

## **A HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS** **By Thomas Armitage**

### **THE AMERICAN BAPTISTS**

#### **XII. THE AMERICAN BAPTISTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL LIBERTY**

Dr. Leonard Bacon writes of the Baptists in his 'New England Theocracy' thus: 'It has been claimed for these Churches that from the age of the Reformation onward they have been always foremost and always consistent in maintaining the doctrine of religious liberty. Let me not be understood as calling in question their right to so great an honor.' But until the American Revolution they had scant means, comparatively, to demonstrate the practical soundness of this claim. Yet when the field was open for experimental proof that it was well founded, they were not found faithless in their relations either to the free constitutions of the several States or to that of the United States. They had little to hope from most of their fellow-colonists, who had gone to the verge of their power in using all social and legal forces to persecute and destroy them as a religious body, and that phase of the question was solemnly considered by them. When Dr. Samuel Jones went as one of their committee to present their appeal to the Continental Congress he said: 'It seemed unreasonable to us that we should be called to stand up with them in defense of liberty, if, after all, it was to be a liberty for one party to oppress another.'

The little Baptist colony of Rhode Island had more to lose and less to gain by revolution than any of her twelve sister colonies. Unlike Massachusetts and Virginia, she had no Governor appointed by the Crown, who could veto her acts of legislation. Bancroft tells us that this State enjoyed after the revolution, 'a form of government under its charter so thoroughly republican that no change was required beyond a renunciation of the King's name, in the style of its public acts.'

Revolution would imperil her largest liberties, while complete success in the attempt to secure independence of Britain would add little to the rights which she already possessed. But should she be conquered she must relinquish even these, for the Crown would appoint her a Governor and control her legislation, at least by the power of the veto. Yet no selfish consideration of this sort weighed with the Baptists of Rhode Island. They saw their brethren of other colonies oppressed more than they were, and as their own love of liberty was a genuine growth, they demanded it as the birthright of all. Hence, they were as ready at once to resist encroachment upon the civil liberties of all the colonies as they had been to defy the unjust exactions of a spiritual tyranny upon themselves. They, therefore, carried with them into the struggle against civil oppression the same spirit which had moved them in resisting all encroachment upon the liberties of the soul. Two months before the Declaration of Independence, and thirty-two days before Virginia renounced allegiance to the Crown, Rhode Island repudiated all allegiance to George III, May 4th, 1776; and immediately after the retreat of General Gage from Concord and Lexington, her Legislature voted to send 1,500 men to the scene of

conflict. It is, therefore, a significant testimony to the character of the teaching of Williams and Clarke that the boon which they had given the Rhode Islanders, first the town-meeting and then the Colonial Assembly shorn of all power to touch the question of 'conscience' and shut up to 'civil things,' should in the next century have borne such good fruit. Nearly five generations had passed since the colony was first planted, and now it was willing to imperil its own religious freedom in order to advance the political liberties of other communities. This brought no small strain upon its unselfish patriotism.

The Baptists of Virginia took an equally resolute step in favor of independence. but though under different circumstances, not a jot less honorable. Notwithstanding their persecutions by the Colony itself, the moment that the State Convention met to determine the duty of the Colony, sixty Baptist Churches said to this civil body: Strike the blow! 'Make military resistance to Great Britain, in her unjust invasion, tyrannical oppression and repeated hostilities,' and we will sustain you, ministers and people. Virginia had no sympathy with Puritanism, and in her old devotion to the Stuarts had refused to recognize the authority of the Commonwealth. For this Massachusetts had prohibited all intercourse with her, and under the administration of George III, when Patrick Henry introduced His famous Fifth Resolution into the Virginia Legislature, containing the doctrine of revolution, denouncing the Stamp Act, and refusing taxation without representation, the leading men of that body cried with horror, 'Treason! treason!' Campbell, in his history of Virginia, says: 'Speaker Robinson, Peyton Randolph, Richard Bland, Edward Pendleton, George Wythe, and all the leaders in the House and proprietors of large estates made a strenuous resistance.' True, the wonderful eloquence of Henry secured a majority for the resolution, but the men who voted for it were so alarmed by the cry of treason which it provoked that the next day they secured its erasure from the records. One of the paradoxes of American history has been that, despite the sentiment of many of its leading men thus loyal to the Crown, Virginia should have finally taken front rank amongst the revolting colonies.

Jefferson, in his 'Notes on Virginia,' incidentally supplies the clue to this problem. He states that at the time of the Revolution two-thirds of her population had become Dissenters; for the most part they were Quakers, Presbyterians and Baptists. By the intolerable sufferings and indefatigable labors of the Baptist preachers they had cherished and diffused their own love of liberty throughout the whole colony for half a century. Their memorial to the Convention had deeper root than the feeling of the hour; it was grounded in these evangelical convictions which were shared by a majority of the people of Virginia. That Virginia cast her Royalist antecedents aside and loyally espoused the cause of the revolution was largely due to the fact that Baptist suffering, preaching and democratic practice, had educated her people for the issue. Thomas Jefferson, possibly an advanced Unitarian; Patrick Henry, a devout Presbyterian; and James Madison, thought to be a liberal Episcopalian, felt the throb of the public heart, saw that its patriotism was founded upon religious conviction, and, like wise men, instead of stemming the strong tide

they gave it their leadership, under which it swept on, notwithstanding the opposition of English rectors and the entangling traditions of a grinding hierarchy.

