

John Eliot's Brief Narrative

(1670)

[John Eliot (1604–1690), 1 “The Apostle to the Indians,” came to New England in 1631, and began his ministrations to the Indians in their own language in 1646. His great work, the translation of the Bible into the tongue of the Massachusetts Indians, was finished in 1658 and published 1661–63. He wrote a number reports on the progress of Christianity among the Indians, of which the Brief Narrative was the last. This pamphlet gives an interesting picture of the conditions of evangelisation among the natives at the end of the first generation of intercourse with the colonists. The movement which was so vigorously started by Eliot was checked before his death by King Philip's war, 1675–6.]

To the Right Worshipful the Commissioners under his Majesties' Great-Seal, for Propagation of the Gospel amongst the poor blind Indians in New-England

Right Worshipful and Christian Gentlemen:

THAT brief Tract of the present state of the Indian-Work in my hand, which I did the last year on the sudden present you with when you call'd for such a thing; That falling short of its end, and you calling for a renewal thereof, with opportunity of more time, I shall begin with our last great motion in that Work done this Summer, because that will lead me to begin with the state of the Indians under the hands of my Brethren Mr. Mahew and Mr. Bourn. 1

Upon the 17th day of the 6th month, 1670, there was a Meeting at Maktapog near Sandwich in Plimouth-Pattent, to gather a Church among the Indians: There were present six of the Magistrates, and many Elders, (all of them Messengers of the Churches within that Jurisdiction) in whose presence, in a day of Fasting and Prayer, they making confession of the Truth and Grace of Jesus Christ, did in that solemn Assembly enter into Covenant, to walk together in the Faith and Order of the Gospel; and were accepted and declared to be a Church of Jesus Christ. These Indians being of kin to our Massachuset-Indians who first prayed unto God, conversed with them, and received amongst them the light and love of the Truth; they desired me to write to Mr. Leveredge to teach them: He accepted the Motion: and performed the Work with good success; but afterwards he left that place, and went to Long-Island, and there a godly Brother, named Richard Bourne (who purposed to remove with Mr. Leveredge, but hindered by Divine Providence) undertook the teaching of those Indians, and hath continued in the work with good success to this day; him we ordained Pastor: and one of the Indians, named Jude, should have been ordained Ruling-Elder, but being sick at that time, advice was given that he should be ordained with the first opportunity, as also a Deacon to manage the present Sabbath-Day Collections, and other [4] parts of that Office in their season. The same day also were they, and such of their Children as were present, baptized. 2

From them we passed over to the Vineyard, where many were added to the Church both men and women, and were baptized all of them, and their Children also with them; we had the Sacrament of the Lords Supper celebrated in the Indian-Church, and many of the English-Church

gladly joyned with them; for which cause it was celebrated in both languages. On a day of Fasting and Prayer, Elders were ordained, two Teaching-Elders, the one to be a Preacher of the Gospel, to do the Office of a Pastor and Teacher; the other to be a Preacher of the Gospel, to do the Office of a Teacher and Pastor, as the Lord should given them ability and opportunity; Also two Ruling-Elders, with advice to ordain Deacons also, for the Service of Christ in the Church. Things were so ordered by the Lord's guidance, that a Foundation is laid for two Churches more; for first, these of the Vineyard dwelling at too great a distance to enjoy with comfort their Sabbath-communion in one place, Advice was given them, that after some experience of walking together in the Order and Ordinances of the Gospel, they should issue forth into another Church; and the Officers are so chosen, that when they shall do so, both Places are furnished with a Teaching and Ruling-Elder. 3

Also the Teacher of the Praying Indians of Nantuket, with a Brother of his were received here, who made good Confessions of Jesus Christ; and being asked, did make report unto us that there be about ninety Families who pray unto God in that Island, so effectual is the Light of the Gospel among them. Advice was given, that some of the chief Godly People should joyn to this Church, (for they frequently converse together, though the Islands be seven leagues asunder) and after some experience of walking in the Order of the Gospel, they should issue forth into Church-estate among themselves, and have Officers ordained amongst them. 4

