

On Two Somerset Wills, temp. Edward VI, 1548.

BY A. J. MONDAY.

IT has been my privilege recently, through the kindness of R. A. Kinglake, Esq., to peruse several of the wills which had been proved in the Archidiaconal Court at Taunton, in the 16th century. It was a matter of interest at the time to note the almost marvellous advancement made in agriculture since the Tudor period of English history. The scarcity of money, and the high value set upon manufactured goods of all kinds also struck me as two of the leading features of rural life some three hundred and forty years ago.

Thinking that details of this description would prove of general interest, I have selected wills made in the 2nd year of Edward VI, by two individuals, who apparently belonged to that section of society which has been so aptly defined as "the pure Middle Class." Such material must serve well to illustrate the social condition of the rural population in West Somerset in early times, when almost all—from the highest to the lowest—were compelled, through necessity, to have recourse to that art and science for self-support—the original business of mankind—Agriculture.

The first will is that of Thomas Young, of Kingsbrompton.

"In the name of God Amen on the fourthe daie of Dece'ber in the yere of our Lord God 1548 and of the Raigne of our sou'aigne Lord Edwarde the VIth by the grace of god of England ffrunce and Ireland Kinge defendour of the faithe and in earthe of the churche of England and Ireland the Supreme hed, I Thomas Yonge of the pishe of Kingesbrumpton beigne pfitte of mind and in good remembrance make my

Testament and last will in this wise ffirst I gewe and bequethe my soule to Almightye god to our blessed Ladie S^t Marie and to all the Saints of heaven and my bodie to be bueried in the churcheyarde of Kingesbrumpton above saide. Itm̄. I bequethe to the pore mens boxe there a xx^d. Itm̄. I bequethe to the pore mens boxe of Langford a xx^d. Item. I bequethe to Alice Zeyman my s^rūnte ij lambes. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto Alice veysie ij Lambes. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto Johane yonge my s^rūnte a vj^{li} xiijs^s iiij^d vppon this condicion that the said Johane doe abid in s^ruice wth my sonne John yonge vntill she be married soe that she be honestlie vsed wth him in meate drink and clothe. And if not I will the Rulers vnto my Executors vnderwriten to take her from him and to put her to a master to s^rue for her lyvinge and then my bequestes is that my sonne John shall paie to her mariage fyve m(ar)ks of good and lafull monie of England. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto Julian my s^ruante a vj^{li} xiijs^s iiij^d and xvij Shepe and the said Julian shall abide one yere wth my wief and my sonne if she be not married before that time. And the said vj^{li} xiijs^s iiij^d shall be paide in a diu(er)s payments as the p'ties maie agre to make paymente. Itm̄. I bequethe to the mariage of Alice Jordaine my sisters dawghter a ijs^s iiij^d and if she die before she be married it shall remaine to her yongeste child's mariage. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto Roger (Thomas' Eldest sonne of Buckland) a Shepe and vj^s viij^d of money. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto John Stere ye yonger my godsonne iiij^{or} Shepe or els at the daie of his mariage a viij^s which shall be att his pleasure to take the money or the Shepe. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto Willm̄ Smythe one of my three coates. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto Willm̄ White my Canvas Doublett and half a bz. (bushel) of Rie. Itm̄. I bequethe unto Phillippe Davie a paire of my olde hoses and half a bz. of Rie. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto Elizabeth yether half a bz. of Rie. Itm̄. I bequethe vnto eu(er)ie one of my godchildren a Shepe apece. Itm̄. I bequethe to the Vicar of Kingesbrumpton vj^s viij^d I bequethe to eu'ie of

the Rulers of my executours vnder writen vj^s viij^d apece. And to eu'ie of the witnesses of this testam^t vnder writen xx^d apece. The Reste of my goods, debts paide and this my will fulfilled, I geue and bequethe in forme vnder writen to Alice my wief and John my sonne, whome I make my executours, that they wth the advice consente and assente of John Steeare thelder and Nicholas Lande whome I appointe and make the Rulers to mynister and execute this my saide will in forme above writen and as here vnder is specified and declared; That is to saie as longe as my [said wief] dothe lyve sole and chaste and will be ordered by her Rulers, so longe my said wife to be executrix of my goods and landes. Neu'thesse she shall assente and my Will is that the said Rulers doe bie the Reu(er)sion of my bargaine here of Liddon vnto my said sonne John Yonge whome I will tō marrie therin vnder his Mother, and to worke and labo^r there vppon for his lyvinge, not comaundinge his mother to anie worke or laboure, but onlie at her pleasure. And that my said sonne shall meddle, nether doe anie thinge uppon or in the said bargaine or in byinge or sellinge or changinge of beastes or takinge in of mowes, or in anie other things to be don uppon the bargains, wthout the consente of his mother. And likewise my wief to haue to doe wth nothings wthout the consente of my forenamed sonne, and soe quietlie to liue one wth an other. And further if it happen my wief after suche time my sonne is married she canot agre to bide wth my saide sonne but will dwell at Gunham, then my bequest is vnto her one flock bedde p^rformed, iiij^{or} of my Kie [Kine], ij bullocks of xij monethes age, foure skore shepe chosen out of the beste of my flock, and my wief to take one man to chose one for her and my sonne a nother for him self vntill they have chosen xl apece of the beste, and then to refuse one beste and take the other of the seconde, half the poultrie, a gose, a gander, my seconde beste pan and one of the beste crocks, half a dosen of pewter vessell w^{ch} she shall haue to Gunham wth her. Also she shall haue the said bargaine and

