

LIVING BIOGRAPHIES OF American Statesmen

WASHINGTON · FRANKLIN · JOHN ADAMS · ROGER WILLIAMS · HAMILTON
WILLIAM PENN · JEFFERSON · MADISON · JOHN MARSHALL · MONROE
ANDREW JACKSON · WEBSTER · CLAY · LINCOLN · JEFFERSON DAVIS
CHARLES SUMNER · GROVER CLEVELAND · THEODORE ROOSEVELT
WOODROW WILSON · FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT



Inspiring life stories of the men who have given us the cherished
American heritage of Free Democratic Government

BY HENRY THOMAS & DANA LEE THOMAS

With 20 Full-Page Illustrations by GORDON ROSS

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By HENRY THOMAS AND
DANA LEE THOMAS

Illustrations by
GORDON ROSS



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Introduction



ONE OF THE MOST significant chapters in the history of America is the story of her devoted statesmen embarked upon their search for united freedom. From Roger Williams to Franklin Delano Roosevelt the great American statesmen, with the few exceptions that only emphasize the rule, have dedicated themselves to the principle that all men have an equal right to their own liberty and an equal duty to protect the liberty of others. Each of these statesmen, as we shall see in the following chapters, has contributed a definite characteristic to the composite American character of courageous and optimistic tolerance. Whether Whig or Federal, Republican or Democrat, these leaders of American political thought have worked with a deliberate bias—a bias against oppression and in favor of justice. Inspired by this American Gospel, they have gravitated toward a single objective—to transform their country into a progressive testing-ground for social and racial and religious co-operation. They have tried, each in his own way, yet all of them in the *American* way, to find the solution to the philosopher's eternal quest for the friendly fusion of mankind. Their primary concern has been to make

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the United States the first international nation in the world.

Their road toward this objective has been often difficult, at times almost hopelessly blocked. Internal bickerings, external aggressions, and occasionally the blindness and the stubbornness of the statesmen themselves—all these have at one time or another threatened to wreck their American dream. Yet in spite of their obstacles and their failings, the statesmen have at all times held tenaciously to their dream of the Great American Reunion—the reconciliation of the quarrelsome human family under the democratic form of government.

We find this American dream expressed under different forms at different periods of our history—in the *Democratic Government* of Roger Williams, in Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, in Madison's *Bill of Rights*, in Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, in Theodore Roosevelt's *Square Deal*, in Wilson's *League of Nations Covenant*, in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's *New Deal* and *Atlantic Charter*. These statesmen, and practically all the other statesmen included in this book, have envisioned the free and united states of America as a model for the free and united nations of the world.

H. T.

D. L. T.

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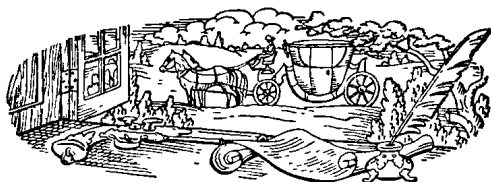
ROGER WILLIAMS

Important Dates in Life of Roger Williams

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1604—Born in London. | 1643—Went to England to obtain a legal charter for Rhode Island. |
| 1627—Graduated from Pembroke College. | 1654—Chosen President of the Rhode Island Colony. |
| 1629—Entered holy orders and became chaplain to Sir William Masham. | 1672—Held public debates with the Quakers on points of religious doctrine. |
| 1631—Emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. | 1676—Took up sword to defend colony against Indian uprisings under "King Philip." |
| 1635—Banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for "heretical and seditious" utterances. | 1683—Died at Providence. |
| 1636—Founded the "first settlement for freedom of worship" at Providence. | |

Roger Williams

1604–1683



HE LIVED as a child in Smithfield, within the hub of London town. A mile to the west sat the tyrannical king at Whitehall with his chosen judges. But just beyond, the Thames moved in freedom. And not far from Whitehall and the Star Chamber, a Parliament of free Englishmen met and deliberated in behalf of the people. The boy was drawn by a grim fascination to play just outside the walls of the Newgate Prison. Within these walls lay the political and the religious radicals of the Kingdom. Roger had heard many stories about these dissenters. Once he had witnessed a terrible scene in the parish where he lived. Old Doctor Leighton had been put into the pillory. There had been a huge crowd gathered to see him publicly whipped. And one of his ears was cut off by the executioner and one side of his nose was split. And he was branded in the face with two searing initials—S.S. “Sower of Sedition.” Many times thereafter, Roger saw these letters flaming in his sleep. “Sower of Sedition.”