The Baptists of Virginia, however, did not rush hastily into this struggle, nor were they without a definite purpose; they counted the cost and anticipated the legitimate result of their position. The records of the Colonial Convention, June 20th, 1776, say that:

'A petition of sundry persons of the Baptist Church, in the County of Prince William, whose names are thereunto subscribed, was presented to the Convention and read, setting forth that at a time when this colony, with the others, is contending for the civil rights of mankind, against the enslaving schemes of a powerful enemy, they are persuaded the strictest unanimity is necessary among ourselves; and that every remaining cause of division may if possible, be removed, they think it their duty to petition for the following religious privileges, which they have not yet been indulged with in this part of the world, to wit: That they be allowed to worship God in their own way, without interruption; that they be permitted to maintain their own minister's and none others; that they may be married, buried and the like without paying the clergy of other denominations; that, these things granted, they will gladly unite with their brethren, and to the utmost of their ability promote the common cause. Ordered that the said petition be referred to the Committee of Propositions and Grievances; that they inquire into the allegations thereof and report the same, with their opinions thereupon, to the Convention.'

The Baptists concealed nothing. For full liberty, civil and religious, they were ready to give their lives and all that they had, but for less they would risk nothing: they might as well be the civil vassals of Britain as the religious vassals of a republic in Virginia. This was understood all around, and hence they kept influential commissioners in constant attendance on the Legislature and Conventions of the State, from the beginning to the close of the struggle for perfect religious freedom; or, as Bishop Meade expresses it, when their full rights were secured: 'The warfare begun by the Baptists seven and twenty years before was now finished.' They had a great advantage in the fact that the three men who were the most prominently identified with the Revolutionary cause in Virginia espoused their cause and co-operated with them--Jefferson, Henry and Madison. This was not due, perhaps, on their part, to the same deep religious conviction which actuated the Baptists. But in their immense breadth of mind, logical adherence to conclusions drawn from those premises which justified the Revolution, brought these mighty men to the same positions.

Thomas Jefferson comprehended Baptist aims perfectly, for he was in perpetual intercourse with their leading men, and they intrusted him with the charge of their public documents. His mother was an Episcopalian, but his favorite aunt, her sister, Mrs. Woodson, was a Baptist. These two sisters were the daughters of Ishain Randolph, Mrs. Woodson residing in Goochland County. When young he loved to visit her house and accompany her to the Baptist Church, of which she and her

husband were members. It is through the members of his uncle's and aunt's family, as well as through the Madisons, that the tradition has come down that he caught his first views of a democratic form of government while attending these meetings. A letter lies before the writer from Mrs. O. P. Moss, of Missouri, whose husband was a direct descendant of the Woodson family; his mother knew Jefferson intimately, and has kept the tradition alive in the family. She says that 'when grown to manhood these impressions became so fixed that upon them he formulated the plan of a free government and based the Declaration of Independence.'

Jefferson himself speaks of his close intimacy with the Baptists in the following epistle, already referred to in Chapter VIII: 'To the members of the Baptist Church of Buck Mountain, in Albemarle; Monticello, April 13th, 1809:

'I thank you, my friends and neighbors, for your kind congratulations on my return to my native home, and of the opportunities it will give me of enjoying, amidst your affections, the comforts of retirement and rest. Your approbation of my conduct is the more valued as you have best known me, and is an ample reward for any services I may have rendered. We have acted together from the origin to the end of a memorable revolution, and we have contributed, each in the line allotted to us, our endeavors to render its issues a permanent blessing to our country. That our social intercourse may, to the evening of our days, be cheered and cemented by witnessing the freedom and happiness for which we have labored, will be my constant prayer. Accept the offering of my affectionate esteem and respect.'

Elder John Leland speaks of his intimacy with Jefferson. In his Address on an Elective Judiciary, he found it necessary to repel certain charges against his beau ideal statesman, and says: 'I lived in Virginia, from December 1776, until April, 1791, not far from Monticello; yet I never heard a syllable of either of these crimes.' There was a oneness of views and a mutual esteem in all that relates to religious liberty between him and the Baptists. John Leland was in constant communication with him on this subject, and he only spoke their sentiments when he said of Jefferson, that 'By his writing and administration, he has justly acquired the title of the Apostle of Liberty.' The replies of Jefferson to three Baptist Associations, and to the Baptists of Virginia in General Meeting assembled, speak of the satisfaction which the review of his times gave him, in remembering his long and earnest cooperation with them in achieving the religious freedom of America.

Early in his life Patrick Henry evinced his deep sympathy with them on the same point, for Semple says of the immortal patriot and orator and of the efforts to attain full liberty of conscience: 'It was in making these attempts that they were so fortunate as to interest in their behalf the celebrated Patrick Henry; being always the friend of liberty, he only needed to be informed of their oppression -- without hesitation, he stepped forward to their relief. From that time, until the day of their complete emancipation from the shackles of tyranny, the Baptists found in Patrick Henry an unwavering friend.'

It is supposed that he drew up the noble petition of the Presbytery of Hanover, addressed to the Virginia Colonial Convention, in favor of religious liberty, Oct. 7th, 1776, and if he did, it is enough to render his name immortal, for no abler document on the subject was ever submitted to that or any other body. William Wirt Henry, his grandson, claims, that his renowned ancestor was the real author of the sixteenth section of the Virginia Bill of Rights, which guarantees perfect religious liberty. George Mason, Edmund Randolph and Patrick Henry were all members of the Committee that framed it; and Randolph says, that when Mason submitted his draft for the consideration of the Committee, he had not made proper provisions for religious liberty.

Whereupon, Patrick Henry proposed the fifteenth and sixteenth sections in these words:

'That no free government, or the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people but by a firm adherence to Justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue, and by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles. That religion, or the duty we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, and not by force or violence; and, therefore, that all men should enjoy the fullest toleration in the exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience, unpunished and unrestrained by the magistrates, unless, under the color of religion, any man disturb the peace, the happiness, or the safety of society; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity toward each other.'