The Church of the Vineyard were desirous to have chosen Mr. Mahew to be their Pastor: but he declined it, conceiving that in his present capacity he lieth under greater advantages to stand their Friend, and do them good, to save them from the hands of such as would bereave them of their Lands, &c., but they shall always have his counsel, instruction and management in all their Church-affairs, as hitherto they have had; he will die in this service of Jesus Christ. The Praying-Indians of both these islands depend on him, as God's Instrument for their good. [5] Advice also was given for the setling of Schools; every Child capable of learning, equally paying, whether he make use of it or no: Yet if any should sinfully neglect Schooling their Youth, it is a transgression liable to censure under both Orders, Civil and Ecclesiastical, the offence being against both. So we walk at Natick. 5

In as much as now we have ordained Indian Officers unto the Ministry of the Gospel, it is needed to add a word or two of Apology: I find it hopeless to expect English Officers in our Indian Churches; the work is full of hardship, hard labour, and chargeable also, and the Indians not yet capable to give considerable support and maintenance; and Men have bodies, and must live of the Gospel: And what comes from England is liable to hazard and uncertainties. On such grounds as these partly, but especially from the secret wise governance of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Harvest, there is no appearance of hope for their souls feeding in that way: they must be trained up to be able to live of themselves in the ways of the Gospel of Christ; and through the riches of God's Grace and Love, sundry of themselves who are expert in the Scriptures, are able to teach each other: An English young man raw in that language, coming to teach among our Christian-Indians, would be much to their loss; there be of themselves such as be more able, especially being advantaged that he speaketh his own language, and knoweth their manners. Such English as shall hereafter teach them, must begin with a People that begin to pray unto God, (and such opportunities we have many) and then as they grow in knowledge, he will grow (if he be diligent) in ability of speech to communicate the knowledge of Christ unto them. And seeing they must have Teachers amongst themselves, they must also be taught to be Teachers: for which cause I have begun to teach them the Art of Teaching, and I find some of them very capable. And

while I live, my purpose is, (by the grace of Christ assisting) to make it one of my chief cares and labours to teach them some of the Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the way how to analyze, and lay out into particulars both the Works and Word of God; and how to communicate knowledge to others methodically and skilfully, and especially the method of Divinity. There be sundry Ministers who live in an opportunity of beginning with a People, and for time to come I shall cease my importuning of others, and onely fall to perswade such unto this service of Jesus Christ, it being one part of our Ministerial Charge to preach to the World in the Name of Jesus, and from amongst them to gather Subjects to his holy Kingdom. The Bible, and the Catechism drawn [6] out of the Bible, are general helps to all parts and places about us, and are the ground-work of Community amongst all our Indian-Churches and Christians. 6

I find a blessing, when our Church of Natick doth send forth fit Persons unto some remoter places, to teach them the fear of the Lord. But we want maintenance for that Service; it is chargeable matter to send a Man from his Family: The Labourer is worthy of his Hire: And when they go only to the High-ways and Hedges, it is not to be expected that they should reward them: If they believe and obey their Message, it is enough. We are determined to send forth some (if the Lord will, and that we live) this Autumn, sundry ways. I see the best way is, up and be doing: In all labour there is profit; Seek and ye shall find. We have Christ's Example, his Promise, his Presence, his Spirit to assist; and I trust that the Lord will find a way for your encouragement. 7

Natick is our chief Town, where most and chief of our Rulers, and most of the Church dwells; here most of our chief Courts are kept; and the Sacraments in the Church are for the most part here administered: It is (by the Divine Providence) seated well near in the center of all our praying Indians, though Westward the Cords of Christ's Tents are more enlarged. Here we began Civil Government in the year 1650. And here usually are kept the General-Trainings, which seven years ago looked so big that we never had one since till this year, and it was at this time but a small appearance. Here we have two Teachers, John Speen and Anthony; we have betwixt forty and fifty Communicants at the Lord's Table, when they all appear, but now, some are dead, and some decriped with age; and one under Censure, yet making towards a recovery; one died here the last Winter of the Stone, a temperate, sober, godly man, the first Indian that ever was known to have that disease; but now another hath the same disease: Sundry more are proposed, and in way of preparation to joyn unto the Church. 8

