THE REAL THOMAS MORTON

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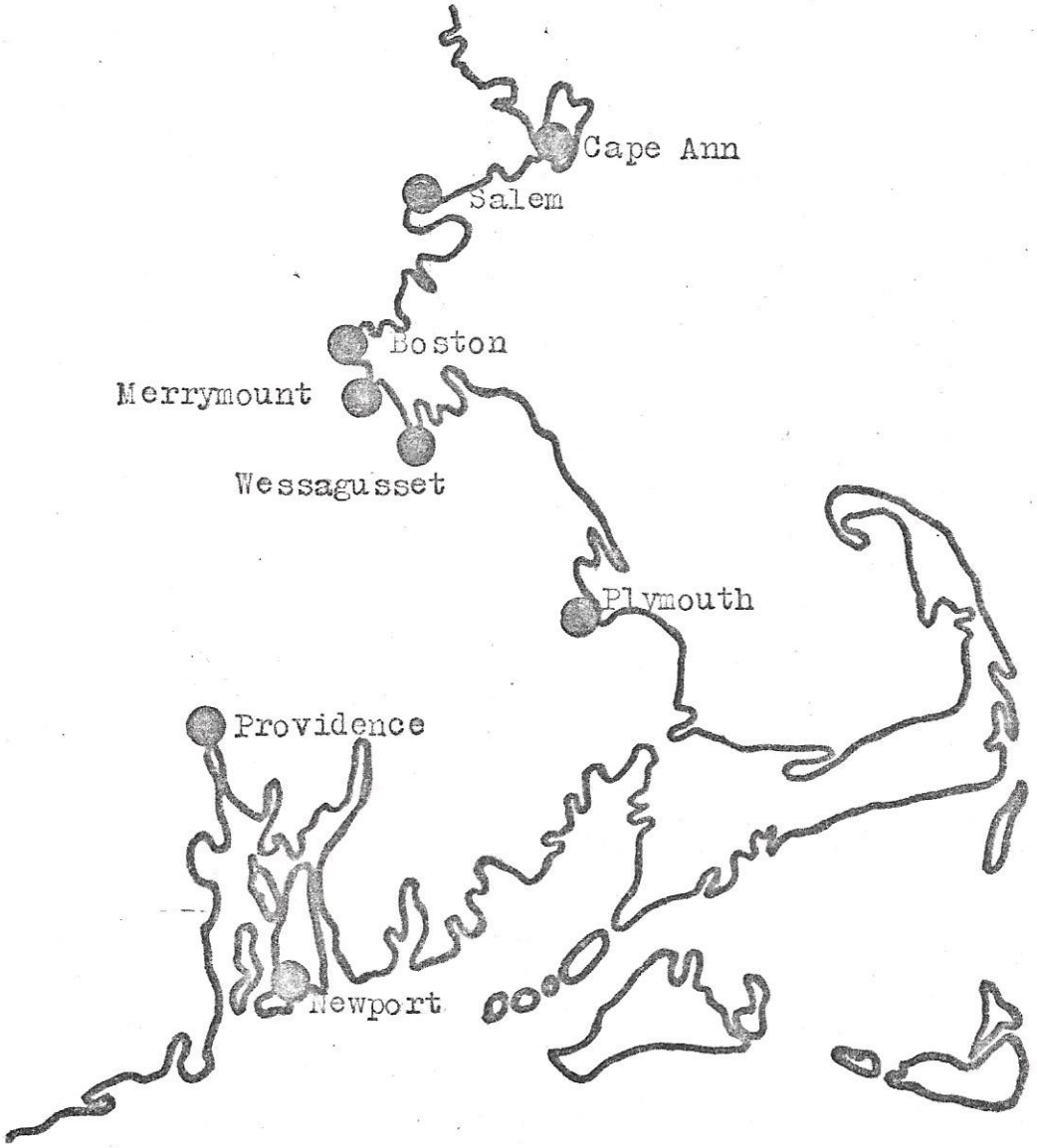
THOMAS MORTON'S NEW ENGLAND



> As we glance again at the Maypole, a solitary sunbeam is fading from the summit, and leaves only a faint, golden tinge blended with the hues of the rainbow banner. Even that dim light is now withdrawn, relinquishing the whole domain of Merry Mount to the evening gloom, which has rushed so instantaneously from the black surrounding woods. But some of these black shadows have rushed forth in human shape.
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> Yes, with the setting sun, the last day of mirth had passed from Merry Mount. --Nathaniel Hawthorne

Objectivity is that shining star toward which every aspiring historian must reach, or so he is advised by the powers that be. Be that as it may, it is also the goal which is seldom--probably never--attained. One glaring example of subjective reporting is the treatment by historians of Thomas Morton, onetime master of Merrymount and opponent of both the Pilgrim colony at Plymouth and the Massachusetts Bay Colony between the years 1625 and 1646.

Writers dealing with the subject, who were perhaps unwilling to tread upon the toes of the revered Puritan and Pilgrim "Fathers," have picked up catch phrases of Governor William Bradford, who called Morton "Lord of Misrule,"[1] and coined similar descriptions of their own. Charles Francis Adams called Merrymount a nest of "unclean birds,"[2] James

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[1]William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ed. by Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Random House Inc., 1952), p. 205.

[2]Charles Francis Adams, Three Episodes of Massachusetts History (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), p. 197.

