

Facts in regard to the Difficulties at Marshpee

Dr Daniel Williams an eminent divine among the English Dissenters, died Jan^{ry} 26. 1716 bequeathing a sum now amounting to \$13000 to the College at Cambridge with a direction in his will as follows: "I give the remainder of my estate," (meaning his estate in Essex) "to be paid yearly to the College of Cambridge, in New England, or to such as one usually employed to manage the blessed work of converting the poor Indians there, to promote which I design this part of my gift." Two thirds of the income of this fund, varying from \$ 390 to \$433, is annually paid to the Rev. Phineas Fish, as minister of the Mashpee Indians, by the College Treasurer. This [*crossout*]^{salary} Mr Fish expects will continue to be paid him, as agreed upon between him & the corporation, in lieu of that stipulated in the original terms of settlement, which were "Mr Fish to receive \$520-annual salary, to be paid quarter yearly, - & \$250 as a settlement, said salary to be paid him, so long as he should

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continue in the service above named -" to wit, ~~in his~~^{the} pastoral ~~relative to~~^{charge of} the Indians at Marshpee & Herring Pond. Mr Fish does not consider himself as missionary to the Marshpees but as their pastor & regularly ordained minister, being ordained over them by an Ecclesiastical Council, convened by letters missive from the College Corporation, Sep^r 18th. 1811. The College acted in this affair in the understanding that the measure was ^{desired &} entirely concurred in alike by the Indians themselves, their overseers, & Mr Fish, ~~who~~^{& after Mr Fish} had ~~previously~~ been preaching to the Indians more than a year as a missionary. deriving his support from the Williams fund. There is evidence that ~~a committee of~~ six Indians, viz. Solomon Francis, Jeremiah Babcock, Gideon Tumpam, Abraham Squib, Richard Cabot, & Nathan Pocknet, waited on Mr Fish ~~as a deputation from the tribe~~ to express to him, in the name of the rest, their desire that he might be ordained over them as the successor of Mr Hawley their former

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minister. The great body of the Indians were also present at the ordination, & appeared to concur in the proceeding, & 183 of them dined at Mr Hawley's with the council. On the other hand, it is not pretended that any note was taken on the subject, either in the congregation or church, by the Indians. It is also denied

that the Marshpee people constituted a regular congregation in law; & if they did, it is further denied that the Corporation of Harvard College had a right to settle a minister over them, or to call a council for that purpose. A question arises, therefore, respecting the validity of that ordination.

In order to judge of the probable usefulness of Mr Fish, at present, among the Indians, the following facts deserve attention. Of 45 male proprietors on the Plantation, the whole number as reported by the District Clerk, 30 are decidedly opposed to Mr Fish, 4 decidedly in his favour,

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& 11 neutral or uncertain. His usual congregation on ^{^pleasant} Sundays consists of from 12 to 30 coloured persons, & from 40 to 100 whites. The whites pay nothing towards Mr Fish's support; but this number, it is said, is not increased, but rather diminished, compared with what it was in the days of his predecessor Mr Hawley. The church consists at present of 4 coloured persons (the only male a negro, not a proprietor,) & about 15 whites. At the time of Mr Fish's ordination the church consisted of 5 Indians & 14 whites, & during his ministry he has admitted 20 persons of colour, & 16 whites. The whole number of Indian & coloured persons on the plantation of Marshpee is reckoned at about 320. Of them only two men, viz Isaac Symonds & William Amos, & six women, viz, Marcy Hanson, Marcy McGregor, *Patience Allen, Bathsheba Richards, Hannah Freeman, & Desire Attaquin, claim to be of pure blood. The rest are mixed, of various degrees, with white or negro blood, by intermarriages with negroes, Hefsians & others. Mr Fish, since settlement
*since dead

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has changed his sentiments from Unitarian to Orthodox; but it but it does not appear that the Indians like him any the less on this account, or make this change a ground of complaint. But they do complain that their feelings were not respected as members of the congregation, that they were less regarded than the whites, that they were not visited by Mr Fish as frequently as the Whites, & above all, that Mr Fish gave his whole influence against them in their late successful exertions to obtain their liberties from the legislature. They do not bring any very serious & definite charge against Mr Fish's moral or ministerial character, which seems to be unimpeachable; but they allege that ~~from various causes~~ in his preaching & his general habits he is unsuited to them, &

that he has from various causes entirely lost ~~their~~ ^{the} confidence ^{of the Indians, as a body,} & is never likely to recover it. Mr Fish, & his friends, on the other hand, say that his present unpopularity is to be ascribed to the notorious fickleness of the Indians, to the agency of strangers who have stirred up the Indians against him, & to unavoidable grounds of dissatisfaction

