

A LETTER FROM THOMAS GORGES' LETTERBOOK

When Sir Ferdinando Gorges received his charter for the Province of Maine in 1639, he appointed his young cousin, Thomas Gorges, the son of Henry and Barbara Gorges of Batcombe Farm his deputy-governor. Thomas, aged 22, had just completed two years at the Inns of Court and could presumably have counted on a prosperous future in the law in London where his great-uncle, Lawrence Hyde, was the King's attorney-general, and his cousin Edward Hyde (later Earl of Clarendon and grandfather of Queen Mary and Queen Ann) had begun his upward way at the English court. How Sir Ferdinando persuaded the young man to abandon such excellent prospects, one can only surmise, but Thomas Gorges' pronounced Puritan convictions may have been the reason for his willingness to brave a career in the environs of the Puritan experiment in New England. He arrived in Boston about the 12th of June 1640 probably on the ship *Desire*, Capt. William Peirce, bringing with him a letter from Sir Ferdinando to Governor Winthrop which he presented at the first opportunity. The Governor found him "sober and well-disposed" and very careful to take advice of our magistrates how to manage his affairs. After a few days in Boston, he made his way to Accomenticus (or Agamenticus) where he was to occupy Sir Ferdinando's house built some years before, manage the Lord Proprietor's personal affairs, and establish the government of the new province. His letters home while in Boston, sent by the *Desire* on its outward voyage, have apparently not survived, but when settled in his new home, he sat down and wrote a letter to his father which he carefully copied into the blank pages of a copybook, some pages of which had already been used for entries in the form of a commonplace-book. Some, if not all, of the pages of this and two

or three similar books have survived, in misplaced order, water-stained, tattered, written with a dull quill in a miniscule hand which is nearly illegible. The manuscript is in the Exeter City Library, Exeter, Devon, England.

The letter to his father, dated 19 July 1640, was sent by George Luxon (or Luxton) of Biddeford, Master of the ship *Fellowship* of Barnstable, who was yearly in Maine waters. It is printed here as a sample of the more than fifty later letters contained in the copybooks. All of them have been transcribed, and except in a few cases, the disarranged pages have been restored to their original order. They await publication when opportunity offers.

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THOMAS GORGES TO HENRY GORGES, 19 JULY 1640

To my father

July 19 1640

Per Luxon

Sir I wrote a letter unto you since my arrival dated the [torn] of June. It [crossed out: came] went by that ship called the Desier by the way of London [torn] I certifiyed you [crossed out: the Bay] my passage, the dangers God delivered me from & how I liked the Countrey & the many courtesies I found amonge all sorts of me by that ship. If you command my brother to goe to the Tower wharfe in London, you may, I suppose, speedily returne me a lettre. You see, as my duty bindes me, soe I am very unwillinge to loose any opportunity of writinge to you. I have now bin these three weeks at Accomenticus where I was a welcome guest to all sorts of people. I found Sr. Fard: house much like your Barne, only one pretty handsome roome & studdy without glasse windowes which I reserve for myself. For the household stuffe only one crocke, 2 Bedsteads and a table board. For his feild without fence, for his miles [mills] (1) without reparation and of cattle only 2 yearlinge and one calf Household stuffe I will shortly provide. In the meanwhile I have use of all the Tenants who with his wife are very godly people & I have a great comfort in there company. I brew beer one day and 'tis good stale beer by the next day and we drinke it till we have mayde an end & then we drinke water till we can get more. This we must doe for there are but few vessels. The weather

Note. Punctuation and capitalization have been supplied. Words within pointed brackets are interlined in the manuscript.

1. Mills for Berwick and York were sent over in the *Pied Cow* in 1634 by Gorges and Mason. The York saw and grist-mills were tidemills.