Phinney Baxter called Morton a "vile fellow,"[3] and the Dictionary of National Biography begins its description of him with words such as "evil reputation" and "nest of pirates."[4] Those who have dealt kindly with Morton have invariably had their own ax to grind against the religious settlements of early New England or have portrayed him as a gallant adventurer in order to entertain. Consequently, writers dealing with Morton lost their objectivity. The Metropolitan Opera's portrayal of Morton as a royalist hero evoked hot response from the Society of Mayflower Descendents.[5] Henry Beston chose him as one of the subjects of his Book Of Gallant Vagabonds,[6] and Nathaniel Hawthorne idealized Merrymount with a short story "The Maypole of Merry Mount,"[7] from which came the opening quote of this paper. None of those who depicted Morton favorably had in mind any intention of clearing the name of Thomas Morton; on the contrary, they accepted Brad-

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[3]James Phinney Baxter, "Memoir of Sir Ferdinando Gorges," Sir Ferdinando Gorges (Boston: John Wilson and Sons, 1890), p. 172.

[4]Dictionary of National Biography, ed. by Sidney Lee, XXXIX (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1894), 158.

[5]Francis R. Stoddard, The Truth About the Pilgrims (New York: Society of Mayflower Descendents in the State of New York, 1952), p. 28.

[6]Henry Beston, The Book of Gallant Vagabonds (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1925).

[7]Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Maypole of Merry Mount," The Complete Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1959), pp. 40-47.

ford's word as gospel and wrote of Morton in the same way a modern writer portrays the hero in a novel about the Mafia.

Other than Morton's own extant writings (New English Canaan, and one letter), nearly all other primary sources of information about Morton came down to us in accounts by the Pilgrims and Puritans; therefore there is no disinterested party upon whom we can rely. Traditionally, the histories of wars have shown the victor as the virtuous party who was merely defending himself or was grievously injured. How can one assume the victor's account is necessarily the correct story unless one is naive enough to believe that old saw about good always triumphing over evil?

Heretofore, discussions of Morton have usually been as an aside from the glorious development of the fathers of New England at Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay; my tack will be to focus upon Morton and deal with the two Puritan settlements as an aside. Obviously, those settlements which survived are of infinitely more importance than Morton's, which disappeared, but perhaps a fresh approach can circumvent bias, or at least present an opposing point of view. It is my purpose to show that Morton was not totally the criminal deviant described by so many.

If this thesis holds, what then did the venerable fathers have to gain by so maligning a seemingly inconsequential figure? Was it, as they claimed, simply moral indignation at his practice of raising and frolicking about a Maypole which

the Pilgrims considered a sin against God? Was it defense against the danger of the Indians to whom Morton sold arms and taught their use? Was it possibly fear that Morton, as a spy for the Council for New England (or even Archbishop Laud), threatened the colonies' autonomous existence? Or was it the possibility that Morton might have gained a strong enough foothold and sufficient immigrants to establish a rival colony which might have placed greater restraints upon the dissenters than they had experienced in the homelands from which they had fled? What about the obvious possibility of economic competition which was already developing? These are important questions in this particular controversy, but they are really no different than those which are present during every phase of human existence. The answers to these specific questions may reveal a much different character in Thomas Morton and a fuller understanding of the motivations of the Puritan founders of New England.

In the summer of 1625, this future neighbor of the Pilgrims landed with the expedition of one Captain Wollaston at Wessagusset, a clearing south of present day Boston. Thomas Morton, whom Governor Bradford of Plymouth described as "slighted by the meanest servant," had been a lawyer and something of an Elizabethan poet.[8] Shortly after his wife died,

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[8]According to Henry Beston (Beston, Vagabonds, pp. 139-145) Morton gallantly protected the property rights of

Morton came to America, presumably to begin a new life.[9]

Wollaston set up a small base on a low hill which he dubbed Mount Wollaston, and, leaving a Lieutenant Fitcher in charge, departed for Virginia with some of his men.[10] Morton, who remained with Fitcher, quickly became leader. Bradford wrote that Morton, "having more craft than honesty,"[11] talked the other men into mutiny and became,

> Lord of Misrule, and maintained a School of Atheism . . . set up a maypole, drinking and dancing about it many days together, inviting the Indian women for their consorts, dancing and frisking together like so many fairies or furies, rather and worse practices.[12]

Morton changed the name of the place to Maré Mount and established his post as a favorite stop for both trading vessels and Indians, providing the former with a good time

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a widow, who had four young children and was pregnant, from the encroachment of a brutal older son (who was so mean that he had once been summoned into court for throwing a neighbor's wife out of her pew during church service). Morton's defense was so successful that he promptly married the widow; whereupon she died, and he and his hunting dog disappeared to America. As to his prowess as a poet, Charles Francis Adams, Jr. (Thomas Morton, New English Canaan, ed. by Charles Francis Adams, Jr. [Boston: the Prince Society, 1883], p. 290n) gives him the tribute: " . . . the verses in the New Canaan are not only more cleanly, but in other respects superior to those found in [Ben] Jonson's work."

[9]Beston, The Book of Gallant Vagabonds, pp. 142-145.

[10]Wollaston took some of his indentured servants to Virginia and intended to return, but there is no evidence that he ever returned (Bradford, Plymouth, p. 205).

[11]Bradford, Plymouth, p. 205.

