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# Eastern Lands. To the Honorable the Members of the Legislature of Massachusetts

Descendant of Miles Standish

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# EASTERN LANDS.

## TO THE HONORABLE THE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

THE agreement for the sale of the Commonwealth's Lands in the State of Maine, will be submitted to the Legislature for their ratification or rejection the present session. Permit me, who never owned a foot of land in Maine, and who has no possible interest, except for the good of posterity, in the decision, to offer a few remarks upon the expediency of ratifying that bargain.

No country can boast of characters more eminent for shrewdness, patriotism, integrity and fairness, than those honorable gentlemen who composed the committees which recommended the sale, and completed the agreement; but the best men are liable to err in judgment, especially in times when a *mania* prevails. We have seen periods, even when such characters have been strongly biassed, by *Land mania*, *Merino mania*, *Scrip and Bank mania*:—The last having lain in a chrysalis state some time, has come out in the form of FIVE PER CENT COMPOUND INTEREST upon personal chattles. There must be no *turf and twig*—no *fee simple*—no *deferred stock*;—every thing must be *tangible*—*pocketable*—and *interest-countable* every ninety days. Such is the present mania among the monied community.

An unexampled state of the world has caused a *torpor* in all pursuits; but it is not a local affection; there is nothing inherent or peculiar in this country, to foster it, for it pervades all parts of the globe. The agriculture, commerce, and even manufactures of the United States, are as prosperous, collectively more so, perhaps, than in any other country; and no solid reason can be assigned why they will not reassume their former elasticity. And will any one pretend that our population is on the decline, or that the state of MAINE will not continue to increase in the same ratio that it has for the last ten years?

It is true there has existed strong prejudices against the soil and climate of that State; but they have somewhat subsided, and it may not be deemed *visionary* to predict, that at the end of forty years, *Maine* will be found to equal her parent state, in agricultural riches; and at the expiration of another forty years, the bay of Penobscot will be whitened by as many sails, and graced by as many "*star-spangled banners*" as the bay of Massachusetts. Few, who have given the subject any serious reflection, but must be convinced, that within that period, the United States will become the *carriers* for the world, and perhaps no spot is better situated for such a commerce, as will by that time be created, than Penobscot bay. I trust you know your duty too well, gentlemen, to be told, that "you are to legislate for *posterity* as well as for the present generation."

The report of the honorable Committee on the subject of the bargain, exhibits great candour and fairness:—It states that the lands have not been explored—the quantity and quality of them are unknown, and that the boundaries are not ascertained; that the Committee were enjoined to enter into an agreement for the sale, and some doubts are expressed whether the people will be satisfied with it. And will the Legislature, with such lessons of former land transactions, as can be laid before them, dispose of *uncounted millions* of acres? Can they justify it to their constituents?

It may be useful to examine the history of land sales about thirty years ago, when some of the members of your honorable body were striplings. In 1787, the Commonwealth, by a compromise with New-York, found itself possessed, in fee simple, of a tract embracing all the western part

of the State of New York, in width, parallel to the north and south lines of Massachusetts, and extending from the head waters of the Delaware to Lake Ontario, denominated the *Genessee Lands*. The cry was soon set up, "these lands are out of the world—they are worth little—they will not be settled in two hundred years—the money to pay the Indians, and the expense of exploring, surveying and management, will eat them all up!" They were sold in the *lump*, and the quantity assumed brought them to *ten cents* an acre, payable by instalments in state securities, at the face, then worth twenty cents on the dollar! But before the purchasers could explore and allot the lands for market, the Federal Constitution was in operation, and Congress, about to assume the state debts, the purchasers became alarmed, fearing the state debt would rise to par, gave up a part of the lands, retaining, however, those situated on the Genessee River, considered the most valuable. A year or two after, when the state had been relieved of a load of debt, Robert Morris came forward to purchase; he had some competitors, but he also had the address to keep them aloof, and all the remaining lands were sold to him for *twenty cents* an acre! One of the competitors realized from the land Mr. Morris gave him, as a *doceur*, to withdraw, *two hundred thousand dollars*! A sum, added to what it is probable other competitors got, equal to all the Commonwealth realized for a tract of country, that has at this moment, a population nearly equal to New-Hampshire! Had the Legislature only have retained those lands till they could have been explored, and the Indian title extinguished, a fund might have been secured from them, to the amount of two millions of dollars! The celebrated Connecticut *school fund* of a million and an half of dollars, was derived from a tract of land far less valuable.

