

TUSSER, THE AGRICULTURIST.

[We take the following remarks from a lecture recently delivered at Kelvidon, in England, by Mr. Crane, on the life and writings of the quaint author of "The Five hundred Points of Good Husbandry," who flourished in the sixteenth century.]

In early youth his father seems to have destined him for the church, then in the throes of the Reformation, and he was sent to the collegiate chapel of the Castle of Wallingford. This arose probably from his possessing an unusually musical voice, and he speaks of it as quite against his own will, as well as that of his mother. After a harassing time, apparently at different places, leaving us to infer that his voice was the cause of his trouble, he ultimately reached St. Paul's and speaks with gratitude of his progress in music under the celebrated John Redford, organist and almoner of that cathedral. From St. Paul's he went to Eton, where he experienced sharp discipline, and probably good teaching, for he progressed to Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He recounts the pleasant way in which his time passed here "with learned men;" but was driven by long sickness to leave his books and seek his fortune at the court, where he obtained employment, probably in his musical capacity, through the influence of his patron, William Lord Paget, the first titled ancestor of the Anglesey family, of whom he speaks in terms of affectionate gratitude. He remained in this position about ten years, which must have been during the latter part of the reign of Henry VIII., and the first years of Edward VI.; his patron, who had been in great favour, about this time fell into disgrace, and was sent to the Tower; and Tusser, being disgusted, as he says, with the vices of the courtiers, and his views probably baffled by the fall of his patron, for, he says, "the court began to frown," married, and began business as a farmer at Catwade, a hamlet in the parish of Brandham, in Suffolk, on the river Stour, which divides that county from Essex. One could scarcely imagine a less eligible training for the calling than his had been, as a singing boy, student, courier, and musician. He must then have been over 30 years old, and started apparently ignorant alike of the theory, if there were theorists of those days, and the practice, rude as it then was, of husbandry.

It was here that he composed, or "devised," as he terms it, his "Book of Husbandry," the first edition of which was published in 1557, and dedicated to his patron William Lord Paget, who, having adhered to the Popish party, regained his influence, and held the office of Lord Privy Seal under Mary. He must have been engaged in farming for some years before producing even the rude essay which first issued from the press, and which formed the germ of his more perfect work, for in it is found a correct outline of agriculture, which could only be drawn by a practised hand, and the filling in and finishing of the picture seems to have been the solace and the business of his future life. This was the second work on agriculture that was printed in the English language, Fitzherbert's "Book of Husbandrie"

being the first. The work seems to have become extremely popular at once, and edition after edition issued from the press, polished, amplified, and continual additions marking its growth. Within comparatively a few years of its first appearance, Tusser's work was reprinted upwards of 20 times, and yet scarcely a copy of these early editions has been preserved, a proof that it had been sedulously applied to those purposes of instruction for which it was so admirably designed. As is remarked in the "British Biographer," "some books become heir-looms from value; and Tusser's work, for useful information in every department of agriculture, together with its quaint and amusing observations, perhaps passed the copies from father to son, till they crumbled away in the bare shifting of the pages, and the mouldering relic only lost its value by the casual mutilation of time." Copies of the modern edition, by Dr. Mavor, published in 1812, are scarce, and I am indebted to the kindness of our honoured chairman for the use of that from which the present paper has been compiled. I can think of no piece of mediæval literature that seems to promise a more liberal return, in a pecuniary point of view, than a cheap reprint of the works of the old Rivenhall rhymist.

The illness of his wife, and the too probable embarrassment of his affairs, induced him to quit Catwade, and he is found successively at Ipswich, at Dereham Abbey, and at Norwich, at which latter place Salisbury, the then Dean, of whom he speaks in terms of warm gratitude, is supposed to have obtained for him the place of a singing man in the cathedral. Tusser, compelled to quit Norwich by a painful disorder, afterwards farmed the glebe and tithes of the parish of Fairstead, in our neighbourhood, where he seems, however, as usual, to have been unsuccessful. We find, even at this early period, that the tithes were evaded as much as possible; for though he himself repeatedly speaks of the honest payment of the impost as a religious duty, he attributed his own failure in some measure to the opposite practice of the parishioners of Fairstead—

"The tithing life, the tithing strife.
Thro' tithing ill of Jack and Gill."

drove him from Essex to London, whence, frightened by the plague of 1574-75, he again sought Cambridge, and found an asylum in Trinity College, which had been founded since his youthful sojourn at the university. On the cessation of the plague he returned to the metropolis to get a living by his voice or his wits, and died there about the year 1580. He was buried in St. Mildred's church, in the Poultry, where an epitaph, probably written by himself, and which is given in Stow's "Survey of London," recorded his memory. This monument perished, of course, with the church, in the great fire of London.

For an author, the vicissitudes of his life present an uncommon variety of incident; "without a tincture of careless imprudence," says Warton, "or vicious extravagance, this desultory character seems to have thriven in no vocation;" and Fuller, in his "Worthies of Essex," quaintly remarks, "that his stone, which gathered no