Gradually the boundaries of his world extended. Far beyond the parish there was a vast new continent. One day Captain John Rolfe had returned to London from America and had

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brought with him his young Indian wife, Pocahontas. And all England had been dazzled by the “prize of his pilgrimage.”

But Roger had heard tales of other pilgrims—men and women who had left England and Holland and traveled across the sea. They were, like himself, people of the upper middle class. And they had gone into exile because they were martyrs of discontent and prophets of something new and better . . .

He was a quick and serious boy. He had scarcely arrived at his teens when he caught the eye of the eminent Puritan lawyer, Sir Edward Coke, who hired him as his amanuensis. Young Roger developed a marked aptitude in shorthand as he transcribed the legal speeches in the Star Chamber Courts where Sir Edward pleaded for the offenders against the Crown. From the learned mind of Sir Edward he acquired the principles of parliamentary government and of common law. And, as he grew older, he rose to comradeship with a number of influential men and women.

He entered the University of Cambridge and “hobnobbed” with the élite of Puritan society. For a time he trifled away his days and nights “breaking rules, reading forbidden books, keeping dogs and cocks, attending boxing matches and taverns.” But gradually “he grew sober.” As he learned to control his physical fires, the light of his mind became focused upon ever more distant horizons.

II

IN HIS twenty-sixth year Roger lived at Oates as chaplain to Sir William Masham. Here in the carved oak halls of the Tudor manor, along the terraces of the Italian garden and in the hunting grounds of the deer and the fox, he mingled with the exclusive aristocracy of England. And one “sweet spring morning” he fell in love with its fairest flower, Lady Jane Whalley. He received an instant rebuff from the lady’s aunt, who asked him politely and frigidly to sum up his worldly possessions. The young preacher idealist replied: “A small library of books.”

ROGER WILLIAMS

Whereupon the negotiations for the young lady's heart came to an abrupt end—so far at least as the young lady was concerned.

But Roger had not as yet lost hope as the spring advanced toward the summer. In the last throes of his romantic ardor he sent to Lady Whalley a tempest of letters, sealing them with emblems of roses and with fleurs-de-lis. To no avail.

And then he fell into an illness. He recovered slowly and convalesced under the golden autumn sunshine in the company of Sir William Masham's daughter Judith—they called her "Jug"—and her maid, Mary. The lady brought his spirits back into harmony as she played for him on the spinet. And the maid, strolling with him along the riverbank, soothed him with her silent sympathy. And then the parishioners of Oates, buzzing with the gossip of their chaplain who had been rejected by a woman above his rank, fell stunned by the thunderbolt of a new surprise. On a December day in the little parish church of High Laver not far from the village of Oates, the Reverend Roger Williams had married Judith Masham's maid, Mary Barnard.

The winter turned slowly into an English spring again.

III

AS ROGER WILLIAMS held the hand of Mary Barnard and pronounced the words of eternal fidelity, he joined hands with the undertrodden throughout the world. He was a self-made middle class preacher—not good enough for the Lady Jane Whalley! Very well, he would reply to her grand rebuff in an equally grand manner. He would bring his fist down with a crash upon the myth of the upper classes. He would shatter their pretensions to bits. It was the solemn warning of an exile—he clasped Mary's hand more tightly—an exile to the ends of the earth, if need be, in order to build a better society among men. A fugitive of lost love to seek a new kind of love.

