

CHAPTER III.

PAROCHIAL INCLOSURES.

Of the history, policy and value of parochial inclosures, a few additional observations may be made, having proof and illustration in what has occurred in Fincham. It is often alleged that the rights of the poor have not been sufficiently respected in these agricultural improvements. This is very probably true of those times, some two or three centuries ago, when lords of manors and owners of lands proceeded in a very arbitrary manner to consolidate their estates. The arable land of a village was then known as the *field*, and was subdivided into *lands* by ridges called *balks*. These *lands* belonged to different proprietors ; but when “the corne was inned and harvest don,” many householders, as well as other tenants, had feeding rights over some of these lands. In the middle of the 16th century the practice began to be adopted of exchanging and enclosing such lands as lay near to each other, including with them the wastes of the manor, generally considered altogether “common” to the whole parish, no compensation being given to poor claimants. The “covetousness of the gentlemen,” so called by the Protector Somerset, was the origin of the notorious commotions in this county known by the name of *Kett's Rebellion*. His efforts were especially directed against these inclosures, and although he and his associates proceeded to the most traitorous and wicked extremities, it is to be feared that they had good

reason for complaint, though none for their violent proceedings.

We have to regret that the people of Fincham prominently committed themselves in those memorable disturbances.¹ “In that same year (1549) certain persons at Fincham were “anxious to raise the common people by ringing the bells in “every town. One of them, Thomas Stylton,² was accused of “saying *it were a good dede that the Comynalte shuld ryse “here as they did ther* (in Yorkshire). Their wish was that “Mr. Fincham, of Fincham, should join them ; and if he “would not, they would *make a carte wey betweene his hed “and his sholders !* And next that *the halydays that were “putte down should be restoryed ageyn.*” In allusion to numerous *Saints' Days*, which at the Reformation were expurgated from the calendar, and the restoration of which none but idle people desired.³

But the boldest, perhaps, of the discontented spirits of the day, to judge by his language, was one John Walker, of another parish, who gave the following advice : “Yf three or “four goode felowes would ryde in the night with every man “a belle, and cry in every towne that they passe through, to “Swaffham ! to Swaffham ! by the morning ther would be ten “thousand at the lest ; and then one bold felowe to stande “forth and say, Syrs, nowe we be here assemblyd, let us go to “the gentylnen's howses, and as many as will not tirn to us, “let us kyllle them yea, evyn their

¹ See Russell's History of Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk, p. 7.

² I find this name in the Subsidy Rolls of this period, and have quoted it as amongst those who are rated upon their *wages*, which shews the position of the family.

³ A petition to the king (Edward VI.) in Parliament, from very many persons, of a different mind to the people of Fincham in this matter, prayed that these holydays might be made *fewer* in number, especially such as fell in the harvest, inasmuch as “on them many great abominable and execrable vices were used and practised.” -- Russell's History, &c., p. 8.

“chyltern in the cradyllles ; for yt wer a goode thinge yf there
 “were only so many gentylnen in Norff as ther be white
 “bulles.”¹

These troubles were not without good fruits. A spirit of reform, and a determination to correct abuses, sprang up ; enquiries were made, and the evils complained of abated. For the last hundred years, and more, Parliamentary sanction has been required for all public inclosures of waste and common lands, after a strict and full enquiry into the rights and claims of all parties concerned.

The great benefits of an inclosure, thus legally effected, must have already appeared in the case of this parish, as regards its agriculture, and increased money value ; and which applies as well to the rights and interests of the poor as of the rich. And when we remember that there are many persons often taking benefit from an unenclosed common, to an extent greatly prejudicial to the rights of the more needy and infirm, the system must be a great boon to these latter, which brings them their portion, whether in money or coal, to their very doors.

The following stanzas, from a quaint and curious poem on the county of Norfolk, by a member of the Gurney family, in the reign of Elizabeth, so well illustrate the evils and inconveniences incident to ancient common rights, whilst also they point attention to the only remedy for the same, that I am thankful for permission to reprint them from the “Record of the House of Gournay,” p. 942 :-

13.

The third or more of all our Norffolk grounde
 is Comom feede, to poore as well as Rich,
 which doth the welth of better sortes confounde,
 and causeth poore -with idleness to itch,
 while they do trust of comoninge of feede
 to have whereby to work they shall not neede.

