A Hand-Book to the Land-Charters, and Other Saxonic Documents

Earle John
A Hand-Book to the Land-Charters, and other Saxonic Documents

BY

JOHN EARLE, M.A.
Formerly Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College
Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford
Rector of Swanswick

Oxford
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
M DCCC LXXXVIII
PREFACE

This book has grown to something beyond its first design. A further text-book being required when the available things were exhausted, it was to have been just a few specimens of land-charters, so grouped as to exhibit roughly the contrast of genuine and spurious. On this principle the book was begun and so far proceeded with that the first sheets bear permanent traces of a plan which was afterwards enlarged. At an early stage of the work, when I was discouraged by some inceptive difficulties, I had the happiness to obtain the help of my friend the Rev. Charles Plummer, of Corpus Christi College in Oxford; and this imported into the task an element of pleasure, which had an expansive effect. As any improvement suggested itself with the progress of the work, I adopted it without stopping to question what the effect would be on the symmetry of the whole. Accordingly, I have to confess that the First Part contains some pieces which would not have been there, if I had had from the beginning a matured prevision of the grouping of the Second Part. This is a defect in form which I thought it well to incur, rather than miss any possible gain in the way of critical discrimination.
Upon a consistent plan, the First Part should have contained no documents from the Worcester Chartulary (Heming), which forms the basis of Group ii in the Second Part; nor should there have been any from the Rochester Book but in Group iv. The gift of Osric to Bath should not stand where it is (p. 6) any more than that of Headdi to Glastonbury (p. 9). A good general indication of an original document (in the First Part) is the presence of contractions. This is due to the circumstance that many of the best documents were printed straight off from the volumes of the British Museum Facsimiles. The student who has handled the Codex Diplomaticus will not find it strange that an abbreviated text should be a token of high quality. Where the documents could be compared either with the original manuscript or with a facsimile, they have for the most part been printed as they stand and the contractions have been kept. The want of uniformity, whereby contracted and expanded texts are intermixed, will not be without its advantage. The unexpanded documents will afford exercise in reading contractions, for which the expanded texts will supply the key.

In the Introduction I have ventured to emancipate myself from the authority of Kemble in two matters of great importance, one chronological and the other constitutional. As regards the former, I have only exercised a right of choice between his statement and another; but as to the latter, I have taken upon myself to reject his view of the elementary scheme
of English life, and I have offered an entirely new exposition of my own. If I am right in my opinion that the manorial system was part of the first plantation, it ought to approve itself by the luminous effect which new truth generally has in lighting up places that are dark. And I seem in my own mind to have found it so;—for it has awakened most unexpectedly a new interest in the Donation of Æthelwulf, a problem which I had long ago abandoned as hopeless. If I have now contributed anything towards the solution of this old and acknowledged difficulty, it has been wholly due to the light which a new elementary truth threw upon the general situation; the explanation grew naturally out of the new conception of the functions of the lord of the manor, and if it should be approved, it will tend to confirm that view. This explanation did not present itself until after the Introduction was in type, so that it had to go into a footnote, where, though condensed, I hope it will be intelligible.

The study of these documents has its place as a natural antecedent to the study of Domesday Book, and the two studies are in fact two parts of one whole. The progress which has been made in the knowledge of the great taxing-book, as evidenced by the recent appearance of 'Domesday Studies,' seems to promise a new era of enquiry into our early his-

1 See page lxix. Lord Selborne's book, 'Ancient Facts and Fictions concerning Churches and Tithes' (1888), in which a chapter is devoted to the Donation of Æthelwulf, appeared too late for me to benefit by the use of it.
tory. We in our day enjoy a great advantage over the men of any former generation, in that we can have the very reflection of the original in our hands and read it at our ease, as light as a pamphlet, and almost as cheap. It is to the late Lieut.-General Sir Henry James, Director-General of the Ordnance Survey, that we owe the facsimiles of Domesday, and with them also three volumes of facsimiles of land-charters, and other documents, which were edited and translated by Mr. W. Basevi Sanders. The example of printing facsimiles of these early charters was given by the authorities of the British Museum, the First Part of whose work is dated in 1873; and it was continued with results so much the more important, as the original documents at their disposal exceed in value all other collections put together. The four volumes of British Museum Facsimiles were edited by Mr. Bond, who has since become the Principal Librarian. These invaluable publications are not merely the stimulants of historical curiosity;—rather let us say that as they furnish those external criteria which are the true counterpart of the internal evidence, they complete the data upon which criticism is to work, and impart to historical studies a scientific quality.

The period in which we live will be characterised by and bye as the period in which great provincial Libraries were founded. Now is the time to store up some things which will ere long be inaccessible and beyond price, and among such I would reckon
the three sets of Facsimiles above described. If any borough is so happy as to have a Library Committee which thinks that something should be acquired beyond the standard of immediate demand, perhaps they might be disposed to look favourably upon these great national publications. For books like these tend to awaken local investigation and to illustrate the land we live in, the land our forefathers 1400 years ago took possession of, the land in which they have through toil and struggle and vicissitudes grown to be a mighty nation, the land they have made illustrious and classical; and there is no kind of study so varied, so healthy, or so favourable to social geniality, as a study which has country for its object, and especially a country in which all men are interested.

The time may perhaps come when the average aim of life will be somewhat modified, when a larger sphere will be accorded to the intellectual part, when commerce will be relinquished for contentment as soon as a modest competence is assured, when men will cultivate a garden of their own, and will seek in books not merely anodyne from care and passive amusement, but materials and tools for the exercise of their mental energies.

Then will rise a demand for such books as I have named, and I will name another of like national rank with them, the New English Dictionary, now issuing in Parts from the Clarendon Press—a work of unprecedented compass, a work which is a library in itself,
a work which (apart from its design) affords, to an extent that is truly marvellous, a first introductory key to every kind of human knowledge.

I close this Preface as I began it, with grateful acknowledgments to Mr. Plummer, not only for his constant and valuable help, but even more for the solace of his companionship; and at the same time I thank the Delegates of the Press for the readiness with which they promoted my wish for a coadjutor.

Oxford,
March, 1888.