ON THE CUSTOM OF BOROUGH ENGLISH:

"Borow-English is a customary descent of lands or tenements in some places, whereby they come to the voungest son, or if the owner have no issue, to his youngest brother, as in Edmunton."*

There are, however, variations of the custom in different manors: in some, for instance, the custom is confined to sons, and does not extend to prefer the youngest daughter, youngest brother, or collateral heir; while in other manors the youngest daughter would inherit, if there were no sons, and the youngest brother or collateral heir if there were no issue; whereas if the custom does not extend to prefer the youngest daughter, or youngest brother, or collateral heir. all the daughters would be entitled to the inheritance; or for want of daughters, the eldest brother would succeed, as at common law: "for the custom is strictly confined to the youngest son, or his lineal representative," "and does not extend to the youngest brother without a special custom of the place for that purpose," for customs ought always to be taken strictly.+

As to the name of the custom, Robinson says, ‡ " the name itself guides us to judge of its antiquity, and teaches us that this custom had its rise among the Anglo-Saxons; indeed it is probable that it was not known by this title until the Normans, who were strangers to any such kind of descent in their own country, on their settlement in this kingdom gave it the name of 'the custom of the Saxon towns,' to distinguish it from their own law, and this may be collected from I Edw. III 12a, where it is said that in Nottingham

^{*} Kitchin on Courts, fol. 102, Terms de la Ley.

[†] Robinson's Gavelkind, 3d ed., pp. 118 and 391, citing Co. Litt. 110 b.

[†] On Gavelkind, p. 385. This reference should be Year Book, 1 Edw. I, p. 12, No. 38.

there are two tenures, 'Burgh Engloyes' and 'Burgh Frauncoyes; 'the usages of which tenures are such, that all. the tenements whereof the ancestor dies seised in Burgh Engloves 'ought to descend to the youngest son, and all the tenements in Burgh Frauncoves to the eldest son as at common law."*

As to the origin of the custom, Littleton says, "this custom also stands with some certain reason, because that the younger son (if he lack father and mother) may least of

all his brethren help himself, &c."+

The editor of 'Modern Reports,' in his preface to part 3, says of Borough English, "It is a custom contrary to the positive law of God, and which inverts the very order of nature;" and he attributes the origin of the custom to a supposed right of the lords of certain manors, on the

marriage of their tenants.

Blackstone, after citing the reason assigned for the custom by Littleton, and referring to its supposed origin from the custom of certain manors as stated by the editor of Modern Reports, -- says he cannot learn that ever this custom prevailed in England, though it certainly did in Scotland (under the name of mercheta or marcheta) till abolished by Malcolm III§; adding that, according to Father Duhalde, this custom of descent to the youngest son also prevails among the Tartar tribes; and that amongst many other northern nations it was the custom for all the sons but one to migrate from the father, which one became his heir. "So that possibly this custom, wherever it prevails, may be the remnant of that pastoral state of our British and German ancestors, which Cæsar and Tacitus describe." But Robinson says he believes on enquiry it will be found that the custom of Borough English does not particularly obtain in those manors where the fine called mercheta mulierum is paid: and this reason, though perhaps sufficient to exclude the eldest, would only if taken in its full force convey

^{*} Bacon on Government, 66, Co. Litt.

[†] Littleton, on Villenage, lib. ii, cap. 2, sec. 211.

¹ Date 1700.

[§] Seld. Tit. of honour, ii. 1, 47, Reg.

Mag. lib. iv, cap. 31.

Walsingh. Upodigm. Neust. cap. 1. ¶ Blackstone's Com., vol. ii. b. 2, cap.

the inheritance to the second son as the next worthy, and not to the youngest; and he inclines to the reason given by Littleton, that the youngest son, after the death of his parents, is least able to help himself, and most likely to be left destitute of any other support: and therefore the custom provided for his maintenance by casting the inheritance upon him; considering in what places this custom prevails, which are for the most part, either ancient boroughs or copyhold manors. In the former was exercised the little trade that was anciently in the kingdom, and tradesmen would find it most for their own ease and the benefit of their sons, as they severally grew up, to send them out into the world, advanced with a portion of goods, thereby enabling them to acquire their living by art and industry: and for this purpose the old law was very indulgent to the son of a burgess, supposing him to be of age, "Cum denarios discrete sciverit numerare, pannos ulnare, et alia negotia similia paterna exercere."* But as the youngest son was most likely to be left unadvanced at the death of his father, the custom prudently directed the descent of the real estate (generally little more than the father's house) where it was most wanted.

