

AUTHOR OF "THE ORIGIN OF THE
REPUBLICAN FORM OF GOVERN-
MENT IN THE UNITED STATES"



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THE CENTURY CO.

1899

E. C.

NY 100

TO MY BROTHERS
ISIDOR AND NATHAN STRAUS

PREFACE

THE Reformation, the Puritan Revolution, and the establishment of Religious Liberty are the important stages in the development of freedom from medieval despotism to the modern recognition of the inalienable rights of man. They are links in the chain of history stretching from the reign of Henry VIII. to the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. The apostles of these three epochs are Luther, Cromwell, and Roger Williams. The first lessened the tyranny of the Church by dividing it. The second weakened the claims of absolute monarchy by overturning the throne of the British empire, and the third reclaimed liberty of conscience by separating the functions of Church and State. The value and significance of a reform are not measured by the population or the extent of the area in which it has its rise. On the contrary, the larger the principle the smaller must often be the community in which it can best be tested.

Roger Williams was one of the most unique and picturesque persons in our early history. He left his native land and came to America at the height of the Puritan emigration, impelled by the same motives as actuated the leaders of that great exodus—to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience. Shortly after his arrival he discovered that the church brethren of Massachusetts Bay Colony were more absolute in exacting conformity than the English hierarchy had ever been, or became, even under the domination of Archbishop Laud. Puritanism had begun its development in Massachusetts Bay practically unobstructed. The leaders were men of learning and ability, prompted by high and holy motives to build up a Christian commonwealth according to an agreed Calvinistic model. They were conscientious in their piety, unyielding in their rigid enforcement of their doctrines, and merciless toward heretics. Roger Williams did not accept this model, which he regarded as permeated with the spirit of the Inquisition. He contended that the civil magistrate had no jurisdiction over conscience. The authorities of the Bay had no scruples in ridding themselves of discordant elements. They had sent back to England only a short time before two Church-of-England men, and were about seizing Roger Williams and shipping him back also. Fortunately he es-

escaped, and, after a perilous exile in mid-winter through the wilderness, went beyond their jurisdiction into the country of the Narragansett Indians and founded Providence. There he built up a little community according to his model, where "all men may walk as their conscience persuade them, every one in the name of his God," and which, as he expressed it, should forever be "a shelter to the poor and the persecuted according to their several persuasions." This was his message for the world at large. This was the logical outcome of the spirit of the Puritans while they were a persecuted sect, but opposed to their politico-ecclesiastical system when they attained to power. His principles, both political and religious, were offensive to the authorities of Massachusetts Bay, and it is not strange that he was regarded and characterized by them as a stubborn heretic and disturber of the civil peace. Accordingly, we find that the early historians, Morton, Mather, Hubbard, and others, wrote against him with a partizan and prejudiced pen. Later writers, some from inherited predilections, and others because they assumed that the estimate of contemporaries was the correct one, followed their predecessors. His life was one continuous battle for religious liberty. The prejudices and enmities he encountered have such vitality that they have come down even to our