

Old Poem on Norfolk.

COMMUNICATED BY

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THE following curious Poem, containing much information on the state of Norfolk in the reign of Elizabeth, is extracted from Mr. D. Gurney's Book of Extracts, copied from "The Register or Common Place Book of Henry Gurney, Esq., of Great Ellingham and West Barsham, in Norfolk, compiled in the reigns of Elizabeth and James the First," from the original MSS. in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, being No. 175 amongst Bishop Tanner's MSS., and described in the Catalogues as, Account of Courts held and Leases of Lands at Ellingham, Hingham, and Irstede, in the County of Norfolk, with a Poem called "The Anatomy of Popery, &c."—Copied by Mr. T. Markham, Thorpe.

1.

Of English Shires our Norfolk seems to yield
 Most pleasures and commodities for gain
 That may be reapt by water, grass, or fild,
 With lesser toyle through erines and the playne:
 Ech thing it hath wherewith to cloathe and battle,
 As wool and hempe, fish, foule, ech corne and cattle.

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M

2.

Not self alone doth Norff. full suffice,
 Although it be as populous a Shire
 As any ells (yet of a smaller size
 Then others are, as mapps do make appeare)
 But also doth of his abundance spare
 To other Shires that not so fruitful are.

3.

For kats that serve to furnish out a board,
 Excepting salt, which all but Cheshire want,
 Of every kind that Englonde doth afforde,
 It rather hath a plenty than a skant ;
 With either cloath for skynne and for the back :
 What needful thing then doth our Norff. lack ?

4.

Ech soyle it hath, land, pasture, meade, and woode,
 The heath and fenn, the marish, lake, and meare,
 To beaste, to fowle, a shelter and a foode,
 Whereby yt doth so great a plenty reare.
 One half the Sea, the reste swete streames surrounde,
 And so with fish no less it doth abounde.

5.

The hier grounds serve Conney, Corne, and Sheepe,
 The low for hay or necessary fuell ;
 They carry not, nor drive by foule or steepe,
 But by the boate, or dry or easy levell,
 Tenn combe of wheate the acr that doth beare,
 Two horses with one boy doe plow or care.

6.

The vaynes thereof that barrayne be of wood
 Yeeld strawe or broome, firr, flag, sedg, turf, or brake,
 And fuell are, both ready, cheape, and good,
 And do suffice the poor of nought to take.

It timber hath sufficiently to spende,
 With surplusage to Cambridgeshire to sende.

7.

Of marriners or ships to send to sea
 For merchandiz, or foes to foyle or noy,
 Or souldiers stout, quenes enemies to slea,
 Scars any shire so many do employ ;

Or that do serve then with truer harts,
 Or manlier doe then performe their parts.

8.

Though thro' the Shire the soil deserveth praise,
 Yet on the parts most toward East and West
 More profit and comodityes they raise,
 (For rate thereof) as well for corne or beast :
 The East doth flow with barley, pease, and wheat,
 The West with oate, hempe, sheepe, fatt ox, and neate.

9.

And tho' sometime this western point be drained
 By rage of sea, as one in forty yeares,
 Yet fewer scathes to Norff. doth redounde
 By other floods than doth to hilly shires :
 Her broader dales make waters shoald and slower,
 So lost no bridge in Anno ninety-four.

10.

Though Norff. thus all other shires excell
 In all that serve for belly, back, or health,
 Or pleasure, ease, or strength foe to repell,
 Yet other shires som compt of greater wealth ;
 For that their lande revenue yeldeth more,
 And do not breed so great excess of poore.

11.

If so it be, yet goodness of the ground,
 Or industry of them is not the cause,
 But casually to them they so redounde,
 Through better mart and better private laws :
 Great help it is rich London to be nigh,
 Where deere to sell, and cheap each thing to buy.

12.

Agayne, their lands in severall they enjoy,
 By which a more and private gain they make,
 And also voyd much damage and annoy,
 W^{ch} Norff. soyle by Combers do take ;
 For what is as joyntly used by all
 Was never yet well husbanded, or shall.

13.

The thirde or more of all our Norfolk grounde
 Is com̄on feed to pore as well as rich,
 Which doth the welth of better sorte confounde,
 And causeth poor with idleness to itch,
 While they do trust by com̄oninge of feede
 To have whereby to woork they shall not neede.

14.

So while as each seek greedily to eat
 His part at least, if not a great deal more,
 Not having hay nor straw for winter meate,
 His greater stock doth breed his greater sore ;
 For winters want doth cause these beasts to starve,
 Which somers feede would scars in life preserve.

15.

By this we see that, what at first was ment
 For helpe of poore, thro' frankness of the lorde,
 Not only wants the purposed event,
 But causeth them with him not to accord ;
 For if he seeke surcharghing to restrayne,
 They say he shoots but at his private gayne.

16.

But if they might be equally divided,
 According to ech tenant right and rate,
 The quarrels sone should cease and be decided,
 Which ells will cause a lasting spence and hate :
 So should the poor gaine more of sever'd acr,
 Than where he is of thousand but ptaker.

17.

Thro' cōmoning in moore or heath or shack
 More suits arise in Norff. in a yeare
 Then matters all in shires which such do lack
 Do mount unto, as by Records appear :
 Not only Lords and Tenants be at jarr,
 But cōmoners among themselves do warr.

18.

And by the suits that thence do spring and growe,
 Through skaith, surcharg, wrong, comōning, or ffee,
 The rich as poor the comōns overthrowe,
 And gaynful but to lawyers only be:
 The wealthy sort they greatly do abate,
 And meaner cause to be of beggars state.

19.

Wher comōns want, and poor do trust to hands,
 By mattock, spade, plow, tumbrell, wain, or cart,
 Through husbanding those tough inclosed lands,
 Ech findeth woork sufficient for his part;
 Then as the poore do serve the rich his need,
 So rich the poor do gladly house and feed.

20.

I then conclude no poverty doth grow
 To Norff. men thro' barreyness of soyle,—
 Which rather doth with ech provision flow—
 But by the suits for damages or spoyle,
 That frowarde minds by comōninge pcure,
 Unto the which fond custome doth allure.

Finis, 22 April, 1595.

B. C. and C. D. G. and G.
 J. K. and K. and L.
 With P. and P. then S. and T.,
 Foreteen in all to tell,
 Be all, I think, within the Shire
 Of Norff. to be founde,
 That only by their land by yeare
 May spend a thousand pound.

Yet meane I not hereby that all
 So have in their possession :
 But after age or joynture fall,
 Or other tayle reversion,
 So few of such, I thinke, no shire doth yeald,
 That is so large and good for land or field.
 The reasons why are partly shew'd before,
 And wiser men can causes render more.

Of welthy gentry or of yeomanry,
 I think no shire so small a rate doth yeald,
 That is so large as touching quantity,
 Or eke so rich in pasture, meede, and field.
 The reasons why are ptly shew'd before,
 And wiser men can causes render more.

A nagg thro' most of Norfolk will in winter further bear
 Thē guelding in ech other shire at driest time of yere ;
 For Norff. wanteth steepy hill and myry soyle or tough,
 And stone and gravel weyes to mend, hath every where
 enough.