[12]Bradford, Plymouth, p. 205.

and good drink and the latter with firearms. The Pilgrims became incensed with his misconduct and petitioned the other settlements in the New England area for aid in dealing with him, aid which seems to have been freely given. At first the coalition sent Morton a letter asking him to stop selling guns to the Indians, to which he replied that the ban on selling guns was a Royal proclamation and was therefore not binding, and further, the king who had made it was dead so it was no longer in force. This show of arrogance stimulated the Pilgrims to action. Captain Standish, sent to arrest Morton, accomplished his task without bloodshed, and the vagabond was sent to England in 1628 for trial.[13]

In less than a year, Morton returned and was lodged in the house of Isaac Allerton in Plymouth for a time prior to his return to Maré Mount (corrupted to Merrymount by this time), much to the chagrin of the Pilgrims. Soon afterward in 1630 he was again taken into custody and deported, this time by the newly established Massachusetts Bay Colony which now had jurisdiction over the Merrymount area. Although Morton spent a short time in Exeter jail, he was soon freed and spent the remaining years of his life dedicated to the overthrow of the two New England colonies. His first attempt was a 1632 petition, submitted in conjunction with Sir Christopher Gardiner and Phillip Radcliff, to the King's Chamber against

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[13]Bradford, Plymouth, pp. 205-210.

Massachusetts Bay.[14] When that failed he was appointed, in 1635, solicitor for the Council For New England to prosecute the repeal of the Massachusetts Bay Charter.[15] Although the Writ of Quo Warranto was successful, that too was defeated ultimately by the stubborn Puritans who simply waited it out. In 1637 Morton published his New English Canaan in a final effort to raise sympathy for his cause. When he was finally convinced that his efforts were fruitless, Morton returned to New England in 1643 where he was punished with a year in a Boston jail for having made his complaints and written the Canaan.[16]

Morton's version of his relations with the Pilgrims was, understandably, quite different from that of Bradford. Morton says of the people he found in New England: "I found two sorts of people, the one Christians the other Infidels; these [the Indians] I found most full of humanity, and the more friendly than the other. . . . "[17] His motive for setting up the maypole was to provide a touch of home to those who had been away for so long, but it was a " . . . lamentable spectacle to

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[14]Adams, Episodes, p. 277.

[15]"Records of the Council For New England," American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings, 1866-1868 (Cambridge, Mass.: John Wilson and Sons, 1868), p. 138.

[16]Adams, Episodes, pp. 345-350.

[17]Morton, Canaan, p. 123.

the precise separatists," whom, he says, persecuted him from then on.[18] The Pilgrims, according to Morton, envied the prosperity of Merrymount, and they waged a deliberate campaign to persuade the other inhabitants in the bay that he was a "monster."[19] When Standish and his men came for him, Morton was visiting at the nearby settlement of Wessagusset, and when they had captured him they were so overjoyed that their subsequent celebration with food and drink put them to sleep and allowed their captive to escape. The "Lord of Misrule" made his way at night some eight miles to Merrymount where he prepared himself and his men for another assault by "Captain Shrimpe."[20] When the showdown came, Morton gave up without a fight[21] upon the agreement that no harm would come to his person or his possessions. After his captive was safely in custody, Standish proceeded to break his word, looted Merrymount and, upon his return to Plymouth, agitated strongly for the death penalty for Morton.[22]

What actually happened probably lies somewhere between the two accounts, and most historians would agree that it is

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[18]Morton, Canaan, pp. 278-280.

[19]Morton, Canaan, p. 282.

[20]Morton's name for Standish (Canaan, p. 286).

[21]Morton says Standish and his men "came into danger like a flock of wild geese," and that he surrendered so that the Plymouth men would not hurt themselves. (Canaan, p. 286).

[22]Morton, Canaan, pp. 286-296.

closer to the one presented by the Pilgrims. However, it seems difficult to imagine that Morton would fabricate an entire book out of carefully constructed lies. His epistle to the reader, of which an excerpt appears below, reveals a man genuinely concerned about the fate of New England.

> I present to the publike view an abstract of New England . . . divers persons . . . out of respect to their private ends, have laboured to keep both the practice of the people there, and the reall worth of that eminent country concealed from the publike knowledge . . . yet if it [The Canaan] be well accepted, I shall esteem my selfe sufficiently rewardded for my undertaking.[23]

Let us now turn our attention to a re-examination of the evidence which almost universally condemned Thomas Morton to villainy. First of all, the charge that from 1625 to 1628 he was selling guns and teaching their use to the Indians is probably true. Nowhere did he deny it, and had Morton not been guilty he undoubtedly would have protested as vigorously as he did against the charge that he sold liquor to the Indians. That Morton was in violation of King James' Proclamation of 1622 he was clearly aware, but he argued that since that king had died the proclamation was no longer valid.[24] At least one historian has agreed with him. According to Charles Francis Adams, British historian David Hume asserted that the

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[23] Morton, Canaan, p. 110.

[24] Adams, Episodes, p. 195.

king's proclamations died with him but discounts that testimony by observing one Lord Campbell's inability to find that distinction.[25] At any rate, Morton felt he was doing no wrong; he was simply a good businessman, exchanging the article which could be traded for the greatest return in furs.

The Pilgrims and other settlers in the vicinity may have been justifiably fearful that armed Indians constituted a danger, but as Morton pointed out, it would seem that a small settlement like his would be in the most danger, and he wasn't worried.[26] Anyway, the successful elimination of Morton would not have dried up the arms supply. Traders and fishermen had been selling them for years at Sowams, Narragansett and many other places.[27] As Bradford wrote in a letter to Sir Ferdinando Gorges, the active member of the Council for New England, " . . . [we are] expecting daily to be overrun and spoiled by the savages who are already abundantly furnished with pieces, powder, and shot."[28]

However seriously the colonists considered Morton's crime, the authorities in England exhibited less concern. Gorges reflected this view, for although he considered the

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[25]Adams, Episodes, p. 202.