He had rebelled against the society of Charles II. There were

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other rebels too. Voices called him to the seacoast town of Bristol. In a crowded tavern he met the son of John Winthrop, who had gone to build a new society in America. And over his glass of metheglin his thoughts turned westward to Massachusetts Bay. Wouldn't it be a good idea to take his wife to a land where everybody got a fresh start? . . .

He embarked on the *Lyon* (December 1, 1630) in the season of hard adventure. In February the ship with its human cargo weighed anchor off the storm-ridden coast of Massachusetts. Roger Williams peered across the bay toward the wilderness. And life looked good to him. All things stared upon him "with a weather-beaten face." Here was the Promised Land.

IV

HE HAD left England to begin life anew. But he found the same old life in America. The same tyrannies and persecutions and prejudices and hates. The Puritan divines who had broken away from the Church of England and who had come to America for conscience' sake were now with heavy tyrannous hand inscribing the tablets of their own ascetic dogmas and persecuting with relentless savagery all those who would not obey. Here were the narrowness and the bigotry of the king and of Archbishop Laud displayed under different colors. Old slaveries under new skies.

At first he was silent, but then he began to speak freely and plainly. He preached from his pulpit and hoed his potatoes and marveled at the quirks of the human mind and the cruelties of the human heart. These people in Massachusetts had planted everything but freedom. But at least he, the guest among them, would never hesitate to arraign his hosts whenever he saw an injustice done. And so he gripped the spade and placed his footsteps more firmly upon the ground as he cultivated his little plot of independent soil. The government of New England was a theocracy. Why in this Promised Land, he asked himself,

should a man's political rights be subjected to his religious beliefs? He refused to give the customary pledge of obedience to these church dignitaries. He would start a controversy that would shake this "Commonwealth of Saints" to its very foundations.

The eloquence of his tongue had begun to agitate the people. And the ecclesiastical princes, John Winthrop and John Cotton, had come to regard him with a hostile eye. Cotton Mather had angrily written in his books, "There is a whole country in America like to be set on fire by the rapid motion of a windmill in the head of one particular man." And the established authorities had rallied their forces to stop the preaching of this "particular man."

For, as he fanned his discontent to a flaming heat, he molded a doctrine that rang like an alarm of steel. Who were these hierophants to compel all men to live and to worship and to think and to be judged in accordance with the commandments of a few arbitrary minds? A man, declared Roger Williams, has but a single infallible judge—his own conscience. "I affirm it 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 . . . I affirm that the state should give free and absolute permission of conscience to all men." And as he spoke and developed his thought, he knew at last what it was that gave the oaks of the New England forests their living strength. It was the firmness of the roots in the rock-ribbed soil. "To persecute a man's conscience and his ways of worship is to pluck up the roots and foundation of all common society in the world."

This, declared the Calvinistic rulers of Massachusetts, was the most heretical doctrine ever heard! And so they prepared to "blot into darkness the flaming scourge who preached nothing less than an uprising of the people." With sardonic piety Cotton Mather reflected, "If the people be the governors, who will be the governed?" To him this "perplexing" question was unanswerable. His own conscience was clear. With a Bible in his hands and a prayer on his lips he came into the Newtown

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Courthouse to see if the world couldn't manage another crucifixion.

V

ROGER WILLIAMS was ordered to go on trial in the church of Thomas Hooker at Newtown. It was a bleak and angry looking wooden building with scowling walls and a floor of frozen dirt. Fifty judges of the Commonwealth sat in black-robed silence. Sober, God-fearing men, Defenders of the "Rule of the Saints." The people, too, were present—a hundred of them, sitting in amazement and terror and anticipation. But they took no part in the proceedings. They had no voice.

It was a court of inquisition. There was to be neither a jury nor a written indictment. The leader of the fifty inquisitors, the prosecuting attorney and the final judge was the governor of Massachusetts. The accused man was allowed neither witnesses nor counsel. In the breathless stillness the governor announced the charge. "Dangerous opinions tending to unsettle the Kingdoms and the Commonwealths of Europe." But hold, the sentence would be stayed if the culprit confessed his error.