my grownd called Stonehaie. Moreou', notwthstandinge anie of the premisses if it happen my saide wief to marrie then I vtterlie exclude her from my executrix Shippe and porcions before bequethed, and then my sonne to be my whole executour and to delu' his mother my bargaine of Gunhām, twoe of my beste kie [kine], twoe bullocks of one yere age, and a flock bedde pformed, w^{ch} I bequethe vnto her, and noe portion of my goodsels. To this beareth witnes Sir William Skinner vicar of Kingesbrumpton; John Holworthie, Marten Bryant, and William Stockham, whom I make supvisors of the above named Rulers, to thintente if they doe not accordinglie to the accomplismente of this my Will I will eu'ie of the said witnes to take the Rule and execution hereof on them and the said Rulers putt a parte to see this will in eu'ie pointe accomplished."

Gunham, mentioned above,—or Gundenham,—is a manor house, long since converted into a farm house. It lies on the main road from Wellington to Milverton, and is in the parish of Langford Budville. It has been identified by means of the will of another person who lived at Langford, and who refers to it when making a special bequest to one of the Yonge family.

The will of Richard Yea, who lived at the same time in the parish of Wiveliscombe, and who appears to have been a substantial yeoman, furnishes considerable information respecting rural life at this period. The family of the Yea,—which appears to have derived its surname from an ancient district, known as La Ya, in the manor of South Brent, in Devon, belonging to the Abbey of Buckfast in that county,—increased its possessions in Somerset by the marriage of David Yea, of Oakhampton, in the parish of Wiveliscombe, with Ursula, the heiress of Edward Hobbes, Esq., of Stogursey and Brompton Ralph. Edward Hobbes was Sheriff of Somerset at the time of Monmouth's Rebellion. The family estates were still further augmented by the marriage of the heiress of Brewer, of Tolland, and the youngest daughter and co-heiress of Lacy, of

Hartrow. William Yea, Esq., was created a Baronet on the 11th of June, 1759, and Col. Walter Lacy Yea, the last lineal descendant and heir-apparent, whose military career promised so favourably for the future, fell bravely fighting at the head of his regiment, the 7th Fusileers, upon the unsuccessful attack upon the Redan during the Crimean campaign, so eloquently described by the author of the Crimean invasion; after which, in course of time, the title was inherited by his uncle, Sir Henry Yea, who, dying without issue, the baronetcy became extinct. The family seat had been removed at the latter end of the last century from Oakhampton to Pyrland, in the parish of Taunton St. James.

“In the name of God Amen the xxvth daie of Julie in the Seconde yere of or Lord God 1548 and in the Seconde yere of the Raigne of o^r Sou'aigne Lorde Edwarde the VIth by the grace of God of England ffrünce and Ireland Kinge defender of the faithe and in earthe nexte vnder christe of the Church of England and also of Ireland the Supreme hed I Richard yea of the prishe of Wyviliscombe in the dioces of Bath and Welles whole of minde and pfitte of Remembrance make my testament and last will in man' and forme folowinge ffirste I bequethe my soule to Almightye god and my bodie to be bueried in the church of Wyviliscombe aforeside. Also I geue and bequethe to the Repacion of the same Church for my bueriall there a vj^s viij^d Also to the Repaacon of the Cathedrall church of Welles I geue a xij^d I geue and bequethe to John yea my seconde beste salt of silu' pcell (parcel) gilte and half a dosen of silu' spones of the beste Dosen. a fetherbede, a paire of Shetes, a paire of blanketts, a cou'lett, and a box bolster, the twoe middle brasen crocks, the third beste brasen pan, vj platters, vj poteng' (potingers), and vj sauc's, one oxe, one cowe, half a skore of yeoes, and half a skore of wethers, not of the beste nor yet of the wurste sorte. Also I geue and bequethe to David yea the third best salte of silu' pcell gilte, half half a dosen of silu' spones of the beste dosen, a ffetherbedd, a paire of shetes, a