[26]Morton, Canaan, p. 256.

[27]Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings, III (2nd ser.; Boston: Munroe and Francis, 1810), p. 64.

[28]Mass. Hist. Soc., Proceedings, III (2nd. ser.), p. 62.

sale of guns to the Indians a heinous offense and had the power to have Morton prosecuted in Star Chamber, he seems to have let Morton off with no more than a scolding.[29] Bradford said Morton escaped from his guard, John Oldham, when they reached England, but Charles Francis Adams says that Oldham met with Gorges and delivered the letter condemning Morton; so there can be no doubt that Morton's status was known. The fact that Morton returned to New England with Plymouth's agent Isaac Allerton[30] adds to the doubt that Morton could have missed notice by Gorges. Adams speculated that Morton presented himself as a persecuted Anglican to gain Gorges' good graces, and that it was possible that Morton, acting as an arbiter between Gorges and Allerton, enabled the latter to secure a Kennebec patent for Plymouth.[31] His subsequent employment as Allerton's scribe would seem to bear this out.

The cause for Morton's being expelled in 1630 by the Massachusetts Bay Colony was clearly <u>not</u> the sale of guns to the Indians. Although The "Company's First General Letter of Instruction to [Governor] John Endicott and his Council" in 1628 states:

> For such of our nation as sell munitions guns or other furniture, to arm the Indians against us, or teach

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[29]Adams, <u>Episodes</u>, p. 221.

[30]Bradford, <u>Plymouth</u>, p. 216.

[31]Adams, <u>Episodes</u>, pp. 222-224.

> them the use of arms, we would have you apprehend them and send them prisoner for England, where they will not escape severe punishment, being expressly against the proclamation.[32]

the charges brought did not include that violation,[33] therefore it seems that, for whatever the reason, Morton had stopped trading in guns by 1630.

Merrymount and Morton have been labeled immoral by the two religious colonies and subsequently by those who wrote about them. A classic description of him would be of a satyr gamboling on May Day with red lasses, shooting hail shot at Indian husbands who didn't move fast enough to suit him, and when he had a free moment from his revels, roaming the countryside searching for new recruits for his settlement. These recruits, it was feared, would be the servants of other settlers. As Bradford wrote, " . . . they saw they could keep no servants, for Morton would entertain any, how vile soever. . . . "[34] It would seem interesting to note at this point that when Morton took over Mount Wollaston there were six men with him,[35] and three years later when Standish captured

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[32]Alexander Young, Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1846), p. 156.

[33]Adams, Episodes, p. 246.

[34]Bradford, Plymouth, p. 208.

[35]Adams, Episodes, p. 194.

him that number had probably not grown by more than two.[36] Also, Morton was nowhere formally charged with harboring fugitive servants, even though the legality of prosecutions against runaway apprentices and those who aided them was certainly well established.

Morton was from the West Counties of England and, while the easterners came to America to find an outlet for repressed religious liberties, the westerners are said to have come to continue the life of "Merrie Old England."[37] Except in Puritan circles, drunkeness in England was looked upon as hardly worse than an amiable weakness, and even Adams, who agreed that Morton was a scoundrel, says:

> The [maypole] episode now breaks in upon the leaden gloom of the early New England annals like a single fitful gleam of sickly sunlight, giving the chill surroundings a transient glow of warmth, of cheerfulness, of human sympathy.[38]

Several authors have asserted that Morton, while at odds with the Pilgrims, was the most popular Englishman with the Indians. Bradford's followers have not been shown to have dealt unfairly with the natives, with the possible exception

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[36]Morton says there were still only seven. (Morton, Canaan, p. 295).

[37]Charles Edward Banks, The Planters of the Commonwealth (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1930), p. 16.

[38]Adams, Episodes, p. 179.

of the alleged massacre of a group of them at Wessagusset.[39] To the separatists, however, Indians were not of the elect in the Calvinist tradition; therefore the Pilgrims were reluctant to mingle with them except for trade purposes. Morton on the other hand included them in his revels, hunted with them and generally treated them with respect.[40]

The charge that Morton flouted morality and the law, it would seem, could be reversed and directed against the Pilgrims. It was they who pointedly and decisively broke with the established church of England. It was, overtly at least, for precisely that reason that their English sponsors abandoned the colony in 1623 and agreed to reunite only if the Pilgrims renounced separatism and allowed them an equal voice in government.[41]

Many non-separatist settlers in the colony found Pilgrim leadership oppressive. John Lyford, who was sent to Plymouth

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[39] An early settlement established by Thomas Weston, which had fallen to thievery to get food, so enraged the Indians that the Englishmen had to seek the protection of the Pilgrims. Standish and some of Weston's men lured several of the Indians into a room, murdered them, and dispatched several others as they tried to escape. This show of force effectively pacified the Indians and disbanded Wessagusset. (Morton, Canaan, pp. 250-254 and John Gorham Palfrey, History of New England [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1858], I, 200-203).

[40] Adams, Episodes, p. 175.