Among the supporters of the fancied origin of this custom, in the supposed right of the lord on the marriage of his villein tenant, is the learned antiquary, Dr. Plot.† Blount, also, in the original edition of his 'Fragmenta Antiquitatis, or Jocular Tenures,' in a note on Berkholt, Suffolk (where there was a custom, that when the tenants would marry their daughters, they used to give to the lord for license so to do, two ores,‡ which were worth thirty-two pence), says, "this fine for the tenants marrying their daughters was without doubt in lieu of the mercheta mulierum."

The notion of the prevalence of such a custom may be attributed to a vulgar error, arising from the fact of a fine called "mercheta" having been payable in some manors to the lord on the marriage of his villein's daughter to a free-

^{*} Glanvil. lib. vii, cap. 9, Bract. lib. ii, cap. 37, f. 86^b.

[†] Plot's Natl. Hist. of Staff., cap. viii, sec. 20.

[‡] An Anglo-Saxon coin, of which there

were two sorts, the larger containing 20 peningas, which, according to Lye, would be about 60 pence, and the other 16 peningas, about 48 pence.

[§] Blount by Beckwith, p. 483.

man, or to any person out of the lordship,* the reason of which was, that as the villeins with all their progeny were the lord's property, and belonged to the soil, if the villein's daughter was married to a freeman, or to the serf of another lord, the lord of the manor to which she belonged was entitled to a fine, as compensation for the loss he would sustain of the woman and her issue, as if he had lost a heifer or a brood mare. This fine was generally a mark, or half a mark, hence the term mercheta, and it is very evident that the vulgar mind, always accessible to the marvellous, might easily understand this customary payment on such an occasion, as a composition for a gross and indecent custom which I am happy to believe existed only in imagination; and this was the opinion of Mr. Astle, in his Essay on the tenures and customs of Great Tey, Essex, in the Archæologia, vol. xii., p. 36. Among other authorities the curious may refer to the following:—Nathaniel Bacon on the Laws and Government of England (fol. 1739), 66, compiled from notes of the learned Selden; Buchan, History of Scotland, lib. iv. and vii.; Co. Litt. 117, b, cap. 140, a; Bract. lib. ii. f. 26; Litt. sec. 167; Robinson's Gavelkind, 388, 9; Sir David Dalrymple's (Lord Hailes's) learned Essay on the Mercheta Mulierum; and "Recherches sur l'origine et la nature des Droits connus anciennement sous les noms de droits des premières nuits, de markette, d'afforage, marcheta, maritagium, et burmede, &c.," par M. J. J. Raepsaet, 8vo., Gand. 1817.

The reasons assigned by Littleton, Blackstone, and Robinson are all virtually the same; all resting upon the disadvantage of position of the youngest son; and they are all equally unsatisfactory, for they are grounded upon the supposition that the youngest son alone is unsettled in life, or left with his father at his decease, in which case alone the custom would have an appearance of justice; and they overlook the very constant occurrence of

pro maritagio: et si eam maritaverit alicui Custumario Ville, nihil dabit pro Maritagio." Extent Manerii de Wivenhoe, 40 Edw. III, Watkins' Cop., by Vidal, vol. ii, p. 358.

^{*} Manor of Wivenhoe, county Essex. "Rie Barre tenet unum messuagium, &c. et debet Tallagium, Sectam Curiæ et Merchet. hoc modo; quod si maritare voluit Filiam suam cum quodam libero homine extra Villam, faciat pacem Domino

one or more of the elder sons being set forward in life during their father's life-time, leaving several at home; and the not unfrequent case of a father dying early, and leaving all his sons young and equally helpless and unprovided for; in which cases it would seem to be most inconsistent with justice and equity, as well as most inconvenient to the family of the deceased tenant, that the inheritance should go to the youngest son in preference to his brothers, as unprovided, and except by a few years more or less of age, not more able to help themselves than he is.

