

**THE FARMER'S BOY;  
A RURAL POEM**

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The Farmer's Boy; A Rural Poem by Robert Bloomfield

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**ROBERT BLOOMFIELD**

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FARMER'S BOY;

A RURAL POEM.

By *ROBERT BLOOMFIELD.*

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"A SHEPHERD'S BOY...HE SEEKS NO BETTER NAME."

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THE SECOND EDITION.

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MDCCG.

## P R E F A C E.

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HAVING the satisfaction of introducing to the Public this very pleasing and characteristic *POEM*, the *FARMER'S BOY*, I think it will be agreeable to preface it with a short Account of the manner in which it came into my Hands: and, which will be much more interesting to every Reader, a little History of the Author, which has been communicated to me by his Brother, and which I shall very nearly transcribe as it lies before me.

In *November* last year \* I receiv'd a *MS.* which I was requested to read, and to give my opinion of it. It had before been shewn to some persons in *London*: whose indifference toward it may probably be explain'd when it is consider'd that it came to their hands under no circumstances of adventitious recommendation. With some a person must be rich, or titled, or fashionable as a literary name, or at least fashionable in some respect, good or bad, before any thing which he can offer will be thought worthy of notice.

I had been a little accusom'd to the effect of prejudices: and I was determin'd to judge, in the

\* This was written in 1799.

only just and reasonable way, of the Work, by the Work itself.

At first I confess, seeing it divided into the four Seasons, I had to encounter a prepossession not very advantageous to any writer, that the Author was treading in a path already so admirably trod by THOMSON; and might be adding one more to an attempt already so often, but so injudiciously and unhappily made, of transmuting that noble Poem from Blank Verse into Rhime; . . . from its own pure native Gold into an alloyed Metal of incomparably less splendor, permanence, and worth.

I had soon, however, the pleasure of finding myself reliev'd from that apprehension: and of discovering that, although the delineation of RURAL SCENERY naturally branches itself into these divisions, there was little else except the General Qualities of a musical ear, flowing numbers, Feeling, Piety, poetic Imagery and Animation, a taste for the picturesque, a true sense of the natural and pathetic, force of thought, and liveliness of imagination, which were in common between Thomson and this Author. And these are qualities which whoever has the eye, the heart, the awakened and surrounding intellect, and the diviner sense of the Poet, which alone can deserve the name, must possess.

But, with these general Characters of true Poetry, "*The Farmer's Boy*" has, as I have said, a character of its own. It is discriminated as much



## P R E F A C E.

as the circumstances and habits, and situation, and ideas consequently associated, which are so widely diverse in the two Authors, could make it different. Simplicity, sweetness, a natural tenderness, that *molle atque facetum* which HORACE celebrates in the Eclogues of VIRGIL, will be found to belong to it.

I intend some farther and more particular CRITICAL REMARKS on this charming Performance. But I now pass to the Account of the Author himself, as given me by his Brother: . . . a Man to whom also I was entirely a stranger: . . . but whose Candor, good Sense, and brotherly Affection, appear in this Narrative; and of the justness of whose Understanding, and the Goodness of his Heart, I have had many Proofs, in consequence of a correspondence with him on different occasions which have since arisen, when this had made me acquainted with him, and interested me in his behalf.

In writing to me, Mr. GEORGE BLOOMFIELD, who is a Shoemaker also, as his Brother, and lives at BURY, thus expresses himself.

“ As I spent five years with the Author, from the time he was thirteen years and a half old \* till he was turned of eighteen, the most interesting time of life (I mean the time that instruction is acquir'd, if acquir'd at all), I think I am able to give a better account of him than any one can, or

\* This by farther recollection has since been discover'd and stated by Mr. G. and Mr. R. BLOOMFIELD not to be quite exact. See p. viii. C. L.

than he can of himself: for his Modesty would not let him speak of his Temper, Disposition, or Morals."

"ROBERT was the younger Child of GEORGE BLOOMFIELD, a *Taylor*, at HONINGTON.\* His Father died when he was an infant under a year old. † His Mother ‡ was a Schoolmistress, and instructed her own Children with the others. He thus learn'd to read as soon as he learn'd to speak."

"Though the Mother was left a Widow with six small Children, yet with the help of Friends she manag'd to give each of them a little schooling."

"ROBERT was accordingly sent to Mr. ROWELL, § of Ixworth, to be improved in *Writing*: but he did not go to that School more than two or three months, nor was ever sent to any other; his Mother again marrying when ROBERT was about seven years old."

"By her second Husband, JOHN GLOVER, she had another Family."

\* This Village is between *Ennes* and *Totes*, and about eight miles N. E. of *Bery*. L.

† Our Author was born, as his Mother has obligingly informed me, 8 Dec. 1756. L.

‡ ELIZABETH, Daughter of ROBERT MAFBY. Vide Note at the end of this Preface.

§ This respectable Man is senior Clerk to the Magistrates of the Hundred of BLACKBOURN, in which Honington is situated, and has conducted himself with great propriety in this and other public employments. L.

"When Robert was not above eleven years old, the late Mr. W. AUSTIN, of SARISTON,\* took him. And though it is customary for Farmers to pay such Boys only 1s. 6d. per week, yet he generously took him into the house. This reliev'd his Mother of any other expence than only of finding him a few things to wear: and this was more than she well knew how to do."

"She wrote therefore," Mr. G. BLOOMFIELD continues, "to me and my Brother NAT (then in London), to assist her; mentioning that he, ROBERT, was so small of his age that Mr. AUSTIN said he was not likely to be able to get his living by hard labour."

Mr. G. BLOOMFIELD on this inform'd his Mother that, if she would let him take the Boy with him, he would take him, and teach him to make shoes: and NAT promis'd to clothe him. The Mother, upon this offer, took coach and came to LONDON, to Mr. G. BLOOMFIELD, with the Boy: for she said, she never should have been happy if she had not put him herself into his hands.

"She charg'd me," he adds, "*as I valued a Mother's Blessing, to watch over him, to set good Examples for him, and never to forget that he had lost his Father.*" I religiously confine myself to Mr. G. BLOOMFIELD's own words; and think I should wrong all the parties concerned if in mentioning this pathetic and successful Admonition, I

\* This little Village adjoins to HANINGTON. L.