



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,* 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.

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. Affamed that more sollicitude 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,

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

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 disseminate christian knowledge among more distant tribes.

That part of the funds of the society, which is not appropriated solely to the Indians, has

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.



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 Morfe, 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, <i>Esq.</i> | Jedidiah Morfe, <i>D. D.</i> |
| Jeremy Belknap, <i>D. D.</i> | <i>Rev. Phillips Payson.</i> |
| <i>Rev. Alden Bradford.</i> | <i>Hon. William Phillips, Esq.</i> |
| <i>Hon. Richard Cranch.</i> | <i>William Phillips, jun. Esq.</i> |
| John Clarke, <i>D. D.</i> | <i>Rev. Eliphalet Porter.</i> |
| <i>Hon. Francis Dana.</i> | <i>Mr. Samuel Salisbury.</i> |
| <i>Hon. Thomas Dawes.</i> | <i>Ebenezer Storer, Esq.</i> |
| Joseph Eckley, <i>D. D.</i> | <i>Hon. James Sullivan, Esq.</i> |
| <i>Rev. John Eliot.</i> | <i>His Excellency Increase Sumner, Esq.</i> |
| <i>Rev. Nathaniel Emmons.</i> | <i>Peter Thacher, D. D.</i> |
| <i>Rev. Levi Frisbie.</i> | <i>Hon. Cotton Tufts.</i> |
| <i>His Honour Moses Gill, Esq.</i> | <i>Hon. Oliver Wendell, Esq.</i> |
| David S. Greenough, <i>Esq.</i> | <i>Rev. Samuel West.</i> |
| <i>Rev. Abiel Holmes.</i> | Joseph Willard, <i>D. D.</i> |
| <i>Hon. Benjamin Lincoln, Esq.</i> | Samuel Williams, <i>LL. D.</i> |
| <i>Rev. Daniel Little.</i> | <i>Mr. Ebenezer Wight.</i> |
| <i>Hon. John Lowell, Esq.</i> | <i>Mr. James White.</i> |
| <i>Hon. Jonathan Mafon, Esq.</i> | <i>Mr. William Woodbridge.</i> |