

THE BOOK OF HUSBANDRY

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The Book of Husbandry by Master Fitzherbert & Walter W. Skeat

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MASTER FITZHERBERT & WALTER W. SKEAT

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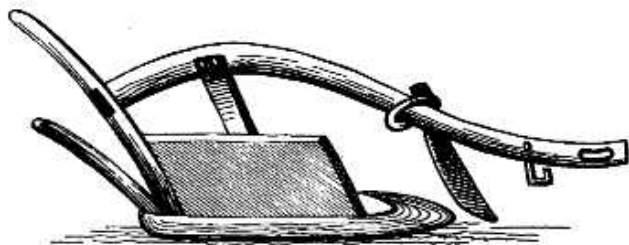
FITZHERBERT'S
BOOK OF HUSBANDRY.

1534

THE
BOOK OF HUSBANDRY,
BY
MASTER FITZHERBERT.

REPRINTED FROM THE EDITION OF 1534,
AND EDITED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND GLOSSARIAL INDEX,

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INTRODUCTION.

ONE question of chief interest respecting the volume here printed is—who was the author? We know that his name was “*Mayster Fitzherbarde*” (see p. 125), and the question that has to be settled is simply this—may we identify him with Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, judge of the Common Pleas, the author of the *Grand Abridgment of the Common Law*, the *New Natura Brevium*, and other legal works?

The question has been frequently discussed, and, as far as I have been able to discover, the more usual verdict of the critics is in favour of the supposed identity; and certainly all the evidence tends very strongly in that direction, as will, I think, presently appear.

Indeed, when we come to investigate the grounds on which the objections to the usually received theory rest, they appear to be exceedingly trivial; nor have I been very successful in discovering the opposers' arguments. Bohn's edition of Lowndes' *Bibliographer's Manual* merely tells us that “the treatises on Husbandry and Surveying are by some attributed to the famous lawyer Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, by others to his brother John Fitzherbert.”

In the Catalogue of the Huth Library, we find this note: “The Rev. Joseph Hunter was the first person to point out that the author of this work [Fitzherbert's Husbandry] and the book on Surveying was a different person from the judge of the same name.” It will be at once observed that this

note is practically worthless, from the absence of the reference. After considerable search, I have been unable to discover where Hunter's statement is to be found, so that the nature of his objections can only be guessed at.

In Walter Harte's *Essays on Husbandry* (ii. 77) we read—"How Fitzherbert could be a practitioner of the art of agriculture for 40 years, as he himself says in 1534, is pretty extraordinary. I suppose it was his country amusement in the periodical recesses between the terms." We are here presented with a definite objection, grounded, as is alleged, upon the author's own words; and it is most probable that Harte is here stating the objection which has weighed most strongly with those who (like Hunter) have objected to the current opinion. The answer to the objection is, I think, not a little remarkable, viz. that the alleged statement is *not* the author's at all. By turning to p. 125, it will be seen that it was Thomas Berthelet the printer who said that the author "had exercysed husbandry, with greate experyence, xl. years." But the author's *own* statement, on p. 124, is *differently worded*; and the difference is material. He says: "and, as touchynge the poyntes of husbandry, and of other artycles conteyned in this present boke, I wyll not saye that it is the beste waye and wyll serue beste in all places, but I saye it is the best way that euer I coude proue by experyence, the whiche haue *ben an housholder* this xl. yeres and more, and haue assaied many and dyuers wayes, and done my dyligence to proue by experyence which shuld be the beste waye." The more we weigh these words, the more we see a divergence between them and the construction which might readily be put upon the words of Berthelet; a construction which, in all probability, Berthelet did not specially intend. Any reader who hastily glances at Berthelet's statement would probably deduce from it that the author was a farmer merely, who had

had forty years' experience in farming. But this is not what we should deduce from the more careful statement of the author. We should rather notice these points.

1. The author does not speak of husbandry *only*, but of *other points*. The other points are the breeding of horses (not a necessary part of a farmer's business), the selling of wood and timber, grafting of trees, a long discourse upon prodigality, remarks upon gaming, a discussion of "what is riches," and a treatise upon practical religion, illustrated by Latin quotations from the fathers, and occupying no small portion of the work. This is not the work of a practical farmer, in the narrow acceptation of the term, meaning thereby one who farms to live; but it is clearly the work of a country gentleman, rich in horses and in timber, acquainted with the extravagant mode of life often adopted by the wealthy, and at the same time given to scholarly pursuits and to learned and devout reading. Indeed, the prominence given to religious teaching can hardly fail to surprise a reader who expects to find in the volume nothing more than hints upon practical agriculture. One chapter has a very suggestive heading, viz. "A lesson made in Englysshe verses, that a *gentylmans seruaunte* shall forget none of his gere in his *inne behynde hym*" (p. 7). This is obviously the composition of a gentleman himself, and of one accustomed to take long journeys upon horseback, and to stay at various inns on the way.¹

2. Again he says, "it is the best way that euer I coude proue by experyence, the whiche . . . haue assaied *many and dyuers* wayes, and done my dyligence to proue by experyence which shuld be the beste waye." Certainly this is not the language of one who farmed for profit, but of

¹ "And [I give] to euery of my seruantes that be used to Ryde with me," etc.; Sir A. Fitzherbert's Will, quoted below at p. xviii.

the *experimental* farmer, the man who could afford to lose if things went wrong, one to whom farming was an amusement and a recreation, and who delighted in trying various modes that he might benefit those who, unlike himself, could not afford to try any way but that which had long been known.

3. We must note the language in which he describes himself. He does not say that he had "exercised husbandry" for forty years, but that he had "been a householder" during that period. The two things are widely different. His knowledge of agriculture was, so to speak, accidental; his real employment had been to manage a household, or, as we should rather now say, to "keep house." This, again, naturally assigns to him the status of a country gentleman, who chose to superintend everything for himself, and to gain a practical acquaintance with everything upon his estate, viz. his lands, his cattle, his horses, his bees, his trees, his felled timber, and the rest; not forgetting his duties as a man of rank in setting a good example, discouraging waste, giving attention to prayer and almsgiving, and to his necessary studies. "He that can rede and vnderstande *latyne*, let hym take his booke in his hande, and looke stedfastely vppon the same thyng that he readeth and seeth, *that is no trouble to hym*," etc. (p. 115). Are we to suppose that it could be said generally, of farmers in the time of Henry VIII., that Latin was "no trouble to them"? If so, things must have greatly changed.

I have spoken of the above matter at some length, because I much suspect that the words used by Berthelet are the very words which have biassed, entirely in the wrong direction, the minds of such critics as have found a difficulty where little exists. It ought to be particularly borne in mind that Berthelet's expression, though likely to mislead *now*, was not calculated to do so at the time, when the authorship of the