

CHAPTER IV.

CONTROVERSIES WITH THE REV. JONATHAN SEARLE.

No document, record, or entry, has been found, which shows at what time the troubles and misunderstandings between the Rev. Jonathan Searle and his church and people, were first manifested; nor are the grounds of the controversy and difficulties anywhere clearly set forth. They are to be gathered rather by inference, than from any satisfactory or positive statement. The records of the church, during the time of the controversy, are exceedingly meagre, and contain very little information upon the subject. The town records, however, contain entries which give some insight into the matter. Probably there is no document or living memory remaining, which can throw any light upon such parts of the transactions as are not, by the entries in the town records, sufficiently set forth to be understood. It will be recollected that the salary voted to him on his settlement, was .£60 lawful, a year, to be increased at the end of ten years to £60 13s. 4d. He was ordained, October 14, 1772. A town meeting was called, January 5, 1779. Among other articles was one for inquiring "into the conduct of the Rev. Jonathan Searle, in his not giving receipts in full for the money he hath received for his yearly salary, &c., and for increase of his salary." The record proceeds as follows: "Mr. Searle being present, Voted, That the moderator ask him whether he would discharge the town of his salary, if said town would pay him up the nominal sum from the first settlement, &c., and trust the town's generosity for an addition to said salary; the question being asked by the moderator, his answer was in the affirmative. The moderator called on the constables to make a settlement with Mr. Searle; the said constables readily complied with the terms; the moderator at the same time wrote a receipt and read it to Mr. Searle, and asked him whether he would sign such a one. His answer was that he would, or any one that the town should require. The town then proceeded to get the money that was his due as salary from the first of his settlement in said town, until the 14th day of October, 1778, and pay it to him. Said money being offered to Mr. Searle by the selectmen, requiring him to sign said receipt, he utterly refused to sign said receipt, or a similar one. For which reason, the town voted to assess the last year's salary, and order it into the

treasurer's hands, there to remain until it should be ordered otherwise. By said town, Voted, That Lt. Samuel Brown take the money and make a lawful tender to Mr. Searle, of the whole of his salary that yet remains unpaid from the first of his settlement in said town, until the 14th day of October, 1778, and require him to sign such a receipt as was approved by said town." Then adjourned to the 8th instant. At the adjournment, "Voted, To choose a committee to desire the Rev. Jonathan Searle to attend the meeting by adjournment, in order for him to make some proposals to the town, on what terms he would settle with the town, and if he refused to come, for him to send in writing, by said committee, on what terms he would settle." Dea. Amos Dakin and Lts. Samuel and Isaac Brown, were the committee. The town, after transacting some other business, adjourned to the 12th of January. At the adjournment, "After hearing the Rev. Jonathan Searle's letter directed to the moderator read, Voted, That it was not an acceptable answer, according to the town's request. Voted, To choose a committee to reason with Searle and make a report to the town." The committee were Joseph Barrett, Joseph Merriam, Dea. N. Hall, William Eliot and David Blodgett. Adjourned to the 20th instant. At adjournment, "Voted, Not to make any addition to the Rev. Jonathan Searle's salary, for the time being." The authority of the committee was continued, and they were directed to report at the next meeting. Adjourned to February 9. It was at the adjournment, "Voted, That the Rev. Jonathan Searle's conduct hath been dissatisfactory to the town, with regard to what hath been acted on his part, relative to his falling from his first agreement, as well as at other meetings held after adjournment." "Voted, That the town call upon the Church of Christ in this place to desire the Rev. Jonathan Searle to join in a mutual council, and have all matters of aggrievance subsisting between Mr. Searle and this people brought before said council for their wise determination. Voted, That the town and church are connected together in paying the cost of said council. Capt. Joseph Barrett, Dea. Nathan Hall, and Mr. Edmund Tarbell, each entered their dissent against the proceedings of this meeting, so far as what is comprehended in the second vote of said meeting."

At the annual meeting, March 8th, 1779. The seventh article was, " To see if the town will pay the Rev. Jonathan Searle his salary, for the year 1778." On this article, the town

"Voted, To pay the salary of the Rev. Jonathan Searle, provided he give a receipt in full, &c."

At a meeting called March 30th, 1779. " Voted, To pass over the article about the Rev. Jonathan Searle."