[41] George D. Langdon, Pilgrim Colony, A History of New Plymouth (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1966), p. 27.

to be the pastor, was accused of "plotting against them, and disturbing their peace, both in respect to their civil and church state."[42] Because he was refused ordination at Plymouth, Lyford set up his own church to which he attempted to draw converts. To produce evidence which would justify banishing him, Governor Bradford intercepted and read some letters written to the Adventurers.[43] Adams claimed that Lyford's charge that Bradford discriminated against non-separatists is nonsense, and that is probably correct. However, the Governor's condemnations do not seem to be consistent. Because John Oldham sided with Lyford, he was punished with banishmont and Morton says, " . . . compelled in scorne to passe along betweene and receive a bob on the bumme be every Musketier."[44] But only a few years later Oldham was sufficiently reinstated to be entrusted to convey Morton to England for punishment. When he failed to get Morton punished and began competing with Plymouth for patents, Oldham again fell from favor, only to reappear as head of the Massachusetts Bay expedition up the Connecticut River. In another case one ship captain Thomas Cromwell and his crew were deservedly

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[42]John A. Goodwin, The Pilgrim Republic (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Co., 1920), p. 318.

[43]Palfrey, History, I, 219.

[44]Morton, Canaan, p. 264.

called louts and pirates by Governor Bradford, but when they stopped at Plymouth they were welcomed because they had aboard much needed supplies.[45] Cromwell was also welcome in Massachusetts Bay where the name Thomas Morton had become synonymous with outlaw and murderer. It seems no matter how unsavory the company, the two colonies would welcome those who could do them a service.

One of the first acts of Governor John Endicott upon arriving in America in 1629 was to march to Merrymount, hew down the scandalous Maypole, change the name of the place to Mt. Dagon,[46] and rebuke those who were still there for their profaneness.[47] Endicott must have had advance knowledge of the antics of Morton and was probably disappointed that he had missed the opportunity to admonish Morton personally. Morton had been deported by Plymouth just prior to Endicott's arrival.

When Morton returned to New England in 1630, he was immediately in trouble with the Massachusetts Bay authorities. He refused to sign articles which acknowledged the authority of the company to decide in all cases ecclesiastical and po-

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[45]Bradford, Plymouth, p. 345.

[46]Dagon was the sea god of the Phillistines during whose feast Samson pulled down the temple (Morton, Canaan, p. 32n).

[47]Bradford, Plymouth, p. 206.

litical, according to the word of God found in scriptures.[48] This incident has been pointed to as proof of the immorality of Morton; after all, who but an atheist would refuse to follow God's law? However, it was not God whom Morton feared; it was the Puritans. He declared that he was willing to sign if but one short clause were added; "So as nothing be done contrary to the laws of England."[49] Who but a rebel would refuse to enter such a clause?

Endicott brought with him to America, according to Adams, a warrant for Morton's arrest for murder.[50] If that were true, then why was there any attempt to have Morton sign an agreement at all? It was subsequently well established that the government of the colony was ruthless in dealing with offenders, and it seems they would have deported Morton immediately to stand trial in England. This point is exemplified by a letter from John Winthrop, who arrived in June 1630 and relieved Endicott as Governor of Massachusetts Bay, to Lord Chief Justice of England. The letter explained the deportation of one Robert Wright in March 1631 as being based upon nothing more than "intelligence" that he had " . . . fled out

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[48]Adams, Episodes, p. 225.

[49]Adams, Episodes, p. 225.

[50]Adams, Episodes, p. 245.

of England for Treason. . . . "[51] In June that same year Phillip Radcliff had his ears lopped off for speaking out against the government and the church.[52] But when Morton was brought to trial, it was for trivial trumped up charges which included the theft of a canoe and shooting at an Indian, but no mention of murder.[53] The First Court of Assistants at Charlestown, according to historian James Hosmer, was a vigorous and impartial disciplinarian. It is true that others had been deported for seemingly minor offences,[54] but the punishment meted out to Morton was exceptionally severe for his alleged crimes. His feet were put in bilboes, his hands bound, his house with all belongings burned, and he was deported. The burning was postponed to coincide with his departure so that he would be forced to watch as a final reminder.[55] The first ship sailing for England refused to take Morton aboard; one can only speculate as to the reason.[56]

What then of the murder charge? The only reference that

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[51] Winthrop Papers (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1931), III, 15.

[52] Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, VIII (3rd ser. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown. 1843), p. 323.

[53] Adams, Episodes, p. 246.

[54] Winthrop's Journal, History of New England ed. by James Kendall Hosmer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 52n.

[55] Young, Chronicles of Mass., p. 322.

[56] Winthrop's Journal, p. 53.

it was stronger than suspicion was contained in a letter written by Thomas Wiggins to a Master Downing in which he states that he has been informed by a "Moreton's wife's son and others that Moreton" fled such a charge.[57] All others are simply speculations ranging from rumors to statements that Morton was tried and acquitted.[58] One item of interest appears in the writings of Governor Winthrop prior to his coming to America. An entry in his notebook of cases before the courts of wards and liveries from 1623-1629 cites an accusation of murder against a Thomas Moreton from "Swallowfield in Com." The victim was Thomas Wigge, and a man named Edwards, apparantly Moreton's accomplice, served a term in prison for the crime. No mention is made of Moreton's guilt or punishment.[59] It seems difficult to believe that Winthrop, who had become governor prior to Morton's September 30, 1630 trial, would fail to draw the connection if he were the same Merrymount Morton. If he were, Morton must have in fact been acquitted of murder before coming to America. Another explanation may be that of mistaken identity; Thomas Morton was a common English name. One Thomas Morton lived as close as Plymouth Colony and another was a famous English churchman.[60]

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[57] Mass. Hist. Soc. Collections, VIII (3d ser.), 323.

[58] Goodwin, Republic, p. 321.

[59] Winthrop Papers, II, 44.

[60] D. N. B., XXXIX, 159.

