

CHAPTER IV.

AMERICAN BAPTISTS

In transferring this discussion from England to America it changes location and environments, but virtually has to do with the same people. The Baptists of America, at first, came from England and Wales, with possibly a few from other countries. It has been repeatedly stated, however, that the Baptists of this country owe their origin to Roger Williams, who, with a small company, started a church of their own by baptizing each other without any previous authority.

All Baptists delight to honor Roger Williams, and vie with each other to perpetuate his name as one of our greatest Americans, and one who did much to establish Baptist principles, especially “Religious Liberty.”

What we deny is, that Baptists of America are indebted to his irregular church for the administration of baptism, or owe their origin as a denomination to him. We might state just here, by way of parenthesis, that a number of churches, in church capacity, emigrated to this country and settled here with the same constitution formed in the old world. We might state also that Roger Williams himself was too good a Baptist (as will be seen later) to try to impose such an administration upon the denomination.

Baptists on coming to America were still dubbed as Anabaptists by their persecutors. Nich Ayres, a Baptist preacher, of

New York, was given legal license on January 23, 1721, in which he was denominated an “Ana-baptist”. Semple’s History Va. Bap., p. 444.

The first Baptist church (Kioka) ever planted on the soil of Georgia, was incorporated as an “Ana-baptist Church”. Hist. Bap. of Southern States, p. 32. They were everywhere dubbed as Ana-baptists by their persecutors.

NEW ENGLAND BAPTISTS.

We will begin with Roger Williams. Prof. W. J. McGlothlin tells us: “Roger Williams reached conviction that only immersion of a believer was baptism, was baptized by E. Holliman, and he baptized Holliman and others.” Guide to Church Hist., p. 212. This was irregular proceeding, and is often held up before us by the advocates of alien immersion.

“Richard Scott, who was a Baptist with Williams at providence, but who afterward became a Quaker, writing against Williams thirty-eight years afterward, says: “I walked with him in the Baptists’ way about three or four months...in which time he broke from his society, and declared at large the ground and reason for it; that their baptism could not be right because it was not administered by an apostle.” Armitage, p. 279.

Later, in a letter to Winthrop , he repudiated his baptism on the ground of “authority”. It is clear to be seen that Williams first

took this rash step, but after mature thought he repudiated this irregular baptism as being invalid, and never did again adhere to it.

Henry S. Burrage quotes S. L. Caldwell thus: “But Williams remained only a few months in connection with the church. He had doubts in reference to the validity of his own baptism and the baptism of his associates on account of the absence of ‘authorized administrators.’ For him there was no church, and no ministry left. The apostolic succession was interrupted and apostolic authority had ceased. It was the baptizer, and not the baptism, about which he doubted. He was a high church Ana-baptist.” *Hist. New England Baptists*, p. 23.

“The General Association of Connecticut, in 1745, put on record the declaration that ‘if Mr. Whitfield should make his progress through this government, it would by no means be advisable for any of our ministers to admit him into their pulpits, or for any of our people to attend upon his preaching and administrations.” *Hist. New England Baptists*, p. 63. Here is the General Association of this New England State taking this high landmark ground. They advise against pulpit affiliation with the great Whitfield, and go so far as to advise the people to not even hear him preach, or look upon his “administrations,” much less receive them. This was exactly one hundred years before the coming of J. R. Graves to Tennessee.

This clearly shows how the denomination stood in New England. That some individuals broke faith with the denomination at large was true then, is true now, will always be true.

G. D. B. Pepper in an address (“Baptists and the National Centenary”): “There have been individuals, in some instances prominent ministers, who have believed, thought, and practiced, in some respects, contrary to the common faith. Some churches have been led to place themselves, at least for awhile, in opposition to the general belief. But the denomination has been wise in its action in such cases. When possible it has allowed dissent and dissenters to remain within it... A break or schism has taken place only when dissent has so made issue with the denomination that without the break the doctrine of the dissent must be endorsed... Such has been its practice hitherto. It has thus far stood together in doctrine a compact body.” Hist. New England Bap., pp. 286-287