Mr. Madison, however, who was also a member of the Committee, detected serious danger lurking in the word 'toleration,' and moved this amendment, which was adopted, first by the Committee, and on May 6, 1776, by the Convention:

'That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love and charity toward each other.'

Jefferson was not in the Convention which framed this Bill, but nine years afterwards he served on a Committee of the General Assembly to revise the laws for the new State, when he submitted the following, which was adopted, Dec. 16, 1785, and is still the fundamental law of Virginia. 'An Act to establish Religious Freedom:

'Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religions opinions or belief; but that all men shall

be free to profess and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.'

James Madison had as close relationship to the Baptists as his two illustrious peers, and made himself intimately acquainted with their radical views on the subject of religious equality. Honest John Leland says of him: 'From a child, he was a pattern of sobriety, sturdy and inflexible justice. From an intimate acquaintance with him, I feel satisfied that all the State of Massachusetts, for a bribe, would not buy a single vote of him. A saying of His is fresh in my memory: "It is ridiculous for a man to make use of underhand means to carry a point, although he should know the point is a good one; it would be doing evil that good might come." This saying of his better describes the man than my pen can do.' General Madison, his brother, was a member of a Baptist Church, and their family took a deep interest in the struggles of the denomination. James was one of the youngest members of the Convention which adopted the Bill of Rights, and it required no small judgment and nerve to oppose the idea of 'toleration' on abstract principles there, or to support the tenet that 'all men are entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to their own consciences.' One measure succeeded another, in opposition to the legally established religion of Virginia, in which the Baptists took the leading part at times, and on some measures stood entirely alone, until in the main, through the influence of these three great statesmen, the last step was taken in 1802; the glebes [land belonging to the state-supported churches] were ordered to be sold in payment of the public debt, on the ground that they had been purchased by a public tax, and belonged to the State. Thus ended the struggle for religious liberty in Virginia, and with the disappearance of the Established Church, the last vestige of ecclesiastical tyranny was wiped from the statute-books of that State.

The most worthy Baptist writers have never claimed that their Baptist fathers achieved this grand result alone, nor could such a claim be sustained. They were the most numerous body of dissenters in Virginia, and were a unit in this effort, but they were earnestly aided by all the Quakers and most of the Presbyterians, as lesser but influential bodies. 'Tories' and 'traitors' were held at a large discount in both these denominations, and there were few of them. Indeed, so far as appears, the twenty-seven Presbyterians who met at Charlotte, N.C., May, 1775, to represent the County of Mecklenburg in patriotic convention, were the first American body which declared itself 'a free and independent people; (who) are, and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing association, under the control of no power other than that of our God and the general government of the Congress.' Besides, at that time, there were good reasons why the Quakers, Presbyterians and Baptists should stand firmly together in favor of religious liberty. From 1749, a plan had been openly pushed in England, to force an American Episcopate on all the American Colonies; it excited the deepest alarm in all the non-Episcopal Churches, and did much to fan the revolutionary flame. In 1773 the 'Quebec Act,' to prevent Canada from uniting with the thirteen colonies, had given full freedom of worship and right of property to the Roman Catholic Church there. England also enlarged that province, by extending its lines to the Mississippi on the

west, and the Ohio on the south, so that the five States, now northwest of the Ohio, were then included in Canada. Most of the Protestants in the thirteen colonies regarded this as an English attempt to establish that Church. As to this Protestant Episcopate, Graham says, in His 'Colonial History of the United States.' (ii., 194):

'The most politic of all the schemes that were at this time proposed in the British Cabinet, was a project of introducing an ecclesiastical establishment, derived from the model of the Church of England, and particularly the order of the bishops, into North America. The pretext assigned for this innovation was, that many non-juring clergymen of the Episcopal persuasion, attached to the cause of the Pretender, had recently emigrated from Britain to America, and that it was desirable to create a board of ecclesiastical dignitaries for the purpose of controlling their proceedings and counteracting their influence; but doubtless it was intended, in part, at least, to answer the ends of strengthening royal prerogative in America--of giving to the State, through the Church of England, an accession of influence over the colonists--and of imparting to their institutions a greater degree of aristocratical character and tendency. The views of the statesmen by whom this design was entertained were inspired by the suggestions of Butler, Bishop of Durham, and were continued and seconded by Seeker, Archbishop of Canterbury, and the society instituted for the propagation of the Gospel. This society had received very erroneous impressions of the religious character of the colonists in general, from some worthless and incapable missionaries, which it sent to America; and Seeker, who partook of these impressions, had promulgated them from the pulpit in a strain of vehement and presumptuous invective. Such demeanor by no means tended to conciliate the favor of the Americans to the proposed ecclesiastical establishment. From the intolerance and bitterness of spirit disclosed by the chief promoters of the scheme, it was natural to forebode a total absence of moderation in the conduct of it.'

This iniquitous plan, added to all the other oppressions of Britain, alarmed New England, for, as John Adams said: 'The objection was not merely to the office of a bishop, though even that was dreaded, but to the authority of Parliament, on which it must be founded. . . . If Parliament can erect dioceses and appoint bishops, they may introduce the whole hierarchy, establish tithes, forbid marriages and funerals, establish religion, forbid dissenters.' In 1708, the Assembly of Massachusetts appointed its Speaker, Mr. Cushing, James Otis, Mr. Adams, John Hancock and five others, a Committee on the Consideration of Public Affairs. In treating of this grievance they say to Mr. Deberdt, the agent of Massachusetts in England:

'The establishment of a Protestant episcopate in America is also very zealously contended for; and it is very alarming to a people whose fathers, from the hardships which they suffered under such an establishment, were obliged to fly their native country into a wilderness, in order peaceably to enjoy their privileges, civil and religious. Their being threatened with loss of both at once must throw them into a disagreeable situation. We hope in God such an establishment may never take place in America, and we desire you would strenuously oppose it. The

revenue raised in America, for aught we can tell, may be as constitutionally applied towards the support of prelacy, as of soldiers and pensioners.'

