

ESSAYS ON AGRICULTURE

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Essays on agriculture by Thomas Gisborne

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THOMAS GISBORNE

**ESSAYS ON
AGRICULTURE**

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ESSAYS
ON
AGRICULTURE,

BY THE LATE
THOMAS GISBORNE, Esq.,
OF FOXALL LODGE, STAFFORDSHIRE.

REPRINTED, BY PERMISSION, FROM THE QUARTERLY REVIEW.

1. CATTLE AND SHEEP.
2. AGRICULTURAL DRAINAGE.
3. ANCIENT AGRICULTURAL LITERATURE.
4. HIGH FARMING, AN UNPUBLISHED FRAGMENT.

THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.
1854.

PREFACE.

THE Author of this volume of "Essays on Agriculture," the late THOMAS GISBORNE, of Yoxall Lodge, Staffordshire, was born in 1787, and died in 1852. He was an extensive landowner in the counties of Stafford and Derby; he personally farmed a considerable acreage of arable and pasture land, and was especially conversant with the dairy and with cattle and sheep feeding. Mr. Gisborne was also well acquainted with the agriculture of Scotland, both Lowland and Highland. Few agriculturists of his day were more generally known in their class; few men, in public or private life, were more beloved. His talents, his various attainments, his warm heart and popular manners, his ardent love of field sports, made him the delight of numerous friends. A Member of the British House of Commons for a quarter of a century, he was well known as a "public man," and his speeches and pamphlets on various subjects were numerous; but it is the purpose of the present volume, simply to collect, in their entirety, his valuable writings on Agriculture.

The first three Essays were written by Mr. GISBORNE in 1849 and 1850, and originally appeared in Nos. CLXVIII., CLXXI., and CLXXIII., of the *Quarterly Review*. The article on *Agricultural Drainage* was subsequently carefully revised by him, and separately published by Mr. MURRAY, in 1851, passing rapidly through two editions.

The proofs of this first reprint were submitted by the deceased Author to the further revision of his schoolfellow

and neighbour, the late Sir Robert Peel, who, on the system and under the superintendence of Mr. Josiah Parkes, had early deep-drained his Drayton estate. An extant private letter from that eminent statesman to Mr. Gisborne, dated Whitehall, 26th June, 1851, is not only a high testimony to the value of this Essay, but an interesting evidence of the earnestness and sagacity of Sir Robert Peel, amidst the distractions of public life, on subjects affecting the progress of agriculture. The following is an extract:—

“I do not think the article admits of improvement by addition; certainly not by omission. Would it be easy to present engraved plans and sections of the ordinary four-foot Drain for the reception of 1½-inch Pipe; and of the Tools used in making the Drain and laying the Pipes and Collars? Some people understand such an appeal to their Senses in half the time they comprehend one to their Reason.—Many of those who drain extensively neglect to have a *plan* of the Draining of each field made at the time that the work is done: a hint as to the advantage of this might be advisable.”

Mr. GISBORNE had intended a similar revision and re-publication of the articles on *Cattle and Sheep* and *Ancient Agricultural Literature*; but death intervening, they are now reprinted as they originally appeared in the Review, with the addition only of the Tables of Contents.

The fourth Essay, on *High Farming*, is a posthumous publication. It was written in 1851–2, and designed for the same channel of publicity. A printed proof of “High Farming” was found in his Study; but the latter part appears not to have received the Author’s final correction, nor had it then been fully approved by the Editor of the Review.*

Mr. GISBORNE had also meditated a succession of articles on other agricultural topics, which would doubtless have been composed and published, had his life been spared. There is reason to believe that the earliest paper

* The proof is endorsed by Mr. Gisborne as “corrected,” so far as the last paragraph in pages 235–6 of this volume.

he contemplated was one on "Woods and Plantations." He had also intended, at the suggestion of the Earl of Lonsdale, a dissertation on the "Revival of Agriculture in Britain"—considering that a decided era was ascertainable; and the history would have been carried down to, and have embraced, the introduction and development of the turnip and green crop systems of farming, which constitute the grand basis of improvement and progress in British, as contrasted with the declension of Roman, Agriculture, so clearly traced and described in his *Essay on "Ancient Husbandry."*

The above circumstances—of the degree of ultimate revision of the respective Essays by their Author—are thus particularly stated, because some of his views are subjects not only of pending discussion and difference of opinion, but of naturally important and enduring interest. Truth and public enlightenment, however, were the sole aim of the writer, and if now alive, he would have honestly abandoned any demonstrated error; he scorned sinister falsehood and ignorant prejudice, and he had little sympathy with their victims.

The sterling merit and popularity of these remarkable contributions of Mr. GIBBORNE to the periodical literature of his times, amply justify the collection and republication of his Essays in a complete and permanent form. It is a vulgar error to regret that eminent literary men of the present age should have "wasted" their labour as "writers of reviews." No greater fallacy has been current. Even the minor periodicals are in some sort the nurseries of national literature. They are essentially cosmopolite, as the medium of much foreign communication with the Republic of Letters. The higher class of Reviews maintains the standard of literature, and contributes to the purification of the public appetite and taste for knowledge, whilst it creates and trains up a certain number of superior writers. Perhaps, in no instance, can it be proved that Contributors of any class have, in consequence, failed to

make the best use of their faculties and accomplishments. On the contrary, the attraction and remuneration of Reviews largely increase and encourage the productions of authors, and open new markets for books. A Reviewer tests his own powers, and perfects them in a leading Periodical; and Time, aided by the accumulation and reprint of his contributions, gives him a permanent celebrity and the widest sphere of influence. It is scarcely necessary to cite the increasing number of such Essayist collections in our own days, not excluding "Essays from the *Times*!" Such authors become instructors of Posterity.—Thus the brilliant names, in our own generation, of Walter Scott, Southey, Jeffrey, Hazlitt, Mackintosh, Sydney Smith, Arago, Brougham, Guizot, Thiers, the two Mills, McCulloch, Senior, G. C. Lewis, Macaulay, Croker, Wilson, James Stephen, Lord Mahon, and Albany Fonblanque, become fixed stars in the firmament of literature.

The liberality of the Proprietor of the *Quarterly Review* permits the present publication. The *political* opinions of Mr. GIBBORNE, it is well known, were not in accordance with the principles on which that able Periodical is habitually conducted. Nevertheless, the sagacity of its Editor discovered in Mr. GIBBORNE, and produced on neutral ground, a highly-gifted Contributor, whose mental labours might otherwise have never been brought to light. These mutual relations constitute real liberality; may they be everlasting!

The entire Agricultural and Political Essays and Speeches of Mr. GIBBORNE, in Parliament and "out of doors," with a brief memoir of their author, are in the press, and will be early published. In the meantime this portion, consisting exclusively of Essays on Agriculture, cannot be unacceptable to the Land Owners and Tenant Farmers of Great Britain and Ireland. The proprietors and tillers of the soil must now depend solely on themselves. Contests between "Protectionists" and "Free Traders" are exhausted discussions. Agriculturists can henceforth only

ask the Legislature for Fair Play, in acts of free trade for *all* classes.

The personal life of Mr. GISBORNE was, for nearly half-a-century, connected with the stirring events and party-action of his day; but in all his writings on Agriculture, and in his speeches at Farmers' Meetings and Agricultural Societies, he ever avoided controversial politics. On such occasions and times, Agriculture was his only text; his single object the advancement of the Art of Husbandry.

H. S.

Yoxall Lodge, Staffordshire,
20th October, 1853.

