

BEFORE THE LOYALISTS.

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CHAPTER XI.—ROGER WILLIAMS, ANTINOMIANS, ANABAPTISTS, QUAKERS AND WITCHES.

It is not uncommon to hear persons (connected with denominations whose garments at one time were red with the blood of saints and martyrs) speak of the intolerance of the fathers of New England ; and some persons connected with denominations that never had the opportunity to exercise power, are as ready to stigmatise the Puritans as persecutors of Baptists and Quakers. If the charge is true, it is really a serious one, as Baptists and Quakers of the present day are generally really lovers of liberty and friends of good government.

The colonies of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay were settled by refugees from the tyranny of the Stuarts and the bishops, and the question came home to them in all its earnestness, how shall we preserve our own freedom, for which we have crossed the seas? It is said that self-preservation is the first law of nature, and the settlers of Plymouth and Massachusetts considered that their own liberties and the liberties of their children were dearer to them than anything else. If we return to our native land, they argued, we cannot worship God in our own simple way ; if we go to Virginia, the same prohibition meets us ; and if we allow to be established among us the religion of our persecutors, we shall soon be overpowered. Bancroft, the historian, who is not of the faith of the Puritans, says :—" Why should they open their asylum to their oppressors ? Religious union was made the bulwark of the exiles against the expected attacks from the hierarchy of England. The wide continent of America invited colonization ; THEY (the Puritans) CLAIMED THEIR OWN NARROW DOMAINS FOR THEIR BRETHREN." They were but a handful, and the whole world was ready to strike them down. Shall they open their lines and admit foes within, or shall they close their lines, and present an unbroken front. The world was at war with them, and in war time, a body so weak as they must defend their own inheritance. They were not agreed upon this point. Vane and Cotton, and some others, would have thrown the door wide open and invited exiles of all shades of opinion to partake of their freedom ; but his co-religionists argued that in their position of peril it was no time to warm into life the serpent that would turn against them.

Their first religious difficulties came from within. One of the earliest troublers of " their Israel " was neither catholic nor prelatist, but a man of their own faith and order, Roger Williams. It is said he was a Baptist, but this is not so, and he did not become a Baptist, until later in life, after his expulsion. Roger Williams was a pious young man, a fugitive from the persecution of the Stuarts, a Congregationalist in belief, but a " Leveller " in politics. He arrived in New England in the year 1631, and being godly and zealous, and having precious gifts, " was soon settled as " teacher " in the Congregational church at Salem, but in a short time found himself at variance with the magistrates. At that time the Stuarts had an intense jealousy of Massachusetts, and in 1634 the records say, " The general court received intelligence of some episcopal and malignant parties against the country." Bancroft says " the magistrates on the one hand were scrupulously careful to avoid all unnecessary offence to the English government, on the other were