Ponkipog, or Pakeunit, is our second Town, where the Sachems of the Bloud (as they term the Chief Royal-Line) had their Residence and Rights, which are mostly Alienated to the English Towns: The last Chief Man, off that Line, was last year slain by the Mauquzogs, against whom he rashly (without due Attendants and Assistance, and against Counsel) went; yet all, yea, his Enemies say, He died valiantly; they were more afraid to kill him, than we was to died; yet being de- [7] serted by all (some knowingly say through Treasoon) he stood long, and at last feel alone: Had he had but 10 Men, yea 5 in good order with him, he would have driven all his Enemies before him. His Brother was resident with us in this Town, but he is fallen into sin, and from praying to God. Our Chief Ruler is Ahauton, an old stedfast and trusty friend to the English, and loveth his Country. He is more loved than feared; the reins of his bridle are too long. Waken is sometimes necessarily called to keep Courts here, to add live and zeal in the punishment of Sinners. Their late Teacher, William, is deceased; He was a man of eminent parts, all the English acknowledge him, and he was known to many: He was of a ready wit, sound judgment, and affable; he is gone unto the Lord; And William, the Son of Ahauton, is called to be Teacher in

his stead. He is a promising young-man, of a single and upright heart, a good judgment, he Prayeth and Preacheth well, he is studious and industrious, and well accounted of among the English. 9

Hassunnimesut is the next Town in order, dignity, and antiquity; sundry of our chief Friends in the great work of Praying to God, came from them, and there lived their Progenitors, and there lieth their Inheritance, and that is the place of their desires. It lieth upon Nichmuke River; the people were well known to the English so long as Connecticut Road lay that way, and their Religion was judged to be real by all that travelled that journey, and had occasion to lodge, especially to keep a Sabbath among them. The Ruler of the Town is Anuweekin, and his brother Tuppukkoowillin is Teacher, both sound and godly Men. This Ruler, last Winter, was overtaken with a Passion, which was so observable, that I had occasion to speak with him about it; he was very penitent; I hold him, That as to man, I, and all men were ready to forgive him. Ah! said he, I find it the greatest difficulty to forgive myself. For the encouragement of this place, and for the cherishing of a new Plantation of Praying Indians beyond them, they called Monatunkanet to be a Teacher also in that Town, and both of them to take care of the new Praying-Town beyond them. And for the like encouragement, Captain Gookins joyned Petahheg with Anuweekin. The aged Father of this Ruler and Teacher, was last year Baptized, who hath many Children that fear God. In this place we meditate ere long (if the Lord will, and that we live) to gather a Church, that so the Sabbath-Communion of our Christian Indians may be the more agree- [8] able to the Divine Institution, which we make too bold with while we live at such distance. 10

Ogquonikongquamesut is the next Town; where, how we have been afflicted, I may not say. The English Town called Marlborough doth border upon them, as did the lines of the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin; the English Meeting-house standeth within the line of the Indian Town, although the contiguity and co-inhabitation is not barren in producing matters of interfering; yet our godly Indians do obtain a good report of the godly English, which is an argument that bringeth light and evidence to my heart, that our Indians are really godly. I was very lately among them; they desired me to settle a stated Lecture amongst them, as it is in sundry other Praying Towns, which I did with so much the more gladness and hope of blessing in it, because through Grace the Motion did first spring from themselves. Solomon is their Teacher, whom we judge to be a serious and sound Christian; their Ruler is Owannamug, whose grave, faithful, and discreet Conversation hath procured him real respect from the English. One that was a Teacher in this place, is the man that is now under Censure in the Church; his sin was that adventitious sin which we have brought unto them, Drunkenness, which was never known to them before they knew us English. But I account it our duty, and it is much in my desire, as well to teach them Wisdom to Rule such heady Creatures, as skill to get them to be able to bridle their own appetites, when they have means and opportunity of high-spirited enticements. The Wisdom and Power of Grace is not so much seen in the beggarly want of these things, as in the bridling of our selves in the use of them. It is true Dominion, to be able to use them, and not to abuse ourselves by them. 11

Nashope is our next Praying Town, a place of much Affliction; it was the chief place of Residence, where Tahattawans lived, a Sachem of the Blood, a faithful and zealous Christian, a strict yet gentle Ruler; he was a Ruler of 50 in our Civil Order; and when God took him, a chief man in our Israel was taken away from us. His only Son was a while vain, but proved good, except in the Scripture, was Elected to rule in his Father's place, but soon died, insomuch that this place is now destitute of a Ruler. The Teacher of the place is John Thomas, a godly understanding Christian, well esteemed of by the English: his Father was killed by the

Mauquaogs, shot to death as he was in [9] the River doing his Eele-wyers. This place lying in the Road-way which the Mauquaogs haunted, was much molested by them, and was one year wholly deserted; but this year the People have taken courage and dwell upon it again. 12