It is not needful to quote authorities to show that Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey were specially excited on the subject, but it may be stated that Virginia resented the aggression as warmly as any of her sister colonies. Boucher, the Episcopal historian in Virginia, espoused the scheme warmly, and in a sermon on 'The American Episcopate,' preached in Caroline County, Va., in 1771, says:

'The constitution of the Church of England is approved, confirmed and adopted by our laws and interwoven with them. No other form of Church government than that of the Church of England would be compatible with the form of our civil government. No other colony has retained so large a portion of the monarchical part of the British constitution as Virginia; and between that attachment to monarchy and the government of the Church of England, there is a strong connection. . . . A levelling republican spirit in the Church naturally leads to republicanism in the State; neither of which would hitherto have been endured in this ancient dominion. . . . And when it is recollected that till now the opposition to an American episcopate has been contained chiefly to the demagogues and independents of the New England provinces, but that it is now espoused with much warmth by the people of Virginia, it requires no great depth of political sagacity to see what the motives and views of the former have been, or what will be the consequences of the defection of the latter.'

The tobacco crop in Virginia was light in 1755 and again in 1758, and the price ran up. Debts had been paid in that staple, but the Assembly decreed that they might now be paid in money at the rate of two pence for a pound of tobacco. The salaries of sixty-five parish ministers were payable in tobacco, and at this rate they were heavy losers. Through Sherlock, Bishop of London, they induced the Council there to pronounce this law void and commenced suits to recover the difference between two pence per pound and the value of the tobacco. As a lawyer, Patrick Henry took sides against the parsons. In the case of Maury, who was to be paid in 16,000 pounds of tobacco, he raised the issue that the King in Council could not annul the law of Virginia. This was his plea in part:

'Except you are disposed yourselves to rivet the chains of bondage on your own necks, do not let slip the opportunity now offered of making such an example of the Rev. plaintiff, as shall hereafter be a warning to himself and his brothers not to have the temerity to dispute the validity of laws authenticated by the only sanction which can give force to laws for the government of this colony, the authority of its own legal representatives, with its council and governor.'

When the jury fixed the damages at one penny, the Bishop of London said that the 'rights of the clergy and the authority of the king must stand or fall together,' and so a joint constitutional and ecclesiastical question met the new question of an episcopate at the first step. This question brought the Presbyterians and Baptists to

common ground, with slight exceptions. The Presbyterians had not been true to the principle of full religious liberty in the Old World more than the Congregationalists had been in the New, and thousands of them had found a home in Virginia as early as 1738, under the promise of protection from that colony. They came to have a touch of fellow-feeling with their suffering Baptist brethren, hence they were able to say in their Hanover Memorial, of 1777: In this enlightened age, and in a land where all of every denomination are united in the most strenuous efforts to be free, we hope and expect that our representatives will cheerfully concur in removing every species of religious as well as civil bondage. Certain it is, that every argument for civil liberty gains additional strength when applied to liberty in the concerns of religion.' 'Honor to whom honor,' the Bible demands. While this contest was in progress, however, another, quite as warm and vastly more important, was waged in regard to the Constitution of the United States, and chiefly through the same agencies. This great civil document was adopted by the Constitutional Convention and submitted for ratification to the several States, September 17th, 1787, nine States being needed to ratify the same. Immediately it met with strong opposition from all the States, some for one reason and some for another. Its only provision on the subject of religion was found in Article VI, thus: 'No religious Test shall ever be required, as a Qualification to any office or public Trust under the United States.' Great dissatisfaction prevailed with many of its provisions, and there was serious danger of its rejection for a time. Dissatisfaction with this provision lodged with the Baptists in all the States, but Virginia became their great battlefield. On the 7th of March, 1788, the representatives of all their Churches met in their General Committee in Goochland, and the minutes of the meeting say: The first Religious Political subject that was taken up was: 'Whether the new Federal Constitution, which had now lately made its appearance in public, made sufficient provision for the secure enjoyment of religious liberty; on which it was agreed unanimously that it did not.' Many of the political and social leaders of Virginia were opposed to the Constitution, and amongst them Patrick Henry, who resisted its adoption in the Virginia Convention, because, as he phrased his difficulty, it 'squinted toward monarchy,' and gave no guarantee of religious liberty.

Here a pleasant incident may be noticed, in which John Leland figures very honorably. James Madison led the Virginia party which favored ratification, but was in Philadelphia during the election of delegates to the State Convention, engaged with John Jay and Alexander Hamilton in preparing that memorable series of political papers, written in defense of the Constitution, and known as the 'Federalist.' When he returned to Virginia, he found that Leland had been nominated in Orange, his own county, by the party opposed to ratification, against himself, as the delegate in favor of that measure. Governor George N. Briggs, of Massachusetts, says, that Leland told him that Madison called on him and carefully explained the purposes of the Constitution with his arguments in its support. The opposing candidates soon met at a political meeting, in the presence of most of the voters, when Madison mounted a hogshead of tobacco, and for two hours addressed his fellow-citizens in a calm, candid and statesmanlike manner, presenting his side of the case and meeting all the arguments of his opponents. Though he was not