¹ It seems strange after this that *Clacklose* does not appear in the list of those 22 Hundreds which sent “Governors” or “Deputies,” to Kett's Council at Norwich.

14.

So while ech seeketh greedily to eate
 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 winter's want doth cause those beasts to starve,
 which somer's feede could scarce in life preserve.

15.

By this we see that what at first was ment
 for help of poore, through frankness of the lorde,
 not only wants the purposed event,
 but causeth them with him not to accord ;
 for if he seeke surcharging to restreyne,
 they say he shootes but at his private gayne.

16.

But if they might be equally divided,
 according to each tenants right and rate,
 the quarrels soon should cease and be decided,
 which ells will cause a lasting spence¹ and hate ;
 so should the poore gaine more of severed acre
 than wher he is of thousand but partaker.

As connected with the *Inclosure* of our parish, a few words on its admirable *Drainage*, so important agriculturally, as well as in a sanitary point of view, will fitly follow here. Fincham is about equally bisected by a deep, direct and well-formed channel, called the *Lode*² *Dyke*, which is the straightened course of a natural stream, flowing from Stradsett through Fincham and Barton into the *String*,³ at Oxburgh, and thence into the *Wissey*, at Stoke Ferry. This drain is from three to four feet below the level of the lands through which it passes, and there is a convenient fall into it from every part of the village. To this, most probably, under Providence, we owe the generally healthy condition of the parish. It would be both instructive and

¹ Spence = expense.

² Lode is from the Anglo-Saxon *lædan*, to lead. It signifies amongst miners a metallic vein or course, and then any regular course or channel. -- Imp. Dict.

³ The *String* rises at Beecham-Well. A friend has ingeniously suggested that we call our brook the *Twine*.

agreeable to dilate a little upon the great importance of good drainage, especially to the farmer, but information of the best kind on this subject is continually, almost daily, issuing from the press. I am strongly tempted, however, to introduce here, instead of my own opinions, those of a reputed ancestor, a practical agriculturist, and landowner, of the county of Warwick, living in the middle of the 17th century. He appears to have anticipated by 200 years, as others also did, very much that has been said and written, and happily done, in our own times. His name was *Walter Blith*, or *Blyth*, and his book is entitled "*The English Improver, or a New Survey of Husbandry, &c.* London, 1649. I quote from it, as well for its amusing quaintness, as for the reasons above given. Inter alia, he says, "The third prejudice [to profitable agriculture] "is where all men's lands lie intermixed in common Fields or "Meadows ; the ingenuous are disabled to the improving "theirs, because others will not. As the cutting straight such "brookes and gutters as are exceeding crooked, which some "that would cannot, because of others interests that will not. "Abundance of the best lands is hereby lost, and wonderful "improvements hindered ; the waters raised, the lands "flouded, sheep rotted, and cattell spoyled, by this neglect." "Another prejudice is the many watermills which destroy "abundance of gallant land, by pounding up the water to that "height that it lieth swelling and soaking and spewing, that it "turneth very much land to a Bog, or to mire, or else to Flag "and Rush and mare-blab, which otherwise was as gallant "land as could be. Many a thousand a year are thus "destroyed, some mills not worth above 10 or 12 pound per "an : destroying lands worth 20." "A strait water-cut a "considerable depth, in a thousand parts of this nation, would "be more advantageous than we are aware of ; a great means "of laying sound

“much land overcome by bogginess, the water lying so upon
“it, that it drowneth or stiflith a great part of the fruitfulness
“of it, yea suffocateth and choaketh others also bordering
“upon it, no small prejudice to the Nation in general, and to
“many Townships in particular. Why may not one neighbour
“join with another where both are gainers ? If not, why may
“they not be compelled for their own good, and the
“Common-wealth's advantage ? A law is wanting herein,”
&c., &c., pp. 42, 43, 44.¹

¹ There was “a third impression, much augmented,” of this work, and it was entitled “The English Improver *Improved*, or the Survey of Husbandry *Surveyed*. London, 1652. “ -- Communicated by the Rev. E. Gillett, vicar of Runham, Norfolk.