Roger Williams looked squarely at the judges. "I stand unshaken, sirs. I am ready not only to be bound and banished but if necessary to die for my opinions."

The governor pronounces the verdict. "Guilty . . . Deprived of rights . . . banished . . . outcast from civilized society. . . ."

Friends walked with him silently into the icy streets. The forests were trackless and waist-deep with snow—frozen tombs for the living.

"Tell the judges as a human being before God that your wife is pregnant; that you are sick in body and worn in mind. Plead with them to stay the sentence at least until the spring . . ."

The judge receives the petition. He hesitates. "Well, if he takes a solemn oath that he will cease preaching his opinions, we will permit him to wait out the winter."

Roger Williams refuses. Is one season any different from an-

ROGER WILLIAMS

other when the truth is to be declared? The spring, too, can be hard weather for a man who stifles his voice.

The court issues a warrant for his arrest, dispatches Captain Underhill with fourteen men. But Roger Williams has left for the wilderness three days before their arrival.

A bitter, driving snowstorm. And his wife has remained behind. She will join him later with the little baby that has come—"Freeborn" they have named her.

The north wind stings like a whiplash and the blizzard blinds the eyes. He travels ninety miles from Salem, south by southwest. He seeks shelter in the wigwams of the friendly Indians and eats with them of their beaver meat and warms his hands by their fire. And he wrestles with the irony "that God's children should so persecute God's children." He looks sadly into the tongues of flame. "And we who cannot get together in this world hope to live together in heaven?"

Mile after mile he travels with his compass pointing in the right direction—to the future of decency and human rights. Ninety blood-stained miles through the heart of the winter wilderness, to the Indian island of Sowams-by-the-Sea. Here in the Narragansett territory where the Redskins raised their hands in greeting—"What cheer, friend?"—he found his Providence "northeast by a wooded hill." Upon this spot he was determined to "build a colony where all men may worship God in their own way."

VI

TWELVE FRIENDS followed him to help him build his new sanctuary of freedom. They laid foundations of flattened stones and scalped the forests of their oaks for timber. They planted their gardens and their orchards and plowed their fields and laid out their streets. And then, when they grew tired of their building, they dug out their couches for their final sleep. Five acres of working and sleeping. And no man took an inch more earth than any other man. The first settlers met together to lay the

foundations of a common government. "We whose names are hereunder written . . . do with free and joint consent promise each unto the other that for our common peace and welfare 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 when they had signed their names to their "democratical government," Roger Williams spoke to his fellow free-men: "I desire not that liberty for myself which I would not freely and impartially weigh out to all the consciences of the world besides . . . In this colony we shall open wide our doors so that all the number of the weak and the distressed, scattered throughout New England, may find shelter from their persecution."

In such simple fashion began the first public experiment in human liberty. To Rhode Island came a flock of refugees from oppression—anabaptists, antinomians, generalists, familists, atheists, seekers—a babel of pilgrims who expressed all sorts of political and social and religious doctrines.

To Rhode Island came Anne Hutchinson, banished from Boston for her religious "heresies." She seemed a flaming fanatic even to Roger Williams. "The Lord mercifully redeem her from her illusions," he declared. "And yet I am glad to have her for my neighbor." Here with bleeding footsteps turned Nicholass Upsall and his fellow Quaker, Mary Dyer, who had been snatched from the gallows on Boston Common. Roger Williams debated publicly with the Quakers on the tenets of their religion. He was not sympathetic to their creed. He demanded that they, in common with all the other citizens, should pay their taxes and perform their civic duties. But he never persecuted them.

Here came the Jews from New Amsterdam and Curaçao after they had been refused admission by the Dutch. In Rhode Island they were permitted to build their synagogues and to bury their dead in accordance with the demands of their own faith. All the other "civilized" communities in New England—and old