eloquent, the people listened with profound respect, and said Leland: 'When he left the hogshead, and my friends called for me, I took it, and went in for Mr. Madison.' 'A noble Christian patriot,' remarks Governor Briggs; 'that single act, with the motives which prompted it and the consequences which followed it, entitled him to the respect of mankind.' Leland's advocacy of Madison's claim to a seat in the Convention led directly to the adoption of the Constitution by Virginia, for at the time of his election it was confirmed by only eight States, Hence, the ninth was absolutely necessary, and at the moment every thing appeared to turn on the action of Virginia. New Hampshire, however, approved the instrument on the 21st of June, but five days before Virginia, and New York followed one month later, namely, on July 26th, 1788. Up to this time, none of the other States had proposed the full expression of religious liberty in the organic law of the United States; this honor was reserved for Virginia. But the struggle was a hard one, and Madison, who at first insisted on its ratification precisely as it was, was obliged to save it by shifting his position. Henry submitted a number of amendments, demanding that they be engrafted into the instrument before it received Virginia's sanction. Amongst these was a Bill of Rights, of which the following was the 20th section, namely: 'The religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men have an equal, natural, and inalienable right to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience, and that no particular sect or society ought to be favored or established by law in preference to others.'

At last Mr. Madison conceded the need of amendments, but urged the danger of disunion and the jeopardy of losing the Constitution, and recommended that the Convention ratify it then, which it proceeded to do; but in connection with that act it also recommended the amendments and directed its representatives in Congress to urge their embodiment in the Constitution. On the 26th of June, 1788, Virginia ratified the great charter, but by the narrow majority of eight votes out of 168. From that moment a most exciting controversy arose in other States on the subject of so altering the Federal Constitution as to make it the fundamental law, providing for religious liberty and equality as the right of all the inhabitants of the land. The Baptists of the whole country aroused themselves and opened a simultaneous movement in that direction. Those of Virginia sent Leland to their brethren of New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and other States to solicit their co-operation, which was granted with but few exceptions. There seems to have been a direct union of effort between the Baptists and the Virginia statesmen on this subject, although the Virginian leaders were divided on other subjects. Patrick Henry became the leader in the next State Legislature and induced that body to memorialize Congress to amend the new Constitution. But fearing that after all Mr. Madison might not heartily sustain that measure, he defeated Madison's election to the United States Senate, and secured the return of Richard Henry Lee and William Grayson, who were pledged to sustain the amendments. Madison was then elected to the Lower house of Congress from his own district, under the pledge that he would sustain them there. At this stage the Baptists consulted with Madison as to

what they had better do under the circumstances, and he recommended them to address General Washington, the new President of the Republic, on the question. This suggestion they followed. They drew up a formal and well-digested presentation of the case, drafted, it is said, by Elder Leland, and sent it to General Washington by a special delegation. This paper is too long to transcribe here, but a synopsis may be given. It was entitled an "Address of the Committee of the United Baptist Churches of Virginia, assembled in the City of Richmond, 8th August, 1789, to the President of the United States of America." After a full review of the terrible conflicts and sacrifices of the Revolution, and the acknowledgment of debt on the part of the country to his great skill and leadership, they say:

'The want of efficiency in the confederation, the redundancy of laws, and their partial administration in the States, called aloud for a new arrangement of our systems. The wisdom of the States for that purpose was collected in a grand convention, over which you, sir, had the honor to preside. A national government in all its parts was recommended as the only preservation of the Union, which plan of government is now in actual operation. When the Constitution first made its appearance in Virginia, we, as a society, feared that the liberty of conscience, dearer to us than property or life, was not sufficiently secured. Perhaps our jealousies were heightened by the usage we received in Virginia, under the regal government, when mobs, fines, bonds and prisons were our frequent repast. Convinced, on the one hand, that without an effective national government the States would fall into disunion and all the subsequent evils; and, on the other hand, fearing that we should be accessory to some religious oppression, should any one society in the Union predominate over the rest; yet, amidst all these inquietudes of mind, our consolation arose from this consideration--the plan must be good, for it has the signature of a tried, trusty friend, and if religious liberty is rather insecure in the Constitution, "the Administration will certainly prevent all oppression, for a WASHINGTON will preside." . . .

Should the horrid evils that have been so pestiferous in Asia and Europe, faction, ambition, war, perfidy, fraud and persecution for conscience' sake, ever approach the borders of our happy nation, may the name and administration of our beloved President, like the radiant source of day, scatter all those dark clouds from the American hemisphere.'

After gracefully expressing their gratitude for his 'great and unparalleled services,' and confiding him in prayer to the 'Divine Being,' the paper is signed: 'By order of the Committee, SAMUEL HARRIS, Chairman, and REUBEN FORD, Cleric.'

General Washington's reply was addressed 'To the General Committee, representing the United Baptist Churches in Virginia.' After thanking them for their congratulations, and expressing his own gratitude to 'Divine Providence' for blessing his public services, he proceeds to write thus:

'If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed by the Convention where I had the honor to preside might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it; and if I could now conceive that the general government might ever be so administered as to render the liberty of conscience insecure, I beg you will be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny and every species of religious persecution. For, you doubtless remember, I have often expressed my sentiments that any man, conducting himself as a good citizen and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience. While I recollect with satisfaction, that the religious society of which you are members have been, throughout America, uniformly and almost unanimously the firm friends to civil liberty, and the persevering promoters of our glorious revolution, I cannot hesitate to believe that they will be the faithful supporters of a free yet efficient general government. Under this pleasing expectation, I rejoice to assure them that they may rely upon my best wishes and endeavors to advance their prosperity,

'I am, gentlemen, your most obedient servant, GEORGE WASHINGTON.'

A month after this correspondence James Madison, with the approval of Washington, brought several Constitutional amendments before the House of Representatives, and amongst them moved the adoption of this:

'Article 1. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.'

The chief difference between the old Article VI and this amendment lay in the fact that in the first instance Congress was left at liberty to impose religious tests in other cases than those of 'office or public trust under the United States,' whereas, this amendment removed the power to make any 'law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.'

