

£50 be incurred without an estimate submitted by the committee.

BOROUGHES

Last, but, from the point of view of self-government, highest in the scheme of English local institutions, comes the borough. We have already seen (p. 27) that, by ways the origin of which is obscure, many towns or 'townships,'¹ or groups of towns or townships, in ancient England had, even before the Norman Conquest, acquired, under the title of 'boroughs,' peculiar franchises or privileges, especially in the matter of self-government, which made them a class apart. The name 'borough,' which means a strong, or fortified place, appears to give us a hint as to the original character of these places²; but very early they lost any special military character they may once have had, and became noted chiefly as industrial centres. As such, they (or some of them) were, as we have seen, given special representation in the Parliament of the thirteenth century; and this peculiarity they continued to retain, with disastrous results, as we have also seen (p. 139), both to their parliamentary and their civic character, down to the Reform Act of 1832. Since that date, parliamentary and civic (or municipal) boroughs have become more and more distinct; until they now share little more than the name. The parliamentary borough is regulated by the Representation of the People Acts, and means little more than an urban area sending its own member to Parliament. The municipal borough

¹ It is only a modern fashion which confines the name 'town' to a large centre of population, and contrasts it with a 'village.' For many centuries, 'town' and 'village' were the same thing; and a 'township' was not a little town, but the area of a town or village, or, in legal documents, the inhabitants of a town or village.

² Even this derivation does not really help us to distinguish a borough from an ordinary town; because a 'town' or 'tun' was, originally, a stockaded or enclosed space.