It is possible that the Moreton referred to in Winthrop's log is the sole source for the murder accusation against Morton of Merrymount. Winthrop surely would recognize the man he had seen in court only five years before, but he had not yet seen the Morton in New England. He had only the name. Perhaps he had a strong suspicion that this was the murderer and had applied for the warrant which came with Endicott on that ground. It may have been that Moreton was a fugitive from justice; in that case Winthrop would have been obligated to apprehend him.

The suspicion that Morton was a spy or agent for Ferdinando Gorges was a well founded Puritan mistrust. They had seen Morton receive scarcely more than a reprimand from Gorges when he was deported for selling guns and had noted his quick return to New England. By this time the antagonism between Massachusetts Bay and Gorges had stiffened over patent disputes, and the Puritans were growing wary. That suspicion was strengthened when Morton had served his short term in jail in England and joined with Gardiner and Radcliff in the petition against the colony in 1632. Until early 1634 when Morton was retained to prosecute the writ of Quo Warranto, Gorges remained separate from him, at least openly. Gorges' biographer quotes him as saying prior to that time, seemingly in support of Massachusetts Bay, " . . . doubtless had not the patience and wisdom of Mr. Winthrop, Mr. Humphreys, Mr. Dudley, and others their assistants, been the greater much mischief would

have suddenly overwhelmed them."[61] About the charges in the 1632 petition Gorges wrote, "Many turbulent spirits had crowded into the settlements and their violent words and imprudent acts furnished Morton and Gardiner with weapons with which to attack the whole colony."[62] Yet in 1634 Gorges threw a tremendous effort into the successful attempt to have the Massachusetts charter repealed.

Although some antagonism toward Morton certainly must have been stimulated by the aforementioned factors, probably the single deepest hurt which he dealt to the two religious colonies was in the pocketbook. New England, ever a hostile region to farmers, yielded her abundance grudgingly, therefore the income of the colonies was almost entirely based upon the fur of beaver and other animals. Drawing on examples of French fur profit and Jamestown's difficult initial period, it was decided that the only way to meet the colony's obligations was through friendly relations with the Indians and the fur trade.

The other income possibilities-fishing and agriculture-were soon abandoned. By this time fishing fleets from Europe were well established off the Newfoundland banks, and the Pilgrims discovered they couldn't compete favorably with them. Not only were they inexperienced fishermen, but also the cost

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[61] Baxter, Gorges, p. 160.

[62] Baxter, Gorges, p. 159.

of shipping from the fishing grounds to Plymouth and then to Europe would have been much greater than the costs incurred by European based fishermen.[63] As for agriculture, even with the numbers of cleared fields available to the Pilgrims because of the decimated Indian population (there had been a plague which had killed a great number immediately prior to the Pilgrim landing), it would have been years before a surplus could be established in order to realize a profit. Even then they would have had a difficult time because of the short growing season and the poor land.

Besides their financial obligation to the English Adventurers, the Pilgrims were dependent upon the Council for New England from whom they held their patent. It " . . . did not secure them from the intrusion of others."[64] Prospective settlers were freely granted licenses for fishing, hunting and trading by the Council, which put Plymouth Colony in the position of having intense competition from the beginning. Because of the vague nature of the Plymouth Colony patent and the diminutive size of their jurisdiction, the Pilgrims could not directly eliminate the competition. However, had they not acted, the competition could have become a threat to their survival.

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[63]Francis X. Maloney The Fur Trade in New England, 1620-1676 (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967), p. 19.

[64]Ralph May, Early Portsmouth History (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed, 1926), p. 56.

Morton's trading post was probably the most serious of the threats. He had immediately achieved good relations with both the Indians and the sailors on trading vessels which frequented the New England coast by his reputation as a congenial host with reasonable rates in trade. He sold beaver skins at ten shillings a pound; whereas Governor Bradford said, "I doe not remember any under 14 [shillings]."[65] This disparity of prices alarmed Morton's neighbors. Not only did he undersell them, but " . . . his people by their reckless way of dealing, demoralized trade. The savages were getting a more correct idea of the value of their wares."[66] Even worse, the New England fleet, which numbered about fifty vessels, became reluctant to deal with the Pilgrims.

Morton not only worried the Pilgrims in southern New England, but, before Plymouth established a permanent trading station at the Kennebec in 1628, he had already established an efficient operation there, and the Pilgrims found it difficult to compete with him.[67]

Thomas Morton wasn't the only one who felt the wrath of the Pilgrims. The magistrates regarded "particulars," people who came to Plymouth at their own expense, like Roger Conant

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[65]Morton, Canaan, p. 205n.

[66]Adams, Episodes, p. 197.

[67]D. N. B., XXXIX, 159.

as dangerous potential rivals in the fur trade and were anxious to maintain control over them. As long as these self-financed individuals stayed at Plymouth, they were forced to sign an agreement that they would not enter into trade. Many, however, like Conant, chaffed under these rules and were as anxious to be rid of them as the Pilgrims were to maintain control. Although he thought "some of the Pilgrims were thievish,"[68] Conant agreed to abide by the law. In 1625, after he had lived in Plymouth for a few months, Conant was invited by the Dorchester Company to take over rule of their settlement of about fifty people which was floundering at Cape Ann, and he began to turn it toward profit.[69] Plymouth seems to have gotten along well with them until an abandoned fishing stage belonging to Plymouth was appropriated by a captain associated with the Cape Ann settlement. The incident triggered a clash in which Captain Miles Standish defended Pilgrim interests. The matter was settled by Conant's building a new stage for the Pilgrims. Subsequently, Plymouth transferred her fishing base to the Maine coast.[70] Still alarmed by the competition of Conant's settlement, Plymouth invoked rights of a patent obtained for them from the Council

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[68]Clifford K. Shipton, Roger Conant (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1944), p. 34.