At a meeting called April 22d, 1779. "Article 2d. To see what method the town will pursue, for a settlement with the Rev. Jonathan Searle, and if a settlement cannot be effected, to see if the town will vote him a dismissal, or discontinue him as our minister." At the meeting, a committee was appointed to request the attendance of the Rev. Jonathan Searle. An addition of .£30 was voted to the nominal sum of his salary for 1778, "provided, he give such a receipt, as he proffered to the town in January last." "Voted, Not satisfied with his conduct, in not securing the town for the money paid by the constables for his salary, with other things." William Chambers, Joseph Merriam and. Abijah Alien were appointed a committee, "to offer him the nominal gum, and interest, and the addition above voted, and to make a legal tender, and demand a receipt in full from his first settlement." Adjourned to Friday. At the adjournment, "Voted, That the committee have a record made of the tender to the Rev. Jonathan Searle, according to law," and adjourned.

July 6th, 1779. A meeting was called, "To see if the town will join with the church in a council," &c. " The motion being moved by the Rev. Daniel Emerson, whether the town would leave it to a reference, previous to other matters being left to a council respecting negligence of pay, or fall of money being made up, or any part thereof, to the Rev. Jonathan Searle; it passed in the negative," and then the meeting was adjourned to July 7th; and at that meeting "Voted, To concur with the vote of the church of Christ in this town, on the 6th of July, instant, for dismissing the Rev. Jonathan Searle from his pastoral relation in this town. Voted, The meeting house doors be kept shut up, during the town's pleasure. Voted, The selectmen have power to open and shut the meeting house doors. Chose a committee to make a tender to the Rev. Jonathan Searle, &c."

A meeting was called, August 17th, 1779. Among other matters, was this article, "To see if the town will join with the church to make the following proposal to the Rev. Jonathan Searle; to leave it to a mutual council, to determine, whether Mr. Searle is *constitutionally* dismissed from his pastoral relations in this place, and if the council result that he is not dismissed, then, would have the council take under consideration, the difficulties subsisting between the parties; the advice of the council to be accepted by the parties." At the meeting, "Voted, To concur with the proposals of the church, to the Rev. Jonathan Searle, and on Mr. Searle's compliance therewith, to leave all matters now subsisting between said parties, to a mutual ecclesiastical council; the town being at the cost of said council." Adjourned to the 31st. "Chose Benjamin Mann, Joseph Merriam and Abijah Allen a committee to provide for the ecclesiastical council to sit in October, 1779. Chose David Blodgett, Wm. Chambers, Thomas Tarbell, Timothy Wheeler and Reuben Barrett, a committee to receive complaints from the Rev. Mr. Searle, against the town, and also to prepare complaints against the said Rev. Mr. Searle, and also, bring them before the council." The meeting was adjourned to the fifth and to the sixth of October; at which time, Abijah Allen and Joseph Merriam were added "to the committee, for carrying on the complaints against the Rev. Jonathan Searle, before the council." Adjourned to the seventh and to the eighth. "Voted, That the committee call on the Rev. Mr. Searle, to make out the negligence of pay, and that the committee be ready to settle with him. Voted, That the present committee of the town be empowered, in behalf of said town, to leave the substance matter of Mr. Searle's complaint against the town, to reference, and that Esq. Abbott's method be adhered to;" and adjourned to one o'clock. Then "Voted and agreed to the form of an agreement, between Mr. Searle and the town of Mason, drawn by the Rev. Mr. Farrar." Adjourned to the 9th. Then "Voted, Not to allow any sum of money, for the negligence of pay to Mr. Searle, from his first settlement, to October 14th, 1777. Voted, To make a grant of money to Mr. Searle. Voted, To open the meeting house doors," and adjourned to Monday, October 25th; then adjourned to the 26th; then "Voted, To accept of Mr. Searle's acknowledgment of his fault, to the town as satisfactory," and then after accepting some roads the meeting was dissolved.

The following entries in the record are in the hand writing of Mr. Searle, and were signed by him:

"Mason, Oct'r 9th, 1779. This day received of the town of Mason, by the hand of the selectmen, one hundred and twenty pounds, L. money, in full of all my dues and demands of every name and nature whatsoever, from the first day of my settlement with said town up to this day. Received per me,

JONATHAN SEARLE.

"Attest: DAVID BLODGETT.
 SAM'L BROWN."

"Mason, Oct'r 26, 1779. That whereas, there was a civil contract effected between the town of Mason and myself, on the 14th of Oct'r, 1772, as to my ministerial support, so long as I should remain their Gospel minister, this is a full and final cancel, on my part, of said contract ', and in testimony of this my free act, I hereunto set my hand.

JONATHAN SEARLE.

