

**Brief account of the Society for propagating the gospel among the Indians and others in North-America. Boston January 1798.**

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BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE Society for propagating the Gospel among the *Indians* and Others NORTH-AMERICA.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE Institution, Design, &c. of the Society for propagating the Gospel among the Indians and others in North-America.

IN the year 1762, a number of gentlemen associated with the design of establishing a society similar to that of which we are now about to give an account. They collected a large fund, and obtained a charter of incorporation from the government here, and began warmly and zealously to prosecute their pious and benevolent object. But, when the act of their incorporation was sent to England for allowance, the Archbishop of Canterbury,<sup>\*</sup> jealous lest this should interfere with the society established in Great-Britain, or perhaps unwilling that persons not well affected to episcopacy should obtain new influence and power by this means, obtained from the king a negative on the incorporating bill. It fell of course, and the zeal of its supporters in a great measure fell with it; for no more was heard concerning it till after the Revolution which made us an independent people.

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\* Jasper Mauduit's letter to Mr. Bowdoin, dated April 7, 1763.

In the year 1787, a commission from the society in Scotland, for propagating christian knowledge, was received by a number of gentlemen in Boston and its vicinity, to superintend the funds of the society which were devoted to christianizing the aboriginal natives of America. Ashamed that more solicitude for this object should be discovered by foreigners than by themselves, these gentlemen revived the former plan, and associated for the purpose of forming a society similar to that in Scotland. They petitioned the General Assembly for a charter, which was granted them, with the adequate powers, at the close of the same year, 1787.

Their next object was to raise such funds as should be necessary for the purposes which they had in view. Two methods occurred, as proper to be taken. One was, to obtain a Brief from the Assembly for a collection in all the churches of the state. This was cheerfully granted; but it was by no means so productive as might have been expected 3 expected, the whole amount of it being only 1561 dollars and one cent. The other was a private subscription among the members of the society and other benevolent and pious persons. This was adopted with more success; so that now the funds

of the society, appropriated to their general purposes, yield an annual income of 338 dollars and 74 cents.

The late Hon. John Alford, Esq. of Charlestown, in his last will, devised a large sum of money to be devoted to the purpose of spreading the knowledge of the gospel among the heathen. His executor, the late Richard Cary, Esq. had never, till the incorporation of this society, found any body of men to whom he might entrust this sum, with a prospect of its being applied agreeably to the intentions of the donor. To them, however, he transferred it, and the annual income arising from it is 414 dollars and 36 cents.

In the disposal of this money, the society have consulted the best interests of the Indians, to whom it is solely appropriated. They assist in the support of the Rev. Mr. Mayhew of Martha's Vineyard, Mr. Hawley of Marshpee, and Mr. Sargeant of New-Stockbridge, all of whom are missionaries to the Indians. On Martha's Vineyard they support a number of small schools for Indian children. The society have also furnished to the schools which are supported by other means at Marshpee, Oneida, and New-Stockbridge, books, paper, and every necessary. Believing that to civilize these people is one great and necessary step towards christianizing them, the society have supplied the Indian inhabitants of New-Stockbridge with many implements of husbandry, such as ploughs, chains, and hoes. They have assisted them in building school-houses and a house for their minister; and they have defrayed the expense of printing the assembly's catechism, which had been translated into the language of these Indians. The society have also been careful to distribute books upon pious and practical subjects, in such numbers as they thought expedient and useful. In this way, since the first establishment of the institution, the Indians have received 38 bibles, 84 testaments, 150 spelling-books, 85 primmers, 48 Watts's psalms and hymns, 18 psalters, and 79 other books, amounting in the whole to 544.

Notwithstanding the discouragements which have attended almost all the attempts to christianize the Indians, the society feel it to be their duty still to continue them. Their funds will not admit of sending missionaries into distant parts of the continent, or to seek out those nations of Indians who are wholly unconnected with the white inhabitants. Their attempts are confined to those tribes interspersed among the white inhabitants, or in their neighbourhood. The wish of the society is to propagate and cherish the spirit of Christianity in the minds of these people, and, as their means and opportunity will admit, gradually to diffeminate christian knowledge among more distant tribes.