This proposition met with great opposition in Congress, but it passed that body September 23d, 1789, and was submitted to the several States for ratification. Eleven of the thirteen States adopted it between November 20th, 1789, and December 10th, 1791, New Jersey voting on the first of these dates and Virginia on the last, and all the rest between, those periods excepting Connecticut and Massachusetts. Thus, the contemned, spurned and hated old Baptist doctrine of soul-liberty, for which blood had been shed for centuries, was not only engrafted into the organic law of the United States, but for the first time in the formation of a great nation it was made its chief corner-stone. For the first time on that subject the quiet, pungent old truth asserted its right to immortality as expressed by

Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected is become the head-stone of the corner.'

But this august event did not end the strife for religious freedom on American soil; the battle must be still pressed on the soil of New England. Drs. James Manning, Samuel Stillman and Isaac Backus had work enough left in Massachusetts. The loyalty of all classes to the full principles of the Revolution was not so easily won, because a large body of the people there were not in favor of entire separation between Church and State. Even John Adams wrote: 'I am for the most liberal toleration of all denominations, but I hope Congress will never meddle with religion further than to say their own prayers.' Yet he thought it as impossible to 'change the religious laws of Massachusetts as the movements of the heavenly bodies.' There was the same opposition in Massachusetts to the ratification of the United States Constitution that there was in Virginia, and much for the same reasons. Isaac Backus took about the same ground that Patrick Henry had taken in Virginia, because he could not see that it sufficiently guaranteed religious liberty. Manning and Stillman were wiser in their generation. Stillman had been chosen a delegate from Boston to the State Convention of Massachusetts, which was to accept or reject this instrument, a body numbering nearly 400 members. Manning hastened to Massachusetts, and for two weeks was indefatigable in argument and appeal to induce all Baptist delegates and other Baptists of influence to aid in securing first all that the unamended Constitution did secure. It was a very grave crisis, the public spirit was in a feverish state, and these two great men had their hands full to secure the full support of their own brethren. They knew that this document had not secured everything needful to them, but they also knew that such a revolution could not go backward excepting through alienation between the States. The Convention was in session for a month, half of which time Stillman and Manning were at work, and when the final vote was taken the Constitution was ratified by 187 to 168 votes. Massachusetts adopted the Constitution of the United States February 6th, 1788. After the vote, in which the Baptists held the balance of power, John Hancock, the President of the Convention, invited Dr. Manning to return thanks to God, and it is said that the lofty spirit of purity and patriotism which marked his prayer filled the Convention with reverence and awe.

So far as the MASSACHUSETTS Baptists were concerned, this great opportunity was neither missed nor mismanaged, but was made an important step toward absolute freedom. Massachusetts had formed a State Constitution in 1780, and in that Convention the Baptists contended with pertinacity for their religious rights. Rev. Noah Alden, a lineal descendant of the Plymouth family, was a member of this Convention, and at that time pastor of the Baptist Church at Bellingham. He was also a member of the Convention which framed the Constitution of the United States. When the famous Massachusetts Bill of Rights was reported he moved to recommit the third article, which gave power to the rulers in religious affairs. He was made a member of a committee of seven to consider the subject, and although he could not secure equality before the law for all sects in Massachusetts, he did procure so much concession as to excite marvel at the time, it was so far in

advance of anything that this State had previously known in religious liberality. It recognized the power of the civil rulers to provide for the support of religion in towns where such provision was not made voluntarily; it required attendance on public worship, if there were any religious teachers 'on whose instructions they can conscientiously and conveniently attend;' it provided that the people should 'have the exclusive right of electing their public teachers, and of contracting with them for their support and maintenance;' it gave the right of the hearer to apply his public payments of religious tax 'to the support of the public teacher or teachers of his own religions sect or denomination, provided there be any on whose instruction he attends,' and 'every denomination of Christians, demeaning themselves peaceably and as good subjects of the commonwealth, shall be equally under the protection of the law, and no subordination of any one sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law.' This wonderful gain in the Bill of Rights did not dis-establish the Church in Massachusetts, which was still protected under the several exceptions of the article, but it broke its tyrannical power, and in a little more than half a century it wrought the entire separation of Church and State in Massachusetts. It met with the most violent resistance in the Convention, and a leader of the opposition said: 'We believe in our consciences that the best way to serve God is to have religion protected and ministers of the Gospel supported by law, and we hope that no gentleman here will wish to wound our tender consciences.' 'The plain English of which,' says Leland, 'is, our consciences dictate that all the commonwealth of Massachusetts must submit to our judgments, and if they do not they will wound our tender consciences.' Alden was nobly sustained in this Convention by Dr. Acaaph Fletcher, who was also a member, and a strong advocate of this measure. Under its provisions many ungracious acts were perpetrated, and all sorts of quibbles, pretexts and pleas that ingenious but wounded pride could invent were invoked to annoy the Baptists, but this Bill struck a death-blow at persecution proper in Massachusetts. The new Constitution was soon put to the test, for several persons were taxed at Attleboro, in 1780, to support the parish Church, although they attended elsewhere. Elijah Balkom was seized, and having sued the assessors for damages, judgment was had against him; but, on an appeal to the County Court at Taunton, he obtained damages and costs. In 1783 a similar case, in many respects, occurred in Cambridge, where Baptists were sued to support the Standing Order, and their money extorted, but they sued for its return and it was paid back. These annoyances continued and sometimes were grievous enough. In a letter from Dr. Backus to William Richards, dated May 28th, 1796, he says: 'Though the teachers and rulers in the uppermost party in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Vermont are as earnest as ever Pharaoh was to hold the Church of Christ under the taxing power of the world, yet that power is daily consuming by the spirit of God's mouth.' To meet and thwart these attempts the Warren Association kept a vigilant committee in existence. In 1797 it consisted of Drs. Stillman, Smith and Backus, with Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Grafton, to whom the oppressed Churches appealed for counsel and help, and they did good service indeed. John Leland said, 1801: 'In the year 1800 about six hundred dollars were taken from the Baptists, in Partridge-field, for the building of a meeting-house in said town for another denomination. The case is now in law, hung up, and what the

