EARLY MISSIONARY EFFORTS AMONG THE INDIANS.

THE REV. JOHN ELIOT was styled by his contemporaries, and he is known to posterity, as "the Apostle to the Indians." A truer philanthropist than he did not exist among the early New Englanders. In his day the feeling toward the Indians was not kindly. It seems as if the opinion prevailed then, which has since been embodied in the discreditable phrase, that "the only good Indian is a dead one." The Puritans pronounced the Indians children of the devil, and thought they did a service in ridding the world of as many of them as possible. Yet the conversion and civilization of the natives of America were among the professed objects for which the Puritans left England. The charter of Massachusetts granted by Charles I. contains an expression of the hope that the settlers to whom it is granted "may win and incite the natives of the country to the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and Savior of mankind and the Christian faith, which is our royal intention, and the adventurers' free profession is the principal end of this plantation." The first seal of Massachusetts represented an Indian giving utterance to the words, "Come over and help us."

John Eliot was a native of Nasing, in Essex, where he was born in 1604. Little is known about his family and his early years. It is unquestionable that he received a good education, but where or by whom is
uncertain. His own words imply that his family were God-fearing persons who trained him with care. About the year 1630 he became usher in a school kept by the Rev. Thomas Hooker at Little Baddow, near Chelmsford. Hooker was one of the most popular Puritan clergymen of his time. His preaching at Chelmsford had been very effective; but his eloquent tongue was silenced by Laud, because he would not conform on certain points of ritual upon which Laud set great store. At the request of several influential members of his congregation, he took pupils, and engaged John Eliot as usher. The result was that Eliot became imbued with Hooker's opinions, and inspired with a desire to become a preacher of the gospel. Referring to his sojourn in Hooker's house, he wrote that "to this place I was called through the infinite riches of God's mercy in Christ Jesus to my poor soul; for here the Lord said unto my dead soul, Live; and through the grace of Christ I do live, and I shall live forever. When I came to this blessed family, I then saw, and never before, the power of godliness in its lively vigor and efficacy."

Eliot, having apparently incurred the suspicion of the ecclesiastical authorities, and finding insurmountable obstacles interposed to his following the profession of teacher, resolved to cross the Atlantic. He was one of sixty passengers in the ship "Lyon," which arrived at Boston on the 3d of November, 1631. Among the passengers were the wife, the eldest son, and other children of Governor Wintrop. The congregation of the first church of Boston earnestly desired that Eliot should become their pastor. Before leaving England he had promised to be the pastor in America of several
families of Puritans, who contemplated emigrating thither, and, as they fulfilled their intention and settled at Roxbury, he kept his promise by settling there also. A year after landing at Boston he was married, his wife being a lady whose acquaintance he had made in England, and who followed him to America.

In a work published in 1654, entitled the "Wonder-working Providence of Sion's Saviour in New England," the following account is given of the founding of the church at Roxbury, of Roxbury itself, and of Eliot:

"The fifth church of Christ was gathered at Roxbury, situated between Boston and Dorchester, being well watered with cool and pleasant springs issuing forth from the rocky hills, and with small freshets watering the valleys of this fertile town, whose form is somewhat like a wedge, double-pointed, entering between the two fore-named towns, filled with a very laborious people, whose labors the Lord hath so blessed that in the room of dismal swamps and tearing bushes they have very goodly fruit trees, fruitful fields and gardens, their herd of cows, oxen, and other young cattle of that kind about three hundred and fifty, and dwelling-houses near upon one hundred and twenty. Their streets are large, and some fair houses, yet have they built their house for church assembly destitute and unbeautified with other buildings. The church of Christ here is increased to about one hundred and twenty persons. Their first teaching elder called to office is Mr. Eliot, a young man at his coming hither of a cheerful spirit, walking unblamable, of a godly conversation, apt to teach, as by his indefatigable pains, both with his own flock and the poor Indians, doth appear, whose language he learned purposely to help
them to the knowledge of God in Christ, frequently preaching in their wigwams and catechising their children."

Few incidents of importance are preserved as to Eliot's life as pastor at Roxbury. The most noteworthy relates to an early stage in his career there, when he was taken to task by the rulers of Massachusetts for having improperly reflected upon their conduct. His offense consisted in censuring them in a sermon for having made peace with the Pequot Indians without consulting those among the people who were entitled to vote. Three clergymen who were appointed to "deal with him," brought him to acknowledge that he had erred in holding that the magistrates could not conclude a peace on their own authority, and he made public acknowledgment of his mistake. He was one of the clergymen who actively took part against Mrs. Anne Hutchinson. He was as uncharitable as any of his colleagues in treating that unfortunate woman, who was punished for her independence of spirit with excommunication and banishment.