That part of the funds of the society, which is not appropriated solely to the Indians, has 4 has been expended by them in purchasing school-books, and books of piety and devotion, which have been distributed among the poor inhabitants in the eastern parts of this commonwealth. This distribution has been followed with the best effects. Children have had the means of instruction, and persons

in more advanced life have had the serious impressions, early made upon their minds, revived and strengthened, which they would otherwise have been in great danger of losing in places where they cannot enjoy the advantage of attending upon the public institutions and ordinances of Christianity. In prosecution of these salutary purposes, the society have given away, since the year 1787, 310 bibles, 768 testaments, 969 spelling-books, 634 psalters, 1566 primers, 94 of Watts's psalms and hymns, 78 of Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul, and 4024 other books, mostly pamphlets, but many large and valuable treatises, making in the whole (if we include what were given to the Indians) 8987. Some of these books have been given to the society, in consequence of their publickly requesting the aid of pious and charitable persons in effecting the purposes of their incorporation.

It will be observed that "Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul" is mentioned in the above catalogue of books given away by the society, and the publick will have an idea of the nature of the practical books distributed when it is said that they bear a very near resemblance to this excellent treatise. Books of controversy, never, in a single instance, have entered the society's catalogue; for their object is not to establish modes and forms, nor to propagat any private or party systems; their object is, to promote the interests of true religion, and bring men to know and obey "the truth as it is in Jesus."

It has been suggested, that these books have, in some places, been partially and improperly distributed. None of these complaints have been authenticated to the society, and they hope that there is no foundation for them. They made it a rule, so long as it was found useful and practicable, to furnish their missionaries with books to be distributed, according to their judgment, in the several places where they preached and baptized. When they had no missionaries, or when these gentlemen found it difficult to carry the books with them in journeys of some hundreds of miles, the society sent them to gentlemen of honour, character and abilities, in different places, requesting them to take the trouble of furnishing their poor neighbours according to their best judgment.—If, in any one instance, (and in more than one, the society has no grounds for suspicion), this has not been done, they can only express their regret, and declare, that they always meant to employ persons of integrity and virtue only, in this pleasing office.

Missionaries were mentioned, in the last paragraph, as employed by the society. These missionaries were sent to the vacant towns and plantations in the eastern parts of this commonwealth, and the society have been enabled to send them by means of grants made to them by the General Assembly of this commonwealth. In consequence of a petition 5 petition from the society, presented in the year 1791, the treasurer was directed to pay them five hundred dollars a year, for three years. An account of the manner in which this money had been expended was printed and laid before

the General Court, January, 1795, with a petition, that the grant should be continued: this was so far complied with as that the treasurer was directed to advance five hundred dollars more to the society. This they have expended in the following manner, viz.

The sum remaining of the former grant was 70 Dolls.

Received of the treasurer in 1796, 500

570

Paid in 1796. To Rev. Mr. Cossin, 100

Rev. Mr. Johnson, 100

Rev. Mr. Strickland, for a mission of 3 months, 150

In 1797. To Mr. Cossin, 100

Rev. Mr. Eaton, 100

550

Remains of the grants, 20

The persons whom the society have employed as missionaries were either personally known to them, or were recommended by persons in whom they could place confidence. They have reason to believe that their services were useful; they know that they were acceptable. The people attended upon their ministrations with great readiness and apparent satisfaction. They baptized great numbers of children and many adults. In several places they have gathered churches, and in more have established and confirmed habits of regard to the duties and offices of religion which were formed before. Their discourses and their conversation have tended to check the progress of error and vice, and to confirm the wavering. Full and grateful testimonials have been received by the society from many places on these subjects; and earnest requests presented to them, that they would continue their attentions of this kind. Should the grants be continued by the General Assembly, (which they hope), these requests will be complied with.

The allowance made to the missionaries of fifty dollars a month will not be deemed extravagant, when it is said, that they are always ordained ministers, who have a charge at home, and a pulpit which they must supply. This, it is expected, they will do from their allowance; and they are charged

also never to be burdensome to the people among whom they minister, but to prove to them that a disinterested regard to their good alone has induced their visit. But

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But, the views of the society, with respect to the manner in which their missions should be conducted, will appear more plainly from the following copy of the instructions which are regularly given to all their missionaries, viz.