In this place after the great Earthquake, there was some eruption out of the Earth, which left a great Hiatus or Cleft a great way together, and out of some Cavities under great Rocks, by a great Pond in that place, there was a great while after often heard an humming noise, as if there were frequent eruptions out of the Ground at that place: yet for Healthfulness thee place is much as other places be. For Religion, there be amongst them some Godly Christians, who are received into the Church, and baptized, and others looking that way. 13

Wamesut is our next Praying-Town; it lyeth at the bottom of the great Falls, on the great River Merymak, and at the falling-in of Concord River; the Sachem of this Place is named Nomphon, said to be a Prince of the Bloud, a Man of a real Noble Spirit: A Brother of his was slain by the Mauquaogs as he was upon a Rock fishing in the great River. In revenge whereof he went in the forementioned rash Expedition, but had such about him, and was so circumspect, that he came well off, though he lost one principal Man. This place is very much annoyed by the Mauquaogs, and have much ado to stand their ground. 14

In this Place Captain Gookins ordered a Garrison to be kept the last year, which Order while they attended they were safe; but when the Northern Sachems and Souldiers came, who stirred up ours to go with them on their unsuccessful Expedition, the Town was for the most part scatter'd and their Corn spoyled. 15

The Teacher of this Place is named George: they have not much esteem for Religion, but I am hopefully perswaded of sundry of them; I can go unto them but once in a year. 16

Panatumket is the upper part of Merimak-Falls; so called, because of the noise which the Waters make. Thither the Penagwog-Indians are come, and have built a great Fort; Their Sachems refused to pray to God, so signally and sinfully, that Captain Gookins and my self were very sensible of it, and were not without some expectation of some interposure of a Divine-Hand, which did eminently come to pass; for in the forenamed expedition they joyned with the Northern Sachems, [10] and were all of them cut off; even all that had so signally refused to pray unto God were now as signally rejected by God, and cut off. I hear not that it was ever known, that so many Sachems and Men of Note were killed in one imprudent Expedition, and that by a few scattered people; for the Mauquaogs were not imbodyed to received them, nor prepared, and few at home, which did much greaten the Overthrow of so many great Men, and shews a divine over-ruling hand of God. But now, since the Penaguag-Sachems are cut off, the People (sundry of them) dwelling at Panatumket-Fort do bow the ear to hear, and submit to pray unto God; to whom Jethro, after he had confest Christ and was baptized, was sent to preach Christ to them.

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Magunkukquok is another of our Praying-Towns at the remotest Westerly borders of Natick; these are gathering together os some Nipmuk Indians who left their own places, and sit together in this place, and have given up themselves to pray unto God. They have called Pomham to be their Ruler, and Simon to be their Teacher. This latter is accounted a good and lively Christian; he is the second man among the Indians that doth experience that afflicting disease of the Stone. The Ruler hath made his Preparatory Confession of Christ, and is approved of, and at the next opportunity is to be received and baptized. 18

I obtained of the General-Court a Grant of a Tract of Land, for the settlement and encouragement of this People; which though as yet it be by some obstructed, yet I hope we shall

find some way to accomplish the same. 19

Quanatusset is the last of our Praying-Towns, whose beginnings have received too much discouragement; but yet the Seed is alive: they are frequently with me; the work is at the birth, there doth only want strength to bring forth. The care of this People is committed joyntly to Monatunkanit, and Tuppunkkoowillin, the Teachers of Hassunemeeesut, as is abovesaid; and I hope if the Lord continue my life, I shall have a good account to give of that People. 20

Thus I have briefly touched some of the chiefest of our present Affairs, and commit them to your Prudence, to do [11] with them what you please; committing your Selves, and all your weighty Affairs unto the Guidance and Blessing of the Lord, I rest,

Your Worship to serve you in the Service of our Lord Jesus.

JOHN ELLIOT.

Roxbury, this 20th of the 7th month, 1670. 21

Note 1. The full title of this tract was as follows:

A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England, in the Year 1670, given in by the Reverend Mr. JOHN ELLIOT, Minister of the Gospel there, in a LETTER by him directed to the Right Worshipfull the COMMISSIONERS under his Majesties Great-Seal for Propagation of the Gospel amongst the poor blind Natives in those United Colonies. LONDON, Printed for John Allen, formerly living in Little-Britain at the Rising-Sun, and now in Wentworth street near Bell-Lane, 1671.

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