

JOHN HOPKINS MORISON

A Memoir

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Smith. The result was two families of identical blood. Hon. Jeremiah Smith was one of the sons of William and Elizabeth Smith; his brothers, Samuel and John, though less known beyond the limits of Peterborough, were equally esteemed there.

Robert, the second son and third child of Thomas Morison, was born in Lunenburg, Mass., in 1744. He came to Peterborough with his father, and subsequently occupied and owned the farm which his grandfather, John Morison, had occupied. He married Elizabeth Holmes. He was a deacon in the Presbyterian Church. In 1791 his house was burned and the church records destroyed; in the same year he built on a different site a house which is still standing and in which John Hopkins Morison was born. He died in 1826, aged eighty-two years.

Nathaniel Morison, the third son of Deacon Robert Morison, and the oldest who survived infancy, was born in Peterborough, October 9, 1779. His life is best described by giving in full an account sent by his son, the subject of this memoir, to Dr. Albert Smith in 1876, and printed in Dr. Smith's History of Peterborough.

“Of my ancestors on my father's side beyond John Morison, my grandfather's grandfather, I

know nothing. He lived to be ninety-eight years old. For many years he was looked up to with great respect by the younger members of the family. From what I could learn, I have inferred that he was a man of sound judgment, of a mild disposition, and a natural dignity of character, a man to command the confidence of others. The account which I gave of him in the Centennial was taken from the recollections of his two grandchildren, Jeremiah Smith and Sally Morison, both of whom had very distinct and pleasant recollections of him as, more than any one else, the patriarch of the town.

“His son, Capt. Thomas Morison, was a more enterprising and ambitious man, with greater activity of mind and greater force of character. These more efficient traits were ascribed to his mother, Margaret Wallace, who wished her house, if it must be a log-house, to be a log higher than any other in the place. During the active period of his life he was, I suppose, one of the five or six leading men in Peterborough.

“His sons were none of them remarkable men. Three of his daughters, Polly, Sally, and Mrs. Wallace, were uncommonly intelligent. My grandfather, Robert Morison, was a man of good sense, but of moderate ability. He was a very devout man. I have seen many of his letters to my father that were marked by a degree of practical good judgment which I fear he did not know how to apply to his own affairs; for he was always in debt, and always appealing to my father for pecuniary assistance.

“My father, Nathaniel Morison, was the only one of his children who had more than ordinary ability. Ezekiel, his youngest son, was a man of correct and industrious habits ; he died young in Mississippi. Nathaniel was born October 11, 1779. In 1802 he went with an invoice of chairs to some place in the West Indies, but finding no market for them there he took them to Wilmington, N. C. After disposing of them he went to Fayetteville, in the same State, and entered into the business of making carriages. In 1804 he came to New England and married Mary Ann Hopkins, who was born in that part of Londonderry which is now Windham, and returned to his business in Fayetteville with his wife, where he remained till 1807. Then, at the urgent solicitation of his father, he came back to Peterborough, and settled down with his wife and daughter, having bought his father’s farm. He brought with him five thousand dollars in specie, and there were still considerable sums of money due him at the South. In five years he had laid up between six and seven thousand dollars. He was not fitted to be a farmer. The success of a more extended enterprise, and the habits formed in a different sphere, made him restless under its slow and limited operations. In 1811, I believe, he returned to Fayetteville to settle up his affairs there, and when he returned he brought with him John H. Steele,¹ a young man whom he had found there, and consid-

¹ John H. Steele was Governor of New Hampshire in 1844 and 1845 ; one of his Thanksgiving proclamations was written by J. H. Morison.

ered a very ingenious and capable mechanic, and who afterwards filled so important a place in Peterborough. Three or four years more passed by, when he purchased for ten thousand dollars what was then called the South Factory, and devoted all his energies to that and kindred enterprises. He put up a building for the manufacture of fine linen, particularly table-cloths. The women in Peterborough and the neighboring towns were famous for their labors at the distaff. The object of this new undertaking was to weave, by improved processes, the linen yarn that was spun in the vicinity. The looms were worked by hand, but with what was called a spring shuttle, then a new invention. In connection with these factories my father, now a militia captain, opened a small store, and he had upon his hands all that he could attend to.

“But he had chosen an unfortunate time for these investments. The war with England was soon over. The country was flooded with foreign goods. There was no sale for our domestic products. The factories were closed. His little competence melted away. He was embarrassed with debts. His farm and factory property were heavily mortgaged. For all industrial enterprises, the term from 1815 to 1820 was a period of greater depression than any other period of five years during the present century. After struggling in vain with adverse events, and with embarrassments which were constantly increasing, he went to Mississippi, in the fall of 1817, to collect a considerable debt that was due him there. He carried out with him

a few cases of axes and shoes, which he disposed of at a good profit. He collected his debt so as to reach home in the spring of 1818.