In the year 1646, fifteen years after he had settled in New England, Eliot began to preach to the Indians in their own tongue. Before so doing he had spent some time in mastering their language. He learned it from a young native employed in his house, whom he describes as "a pregnant-witted young man who had been a servant in an English house, pretty well understood his own language, and had a clear pronunciation."

Irrespective of the philanthropy which prompted Eliot to render service to the Indians, there was an influence which specially moved him. While others held these Indians to be children of the devil, he firmly
believed them to be descendants of the lost tribes of the house of Israel. To raise these people from their fallen and degraded state was, in his opinion, a sacred duty. He was not singular in thinking that the Indians were of Jewish descent; the same theory still finds adherents. The origin of the North American Indians is involved in as great mystery in our day as it was when Eliot lived. Anything may be conjectured about them with plausibility, because so very little is known with certainty. Yet it is no longer doubtful that these Indians were not the first or only inhabitants of the country before the advent of white men. Another race, called Mound Builders, which has long been extinct, possessed the land before the Indians, and they were either driven from it southward or exterminated. The lot of the Indians, owing to the conduct of the white men who have mastered and supplanted them, cannot, at the worst, be more deplorable than that of the Mound Builders whom these Indians subdued and succeeded.

After laboring for two years to obtain a colloquial command over the tongue spoken by the Indians of Massachusetts, Eliot considered himself qualified for preaching to them. The first Christian sermon in the Indian tongue delivered on the North American continent was delivered by Eliot at Nonantum on the 28th of October, 1646. His text was the 9th and 10th verses of the 37th chapter of Ezekiel—"Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding
great army." In his sermon he explained the character of Christ, the purpose and manner of His appearance upon earth. He told them of the judgment day, when the wicked are to suffer and the good are to be rewarded. He urged them to repent of their sins as fallen children of Adam, and to pray to God and accept Christ as their Savior. He invited questions after his sermon, and he found it as difficult to return satisfactory replies as in our day Bishop Colenso did in the case of the inquiring Zulu.

After satisfying their curiosity, Eliot received their thanks. He neither spared himself nor them. His sermon lasted an hour and a quarter, and the conference three hours. As a reward for their patient attention, he distributed tobacco among the men and apples among the children. This was the beginning of a course of teaching which Eliot kept up during forty years, in addition to discharging his duties as pastor of Roxbury. He underwent many dangers as well as severe toil. What he sometimes endured, and the spirit which always animated him, can be gathered from his own words to Mr. Winslow: "I have not been dry, night or day, from the third day of the week until the sixth, but so traveled, and at night pull off my boots, wring my stockings, and on with them, and so continue. But God steps in and helps. I have considered the Word of God, II. Timothy, ii. 3, 'Endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.'"

One of the first fruits of his teaching was to excite a desire on the part of the Indians to have their children educated in the English fashion. A convert named Wampas brought his own son to Eliot, and three other children, of whom the youngest was four and the eldest
was nine, with the request that they might be brought up by him in the fear and knowledge of God. The same Indian and two others sought and found situations in English families, with a view of being better instructed in religion. Difficulties of various kinds had to be overcome. In addition to accepting the religious faith offered to them by the English missionary, the Indians copied the English fashion of cropping their hair. This exposed them to the derision of their unconverted brethren. But they had a still harder trial to undergo. Speaking for his fellow converts, Wampas told Eliot that “on the one hand, the other Indians hate and oppose us because we pray to God; on the other, the English will not put confidence in us, and suspect that we do not really pray.” Eliot admitted that such a suspicion was entertained by some of the English, adding that, for his part, he considered it groundless.

It was natural that the Powaws, or priests, should have objected to Eliot’s work and have placed obstacles in his path. He had the triumph of converting one Powaw, but he found it hard to satisfy another who asked him how it happened that the English were twenty-seven years in the country before attempting to teach their religion to the Indians. The Powaw urged that if this had been done sooner much sin might have been prevented; “but now some of us are grown old in sin.” All that could be said by way of defense and explanation was that the English had repented them of their neglect, as was evinced by the efforts which Eliot and others were then making. As a consequence of the adoption of Christianity, the Indians had to change many old habits and customs, and in
doing so they were often perplexed. They were enjoined to renounce polygamy; but they asked which of their wives should they put away? They were told that gaming was sinful; but they asked was it permissible to repudiate debts contracted before their conversion through gaming with non-praying Indians? This last question gave Eliot great concern. He could not reply that gaming was lawful, nor would he countenance the breach of a promise. He found a way out of the dilemma by urging on the creditor that gaming was sinful, and persuading him to reduce his claim by one half; by informing the debtor that, though he had sinned by gaming, yet that he must fulfill his promise, and by inducing him to pay one half of what he owed. This compromise was adopted in all cases of the kind, but it led to the result of a winner at play counting upon receiving and the loser of paying half the amount in each case, so that the change was no real improvement.