It seems to me, therefore, that the real cause of the origin of the custom of Borough English has not yet been ascertained; and although venturing to differ from such learned authorities as I have cited, I propose to give my own views on the subject. I am by no means so confident as to say, or to think, that I have discovered the sure and very cause and reason of this singular custom, and I submit what I have to say as to its origin, with very sincere deference to the opinions of those who are much better qualified to decide upon questions of legal and antiquarian research.

With these preliminary observations, I beg to say that I consider the custom of Borough English took its rise from the period when copyhold lands were held really and substantially, and not, as now, nominally "at the will of the lord," when the lord's will, uniformly exercised, made the custom of the manor, and was not, as now, controlled by the custom. And in no instance was the lord's will so likely to be exercised as in determining which of his tenant's family, on the decease of the tenant, should succeed to the

tenement held by the lord's will.*

The custom of Borough English is in fact to be accounted for in the same manner as the various other customs which exist in different manors. In some manors the lands descend to the eldest son, in others to all the sons equally, as in Gavelkind. "Custom of some manor is, that if the tenant

of the lord; and if the lord consented that some of the posterity of the deceased tenant should again occupy the lands, it was for him to select the individual. Hence the variety of custom as to descents." Watkins' Cop. vol. ii, p. 210.

^{* &}quot;If the villein behaved himself well, was industrious, and faithful in his returns, he often continued in the possession of the lands, and even when he died his children were frequently permitted to succeed him. This, however, depended upon the pleasure

dies seised of five acres or less, then the youngest son ought to inherit, but if above, then all the sons, as in Gavelkind. ought to inherit it."* "Custom of some manor is, that the youngest son, or youngest daughter of the first wife, being married a virgin, ought to inherit." † In other manors, the sons and daughters inherit equally, as at Wareham in Dorsetshire.† In others the eldest daughter alone succeeds to the inheritance if there be no sons, as at Yardlev in Hertfordshire.&

As great a variance exists in different manors as to the wife's dower. In some the wife is entitled to the whole of her husband's copyhold lands for her life, as at Cuckfield, Ditcheling, and Rottingdean: in others to a moiety, in others to a third as at common law, and in some manors she is not entitled to any dower or freebench in respect of the copyhold lands of her husband, as at Rotherfield: and I have been informed of one manor where daughters are preferred in respect of inheritance to sons. | Thus it is, I think, owing to the caprice of the several ancient lords, that these different manorial customs have arisen and been established.

This opinion is in accordance with those of Sir Martin Wright, in his introduction to the Law of Tenures, and Mr. Watkins, in a note on Chief Baron Gilbert's work on Tenures.

And as to the reasons which would induce the lord to prefer the youngest son to succeed the father in the inheritance of the tenements held of his manor, we may suppose that the barons and lords being liable to furnish certain numbers of men for military service, in many instances, took care to secure the elder sons of their tenants as military retainers; and that the villenage or copyhold lands, being generally held by agricultural services, were left to the younger sons or youngest son to cultivate, and render the services due to the lord for the land. And another reason may be attributed to the avarice, or love of patronage of the

^{*} Kitchin, p. 203.

Kitchin, p. 202. Blount's Ten. 288, Watkins' Cop. by Vidal, vol. ii. p. 441.

[§] Salmon's Herts, p. 323, Watkins' Cop. by Vidal, vol. ii. p. 444. || Penrith, in Wales. ¶ Wright on Tenures, p. 221.

lords, for as the lord was entitled to the wardship of his infant tenants, which allowed the infant only a decent maintenance during his minority (all the surplus profits going to the profit of the guardian) the lord had a direct interest in long minorities, and therefore might have willed that the youngest son should be the heir.

It is true that the lord would not frequently trouble himself with such small matters, but there was generally some retainer of the lord, or uncle or near relative of the minor, who begged the wardship of the lord; who in exercise of his patronage, and in imitation of greater men, granted the wardship of his infant tenant to his own dependant, as he himself would have asked and gladly received a more important wardship from the king or his own superior lord.

A very remarkable instance of the exercise of the lord's will, as respects the descent of lands holden of him, is extant in a charter of that very remarkable man, Simon de Montfort (to whom this nation is more indebted than is generally known or acknowledged), dated in 39th Henry III. (A.D. 1255), whereby, as a great favour to his burgesses of Leicester, at their earnest supplication, for the benefit of the town, and with the full assent of all the burgesses, the earl granted to them that thenceforward the eldest son should be the heir of his father instead of the youngest, as was then the custom of the town. This charter is more remarkable as it was the act of a subject, by his own will, altering the local law of inheritance, without any legislative authority or even royal sanction; and that sixty-five years subsequent to the period of legal prescription.