It is said that our Eastern lands have been a constant drain on the Treasury. It is not pretended that *any* wild lands have been productive for some years past; but how stands the general account? The actual receipts for Maine lands, for the last thirty years, will be found to amount, with the addition of compound interest, to little short of two million of dollars! and the expense of management to about eighty thousand dollars! Less than five millions of acres have been sold and one and an half millions given away! *How many valuable institutions now owe their flourishing existence to these grants*! How many noble spirited, enterprising men have gone upon those lands *poor*, and become *rich*!

A State has been built up, which in less than forty years will possess a physical force equal to any one of the Atlantic States south of the Delaware! *an important weight at the eastern end of the balance*. Where would these hardy sons of freedom have been, had the acquisition of these lands been more difficult? Some of them would have been found about *Lake Simcoe*, in Upper Canada; others in Kentucky; and a few, perhaps, on the banks of the Missouri, advocating the rights of man by insisting upon the *constitutional* rights of slavery!

The time has arrived when the Commonwealth may begin to husband her interest in those lands. If the system has been badly conducted it need not be continued.

The old adage, "there is no friendship in trade," will apply to States as well as individuals. Has not the government of Maine a more accurate

knowledge of the situation and quality of those lands than it was possible for a Committee of the Legislature to possess, during the time they were able to devote, while attending to the ordinary business of the session? In short, did the Committees of the two States treat upon equal terms? Is there any prospect that the boundary line will be fixed further *west* than it now is, by the Ghent Commissioners? Is not the chance greater that it will extend six miles further *east* to the River St. Johns, and bounding on that river one hundred and fifty miles, by which the value of the adjoining lands will be quadrupled!

Many strong reasons may be offered against the expediency of the contemplated sale; one only will be presented to your view, and which, I trust, will be considered of paramount consideration. Massachusetts has been, and always ought to be a commercial State. But the tools that posterity will want to carry on her commerce with, are to be taken from them.

THE PINE TREE—the symbol of her naval destinies, which she affixed to the *silver coin*, that first aroused the jealousy of mother Britain, is about to be sacrificed, perhaps to an ephemeral policy, to calculations of present interest! And the *Fisherman*, when he rolls out the masts of his schooner upon the banks, is to be deprived of the consolation of reflecting, that he has others growing to supply their place! Former Legislatures had the foresight to order a number of townships to be surveyed for the preservation of *Masts and Spars*; they now remain, and it is believed that the timber of that description, on the lands belonging to the Commonwealth, is worth, to the United States, double the price the whole territory is to be sold for!

Is it not a duty the Commonwealth owes to the Union, to ensure a continuance and increase of its naval power, to place these *Mast Tracts* under the controul of the Federal Government? It may be said that Maine will preserve them; there is no doubt of the patriotic disposition of her citizens, but they have a popular government, which in new countries are not over provident in the preservation of timber! In what a *denuded* state must the soil of this Commonwealth appear at the end of forty years? It is probable the very appreciation of lumber, will by that time equal compound interest at five per cent.! When Maine gets those lands, too many mast tracts may be sold for settlement, the fires get among the rest, and at the expiration of fifty years, the *taunt*, which one of your native poets once hurled at Great Britain, will be *retorted* upon our country by Russia.

"E'en the tall mast that bears your flag on high,

"Grew in our soil, and ripened in our sky."

The quantity of land that will be the portion of this State, is estimated at near six millions of acres! which brings the price you are to receive, at about THREE CENTS per acre, payable in forty years, with annual interest at five per cent.! Pause, gentlemen! At least wait till the boundary line is established, and the lands explored; they may contain a treasure far superior to all the mines of Mexico and Peru; A FUND SUFFICIENT FOR THE EDUCATION OF EVERY CHILD OF THE COMMONWEALTH TO THE LATEST GENERATION! Consider how our progenitors toiled to procure for us the blessings and comforts we now enjoy. It is a debt of gratitude we owe *them*, to be not less unmindful of our posterity! A Descendant of

MILES STANDISH.