

AGRICULTURE—PAST AND PRESENT.

The growth of everything valuable is slow. A century is required to mature the time-defying oak, while other trees of less value mature in a few years. The pages of history record the triumphs of the warrior, the statesman, the philosopher, the sculptor, the poet and the architect—all of whom left imperishable monuments of their genius, which even yet excite admiration. The painters, the sculptors, the architects of the present day study the works of past ages,—are proud to imitate, and hardly dare hope to equal, much less excel the “masters” of antiquity. The agriculturist looks to the past in vain for knowledge to guide him in his avocation. He finds no Roman or Grecian models worthy of imitation. The rude Roman plough, harnessed to the oxen by the simplest contrivance imaginable, showed a lack of thought and invention, and only excites a smile. The agriculturist cannot look backward for his glory, but onwards and upwards. Light and knowledge are to be gained only by earnest thought and well-tried experiments. New facts are to be developed, new modes of culture proved useful, or discarded as unwise, new machines are to be devised to lighten labour and lessen the cost of producing the necessities of life. A glorious career awaits the agriculturist of the present age, and he should be truly thankful that he lives in a day of improvement, of light and knowledge: honour awaits him, but it must be earned—fought for, laboured for—a clear active head and a strong arm may secure the prize.

In ancient times agriculture was considered honourable, for historians have recounted instances of warriors and statesmen engaged in this peaceful occupation. Cincinnatus when called to the head of the Roman nation was found at the plough; and if a little of the wisdom for which he was famous, had been exercised in improving that useful implement, his name might have been more honoured, and lasting benefits been conferred upon the community. But, in early times, as has been truly said, population bore but an insignificant proportion to the extent of inhabited country; so that men were not compelled then, as they are now, to cultivate infertile soils, or crop them so frequently, in order to obtain the necessities of existence; they confined their simple operations to the rich alluvial land which nature had prepared ages before, in anticipation, as it were, of a helpless state of society, and which yielded its increase from the most imperfect cultivation. While, therefore, the philosophy, literature and fine arts of the ancients have formed the basis upon which those of modern times have been reared, the art of cultivating the soil has received little or nothing from ancient agriculture to which its present comparatively advanced state can be ascribed; that advancement is to be sought for, not among the relics of antiquity, but among the materials principally furnished by a generation scarcely yet passed away.

Had we sufficient space, it would be interesting to trace the progress of agriculture from the time that it first seemed to enter the minds of some men that it was susceptible of improvement—that it was not the better way to plough and sow exactly as their fathers had done. It was in 1534 that the first successful attempt was made in England to collect the scattered fragments of agricultural knowledge. At that time Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, published his “*Booke of Husbandrie*.” Although the author knew nothing about chemistry and its application to agriculture, nor of the rotation of crops, he did much good by pointing out prevailing bad practices, and suggesting improvements. He endeavored to impress upon his readers the truth that “a husbandman cannot thrive by his corne without cattelle, or by his cattelle without corne.”

In 1580, Thomas Tusser, an agricultural poet published in verse “*Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*.” This work contained many valuable practical hints, and passed through several editions. The author mentions carrots, turnips and cabbages then recently introduced as kitchen herbs. From 1600 to 1650 several books on agriculture were published, among them “*The whole art of Husbandry*,” by Barnaby Googe, and “*The Improver Improved*,” by Blythe. Cromwell, himself a farmer, in early life was a munificent patron of agriculture, and Harttlibb, an agricultural author received from him a pension, with instructions to devote his time to agricultural investigations. During the