

## COTTON MATHER AND HIS SLAVES.

BY HENRY W. HAYNES.

THE "Rules for the Society of Negroes, 1693," printed in our Librarian's report for October, 1888,<sup>1</sup> are to be found, with the exception of Section IX.; in a MS. diary of Cotton Mather, for the year 1693.<sup>2</sup> That section which contains an allusion to "the catechism in the Negro Christianized," could not have been prepared earlier than 1706, when a little tract with that title was printed by him anonymously.<sup>3</sup> It may have been added at any time between that date and the indorsement made by Judge Sewall upon the broadside in our library: "Left at my house for me, when I was not at home, by Spaniard, Dr. Mather's Negro: March 23, 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ ." A beautiful little reprint of this same broadside was made by our associate, Dr. George H. Moore, in July, 1888, in the preface of which he states that he found in Cotton Mather's Diary for 1693, "the following account of this production: 'Besides ye other praying pious meetings which I have been continually serving in o<sup>r</sup> Neighborhood, a little after this period a company of poor Negroes, of their own Accord, addressed mee, for my Countenance to a Design w<sup>ch</sup> they had, of erecting such a Meeting for y<sup>e</sup> welfare of their miserable Nation, that were Servants among us. I allowed their design and went one evening & prayed & preached [on Ps. 68. 31.] w<sup>th</sup> them; and gave them following orders, w<sup>ch</sup> I insert duly for y<sup>e</sup> curiosity of y<sup>e</sup> occasion.'" Dr. Moore, however, makes no allusion to the fact that Section IX. is not included in the MS. diary.

<sup>1</sup> Proceed. Amer. Antiq. Soc. (N. S.), vol. V., p. 419.

<sup>2</sup> Diary, 1693 [Oct. 10.] (Lib. Mass. Hist. Soc.)

<sup>3</sup> Diary, 1706. [Begin. of June.] (*Ibid.*)

Judge Sewall's indorsement does not relate, I think, to a negro belonging to Dr. Cotton Mather, as our Librarian seems to infer from his reference to a statement by Mr. William B. Weeden that "Cotton Mather employed his negro servant."<sup>1</sup> *Spaniard* was probably the Spanish Indian servant referred to by Mr. Sibley, whom Cotton Mather, in speaking of "the retaliating dispensations of Heaven towards" himself, says he bought and bestowed upon his father, Dr. Increase Mather; adding, "some years after this a knight, whom I had laid under many obligations,"—without doubt meaning Sir William Phips,—"bestowed a Spanish-Indian servant upon me."<sup>2</sup> I have not found in any of Cotton Mather's Diaries the precise passages quoted by Mr. Sibley, but in that for 1681 occurs the following: "Memorandum. About this time I bought a *Spanish Indian*, and bestowed him for a *Servant* on my Father. This thing I would not remember in this place, but only because I would observe, whether I do hereafter see some special and signal returns of this action in y<sup>e</sup> course of my Life. I am secretly persuaded *That I shall do so.*" In a side note he adds: "Now see what I have recorded in the Thirty-fourth year of my Life."<sup>3</sup> This note refers to the following in a later diary: "Memorandum. About Fifteen years ago I bought a *Spanish Indian*, and bestowed him for a *Servant* on my Father. About Three years ago S<sup>r</sup> *William Phips*, o<sup>r</sup> governour, bestowed a *Spanish Indian* for a *Servant* on myself. My *Servant* affecting y<sup>e</sup> *Sea*, I permitted him to go to Sea; and being an Ingenuous fellow, I gave him an Instrument for his Freedom, if hee serv'd mee till y<sup>e</sup> end of y<sup>e</sup> year 1697. Two years ago y<sup>e</sup> *French* took him and I lost him: The loss occasioned me to make a cheerful Resignation unto y<sup>e</sup> will of God. But I was hereupon persuaded, I often ex-

<sup>1</sup>Proceed. Amer. Antiq. Soc. (ubi. sup.), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>Sibley's Harvard Graduates, vol. I., p. 597.

