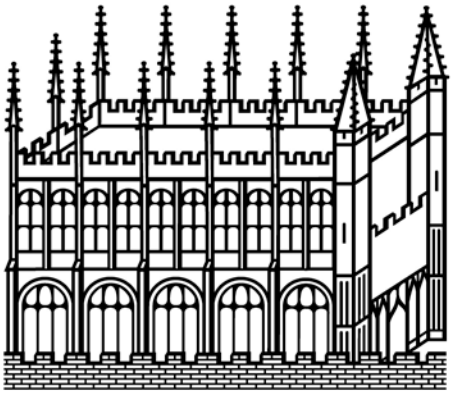

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A Few Observations

ON THE PRINCE SOCIETY'S EDITION OF THE NEW ENGLISH CANAAN.

NEW YORK:
REVISED AND REPRINTED FROM THE CHURCHMAN.
August 18*th*,
1883.

A Few Observations.*

The bitterness with which some Congregationalists and their sympathizers have conducted many open or indirect attacks upon men of the Church of England, does not incline one, as a rule, to look for much fair play in the works of current denominational writers bearing on subjects involving the credit of the Church. The Popham controversy forms an instructive illustration of this, the Church of England colony, planted on the Kennebec thirteen years before the settlement of Plymouth, having been deliberately pronounced a colony of "felons." There were respectable Congregationalists who felt as much aggrieved as Churchmen themselves by the course pursued, which needs no characterization, but, though the tone of discussion has improved, for a long time to come a certain degree of misrepresentation in connection with all Church questions will be in order among a class of writers interested in demonstrating the spotless virtue and immaculate wisdom of men of their own stripe.

*The New English Canaan of Thomas Morton. With Introductory Matter and Notes. By Charles Francis Adams, Jr. [Boston: Published by the Prince Society. 1883.] 4to.

The goodly volume before us touches more or less upon Churchmen of the seventeenth century, and it would be altogether too charitable to say that it is free from the peculiarity already pointed out. Nevertheless, it is a work of very great interest and value. It is edited by a writer who has shown remarkable aptitude for dealing with difficult subjects, and who has made several contributions to New England history that constitute students his debtors. We very cordially recognize the value that attaches to whatsoever Mr. Adams puts his hand, and we also have to thank the Prince Society for giving us the results of his labors in such an admirable form. We are not able, however, to agree altogether with Mr. Adams in his opinion of the author of that most famous work, "The New English Canaan."

Thomas Morton, the hero of Motley's novel entitled "Merry Mount," was far from being a perfect character; and, though he was a Churchman, we know of no "investigators" among Churchmen or others who, as Mr. Adams phrases it, adopt "Morton's cause as their own." Indeed, we have to point out what seems to us to be the fact, that in his introduction the editor does not write with the accuracy that he has shown in other works. He enters upon his enterprise in a languid fashion, evidently a little discouraged by the magnitude of his task, and

wishing that it were fairly out of hand, as he had written two or three laborious papers on the subject already. We have no room, however, to discuss his work in detail, and must content ourselves with a few observations.

At the outset, in groping around for something damaging to say, Mr. Adams finds that there was a "Wollaston" associated with Morton at Merry Mount, and also a pirate named "Wollaston;" and as "it is not likely that two Captain Wollastons were sea adventurers at the same time," the two Wollastons must be one and the same. As "probably was" equals "surmise,' this is all clear gain, and he gets Morton into bad company at the start; even though Froude confounds Captain John Davis of Sandridge with Captain John Davis of Limehouse, and notwithstanding the fact that it was a pirate bearing the classical cognomen of Jones who brought over the Pilgrim Fathers in the Mayflower, the said fathers showing their abhorrence of pirates and piracy by attaching the name of this *confrére* of Captain Kidd to the little river that washed the border of Plymouth's shore.

Making an excellent start, Mr. Adams continues hopefully on an easy down-grade to the end, repeating slanders devised by Morton's enemies, who went so far as to charge him with murder, not being quite so moderate as those who denounced the Popham colonists of 1607 as felons.

Mr. Adams disavows a great deal of Bradford's trash, and in a former essay he even condemned the action of the Boston authorities roundly, though in editing this volume he realizes that the men of the Bay are on trial, and accordingly he does the best for them that he can. Bradford called Morton a pettifogger, but Mr. Adams is forced to confess that he was a lawyer in regular standing, and a good one, too. He secured the services of a specialist to ransack the legal authorities, covering a period of five hundred years, to convict Thomas Morton of error, but in vain. The latter took his positions well, though he could not maintain them against brute force. It is clear that Thomas Morton was a gentleman of property and, as Maverick says, of quality, being a well-bred lawyer of Furnivell's Inn. Nevertheless he is represented as getting possession of Merry Mount by foul means; while the fact that he was not dispossessed is explained by the statement that "there were no courts of appeal in America." Yet we find that the men of Massachusetts Bay could *destroy* property without courts of appeal if they could not *restore* it. But we clearly learn that the property was Morton's, from the fact that they burned his house before his eyes as punishment for alleged offences. In no better way could they have declared that Merry Mount belonged to him, agreeing with the testimony of