event will be we know not.' Great hopes were entertained that the Convention held November 3d, 1820, to amend the Constitution, would entirely dissolve the last bond of union between Church and State in Massachusetts; but this was defeated, chiefly by the determined opposition of John Adams, who was a member of that body. Isaac Backus died in 1806, after a life of astonishing activity in the cause of religious freedom. But his survivors adopted the motto of Caesar, 'that nothing is done while anything remains undone,' and they pressed their case with new zeal, encouraged by their gains in securing a modification of the Bill of Rights. The dissatisfaction with the partial measure, however, was very great. Leland gave it voice in many addresses and in numerous articles from the press. He said:

'The late Convention, called to revise the Constitution, still retains the same principle. Strange, indeed, that Massachusetts, all alone, in opposition to all the other States, should still view religion a principle of State policy, the Church a creature of State, and ministers in the light of State pensioners! That the Legislature should have the power to clothe the majority of each town or parish with authority to compel the people, by a legal tax, to support the religious teachers among them. What a pity! When will men realize that a constitution of civil government is a charter of powers bestowed and of rights retained, and that private judgment and religious opinions are inalienable in their nature, like sight and hearing, and cannot be surrendered to society. Consequently, it must be impious usurpation for ecclesiastics or civilians to legislate about religion.'

In 1811 Judge Parsons gave a decision to the effect, that no congregation or society not incorporated by law could claim all the privileges which the dissenters claimed under the Bill of Rights, and alarm awakened them throughout the State. Petitions were circulated everywhere and sent to the Legislature, praying for a revision of the religious laws, and the people of Cheshire elected Elder Leland to that body for the purpose of pleading their cause. There he delivered that remarkable speech, in which reasoning, satire, eloquent declamation and sound statesmanship hold such equal and changeful parts. The following characteristic extracts are not familiar to the present generation of Baptists and may be reproduced:

'Mr. Speaker, according to a late decision of the bench, in the County of Cumberland, which, it is presumed, is to be a precedent for future decisions, these non-incorporated societies are nobody, can do nothing, and are never to be known except in shearing time, when their money is wanted to support teachers that they never hear. And all this must be done for the good of the State. One hundred and seventeen years ago wearing long hair was considered the crying sin of the land. A convention was called March 18 1694, in Boston, to prevent it; after a long expostulation the Convention close thus: "If any man will now presume to wear long hair, let him know that God and man witnesses against him." Our pious ancestors were for bobbing the hair for the good of the Colony; but now, sir, not the hair but the purses must be bobbed for the good of the State. The petitioners pray for the right of going to heaven in that way which they believe is the most

direct, and shall this be denied them. Must they be obliged to pay legal toll for walking the King's highway, which has been made free for all? . . . Since the Revolution, all the old States, except two or three in New England, have established religious liberty upon its true bottom, and yet they are not sunk with earthquakes or destroyed with fire and brimstone. Should this commonwealth, Mr. Speaker, proceed so far as to distribute all settlements and meeting-houses, which were procured by public taxes among all the inhabitants, without regard to denomination, it is probable that the outcry of sacrilege, profanity and infidelity would be echoed around; and yet, sir, all this has been done in a State which has given birth and education to a Henry, a Washington, a Jefferson and a Madison, each of whom contributed their aid to effect the grand event. . . . These petitioners, sir, pay the civil list, and arm to defend their country as readily as others, and only ask for the liberty of forming their societies and paying their preachers in the only way that the Christians did for the first three centuries after Christ. Any gentleman upon this floor is invited to produce an instance that Christian societies were ever formed, Christian Sabbaths ever enjoined, Christian salaries ever levied, or Christian worship ever enforced by law before the reign of Constantine. Yet, Christianity did stand and flourish, not only without the aid of the law and the schools, but in opposition to both. We hope, therefore, Mr. Speaker, that the prayers of thirty thousand, on this occasion, will be heard, and that they will obtain the exemption for which they pray.'

But their prayers were not heard, and their most strenuous efforts at reform were unavailing, until the people arose in their might and so amended the Bill of Rights in 1833 that the Church and State were forever separated, since which time what Leland called 'the felonious principle' has been banished from the statute books of all the States, and, as Leland did not die until 1841, he breathed free air for the last seven years of his life, to his great health and delectation. He lived to be eighty-seven years of age, and deserved ten years of fresh air after he had labored sixty-seven years to vindicate the civil and religious rights of all men. Rest, royal old warrior, rest on the Cheshire hills, which thou didst so much to make free!

