

MORE YET ON RHODE ISLAND

Before the Revolution Rhode Island was the freest Colony in North America, or in the history of our race. Her Baptist founders had made their settlement a Republic complete in every development of liberty, even while under the nominal rule of a king; they created a government with which there could be no lawful interference by any power in the Old World or the New. Rhode Island had no viceroy; before the Revolution the king had no veto on her laws. In March, 1663, it was enacted that "no tax should be imposed or required of the Colony but by the act of the General Assembly."*

In 1704, Mompesson, the chief-justice of New York, wrote Lord Nottingham that "when he was in Rhode Island the people acted in all things as if they were outside the dominion of the crown."* Rhode Island," says her historian, Arnold, when the United States Constitution was adopted, "for more than a century and a half has enjoyed a freedom unknown to any of her compeers, and through more than half of that period her people had been involved with rival Colonies in a struggle for political existence and for the maintenance of those principles of civil and religious freedom which are now everywhere received in America." (Note: Biography of Signers of the Declaration of Independence, Philadelphia, 1831, 1., p. 341).

The State of Roger Williams had more at stake in the Revolution than any other Colony; founded by men who loved a wider liberty than their fellow-settlers elsewhere, its people were accustomed to enjoy higher privileges than their neighbors, and the destruction of American liberty by the king threatened them with heavier calamities than any British plantation on the Continent. "With scarcely fifty thousand people of all ages and of both sexes, the Baptist State supported three regiments in the Continental army throughout the entire war; (Sabine's American Loyalists, Boston, 1847, p. 15.) an immense number for her, when it is remembered how many men she had to employ for local defence. Rhode Island began the struggle early, and continued inflicting her heaviest blows till victory rested upon the banners of the United States all over their widespread territory. And when

the Constitution of the United States was adopted, requiring each State to sacrifice some of its independence to form a strong General Government, Rhode Island hesitated long before she would accept that grand instrument. The other States, except North Carolina, before 1789 received the plan of government devised by the Convention of 1787. They had, however, never enjoyed full liberty except during the brief period of the war, but to Rhode Island full freedom was an inheritance possessed for many generations, to sacrifice the smallest part of which inflicted great pain. As Baptists we have reason to thank God for the Revolutionary deeds of our heroic brethren in Rhode Island.

*Sabine's American Loyalists, Boston, 1847, p. 15.

t History of the United States, IX., 261.

I Arnold's History of Rhode Island, II., 563.