[69]Shipton, Conant, pp. 34-52.

[70]Shipton, Conant, p. 53.

for New England by William Pierce in 1622 and claimed the land at Cape Ann on which the settlement was located. The ousted settlers moved to Naumkeag to become the foundation of the town of Salem,[71] later to become the initial nucleus of the Massachusetts Bay colony.

An earlier settlement established at Wessagusset by Thomas Weston, one of the original Adventurers who backed Plymouth, began causing Plymouth problems in 1622. Warned in advance by Robert Cushman, one of their agents in England, that the men of Weston's group were " . . . so base in condition, for the most part, as in all appearance not fit for an honest man's company,"[72] the Pilgrims welcomed them at first but were happy to see them move on. These new settlers grew short of provisions in the winter and proposed to the Pilgrims that they combine forces to steal from the Indians until they could be resupplied. Plymouth sent them corn but denounced the plan. It seems, however, that the Wessagusset settlers persisted and provoked trouble with the Indians. The problem was solved by Standish, who trapped and killed several Indians.[73]

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[71]Charles Knowles Bolton, The Real Founders of New England (Boston: F. W. Faxton Co., 1929), p. 57.

[72]Palfrey, History, I, 199n.

[73]Palfrey, History, I, 200.

According to Thomas Morton, the people at Wessagusset were lazy, grew sick and probably did resort to some thievery to survive, but the real instigator of the trouble was Plymouth Colony. He said it was men from Plymouth who despoiled the grave of a sachem's (Chautawback) mother, and committed the murders to arouse the Indians against Wessagusset so that it would be impossible for small English settlements to exist.[74]

Other independent settlers in the area had their problems with Plymouth also. In 1626 David Thomson, a settler on what became known as Thomson's Island in Boston Harbor, accompanied Bradford on a trading expedition to Monhegan on the Maine coast. Bradford recorded that the two dealing separately resulted in:

> . . . some hindrance to them both. For they, [the settlers at Monhegan] perceiving their joint desires, to buy, held their goods at higher rates, and not only so, but would not sell a parcel of their trading goods except they sold it all.[75]

That problem was solved by the two agreeing to buy together and divide the goods afterward. Another episode involving Plymouth and others at Piscataqua, New Hampshire in 1634 ended more tragically. A party of white men from Piscataqua tried to trade with the Indians at Kennebec, where Plymouth claimed

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[74]Morton, Canaan, pp. 247-249.

[75]Bradford, Plymouth, pp. 181-182.

a monopoly, and when they were forbidden there was a fight. It was the eleven men from Plymouth against three men and a boy, and when the fracas ended one of each group was dead.[76]

By the time the Massachusetts Bay Colony was established in 1630, the nearby fur trade had all but been eliminated by Plymouth, and the new colony was forced to look elsewhere. Earlier settlers like Morton had already established a chain of posts, and from information received from Plymouth, Governor John Winthrop must have known how difficult competition with the Lord of Merrymount would be. When the Puritans could not eliminate Morton's competition in 1630 by forcing him to sign the articles of allegiance to the Colony, the only way remaining was to deport him. Everyone agrees that the charges against Morton were petty and trumped up but supposed that Massachusetts Bay was extirpating a bad moral influence. It seems clear upon close examination of the evidence, however, that the real reason was economic rather than moral.

Can we assume then that Morton, upon his return to New England in 1643, represented an economic threat that would justify his elimination? His associations at this time are unclear. Gorges had written Winthrop in 1637 that Morton was "casheerd" from any of Gorges' affairs, and although there

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[76] Winthrop Papers, III, 167.

were suspicions that this was only a ruse,[77] there is no evidence to support them. During the year prior to his apprehension by Massachusetts Bay in September, 1644, Morton appeared in various places from Rhode Island to Maine. According to Charles Francis Adams, he claimed to be an agent for the King, under the protection of Parliament engaged in recruiting settlers for Narragansett or New Haven.[78] This is hardly likely, for Adams wrote later that Morton was old, decrepit, weak, lived on only four shillings a week and could therefore not afford to drink anything but water.[79] There can be little doubt that Governor Winthrop knew of the old vagabond's circumstances. In August, 1644 he had received a letter from William Coddington of Newport, Rhode Island, (where Morton was staying) in which Coddington stated that he did not believe Morton's story about his ability to grant lands,[80] and Pilgrim leader Edward Winslow clearly described Morton's physical condition in a letter to Winthrop dated January 7, 1644.[81] Although it has been shown that Morton did present an economic threat in 1630 and before, it hardly seems reasonable at this point in his life that Morton could have pre-

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[77] Adams, Episodes, II, 303.

[78] Adams, Episodes, II, 344-346.

[79] Adams, Episodes, p. 428.

[80] Winthrop Papers, IV, 490, 491.

[81] Winthrop Papers, IV, 428.

sented any threat to Massachusetts Bay.

Morton had continued to be involved in Colonial affairs during his long absence from 1630 to 1643, mostly in an effort to attain the repeal of the Massachusetts Charter. The final realization that his efforts were in vain must have come as a terrible disappointment to him. His decision to return to New England in 1643 was probably simply a desire to live his remaining days in the country about which he had written with such admiration in the Canaan.