To revert to the name of the custom, my opinion is that it originated with the Norman lords, who imposed this custom as a peculiar mark of serfdom on their English vassals, which their Norman followers, who were accustomed to the law of primogeniture as attached to freeholdings, would not submit to; hence the distinction of tenures at Nottingham, of Burgh Engloyes, and Burgh Frauncoyes, which although not now known in that town, are kept in remembrance by the two parts of the town having been not long since distinguished as the English borough and the French borough. It is worthy of observation, as corrobo-

rative of this view of the subject, that the Earls of Warren and Surrey, who soon after the Conquest possessed the barony and rape of Lewes, where the custom of Borough English is almost universal as regards copyholds, possessed also Reigate, Dorking, Betchworth, and Kennington in Surrey, and Stamford in Lincolnshire; in all which places

we still find the same custom prevailing.

To show that the customary descent to the youngest son was not unknown to the Norman and Flemish followers of William, as a peculiarity of serfdom or villeinage (although Robinson says they were unacquainted with it in their own country, and Blackstone was obliged to go so far away as to the Tartar tribes for any similar custom), I can refer to the "Coutumes locales du Baillage d'Ámiens," by M. Bouthors, Greffier en chef de la Cour d'appel d'Amiens, &c., published by the Société des Antiquaires de Picardie, where we find that the same customary descent to the youngest son prevails in that province of France, and in Artois, under the name of Maineté,* viz., in the Seigneuries of Gouy et Bavaincourt, Rettembes, Croy, Lignieres, Warlus, Rezencourt, Brontelle, Hornoy, Selincourt, Adinfer, Blairville, Wancour, Guémappes, Hebuterne, Pays de Callieu, Temporel du Chapitre d'Arras, and Rassery.

M. Bouthors, in a letter to me, says, that in the environs of Arras and of Douai the law of Maineté was the general custom. In Ponthieu and Vivier it was the exception.

M. Bouthors also says that it is found likewise in Flanders, under the name of Madelstard;† and Ducange tells us it prevailed among families at Hochstet in Suabia. "Quametiam locum habuisse in famlia Hochstatana Auctor est Ludovicus Guicciardinus in Descr. Belgii."‡

In this kingdom the custom is much more extensive than would be generally supposed. It is found to prevail more extensively in the counties anciently called Southfolk, Southrey, and Southsex, than in any other part of the kingdom. In Suffolk I have found eighty-four manors; in Surrey, twenty-eight manors; and in Sussex, one hundred and thirty-

^{*} Moins né—Moins agé. † Merlin Repertoire de Jurisprudence, en mot Maineté.

[†] This I take to be Hoogstraat. I

cannot, however, find any such passage in Guicciardini's Belgium, 2 vols. 16mo. Amsterdam, 1660.

five manors, in which the custom of Borough English is the law of descent.

I annex a list of all the manors and places in the county of Suffolk that I have been able to collect in which the custom of descent to the youngest son exists, with the names of the present owners, as far as I have been able to ascertain them, the particulars of the customs, and the authorities; which list, although far from perfect, and doubtless containing many inaccuracies, will I hope be found useful. For a great portion of this list I have been much indebted to my late esteemed friend Samuel Golding, Esq., who took great pains in revising and correcting the whole.

I cannot conclude this imperfect paper without expressing my thanks to the stewards of manors, and other professional gentlemen, for the liberal kindness and attention which has been given to my inquiries, and for the readiness with which

they have furnished the information required.

I do not profess to have given a perfect list of all the manors in this county in which the custom prevails, as I have reason to believe there are many others, and I should be much indebted for any further information respecting the nature, extent, origin, and history of the custom, with which any of the members of the Suffolk Institute of Archæology may be so good as to favour me. GEORGE R. CORNER.

^{3,} Paragon, New Kent Road, 25 May, 1855.