"Attest: DAVID BLODGETT.
 SAMUEL BROWN."

Thus this town meeting, commenced August 17, and continued by adjournment, to nine different subsequent days, was concluded. The long battle was fought, and the town won. Undoubtedly, on the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th days of October, there was a council in session; but as the church records, then in the hands of Mr. Searle, are silent on the subject, no means remain of determining who composed the council, or what were the articles of complaint on the part of the church or of the town against him, or on his part against them. One would suppose, judging from the entries in the book above recited, that all connection between the town and Mr. Searle was ended, and that there would be no more controversy between them. But it was not so, as will presently appear. It is not unfrequently the case, that the expenses of a controversy very much exceed the amount of

the sum in dispute. So it was in this case. The sum paid by the town to Mr. Searle was £120, being two years' salary. The expenses paid, by the town for entertaining the council were £327 19s., paid as follows: to William Chambers, £199 10s.; Abijah Allen, £66 18s.; Samuel Abbott, £116s.; Ephraim Sartell, £14: 12s.; Lieut. Isaac Brown, £16; Jacob Blodgett, £8 8s.; Jonathan Searle, £23 13., in all, \$1092,07, a pretty round bill for entertaining some half a dozen of the clergy and attendant lay delegates, one week. Probably the depreciation of the currency was an element which had something to do with the magnitude of this bill, as it was undoubtedly the foundation, and if not the only origin, one of the sources of the difficulty. But as no distinction is made as to the currency in which the £120 was paid to Mr. Searle, and that in which the £327 19s. was paid for entertaining the council, the matter is left somewhat in the dark. Probably he was paid in a currency equal to gold and silver, and the bills for the expenses, were paid in the depreciated currency.

April 10, 1780. At a town meeting, Mr. Searle again appears. The fourth article was, "To see if the town will concur with the church and receive the Rev. Jonathan Searle as their minister, according to an agreement between him and the church." The town "Voted, To accept the first article of the agreement that was formed between the church and the Rev. Jonathan Searle, October 26, 1779, which is as follows: We agree that there shall be no compulsion about the ministerial support, every one in church and town shall be left at liberty to contribute what sum he pleases, or none at all. This article proposed by Mr. Searle. Voted, To receive Mr. Searle upon the above mentioned agreement." How, then, stood the case? He had, by his agreement of October 26, discharged the town from the contract, and by the vote of April 10, to which he was a party, had agreed that he should have no claim for support on church or town, except the voluntary contributions of his friends. Yet it seems he continued to make claims of the town, for at the meeting, October 31, on an article on this subject, the town "Voted, That it is the mind of the town that the Rev. Jonathan Searle discharge the town from October 14, 1779, to October 14, 1780, of any demands he hath or may have against the town."

December 6, 1780. "Voted, To accept of a discharge that the Rev. Jonathan Searle wrote and sent to the town, which is as follows: Mason, Dec. 6, 1780. Know all men by these presents, that I, Jonathan Searle, for and in consideration of what my friends, in and out of town, have done for me in the course of the year past, do fully discharge the town of Mason from all legal demands in future, respecting my ministerial support the last year, beginning Oct. the 14, 1779, and ending Oct. 14, 1780, excepting what is due to me from said town on special obligation, either of note or bond, which is not and cannot be supposed to be included in this discharge. As witness my hand,

JONATHAN SEARLE.

"Voted, Not to pay the Rev. Jonathan Searle the note he has against the town, at present. Voted, To reconsider the vote not to pay the Rev. Jonathan Searle his note, &c., and Voted, To pay it, and to make the money as good as when the note was given, and appointed a committee to go to him and pay him."

January 18, 1781. The second article was, "To hear the report of the committee, &c., to wait on Mr. Searle to see whether he would take the money due him upon his note given in October, 1779, and if, on hearing the report, they find he hath not complied with the request, then, 3dly. To see if they will choose a committee to make a lawful tender. 4thly. To see if the town will make any enquiry into Mr. Searle's conduct in breaking over the result of council respecting that part of the advice of the venerable council, which was for him to give up all his demands upon the town for his ministerial. support, up to the 14th day of October, 1778, except the nominal sum, and likewise, in breaking over the agreement he voluntarily made with the town, in compliance with the result of council, and likewise said he would give up all but the nominal sum, to October 14, 1778," &c. At the meeting, "Voted, Not to make the tender. Voted, Not to make the Inquiry. Voted, To reconsider the vote not to make the tender. Voted, To make a tender, and chose a, committee for that purpose, and dissolved."