paire of blanketts, a cou'lett and a bolster the beste, and the leste newe brasen crocks, the seconde beste brasen pan, vj platters, vj poteng's, vj sawc's, one ox, one cowe, half a skore of yewes, and half a skore of wethers of the same sorte that his brother John is s'ued. Also I geve and bequethe unto Radegond Yae a cowe and a litle brasen crock; Provided alwaies that if the same Radigond doe departe this worlde before she be mairried that then she be browghte honestlie in earthe and the residew of her bequests to be returned vnto John yae and to David yae her brothers equallie to be devided. Also provided John yae or David Yae doe dpte (depart) this worlde before they be of the age of xxj yeres if they or anie of them be vn-married that then I woulde that he who first deptethe should be honestlie brought in earth and the goodes to him bequethed shall be restored to him that lyveth, whether it be John or David. And if chance they doe depte out of this worlde both of them before they be married that then I woulde they be honestlie browghte in earthe; And Radigond yae there sister to haue of their goods a vj^{li} xiijs^s iiij^d And all the residue thereof to remaine vnto David Slocombe and Alice his Wief and to there children. Also I will y^t (that) if the foresaide John yae, David yae, and Radigond yae, or anie of them will not be ordered, ruled, governed, and married, by the advice and councell of David Slocombe and my ou'seers, that then my bequests to the bequethed, to be devided vnto the by the discretion of the same David Slocombe and my said ou'seers. Also I geue vnto Alice yae my wief xiiij^{li} vjs^s viij^d to be paide to her in money or monie worth. Also I geue and bequethe to the same Alice my wief all the beddinge that is lefte w^{ch} she browghte from Whitfeld, and all her apparell, naprie, beades, girdles and taches that she likewise browghte wth her. Also I geue to the same Alice my wief yerelie duringe her lief a xx^s by the yere for her Dowrie of my ffree-lands, to be paide of my heires that shall enioye my saide ffree-lands. Also I geue and bequethe to the same Alice my

wief, to be good to the pore children beforenamed xx^s Also I geue bequethe to Richard Collard the sonne of my Dawghter Johane Collard xx^s Also I geue and bequethe to Christopher Norman a heaffer of iij yeres age in the stede of a viij^s w^{ch} he claymeth of me. Also I geue and bequethe to Agnes Norman a xx^s. Moreou' I will that my executors do delu' unto David yae or to John yae when they or anie of them shall, chance to enter into the farme of Okehampton, all my plowghe stuff, that is to saie my beste waine wth the wheles bownde wth yron, and the worste butt wth the wheales likewise bownd wth yron, and all my pte (part) of Ropes, yokes, sooles, and all other man' of instruments for the plowghe. And that if David yae doe die before he be maried that then to leave all the plowghe stuff and all the instrumentss before rehearsed, to John yae his brother. Also I will yt. [that] when David Slocombe and Alice his wief, doe depte this worlde, they to leave to the said David such ymploym^{ts} as hereafter foloweth, Twoe Vates, ij coffers, ij chaires, a cobbard and a Tablebord yt. is nowe in the hall, and the barre of Iron in the chymney and parte of the potthangings. And if that David yae depte this worlde before he be married then he to leave it to his brother John yae all the saide Employments. ffarthermore I will that David Slocombe and his wief have the kepinge of the said John and David yae vntill they be of a suffyciente age. Mou' I constitute ordaine and make my ou'seers John Benett, John Kinge, Thomas Collard, and Christopher Howell, to see this my last will in eu'ie condition well and trulie performed, and they to have eu'ie of them for their labour and paines a iij^s iiiij^d The resydue of all my goodes and cattalls not bequethed, my debts, bequests, and fun'all trulie contented and paide, I geue and bequethe to David Slocombe and Alice his wief whome I make my executors, to dispose them for the wealth of my soule as they shall seme best. To this witnesseth Thomas Collard, John Kinge, John Benett, and Xpofer Howell, wth Dyu's others."

"Proved 27 ffeb. Ao. Dni 1549."

There is a freehold estate in the parish of Wiveliscombe still belonging to the representatives of the Yea family called Yea's, and it was probably to this identical estate that Richard Yea refers to in his will as "my freelands." He likewise makes use of the expression, it will be seen, "shall chance to enter into the farme of Okehampton." In respect of the Manor of Oakhampton, in the parish of Wiveliscombe, the Yea family were lessees under the Bishop of Bath and Wells, the reversion to which for life having been apparently acquired by either Richard Yea or his father in the year 1500.

It will be observed there is no reference to a horse of any kind in either of these wills; neither is there in that of John Sydenham, Esq., who made his will at Dulverton, on the 29th of June, 1558. William Norton, a native of Hillfarrence, who made his will at Nynhead, 28th May, 1542, however, gives to his daughter Agnes his "grey amblyn mare," after the death of his wife. Nicholas Gale, of Creech—will dated 28th day of July, 1547—makes specific bequests to his children of a "yonge mare with her colt" and "a mare colt." The ox was chiefly used instead of the horse for the ordinary purposes of husbandry in West Somerset until within, comparatively speaking, a recent period.

It will be noticed that rye is the only corn mentioned; this corn, and not wheat as now, was the staple consumption for bread making.