Maverick in the "Clarendon Papers," and the statement of "New England's Vindication," that Morton had a patent; the latter authority, not quoted by Mr. Adams, showing that the "Pirate" Wollaston also had a patent for land. Such a lame treatment of a plain legal subject was hardly expected, any more than a vindication of the persecution waged against Morton, on the ground that he was selling arms to the natives, and was, therefore, a dangerous man to the community. If he had been selling glass beads, it would have been equally dangerous to the community; yet our editor writes, speaking of Merry Mount, that "it was the yearly rendezvous of a rough and lawless class of men, only one step removed from freebooters, who cared for nothing except immediate gain. Once let such a gathering place as that of which Morton was now head become fixed and known, and soon it would develop into a nest of pirates." This, however, is really too much. He quite overdoes the subject, reminding the reader of Bradford's lamentation: "O the horiblnes of this vilanie!"

One peculiar feature of his treatment, however, is found where he tries to make it appear that the Churchmen situated around Boston approved of the capture and banishment of Morton. Speaking of the papers sent to England when Morton was driven out, he says: "These letters

were signed by the chief of the several plantations," but Bradford says (the italics are ours): "This letter was subscribed by *some* of the chiefs of every plantation, but I have not their names to the copy, and therefore omit them; yet they may *in part* be seen by that at the same time underwritten (in another paper) toward the charges as followeth." According to this paper, among those assessed for the expenses of arresting Morton, we find the Rev. William Blackstone, the Church clergyman then dwelling at Boston; and on this pretext, another "surmise," it has been argued that Churchmen themselves were arrayed against Morton; whereas, there is no proof whatsoever that Blackstone paid a penny of the assessment, or that he sympathized in the slightest degree with the men of the Bay, from whom he was glad to escape by going to Rhode Island. When they levied even a *fine* upon Walford, the Charlestown Episcopalian, they could not collect it; while at the same period the authorities remitted Saltonstall's fine. The only testimony we have respecting the judgment of Churchmen on Morton is that of Maverick, who was in his favor, and denounced the authorities in unmeasured terms.

We get on well toward a climax, where we are told that Morton wrote his "New English Canaan" in the interest of Archbishop Laud and the commissioners. Here, therefore, one is

impressed by the singular way of Mr. Adams in ignoring the fact that the third part of the book was an afterthought, an epilogue having been put at the end of the second part. The third part was written as the result of his bitter experience at Boston and Plymouth, and abounds with satire, from which the other portions of the work are free, the tone being reverent and religious, though we are told solemnly that he was "a man of undevout mind," and that he put in piety and Prayer Book to please Laud. It was thus put in, we must notice, at a particular point of time, and put into a portion of the book described by Mr. Adams as "saturated with drunkenness, ribaldry, and scoffing." We thus readily perceive from this that Laud was a man pleased with such stuff, and that the archbishop was quite disposed to favor a cause bolstered up by writings saturated with indecency and vice. To such lengths has Mr. Adams gone; but we must remind him that he is not quite consistent—saying in one place that a thing is "lewd," and in another confessing that he does not know what the language means, and again saying that Morton's book is not "even a coarse book," that the verses in the third part are "decent enough," the fault being their "incomprehensibility," while, as we have seen, it is "saturated with drunkenness, ribaldry, and scoffing."

The novelty of the theory, that the book was written in the interest of Laud, must prove somewhat diverting to the average reader; the first and second parts containing nothing whatever to interest Laud in connection with his plans respecting New England, while large portions of the third part are written in such a way that experts in New England history cannot make out the sense. Mr. Adams himself gives up four chapters of the third part, chapters ix., x., xii., xiii., saying that he cannot understand them. Yet a work like this, pronounced by Mr. Adams, when the particular mood is upon him, as reeking with everything vile, was intended to help the Archbishop of Canterbury, and forward his work.

In many respects Thomas Morton was a reckless man. We have no excuse to offer for his faults, except such as we plead in behalf of his persecutors, toward whom he maintained less bitterness than is generally supposed, and whom though ridiculed without stint, he did not dismiss without words of praise; for, in this third book, "decent enough" yet saturated with indecency and vice, he tells Laud what must have given him great satisfaction, namely, that, "Among those who have settled themselves in New England, some have gone for their conscience's sake (as they professe,) and I wish that they may plant the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as be-

commeth them, in sincerity and without satisme or faction, whatsoever their former or present practices are, which I intend not to justifie; howsover, they have deserved (in mine opinion some commendations, in that they have furnished the country so commodiously in so short a time."

There is a great deal that is valuable in this work, but we do not believe that Mr. Adams has done either Morton or himself justice. Indeed he seems to confess failure where he says that if he were going to do the work again, he would do it in a different way; for, even if Morton were the man he has been depicted, it would then remain true, that, in destroying his property, and freezing fatal torments into his aged bones during the bitter winter spent in the fireless dungeon of Boston jail, his persecutors were guilty of a crime that the cunning pen of Mr. Adams cannot cancel, and that the elegant typographers of the Prince Society cannot print away.