“To A. B. Missionary, &c.

“Rev. Sir,

“You will please to attend, during your mission, to the following instructions, adopted by the society for propagating the gospel among the Indians and others in North-America, and given to all their missionaries.

“First. You will improve every opportunity of giving private and public religious instructions to the objects of your mission. You will not suffer a day to pass, during the continuance of it, without attempts of this kind.

“Secondly. You will be careful to spend as little time as possible in places where the people enjoy the ordinances of religion. Those who are without these privileges, the poor and the destitute, are the objects of your mission.

“Thirdly. You will not accept of any reward from those to whom you minister, excepting necessary support. Let the gospel be preached freely.

“Fourthly. You will not, during your mission, attempt the purchase of lands, or any other secular business, lest the people should suppose that you are governed by interested motives in coming among them.

“Fifthly. You will keep a daily journal, from the time of your leaving home, of your proceedings, particularly a list of the baptisms which you may administer, and an exact account of the manner in which you distribute the books entrusted to your care. The society wish you the presence and blessing of Heaven; and in their name I subscribe myself Your, &c.

E. F. Secretary. C. D. President.”

It has been the custom of the society to advance one half of their allowance to the missionaries on their setting out, but not to pay the other till they have exhibited the journal required by the above instructions.

Conscious that they have no other motive than a wish to do good, the society submit the above account of the manner in which they have discharged their trust, to the General Assembly and to their fellow citizens. They may have erred in their judgments, but they know that their intentions have been pure. They ask the aid of the government, and of the pious and munificent, to enable them to prosecute the objects of their institution; and request the prayers of all good men, that the blessing of Heaven may crown their endeavours with success. By order.

*Boston, January, 1798. Peter Thacher, Secr'y.*

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List of the Officers of the Society.

*His Honour Moses Gill, Esq. President.*

*Hon. Oliver Wendell, Esq. Vice-President.*

*Ebenezer Storer, Esq. Treasurer.*

*Rev. John Eliot, Vice-Treasurer.*

*Rev. Peter Thacher, D. D. Secretary.*

*Rev. Jedidiah Morse, D. D. Assistant-Secretary.*

Select Committee.

*Hon. Thomas Dawes, Esq.*

*William Phillips, jun. Esq.*

*Rev. Mr. Samuel West*

*Rev. Peter Thacher, D. D.*

*Rev. Joseph Eckley, D. D.*

List of Members.

Nathaniel Appleton, *Esq.*

Jeremy Belknap, *D. D.*

*Rev.* Alden Bradford.

*Hon.* Richard Cranch.

John Clarke, *D. D.*

*Hon.* Francis Dana.

*Hon.* Thomas Dawes.

Joseph Eckley, *D. D.*

*Rev.* John Eliot.

*Rev.* Nathaniel Emmons.

*Rev.* Levi Frisbie.

*His Honour* Moses Gill, *Esq.*

David S. Greenough, *Esq.*

*Rev.* Abiel Holmes.

*Hon.* Benjamin Lincoln, *Esq.*

*Rev.* Daniel Little.

*Hon.* John Lowell, *Esq.*

*Hon.* Jonathan Mason, *Esq.*

Jedidiah Morse, *D. D.*

*Rev. Phillips Payson.*

*William Phillips, jun. Esq.*

*Hon. William Phillips, Esq.*

*Rev. Eliphalet Porter.*

*Mr. Samuel Salisbury.*

*Ebenezer Storer, Esq.*

*Hon. James Sullivan, Esq.*

*His Excellency Increase Summer, Esq.*

*Peter Thacher, D. D.*

*Hon. Cotton Tufts.*

*Hon. Oliver Wendell, Esq.*

*Rev. Samuel West.*

*Joseph Willard, D. D.*

*Samuel Williams, LL. D.*

*Mr. Ebenezer Wight.*

*Mr. James White.*

*Mr. William Woodbridge.*