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growing out of the late changes in their civil affairs; & that if he is sustained in his place, he will be likely in a short time, after the present occasions of uneasiness have passed away, to regain his ascendancy over his scattered flock. Besides Mr Fish's congregation, there are two others, at present, on the Plantation; one of which is under the pastoral charge of a native, Joseph Amos, or Blind Jo, as he is commonly called, who is regularly ordained over his ^{church &} society as a Baptist ~~preacher~~ minister. He is ^{blind from birth,} & but very imperfectly educated; but he is evidently a well meaning & pious man, & his influence in general is good, & ^{he is also} at this time in much favour with the Indians, his congregation consisting, on fair Sundays, of from 50 to 70 hearers ^{all coloured,} who hold their meetings in one of the School houses. His church also consists of from 20 to 50 members. The other society, ^{worshipping in the other schoolhouse,} & consisting of from 20 to 40 hearers, with about 20¹⁵ communicants, all coloured, has for its minister, at present, W^m Apes, ^{a Pequot Indian from Connecticut,} formerly a Protestant Methodist preacher, but now of no particular denomination. This man figured greatly in the late disturbances at Marshpee, which made the interference

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of the government necessary, & he was popular among the Indians for a while, but ~~he~~ is now understood to be rapidly losing their confidence, ~~of the~~ & not without good reason.

Rev Mr Merrick, of Sandwich introduced ^{me} to several gentlemen in his society, all of whom concurred in thinking that Mr Fish's usefulness at Marshpee was at an end. On the contrary Mr Hawley, Mr Ezra Cocker, & the gentlemen generally at Cotuit Village, in the immediate vicinity of Mashpee, concurred in thinking that Mr Fish ought to be sustained. The leading gentlemen in Barnstable & Falmouth were understood to accord, in general, with the latter.

The great majority of the Marshpees now wish that if consistent with Mr William's will, the proceeds of his charity now paid to Mr Fish should go to the support of a competent white schoolmaster to reside among them. Otherwise, on account of their religious differences, & for other reasons, their petition is that the income of the fund may not be

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bestowed on them, but be given to some other body of Indians by whom it will be received more thankfully, & to whom, from a difference in the circumstances, it will be likely to do more good. The Selectmen of Marshpee have sent up a Memorial to this effect, & now desire to be heard in it, & through & by their counsel, Mr Hallett, before the corporation. In regard to the education of the Marshpees it may be observed that the State has appropriated \$100 a year to them from the School Fund; that they have two good school houses, & as much schooling, as to time, as other country towns of the same magnitude; & that in effect, the children on the Plantation generally, are taught to read & write decently well, & some few have attended a little to Arithmetic. they depend at present however on native teachers, who, as they allege are incompetent properly to instruct the higher clafses.

Mr Fish preaches every seventh Sunday at a small Indian settlement at Herring Pond in Plymouth, distant almost 10 miles from Marshpee. Here there is but one pure blooded native, Clarifsa Conant, & his congregation consists of not

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more than 12 or 15 persons; & but very little interest is taken in his ministrations, though no objections are made to his character or his services, except that his preaching is cold & dull.

In view of these facts I come to the following conclusions.

1. If practicable, it would be desirable on all accounts, & more in accordance with the will of Mr Williams, to have the entire trust transferred to the Society ~~from~~^{for} the Propagation of the Gospel among the Indian's & others in North America.

2. If this cannot be done, the Corporation had better continue to pay Mr Fish as heretofore, until the question respecting the validity of his ordination is settled by due procefs of law, it being understood that the people of Marshpee will soon commence such a procefs on account of the hearing of that question on Mr Fish's claim on [^]the Meeting house, & Parsonage Lot, &c.

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3. If however the Corporation think that some steps should be immediately taken towards the removal of Mr Fish, the best course to be pursued, as it seems to me, is this: I do not think it would be well for the Corporation ~~arbitrarily to~~^{to be foremost in} deciding that the doings of the Council which ordained Mr Fish, called by them as it was, & acting as it was supposed at the time in their name & under their authority [^]&sanction, are null &void. But the Corporation may propose ~~to~~^{in concert with} the

other parties the calling of a mutual council; or they may, in case that proposal is rejected, call an ex parte council, ~~consis~~ to be composed of representatives from the same churches as the former one; & to the decision of this body all the difficulties in the case may be referred.

Meanwhile both Mr Fish & the Indians are to be given distinctly to understand, that the Corporation of the College have ~~ing~~ nothing whatever to do with any questions touching the civil ~~right~~ or religious rights of the Indians, or with

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Mr Fish's legal title to the Marshpee Meeting House, or the Parsonage Lot, or any other perquisites or immunities claimed by ~~Re Mr Fish~~ him, save the annual salary stipulated & agreed upon as above.

All which is respectfully submitted

James Walker

October 17. 1835

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Mr Walker's Report respecting the
Difficulties of Mr Fish at Marshpee
17. Oct. 1835

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