March 12, 1781. "Voted, To order the selectmen to take the invoice of the Rev. Jonathan Searle's real and personal estate, and tax him to the Continental, State and War tax accordingly."

April 11, 1781. At a town meeting, on an article to that purport, the town "Voted, To own the Rev. Jonathan Searle to be their minister. The persons whose names are underwritten entered their dissent against the Rev. Jonathan Searle being any longer their minister: Wm. Eliot, Jonas Fay, Jonathan Foster, Jr., Andrew Eliot, Silas Bullard, Abijah Allen, Nathan Whipple, Enosh Lawrence, Joseph Lowell, Jonathan Chandler, John Adams, John Lawrence, Joseph Ball, Thomas Blood, Amos Dakin, David Blodgett, Zaccheus Davis, Simon Ames, Thomas Robbins, Oliver Scripture, Edmund Adams, Stevens Lawrence."

June 21, 1781. "Voted, Not to concur with the church in their vote passed 4th of May last, to dismiss the Rev. Jonathan Searle from his pastoral relation to said church."

August 14, 1781. The second article was, "To see if the town would concur with the church in their vote to dismiss Mr. Searle, 4th of May last." It was "Voted, To concur. Voted, To hire preaching, and to raise £20, silver, for this purpose." Adjourned to the 21st of August. Then "Voted, To reconsider the vote to hire preaching, and adjourned to the 28th. Then Voted, To hire preaching, and to raise £20, hard money. Voted, To leave it to Mr. Abijah Allen to pay or not, if he pleases, and chose Deacon Hall, Joseph Merriam and Ens. John Wood, committee to hire preaching. "

March 11, 1782. "Voted, To direct the selectmen to apply to Mr. Jonathan Searle, for a settlement of a note that he has against the town, said note to be liquidated by the scale to balance his taxes."

August 28, 1782. The seventh article was, "To see what the town will do with regard to making out a settlement with Mr. Searle, as he is advised to leave the matter to the generosity of the town." "Voted, To make out legal settlement with Mr. Searle as soon as

may be, and chose as a committee, Benj, Mann, Wm. Eliot and Joseph Merriam, for the purpose."

February 20th, 1783. At a meeting called for that purpose, Voted, That if Mr. Searle will settle a note he has against the town, and take the money according to the scale of depreciation of this state, that for the sake of peace, the town will abate his rates for the year 1781. Chose a committee to make the settlement, James Withee, Benjamin Mann, Esq. and Wm. Eliot. It was further Voted, That if he would not accept the proposition, the town would leave it to men," &c.

Annual March meeting, 1785. "Article 5th. To see if the town will desire the church to call upon Mr. Jonathan Searle, in an ecclesiastical manner, to make satisfaction for words he has spoken, which is thought to be a scandal upon said town and church; and be at the cost of it, should it end in advice of council." The vote was in the negative.

September 4th, 1787. "Voted, To leave the complaint which Jonathan Searle, Esq., exhibited against the church and people, &c., for neglecting to pay him for his support in 1779, together with a bond and order he had against the town, to arbitration; that the Rev. Mr. Payson, of Rindge, be one of the arbitrators, and act as chairman; and chose Joseph Merriam, Dea. Amos Dakin, Benjamin Mann, Esq., Hubbert Russell and Joseph Barrett, a committee to. agree with Jonathan Searle, Esq., in choosing the other two arbitrators, and to conduct the defence before the arbitration."

January 1st, 1788. "Voted, To raise sixty pounds, to pay Jonathan Searle, Esq., his due, by the award of arbitrators. Voted, To make the rate to pay Jonathan Searle, Esq., in two columns."

Thus," a controversy which lasted as long as the Trojan war, and which exhibited about as many vicissitudes, as did that memorable contest, was brought to a close. All that can now be known of the merits and different aspects of the controversy, has been above exhibited; and it is left for the candid minds of readers, to draw their own conclusions.

Soon after these difficulties arose, Mr. Searle ceased to preach. He owned a valuable real estate in the town, o which he continued to reside, till the close of his life. He was commissioned as a justice of the peace, and acted in that capacity many years. He took an active part in the building of the meeting house, and in the settlement of his successor as has already appeared. He was frequently employed in matters of town business, but from some time near the close of the last century, he, in a great measure, withdrew from all active concerns in business affairs, and devoted himself almost entirely, to agricultural pursuits. He died, December 7th, 1812, aged sixty eight years.