

**LIFE OF ROGER WILLIAMS:
THE FOUNDER OF THE
STATE OF RHODE ISLAND**

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Life of Roger Williams: The Founder of the State of Rhode Island by William Gammell

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WILLIAM GAMMELL

**LIFE OF ROGER WILLIAMS:
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LIFE
OF
ROGER WILLIAMS,
THE
FOUNDER OF THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND.

BY
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"Roger Williams justly claims the honor of having been the first legislator in the world, in its latter ages, that fully and effectually provided for, and established a full, free, and absolute liberty of conscience." Gov. HOPKINS.

BOSTON:
GOULD AND LINCOLN,
59 WASHINGTON STREET,
1854.

PREFACE.

In preparing the following sketch of Roger Williams, the writer has consulted nearly all the works of New England history, from which materials might be derived for the illustration of his life and character. He is, however, by far the most indebted to the elaborate "Memoir," prepared by the late Mr. Knowles, a work of great fulness and accuracy of information respecting not only the immediate subject to which it relates, but also the general affairs of New England in that early age. This work, which probably contains all that can now be known concerning the life of the calumniated founder of Rhode Island, renders the task of a subsequent biographer comparatively easy. The narrative of Mr. Knowles has been generally compared with the original authorities on which he relies, and in all cases his statements have been found to be correct.

In selecting and arranging the materials, which are thus supplied, the aim of the present writer has been, to confine himself to

those which are best fitted to illustrate the personal character of this eminent man, and to furnish the means of estimating aright the services he rendered to his own and to subsequent times. He has sought to give a plain and faithful narrative of a series of events, which seem the more remarkable, as, by the lapse of time, we are further separated from the period in which they occurred. These events, indeed, furnish a sad and perplexing commentary upon the principles of the Puritans, while they serve to impart the aspect of heroism to the life of him, whom the Puritans persecuted and banished. They are now well understood, and are regarded as, in some sense, among the anomalies of history; yet they can never lose their interest and importance. So long as men shall continue to differ on religious subjects, and require the exercise of Christian charity and liberality, so long may they learn lessons of the highest practical value from the life of him, who has been justly styled "the apostle of religious liberty."



L I F E

OF

R O G E R W I L L I A M S,

BY

W I L L I A M G A M M E L L.

ROGER WILLIAMS.

CHAPTER I.

His early Life.—His Education.—The Influences that formed his Character and Opinions.—He arrives at Boston.

OUR only knowledge of the life of ROGER WILLIAMS, previous to his arrival in America, is derived from tradition; and even this tradition rests upon no very certain evidence. No allusion is found in his writings, nor has any trace of documentary history been discovered, which can guide us to definite information concerning this period of his life. His peculiarities of opinion, and his subsequent exclusion from the sympathies of the colonies, undoubtedly contributed to render the interest of the early annalists of New England, in his personal history, far less than in that of most of the other leading men of his time. Not one of them appears to have taken any pains to inquire into his origin, or to

preserve, for the gratification of posterity, any account of his life and fortunes while living in Great Britain.

According to the traditions which have been preserved concerning him, he was born in Wales, in the year 1599. His parents were in the middle ranks of life, but of the character and circumstances of his family, or of the place of his birth, nothing can now be ascertained. He is said to have received his education at the university of Oxford, under the patronage of Sir Edward Coke, whose interest in him was first excited by an incident, which may have been characteristic of the early bias of his mind. He was struck with the young man's appearance at church, and his devout attention during public worship, and one day found that he was taking notes of the sermon. Sir Edward afterwards sent for him, and became so well pleased with his talents and character, that he obtained permission of his parents to place him at one of the colleges at Oxford. His name, however, cannot now be found on any of the rolls of the university, and, from the fact that Sir Edward Coke was himself a graduate of Cambridge, it has been doubted whether Williams did not also receive his education at the same seat of learning.

The whole of the tradition relating to the

patronage of Sir Edward Coke may well be called in question; for, at best, it rests upon no very satisfactory foundation. It is certain, however, from his own statements, as well as from the character of his writings, that Mr. Williams received a classical education, and it is in a very high degree probable, that he pursued his studies at one of the famous seats of learning, which, until a recent period, have given to England nearly all her educated men. After the close of his residence at the university, he is said to have commenced the study of the law, under the guidance of his illustrious patron; but his inclinations, which were early subjected to the influence of strong religious feelings, led him soon to abandon this pursuit, and enter upon the study of theology. This was a study, which largely engrossed the minds of most of the educated men of that age, and to which the growth and culture of his own spiritual nature had already given him a decided and controlling bias. "From my childhood," says he, near the close of his life, "now above threescore years, the Father of lights and mercies touched my soul with a love to himself, to his only-begotten, the true Lord Jesus, and to his Holy Scriptures." The religious character, whose germs were thus early planted, grew and ripened with his years, amidst the retirement of his secluded studies,