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 1691, 19, 4m. (Lib. Mass. Hist. Soc.)

pressed my persuasion, that my *Servant* would be *returned* unto mee. In the Beginning of the year an English *man-of-war*, by taking y<sup>e</sup> vessel, wherein my servant was Retook him. Nevertheless y<sup>e</sup> *captain* of the man of war, being a Fellow, that had no principles of Honour or Honesty in him, I could by no means recover my servant out of his hands, who intended to make a perpetual *slave* of him. So, I gave over my endeavours to Recover him, chiefly troubled for y<sup>e</sup> condition of y<sup>e</sup> *poor servant*.”<sup>1</sup>

But this was not the only slave presented to him. In a subsequent diary he writes: “This Day a surprising thing befel me. Some gentlemen of o<sup>r</sup> church, understanding, (without any Application of mine to them for such a thing) that I wanted a Good Servant, at the expense of between Forty and Fifty pounds, purchased for me a very likely *Slave*; a Young Man, who is a Negro, of a promising Aspect and Temper, and this day they presented him unto me. It seems to be a mighty smile of Heaven upon my Family; and it arrives at an observable Time unto me. I put upon him y<sup>e</sup> name of *Onesimus*; and I resolved, with y<sup>e</sup> help of y<sup>e</sup> Lord, that I would use the best Endeavours to make him a servant of Christ; and also be more serviceable than ever to a flock, which laide me under such obligations.”<sup>2</sup>

At different times he seems to have owned other slaves. I find him writing: “unto my surprise, when I came home, I found one of my negroes horribly arrested by spirits.”<sup>3</sup>

Later, he speaks of his “negro servant Obadiah,” in reference to whose baptism he had previously made several anxious entries.<sup>4</sup>

Abundant evidence is to be found in his diaries of his sincere interest in the material as well as the spiritual welfare of his slaves. His latest biographer, Rev. William B. O. Peabody, bears witness also to the philanthropical kind-

<sup>1</sup>Diary, 1696, 12d. 6m. (Lib. Amer. Antiq. Soc.)

<sup>2</sup>Diary, 1706, 13d. 10m. (Lib. Mass. Hist. Soc.)

<sup>3</sup>Diary, 1692-3. [Begin. of Sept.] (*Ibid.*)

<sup>4</sup>Diary, 1718, Oct. 21. (*Ibid.*)

ness displayed by him towards the African race in general. "Perceiving," he says, "that the negroes, though kindly treated, had not those advantages of instruction, which were necessary to make them familiar with the religion which he wished to have them embrace, he established a school, in which they were taught to read. And he himself bore the whole expense of it, paying the instructor for her services at the close of every week. There are many, who point out to others the way of duty and benevolent exertion; but this was better; it showed that he was willing to make sacrifices as well as to enjoin them on others; indeed, that he could sometimes impose on himself, what he would not ask others to do."<sup>1</sup>

But it is upon the occasion of his preparing the little tract, "The Negro Christianized," before referred to, a copy of which is preserved in the Prince Collection, now at the Boston Public Library, that the deeply religious motives which prompted this kindness are best displayed. I find in his diary in reference to this: "In the Beginning of *June*, I did, with the Help of Heaven, dispatch a Work, which my Heart was greatly sett upon; a Work which may prove of Everlasting Benefit unto many of the Elect of God; a Work which is Calculated for the Honour & Interest of a glorious CHRIST; and a Work, which will Enrage y<sup>e</sup> Diavel at such a rate, that I must Expect, he will immediately fall upon me, with a storm of more than ordinary Temptations; I must immediately be buffeted in some singular manner, by that Revengeful Adversary. And the late Calamities on y<sup>e</sup> American Islands, I thought, had a Word in them, to quicken my doing of this Work. I wrote as well contrived an Essay as I could, for y<sup>e</sup> animating and facilitating of that work, the Christianizing of the *Negroes*. It is entitled, THE NEGRO CHRISTIANIZED. *An Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work; the Instruction of the Negroes in Christianity.* And my design is not only to Lodge one of

<sup>1</sup> Sparks's Amer. Biography (1st Ser.), vol. VI., p. 305.

the Books, in every Family of *New England*, which has a *Negro* in it, but also to send Numbers of them into the *Indies* & Write such Letters to the principal Inhabitants of y<sup>e</sup> Islands, as may be proper to accompany them."<sup>1</sup> The reference to "the late calamities on the American islands," is to the ravaging, by the French, of the islands of St. Christopher and Nevis, in the West Indies, and to the contributions for the relief of the sufferers, taken up in the churches in accordance with a proclamation issued by Gov. Joseph Dudley.<sup>2</sup> Upon this occasion Cotton Mather's church contributed nearly one hundred pounds sterling.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Diary, 1706. [Begin. of June.] (Lib. Mass. Hist. Soc.)

<sup>2</sup> Sewall's Diary, vol. II., p. 94.\*

<sup>3</sup> Sewall's Diary, vol. II., p. 42.\*

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.