is hot that quickly sours it, & likewise I want hops, but now I am makinge a seller & have sent to the Bay for hops, so I hope to have all in a better order. In the meantime I am better contented than ever I was in England. Hither my diet is beef & pease, butter & cheese, fowl & fish. At winter I intend to get Bacon & poultry soe that I cannot see without good judgment the want of anythinge. Hitherto I have imployed my men about the house, now I intend to set them to mow-inge. I expect 10 young beasts (2) every day. And at winter they shall prepare pale to fence the feild which is 7 or 8 acres. For springe, Chris: Rogers (3) I intend to put into the grist mill as soone as I shall have it a little repaired, which mill & the saw mill with a little cost if they be well mended, as I hope they shall, will bringe in 200 li per an. to Sr. Fard: at the least. As yet he hath but halfe the profit. Likewise the smiths mill will bringe in a good round sum, & in the interim he works it & will be every day cominge. Likewise the Rents of the Province will amount to a good round sum in time. Some now pay 10s per an., some 5s, some more, some lesse. At the next Court (4) we intend to confirm all theyr leases & have exact account of expences [?arrears?]. At my landinge in the Bay [torn] begun in the Province & at my arrival here [2] [torn] brought me all theyr proceedings, & I protest I admir'd to see so excellent way of orderinge all thinges. They doe it with grand & pety Juries & the officers of a court as they do in England & all the fines goe to Sr. Fard:. About 8 weeks hence we have a 2d wherin my commission (5) is to be published & Mr. Champernoun & myselfe are to take our oaths,

2. Bought at £10 a head, then a favorable price. But within a short time they could be bought at £5 a head.

3. This mention of Rogers is three years earlier than the date given in the *Genealogical Dictionary of Maine and New Hampshire*. He was from Cheddar whose parish church the Gorges family of Batcombe Farm attended.

4. At Saco, 8 Sept. 1640. *Province and Court Records of Maine*, 1:56.

5. Dated 10 March 1639-40 and brought over by Thomas Gorges. Printed in *ibid.*, 1:36-41.

& then I intend to have my lease of 4000 acres (6) registered, which giuft of Sr. Fard: is not to be contemned for I know what benifit by Gods blessinge accrue of it. I could wish I had my law books I left in England, for I studdy Law & have more <need to use> of it then ever I had. I will direct you shortly some means for the conveyance of them to me. I pray Sr. intreat God to endow me with a wise heart that my actions may tend to his glory, to the advancement of the church and commonwealth, with a faythful heart towards Sr. Fard: & with a dutiful & obedient heart towards you & my mother, as I hope in God you shall finde. You shall hear from me shortly concerninge my brother. I pray in the mean while let him be with Mr. Bernard (7) to whom I will shortly write, & for my unckle (8) I am not resolved on any thinge nor shall as yet. I have sent my sister 2d of the Indians silver as I may call it. Theyr gold is blacke & 2 a penny. I hope in time to be able to send better tokens of my love. The great Sagamour (9) hath bin with me to welcome me to his country. I find them very ingenious men only Ignorant of the true wisdom. I told him I pittied his case that he was soe Ignorant of God. He answered me he knew his great God Tanto, that he lives westward in a great city & feeds uppon pidgeons & they that doe well shall goe to him to the west country, & the naughty men shall go into the east cold country, & with those that dy they bury theyr bows & arrowes, money which they call wanpumpeage & theyr other thinges bec: they [?think?] they shall have need of it where they goe. Truly I take great delight to discourse with them. <God has almost

6. The grant was increased to 5000 acres when it was finally granted 4 March 1641/2.

7. Rev. Richard Bernard of Batcombe, now Thomas Gorges' close friend, had years earlier been disowned by Rev. John Robinson, the Separatist, for not entirely leaving the Church of England.

8. His uncle Edward whom he hoped to interest in a fishing and trading venture.

9. Probably Sagamore Thomas Chabinocke of Wells. E. E. Bourne, *History of Wells and Kennebunk*, pp. 21-22.

denyed them>. I have bin longer in writinge these thinges Bec: I know hou love & desier to hear every-thinge concerning the country as near as you can. One word more & I have done. We spend the Lds. day thus: in the morninge before we goe, we begin with prayers. When we come to our ministers (10) house wher our meeting is ((who is a man of wonderfull parts)), he begins with prayer, not with the common prayer, then with a Psalme. He reads & expounds a chapter, then singes, then preacheth some, concludes with a prayer. Soe in the afternoon likewise. Then we come home, repeat the sermon, singe & pray & to bed. Every morninge we begin with a Chapter, exposition on it & prayer, & shut up the day with a psalme & prayer. Now that before I had only [torn] now of many & those which are soe Ingor[ant] [torn] [3] yet they are much altered in their lives, for I can [torn] blessinge from God where we serve him. Thus with my duty remembered yourselfe, my ever lovinge mother, my brothers & sisters & all my friends in general, I rest.
I pray Sr. have a care to whom you read or shew my lettres.

10. Rev. George Burdett, whose moral offenses were uncovered at the court at Saco, 8 Sept. 1640. *Province and Court Records*, 1:74.