“ While he was in Natchez, he became acquainted with several gentlemen of large fortunes, and made a contract with them to supply the city with water by means of lead pipes for \$30,000. On reaching home he engaged a competent man in New Hampshire to lay the pipes, and in the autumn of 1818 he went out with a larger supply of axes, ploughs, and shoes. But the boat which carried a part of his merchandise struck a snag and sunk in the Mississippi; and when he reached Natchez, and had made all his arrangements and got his men and materials there to supply the city with water, the Southern gentlemen repudiated the contract which he supposed they had made, and the whole enterprise, with consequences ruinous to all his hopes, was thrown back upon him. He had recourse again to his old occupation, and endeavored to gain a little money by working as a wheelwright and carriage-maker. But disappointment, anxiety, and the hot, malarious summer climate there were too much for him. He was taken down by the yellow fever, and after a few days of severe suffering, in which he was carefully attended by his brother Ezekiel, and his townsman, John Scott, Jr., he died on the 11th day of September, 1819, just before he had completed his fortieth year. Rumors of his death had already reached us, when, on a cold, cloudy, November Saturday afternoon, I, then a boy of eleven, walked to the village to

see if any letter had come by the mail. On entering your father's store just before dark, I heard the people talking of the report, and, as they did not know me, they kept on with their conversation till I had received the letter. I had a sad journey home in the dark night, and the burst of grief with which the first line of the letter was greeted was more than I could bear. The next morning my grandfather called us all together to prayers as the custom was of a Sunday morning, and I shall never forget the solemnity and pathos with which the old man, with trembling hands and a voice broken with emotion, read the third chapter of Lamentations: 'I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.'

"A month or two before, when news of the falling through of the Natchez enterprise had reached this part of the country, the sheriff had come to our house and taken possession of everything that the law allowed him to take. The sharpest pang that I felt at that time was in witnessing my mother's anguish, and, next to that, was when I saw the officers of the law drive away a pair of young steers that I had watched over and tended and fondled ever since they were born. I did not see them again for three years, and it was very painful to me then to find that I could not get from them any sign of affection or recognition. They had entirely forgotten me. After my father's death, we remained in the old homestead through the winter till March or April, 1820. My mother

had for her portion a shell of a house near the South Factory and eight hundred dollars. It required half the money to convert the 'old weaving-shop' into a tolerable residence. I remember well the earnest gaze and the deep sigh with which, on leaving our early home, where all her children but one had been born, she looked back upon it, with a baby on each arm, and then turned slowly away towards her new home. She had been left alone in the fall of 1818 with seven children, the oldest thirteen years, and the two youngest four months old. All her means of support consisted of a half-finished house, two cows, and four or five hundred dollars. She had a most delicate, sensitive nature, but a force of will and an amount of executive energy such as I have never seen surpassed. In my remembrance of her, as she was during the early period of her widowhood, I always think of her sitting at her loom, working and weeping. She did not stop to indulge in discouraging apprehensions, but emphasized her grief by driving her shuttle with increased promptness and vehemence. With a resolution that almost broke her heart, she put her two oldest boys, one eleven and the other nine years old, into farmers' families to work for their living. Lessons of honest industry and helpfulness and self-dependence were thus learned. If there was a great deal of suffering on their part and on hers, caused by severe labor and a divided household, habits were formed which contributed largely to whatever measure of usefulness or success they may have attained. The heaviest burden

rested upon our oldest sister, whose ability and willingness to help all the rest shut her out from the advantages of education which the others enjoyed.

“My father was endowed with abilities ill adapted to his calling, and very much beyond what was required by the sphere in which he lived. He read the best books with a keen delight. The few letters of his which I have seen showed marks of a mental strength and culture superior to what we usually find in the correspondence even of the city merchants who lived at that time. Your uncle John, who was his teacher one winter, spoke to his brother Jeremiah of his mind, and his ingenuous, truthful qualities, with a sort of enthusiastic admiration. If he could have had the educational advantages which his sons enjoyed, I have no doubt that he would have been one of the most distinguished among all the natives of Peterborough. As it was, his lot was a very hard one, and his life very sad. He was a man of delicate sensibilities and generous impulses. He was fitted for intellectual pursuits, and would have made an admirable lawyer. But he had no special aptness for mechanical employments or for trade. His thoughts moved in a different sphere. I have heard his social and conversational qualities very highly spoken of. But he had no special aptitude or taste for the sort of life that was put upon him. After the success of his early days, which certainly indicated no common ability even in uncongenial pursuits, he failed in almost everything that he under-

took. His plan for introducing improved methods of manufacturing linen cloth showed originality of mind and no lack of judgment. Nor could any one situated as he was be likely to anticipate the disastrous effects of peace on our domestic industries. And no honorable man would suspect the arbitrary repudiation of a contract like that which he had made in Natchez.¹ But the disappointment was not on that account any the less severe to him. He became disheartened and unhappy. He was never, I think, according to the ideas then prevailing, an intemperate man, but amid his disappointments and trials he probably fell in too much with the habits of those around him. Indeed, when I look at his ledger and see what quantities of rum and toddy almost everybody drank in those days, I wonder how it was that any one could have been saved from being a drunkard. My mother was so impressed with a sense of the evils and perils in this direction, and warned her children against them with such intensity of feeling, that I have no doubt she had seen, in her home, influences and dangers which we were not old enough to understand. In common with almost every woman around her, she used snuff; but from her own experience, and what she saw in others of the misery of such a bondage, she had a violent antipathy to it, and brought up her children with such a feeling against it that not one of her five sons has ever, I believe, used an ounce of tobacco.

¹ In justice to the people of Natchez, it should be said that the contract was not put in writing.