IN VERMONT the contest was neither so long nor so severe. The lands which now form Vermont were claimed in part by New Hampshire and in part by New York, and were originally known as the New Hampshire grants. Their inhabitants applied to the Continental Congress for admission into the confederacy in 1776, but, New York opposing, they withdrew. The next year they proclaimed themselves independent and formed a Constitution, and were admitted into the Union in 1791. Dr. Asaph Fletcher had removed from Massachusetts to Cavendish, Vermont, in 1787, and was a member of the Convention which applied for the admission of the State into the Union. He was also a member of the Convention of 1793 to revise the State Constitution, when he contended for the separation of Church and State, but the contrary idea prevailed. Such a vital subject could not long rest, however, especially with Dr. Fletcher in active service as a member of the Legislature, a Judge of the County Court, a member of the Council, and a State Presidential elector. In 1789, two years after Fletcher's settlement in Vermont, he was followed

by Rev. Aaron Leland, from Bellingham, Mass. His liberal political sentiments soon commended him to his fellow-citizens, and he was elected to the General Assembly. There he served as Speaker of the House for three years, and for four years he was one of the Governor's Council. For five years, also, he was Lieutenant-Governor of the State, and for eighteen he was an Assistant Justice in the County Court. He had large influence amongst the Baptists of the State, as well as with its citizens generally, and in 1828 he declined a nomination for Governor, fearing that the office would interfere too much with his pastoral duties. He was a Fellow of Middlebury College, possessed great mental power, and was a very forcible debater. While he was Speaker of the House a proposition came before it for a dissolution of Church and State, and in the discussion some one was weak enough to say that Christianity would go down if the State withdrew its support. This stirred all the fervor of his spirit. He left the chair and took part in the debate, delivering one of the strongest speeches ever heard in Vermont in favor of religious liberty, the main strength of his position being that God had founded his Church upon a rock, and that the gates of hell should not prevail against her.

A third Vermont Baptist champion of religious freedom is found in Ezra Butler, who, in 1785, removed from Claremont, N. H., to Waterbury, Vt., where, about 1800, he became a Baptist and formed a Church, which he served as pastor for more than thirty years. His talents and high character induced his fellow-citizens to intrust him with civil office, first as town clerk, justice of the peace, and then as member of the Legislature, also as Chief Justice for Washington County. In 1813-15 he served his State in Congress, and from 1826 to 1828 he was Governor of Vermont, with Aaron Leland as Lieutenant-Governor, both being Baptist ministers at the time. Under these great leaders and their compeers the public sentiment finally threw aside the union of Church and State in Vermont, distancing Massachusetts by a number of years in that race. SOUTH CAROLINA Baptists stood firmly for religious liberty. The State formed its Constitution in 1776, and amended it in 1778 and 1790; but the Baptists were early awake to the need of securing their rights, and as early as 1779 the Charleston Association made it the duty of a standing committee to labor for the perfect equality of all religious people before the law, and for this purpose they were 'to treat with the government in behalf of the Churches.' No one contributed more to the result of civil and religious liberty in Georgia than did the noted Richard Furman, D.D., of whom a brief sketch may here be given. He was born at AEsopus, N. Y., in 1755, but, while an infant, his parents removed to South Carolina and settled on the High Hills of Santee. Here, after a good early education, he became a Christian, and at the age of eighteen began to preach, with a remarkable degree of clearness, devotion and force, for a youth. The district where he labored lay to the east and north of the rivers Wateree and Santee, where wickedness abounded. He formed many Churches, which united with the Charleston Association. He was extremely modest, but his unassuming ardor, with his ripeness of judgment in interpreting Scripture, and His uncommon pungency of appeal awakened universal surprise and admiration. He was scarcely twenty-two when the Revolution commenced, and he avowed himself at once a firm Whig and threw all his powers into the American cause. When the British invaded South Carolina he was obliged to

retire into North Carolina and Virginia, and afterwards Cornwallis put a price on his head. In Virginia he became intimate with Patrick Henry, who presented him with certain books, which are cherished in the Furman family to this day. In 1787 he accepted the pastoral charge of the Baptist Church in Charleston, where he remained for eight and thirty years, and became intimate with those patriot families, the Pinckneys, Rutledges and Sumpters, together with whom he labored earnestly for the Revolutionary cause. When independence was achieved, and the leading men of the State were selected to meet in convention and form a new Constitution, their suffrages made him a member of that body, in which he contended earnestly against the exclusion of Christian ministers from certain civil offices, and did much to secure soul-liberty in the State. So nobly had he blended his patriotism with the refinement and urbanity of a holy character, that on the death of Washington and Hamilton he was appointed by the Cincinnati and the Revolution Society to deliver orations in tribute to their memory.

Taken altogether, he was a most eminent servant of God and of his country. The late Dr. W. R. Williams said:

'Of this eminent servant of the Lord it is difficult to express what is just and proper without the appearance of excessive partiality. To represent him in the ordinary terms of eulogy, or to depict his virtues by any of the common standards of description, would be the direct way to fall short of the truth. The Providence of God gives few such men to the world as Dr. Furman . . . Where others were great he was transcendent, and where others were fair and consistent in character, he stood forth lovely and luminous in all the best attributes of man. . . . In general learning he had made such progress as would have ranked him among men of the first intelligence in any country. . . His studies were chiefly confined to mathematics, metaphysics, belles-lettres, logic, history and theology. He cultivated also an acquaintance with the ancient classics, particularly Homer, Longinus and Quintillian, with whose beauties and precepts he was familiar. He read with sedulous attention all the writers of the Augustan age of English literature, and whatever the language possessed valuable in criticism and immortal in poetry. There are few men, it is believed, who have had their minds more richly stored with the fine passages of Milton, Young, Pope, Addison, Butler and other great authors than Dr. Furman. From them he could quote properly, and appositely for almost every occasion, what was most beautiful and eloquent. He possessed uncommon talent in discerning the utility of these studies connected with the mind, and in condensing them into such abstracts as to make them clearly intelligible to every capacity. In this way he could analyze and expound the principles of moral philosophy and logic, with a facility which could only have resulted from a ready mastery over the subjects. But that which imparted a charm to his whole life was the godly savor which pervaded and sweetened all his superior endowments and qualifications. All the vigor of his noble intellect was consecrated to God. All the matured fruit of His long experience was an oblation to the Father of Mercies. All the variety of his acquirements, and all the vastness of his well-furnished mind, were merged in one prevailing determination to know nothing save Christ crucified.'