The conversion of Cutshamakin, an Indian Sachem, was one of Eliot’s triumphs. He did not find this Sachem a very meek or tractable Christian. On the contrary, the Sachem was not gratified to see the members of his tribe walking in new paths. He complained bitterly that the converts ceased to pay tribute to him as in the old time, and feared that he might eventually be left without any revenue. His complaint was diligently investigated. The Indians alleged that they had paid the accustomed tribute to their chief; that at one time he had received from them six bushels of maize, and twenty at another; that he had obtained their services in hunting for several days; that fifteen deer had been killed for him; that two acres of land had been
broken and a large wigwam built for him. Eliot held that this was an ample payment for one year. He eventually learned that the Sachem's real grievance was, that the converted Indians were not so ready as the others to comply with all his orders and submit to his despotic rule.

Eliot's labors to benefit the Indians were so much appreciated in Massachusetts that, on the 26th of May, 1647, the General Court passed the following resolution:—"It is ordered that £10 be given to Mr. Eliot as a gratuity from this Court in respect of his pains in instructing the Indians in the knowledge of God, and that order be taken that the £20 per annum given by the Lady Armine for that purpose may be called for and employed accordingly." The tidings of his work crossed the sea and became the subject of deliberation in Parliament. It was held to be the duty of "the godly and well-affected" to aid the enterprise, and a resolution was passed on the 17th of March, 1647, desiring the committee on plantations to prepare an ordinance "for the encouragement and advancement of learning and piety in New England." No result followed till the 27th of July, 1649, when an ordinance to the same effect being passed, a corporation was founded for the propagation of the gospel in New England: a general collection was ordered to be made in the churches of England and Wales, and the clergymen were required to read the ordinance from their pulpits. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge issued an appeal in support of the undertaking. Though the sum placed at the disposal of the corporation was not large, yet it sufficed to establish schools for the Indians, to supply them with implements of husbandry, and to defray the cost
of printing Eliot's translation of the Bible and other books into the Indian tongue.

When Charles II. became king it was feared that the corporation for propagating christianity among the Indians would share the fate of other institutions established during the commonwealth. Happily, the corporation for the propagation of the gospel found a warm supporter in Robert Boyle, through whose representations Lord Chancellor Clarendon advised the king to grant a new charter to it. Under this charter, Boyle was appointed governor, and he directed the affairs of the corporation with great zeal, earning Eliot's heartfelt gratitude.

It was Eliot's conviction that, unless the praying Indians, as the converts were always styled, lived in the European fashion there was a fear lest they should lapse from the right path. Accordingly, he planned a town where they might live together. It was called Natick, being situated on the banks of the Charles River, eighteen miles to the southeast of Boston. Natick is described as a town covering six thousand acres, wherein one hundred and forty Indians dwelt. It had three long streets, two on the north side and one on the south. A bridge, built by the Indians, spanned the river. There was a fort for their protection. Some families dwelt in wigwams; others in houses on the English model. A large building served as a place of meeting on Sundays and a school-house on week-days. It had an upper floor, in one corner of which a room was partitioned off to serve as a bed-chamber for Eliot.

After the praying Indians had taken up their abode at Natick they applied to Eliot to devise a plan of mu-
municipal government for them. He had previously induced the converts to agree to the following, among other conditions:—"Powawing" and drunkenness were to be punished with a fine of 20s. for each offense; the person convicted of stealing was to restore fourfold the amount taken; the profane of the Sabbath was to be fined 20s.; a wife-beater was to pay the same fine; while murder and monstrous crimes were to be punished with death. The converts likewise agreed to pray in their wigwams, to say grace before and after meat, to cease howling, greasing their bodies, and adorning their hair, and to follow the English fashions.

Eliot held that all governments should be founded on the pattern given in the Old Testament; he was anxious that England should set an example in this respect, holding that "it would be a blessed day in England when the word of God shall be their Magna Charta and chief law book, and when all lawyers shall be divines and study the Scriptures." It was natural, then, that he should give effect to his views at Natick, and should persuade the Indians there to divide the community into hundreds and tithings, and should appoint rulers over hundreds, rulers over fifties, and rulers over tens, or tithing men. He enjoined the payment of tithes on strictly scriptural grounds, and the Indians consented to do as he desired. Having settled the manner in which, subject to the General Court of Massachusetts, these Indians should govern themselves, Eliot induced them to enter into a solemn covenant. On the 6th of August, 1651, they assembled together, and, after divine service, the following declaration received their assent:—