It would have been terribly naive of Morton to assume that the two colonies which he had much maligned would let him live in peace, but that is what Plymouth did. Granted, the main target of his activities in England was Massachusetts Bay, but the Pilgrims had not entirely escaped. It seems that the only Pilgrim terribly angered by his presence in later years was Miles Standish, on whose land Morton hunted. Even though Edward Winslow spent seventeen weeks in an English jail upon Morton's complaint,[82] he revealed no animosity but only contempt toward Morton in his letter to John Winthrop.

Plymouth must have given Morton protection, for as soon as Endicott was aware that his old enemy was back in New England, the Puritan leader was issuing warrants for his arrest. In a letter to Governor Winthrop, Endicott said he had heard

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[82]Adams, Episodes, p. 344.

Morton was at "Gloster" and sent a warrant to apprehend him. "It is most likelie that the Jesuits or some that way disposed have sent him over to doe us mischiefe to raise up our enemies round about us both English and Indian."[83] There is no evidence that Morton tried to incite a rebellion, as Endicott suggests, and if the charge that Morton had done grave injury to the Indians were true, as the judgment that deported him declared, it seems hardly likely that Indians would follow him in an uprising. All that the Court of Assistants could charge Morton with in 1644 was for having made " . . . a complaint against us [Massachusetts Bay] at the council board."[84] Even so, he was held in jail for a year "awaiting Evidence" from England, and when none came he was again called before the Court and " . . . after some debate what to do with him, he was fined 100 pounds and set at liberty."[85] Because Morton did not have the 100 pounds, he was allowed to escape to Maine where he spent the remaining two years of his life, shortened, he said, by being forced to spend the whole winter in jail without fire or bedding. Even Adams, his harsh critic, wrote, "How he survived such exposure would seem to be the only cause

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[83] Winthrop Papers, IV, 464.

[84] Adams, Episodes, p. 350.

[85] Winthrop's Journal, p. 196.

for wonder."[86]

Whatever the reason for the difficulties between Morton and the Puritan colonies, it seems clear that he was not the villain history has made of him--he was more a victim. That point is made by Samuel Maverick, a man described by John Winthrop as " . . . of very loving and courteous behavior, very ready to entertaine strangers."[87] Maverick wrote:

> Morton was banished, his house fired before his face, and he sent prisoner to England, but for what offense I know not; who, some years after (nothing being laid to his charge) returned for New England, where he was soon apprehended and kept in the common Gaole a whole winter, nothing laid to his Charge but the writing of a Booke entitled New Canaan, which indeed was the truest description of New England as then it was that I ever saw. The offense was he had touched them too neere. They not proveing the charge, he was sett loose, but soone after dyed, haveing as he said, and most believed, received his bane by hard lodging and fare in prison. This was done by the Massachusetts Magistrats.[88]

Adams may well have been right when he contended that . . . anywhere else in the English colonies Morton would have died unnoticed and unremembered,"[89] but that can probably be said about any figure in history. Had John Winthrop stayed

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[86]Adams, Episodes, p. 350.

[87]Bolton, Real Founders, p. 100.

[88]Mass. Hist. Soc. Collections, I (2nd ser., Boston: By the Society, 1885), 238.

[89]Adams, Episodes, p. 225.

in England, it is likely he too would have died in obscurity.

Was it then simply moral indignation toward Morton's antics concerning the maypole which caused such an extensive reaction from the two New England colonies? The Puritan settlements would have considered his antics objectionable, but it would seem there was sufficient distance between Morton's post and the settlements that he could have simply been ignored, especially when one considers that both of the settlements were spending most of their energies in the business of survival.

Perhaps, as it has been suggested, the prime concern was defense against armed, hostile Indians which stimulated the two colonies to eject Morton. However, during the period in which Morton was selling arms, Plymouth enjoyed quite good relations with the Indians. Many of the factors which contributed to the early success of the new colony came about with aid from the Indians. It does not seem that danger from Indian attack was so imminent as to warrant Morton's expulsion. When Morton was expelled by Massachusetts Bay, he had apparantly already stopped arming the natives.

The third factor which would seem to warrant Morton's expulsion was his link with Sir Ferdinando Gorges and The Council For New England. As has been noted, animosity developed between the Council and the Magistrates of the two Puritan colonies, especially Massachusetts Bay, and there was

suspicion that Gorges employed Morton as a spy. That suspicion was probably valid--but not prior to Morton's ejection in 1630--for both colonies up to that time had enjoyed a fairly amiable relationship with the Council. It was not until after 1632 that the challenges against Massachusetts Bay's charter began in earnest. By the time Morton returned to New England in 1643 the two colonies were relatively well established, and any damage which Morton could have inflicted in the area of revocation of charters had long passed.

The possibility of threat by a growing royalist settlement which might possibly have subjected the two Puritan colonies to the same kind of oppression which they had fled in the old country, even from their vantage point, would seem to have been ruled out by the obvious nature of Morton's post. It was not organized as a nucleus for a large colony but only for a small fur trading station for which Morton had no intention of receiving immigrants.

Morton's post was, however, well adapted for its intended purpose: the fur trade. He had become well established in trade along the New England coast, and competition from him or any other like him would have been exceedingly difficult to overcome had he been allowed to continue. Even when it seemed that Morton was too old and weak in 1643 to have posed any threat, Massachusetts Bay was unwilling to give him any opportunity. It would seem that economic survival of the founders of New England was a major cause of the injusti-

ces visited upon Thomas Morton.

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