

THE MEDIÆVAL MANOR.

TRANSLATION OF A TYPICAL EXTENT.

INTRODUCTION.

The prevailing character of mediæval life was that of a rural community, four-fifths at least of the population of England having no connection with any form of town life. The unit of this social organization was not the single farm, but the manor, township or parish, these being usually only three somewhat different aspects of the same group of people, and the same stretch of country. It is then to documents which will give an insight into the life and organization of this rural group that we must look to obtain a knowledge of the normal, habitual life of the vast proportion of Englishmen during the Middle Ages, as indeed of other nations also, in the same period. There are four general classes of such documents ; first, the court roll, or steward's record of the proceedings of the manor courts ; secondly, the *compotus* roll, or annual financial report of the bailiff to the lord of the manor ; thirdly, the rental, or *custumal*, an account of the amount of land held by each tenant on the manor, and the services he owes ; and lastly, the extent, or description and estimate of the area and value of the manor, including a list of the tenants, with their holdings, rents, and services, compiled on the testimony of a sworn jury of inhabitants of the manor. The cause of making such an extent seems to have been twofold ; first, the periodical necessity for an identification of tenants of the manor and their dues, and secondly, the need for a verification of the value of the manor on occasion of its alienation. It was, however, an inquiry into manorial custom, not a prelude to any change of custom. Force of custom kept the general outlines of the manor the

[275]



same, but internal changes, by inheritance or otherwise, or external change of possession necessitated an occasional census for the purpose of finding its detailed condition. The sworn juries who gave the information from which such extents were made up were usually, as in the case below, villeins, and varied in number from three to twelve. Indeed in most of the cases where juries sworn to give testimony as to manorial custom were necessary, they were composed of villeins, as freemen could not be required by the lord of the manor to take an oath.

The extent then is the fullest form of description of the condition of a manor at any particular time, while the first two forms of documents are of more value for telling the actual life, action, and change of the community. The document translated below is an extent, made in 1307, of the manor of Borley, a small manor in the northeastern part of Essex on the river Stour. It has been copied by Professor Cunningham from a MSS. book formerly the property of Christ Church, Canterbury, but now in the British Museum, where it is numbered, Additional MSS., 6159. It was probably copied into this book from the original parchment about 1346. Professor Cunningham has printed it as an appendix to the first volume of his *History of English Industry and Commerce*, from which this translation has been made.

The manor of Borley at the time of Edward the Confessor was in the hands of a freeman named Lewin. At the time of Domesday it was held, along with two other manors, by Adeliza, countess of Albemarle, half sister to William. It came by marriage, with the above title, into the powerful de Fortibus family, and finally to Isabella de Fortibus, who inherited also from her brother the earldom of Devon. In 1269 she was married to the second son of Henry III., and died without issue in 1293. Before this time, however, she had transferred the manor of Borley along with some other domains to King Edward I., in exchange for property of equivalent value. It was, therefore, in 1307, at the time of

[276]

the extent a royal manor, and remained so until 1346, when it was granted by Edward III. to the convent of Christ Church, Canterbury, which retained it until the dissolution of that corporation in 1539. After various changes, in that period of change, Borley was granted to Edward Waldegrave, a courtier of Queen Mary, and to descendants of this family it still belongs.

In the document 811 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres are enumerated, in addition to mention of a common pasture of such size that the lord could pasture 120 sheep in it as his share. In the modern parish of Borley, which is apparently coterminous with the manor, there are but 794 $\frac{1}{2}$ statute acres. This discrepancy may be explained in one or other of two ways. There may have been some outlying lands, included in the extent, as was not unusual and which might be the "meadow of Rainholm," mentioned below. On the other hand the mediæval acre was by no means always a definite term, and if any considerable number of the scattered strips were below the statute acre the apparent discrepancy would disappear. The use of the land according to the extent was distributed as follows :

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Arable, | 702 $\frac{1}{4}$ acres. |
| Meadow, | 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ " |
| Enclosed pasture, | 32 " |
| Woods, | 15 " |
| Manor house land, | 4 " |
| Tofts of two acres each, | 33 " |

The distribution of its possession is given as follows :

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Demesne, | 361 $\frac{1}{4}$ acres. |
| Freeholders, | 148 " |
| Molmen, | 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ " |
| Customary tenants, | 254 " |

The total annual value of the estate to the lord of the manor is calculated to be £44 8s 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. It would therefore, if in the possession of an individual, be double the necessary

amount to allow of him being knighted, and in modern value may be considered to be equal to about \$2750 a year. This sum came from the following sources :

| | £ | s. | d. |
|--|----|----|----|
| Money dues paid by free tenants, | 1 | 12 | 6½ |
| Money dues paid by villein tenants, | 4 | 14 | 8½ |
| Services performed by villein tenants, | 7 | 7 | 6¾ |
| Arable land in demesne, | 15 | | |
| Mowing meadow in demesne, | 7 | 6 | 3 |
| Enclosed pasture in demesne, | 2 | 2 | |
| Rent of mill, | 3 | | |
| Court dues, fishing rights, etc., | 3 | 6 | |

Forty-six persons are named in the extent. Seven are indicated as free tenants, seven as molmen, twenty-seven as villeins or customary holders, and five as cotemen. If these all lived on the manor and if they included the whole population, at an estimate of five persons to each land-holder, the number of inhabitants would be about two hundred and thirty. According to the census of 1831, there were in Borley forty-four families, forty-one inhabited houses, and one hundred and ninety-five persons. In 1891 there were two hundred and ten inhabitants, a striking suggestion of fixedness in rural population. The mediæval value of the benefice is given at £10, the present value being £240 a year. In regard to distribution of land, the proportion of villeins to freemen, the nature of the services, the characteristics of jurisdiction, and the general manorial customs this account of a manor of the early fourteenth century would seem to be as nearly typical as the wide diversity of mediæval conditions renders possible.

E. P. CHEYNEY.

University of Pennsylvania.