"We are the sons of Adam. We and our forefathers
have a long time been lost in our sins; but now the mercy of the Lord beginneth to find us out again. Therefore, the grace of Christ helping us, we do give ourselves and our children to God, to be His people. He shall rule us in all our affairs, not only in our religion and affairs of the church, but also in all our works and affairs in this world. God shall rule over us. The Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our law-giver; the Lord is our King, He will save us. The wisdom which God hath taught us in His book, that shall guide us and direct us in the way. O Jehovah! teach us wisdom to find out thy wisdom in thy Scriptures. Let the grace of Christ help us, because Christ is the wisdom of God. Send thy Spirit into our hearts, and let it teach us. Lord, take us to be thy people, and let us take thee to be our God.”

Nine years after these proceedings a further step was taken in the direction of putting the praying Indians on a footing of equality with their white brethren. A church on the congregational model was founded there, so that the Indians of Natick enjoyed the same civil and religious privileges as the Puritans of Boston. In the strict observance of their religious duties the Indians were patterns to many of their white brethren. They even complained, not without reason, that white men did not seem to be sufficiently scrupulous in their religious observances. On the other hand, the white men expected the Indians to be faultless, and regarded any error on their parts as the evidence of an ineradicably perverse nature.

The most grievous trial which the praying Indians had to endure, and the most desponding period in Eliot’s dealings with them, was during the year of the
war, commonly called King Philip's war, which began in 1675. This was the most vigorous effort as well as the last combined attempt of the Indians to exterminate the white men in New England. The loss of life was great on both sides; as many as six hundred of the settlers were slain. Much property was destroyed. Thirteen towns were laid in ruins; hundreds of dwellings were burned to the ground. Whilst the hostilities between the Indians and white men were in progress, the position of the praying Indians was very trying. Their brethren in race regarded them as enemies; the white men did not count them as friends. Indeed, all Indians were not only regarded as foes at heart, but every Indian's life was in danger at the hands of the exasperated and panic-stricken whites. The General Court, unable to withstand the pressure of public opinion, ordered that the Indians at Natick should be transported for safe custody to Deer Island. They quietly submitted to their fate. After the death of Philip the Indians were permitted to return, at their own expense, to their old homes. Such as did return keenly felt that the love and charity, which they had been enjoined to practice, were not displayed towards them. King Philip's war proved the hopelessness of any struggle in the field between Indians and white men, while it gave a blow to the spread of Christianity among the Indians. The latter were indisposed to listen to teachers whose brethren flagrantly violated the precepts which they inculcated.

In 1797, one hundred and twenty-one years after the war which ended with Philip's death, the Rev. Stephen Badger, minister at Natick, was asked to give an account of the Indians there. He was then in his seven-
ty-second year, and had beheld many changes. The white men had ousted the Indians from their property and offices at Nat’ick before the time that Mr. Badger wrote; the church members had been reduced to two or three; one of them was an aged Indian woman, who could still understand the tongue of her people, but could not speak it. At the present day not an Indian in existence can speak the language which Eliot learned in order to preach the gospel, and into which he translated the Bible. His translation of the Bible is a monument of vast labor. The only practical value of that translation now consists in the service it renders to the philological students who investigate the dead tongue of an extinct race. Besides the Bible, Eliot translated the catechism and Baxter’s “Call to the Unconverted” and the “Practice of Piety.” He labored zealously and without ceasing during a long life. In 1688 he wrote to Boyle, saying, “I am drawing home,” and on 20th May, 1690, he passed away, in his eighty-sixth year, uttering the words, “Welcome, joy.”

Eliot’s wife, whom he married the year after he settled in New England, died three years before him. He had six children, of whom a son and a daughter alone survived him. He owed much to his wife, who managed his household admirably. He was not exacting in domestic affairs, and his tastes were so simple that he was very easily pleased; he liked the plainest food, and he drank water from choice. He had two great aversions—wigs and tobacco. Wearing wigs he regarded as a lust of the flesh, and tobacco he considered a weed produced by satan for man’s injury.

The blunders with which Eliot is chargeable are few and trivial, while his good deeds are innumerable. His
character is without reproach; he was one of the small band of Puritans in whom there was no guile. Unhappily, he could not leave behind him a body of men imbued with his spirit and fitted to continue his work from generation to generation. Had the Indians on the North American Continent been constantly treated in the spirit which animated Eliot, the history of the United States would be free from many grievous stains. It was not Eliot’s fault that the Indians of New England faded away till the land wherein they were once supreme did not contain a single survivor. His memory is still held in honor as that of one who loved his fellow-men, and who devoted a long and laborious life to their service.