A List of Manors and Places in the County of Suffolk

Names of Manors.	Parishe	in wh	ich situ	ate.	C	wners.	
Abrewicks in Ashfield	Great Ashfi		rr e ==		Mr. Newcom	be	•
Aldeburgh Aldeburgh Vicarage	Aldborough	• ,		•		:	• •
All Saints, Alnwick	Ashfield .		•	•		•,	•
Ashfield (Great)	Ashfield Ma	gna an	d Badw	ell Ash	Edward, Lor	d Thurle	·w.
Bacton (Old) Barking cum Needham	Bacton and Town of I Barking	adioini	ng	cet an	Geo. Tòmlin	e, Esq.	•
Becklings, Cantlets, and Risings		•	•	٠	•	•	•.
Bedfield Benningham Hall Billeford	Occold Haslewood	and Al	dboroug	h	G. Tomline,	Esa	•
Braiseworth New Hall Bramford	Bacton	•	•	•	Sir George Bart.	Nathani	-
Brockford cum Membris	Brockford a	ınd adj	oining	•	John Geo. S	heppard,	Esq.
Bucklesham			•	•	77-1 TI	٠	•
Charsfield Hall Chepenhall	Near Wood Fressingfie	lbridge ld	•	:	Earl Howe	•	•
Chevington Christchurch, otherwise	:	:		:	The Marque	ess of Bri	stol ·
Withepole House Cotton Hempnells with Skeith, on the part of Hempnells and on the	1	•	•	٠,	Edwd. Beau	mont Ve	nn, Esq.
part of Skeith Cotton Bresworth			•		Geo. Tomlir	ne, Esq.	
Creeting St. Olave's, other- wise Woolney Hall Mickfield, Cooks upon	,}	•	•	•	•	•	•
Cranes, and Creeting Debach		•		•		•	• ,
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Names of Manors.	Parishes in which situate. Owners.
Framlingham Gislingham	Bedingfield
Gislingham Goldingham, otherwise Goldingham Hall	Gislingham . Sir Edwd. Kerrison, Bart.
Gosbeck	Sir Wm. Fowle Fowle Middle- ton, Bart.
Griston, Stratford .	Stratford St. Andrew
Grundisburgh	
Harborow Hall, with Aspall and Debenham	Deblackuns
Hargrave	J. G. Weller Poley, Esq. Haughley or Haughlish, and va-Rev. H. Crawford and sisters
Henley Sextons	rious parishes adjoining
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Hoxne Hall, with the	Hoxne, near Eye Sir Edwd. Kerrison, Bart.
Priory Kirton Lavenham	— Pye, Esq.
Little Haugh	Norton . P. Huddlestone, Esq Pakenham . Henry Wilson, Esq
Mendlesham cum Membris	Mendlesham, and adjoining Chas. Tyrell, Esq.
Middleton with Fordley Mellis, St. John's .	Middleton
Mellis, Pountney Hall . Newton Hall . Newton with Gosbeck .	Mellis Near Sudbury Lord Henniker Earl Howe Sir Wm. Fowle Fowle Middle- ton, Bart.
Norton Hall Occolt Hall Overhall	Otley
Pulham Hall and Welham Hall	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
Rushes and Jennies	Burgate and near . George Holt Wilson, Esq.
Saxted Sibton, with its Members	Bramfield, Orford, Heveningham, John F. P. Scrivener, Esq., Sibton, Peasenhall, Rendham, Rumburgh, Shadingfield, Wal-
Scotness	pole, Willingham, and Yoxford
Sokemore	

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	Names of Manors.	Parishes in which situate.	Owners.
٦,	Stanton Hall, with Mick- fields and Badwells Stoke Hall, with Thorpe	Stanton, two parishes, now united and adjoining	Henry Capel Lofft, Esq.
•	Theberton	Theberton Thelnetham and adjoining Ditto	Mrs. Thruston . The Rector
	Thorndon, with its Members		The Rector
	Tunstall Tyrell's Hall, Felton's Ufford	Foxhall	
	Ulvestone Waldingfield Hall	Debenham.	
	Wattisfield Hall, with Gyffords and Halymote	Wattesfield	Henry Youngman, Esq.
	Westhorpe	Westhorpe	Lady Nightingale
			Mrs. Thruston Lord Thurlow
	Wetheringsett Wickham Skeith	Wickham Skeith	Edwd. Jermy, Esq Rev. Castell Garrard and wife
`	11 444	Ufford	John Cobbold, Esq.
		Stoke Ash Wortham	Rev. George Turner
	Yoxford, with its Members		

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