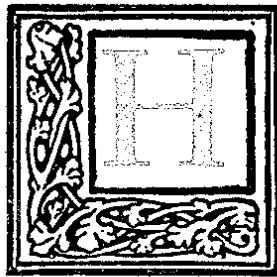


VARRO'S RERUM RUSTICARUM  
LIBRI TRES  
BOOK I

THE HUSBANDRY OF AGRICULTURE

*Introduction: the literary tradition of country life*

I



AD I leisure, Fundania, this book would be more worthy of you, but I write as best I may, conscious always of the necessity of haste: for, if, as the saying is, all life is but a bubble, the more fragile is that of an old man, and my eightieth year admonishes me to pack my fardel and prepare for the long journey.

You have bought a farm and wish to increase its fertility by good cultivation, and you ask me what I would do with it were it mine. Not only while I am still alive will I try to advise you in this, but I will make my counsel available to you after I am dead. For as it befel the Sibyl to have been of service to mankind not alone while she lived, but even to the uttermost generations of men after her demise (for we are wont after so many years still to have solemn recourse to her books for guidance in interpretation of strange portents), so may not I, while I still live, bequeath my counsel to my nearest and

## ROMAN FARM MANAGEMENT

dearest.<sup>1</sup> I will then write three books for you, to which you may have recourse for guidance in all things which must be done in the management of a farm.

And since, as men say, the gods aid those who propitiate them, I will begin my book by invoking divine approval, not like Homer and Ennius, from the Muses, nor indeed from the twelve great gods of the city whose golden images stand in the forum, six male and as many female, but from a solemn council of those twelve divinities who are the tutelaries of husbandmen.

*First:* I call upon Father Jupiter and Mother

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting that Varro has realized the hope, here expressed, that his wisdom might survive for the benefit of the "uttermost generations of men" only in the case of this treatise on Husbandry among the many monuments of his industry and learning. Petrarch in his *Epistle to Varro* in that first delightful book of Letters to Dead Authors (*de rebus familiaribus* XXIV, 6) rehearses the loss of Varro's books and, adapting the thought here expressed in the text, regrets for that reason that Varro cannot be included in that company of men "whom we love even after their death owing to the good and righteous deeds that live after them, men who mold our character by their teaching and comfort us by their example, when the rest of mankind offends both our eyes and our nostrils; men who, though they have gone hence to the common abode of all (as Plautus says in *Casina*), nevertheless continue to be of service to the living." If Petrarch had been a farmer he might have saved some of his regret, for Varro is surely, by virtue of the *Rerum Rusticarum*, a member of the fellowship Petrarch describes.

## ROMAN FARM MANAGEMENT

Earth, who fecundate all the processes of agriculture in the air and in the soil, and hence are called the great parents.

*Second:* I invoke the Sun and the Moon by whom the seasons for sowing and reaping are measured.

*Third:* I invoke Ceres and Bacchus because the fruits they mature are most necessary to life, and by their aid the land yields food and drink.

*Fourth:* I invoke Robigus and Flora by whose influence the blight is kept from crop and tree, and in due season they bear fruit (for which reason is the annual festival of the *robigalia* celebrated in honour of Robigus, and that of the *floralia* in honour of Flora).<sup>1</sup>

*Next:* I supplicate Minerva, who protects the olive; and Venus, goddess of the garden, wherefore is she worshipped at the rural wine festivals.

*And last:* I adjure Lympha, goddess of the fountains, and Bonus Eventus, god of good fortune, since without water all vegetation is starved and stunted and without due order and good luck all tillage is in vain.

And so having paid my duty to the gods, I proceed to rehearse some conversations<sup>2</sup> concerning

<sup>1</sup> Varro was essentially an antiquary and it is amusing to observe that he is unable to suppress his learning even in his prayers. One is reminded of the anecdote of the New England minister, who, in the course of an unctuous prayer, proclaimed, with magisterial authority, "Paradoxical as it may appear, O Lord, it is nevertheless true, etc."

<sup>2</sup> Following Plato and Xenophon and Cicero, Varro cast his

## ROMAN FARM MANAGEMENT

agriculture in which I have recently taken part. From them you will derive all the practical instruction you require, but in case any thing is lacking and you wish further authority, I refer you to the treatises of the Greeks and of our own countrymen.

The Greek writers who have treated incidentally of agriculture are more than fifty in number. Those whom you may consult with profit are Hieron of Sicily and Attalus Philometor, among the philosophers; Democritus the physicist; Xenophon the disciple of Socrates; Aristotle and Theophrastus, the peripatetics; Archytas the pythagorean; likewise the Athenian Amphilocheus, Anaxipolis of Thasos, Apollodorus of Lemnos, Aristophanes of Mallos, Antigonus of Cyme, Agathocles of Chios, Apollonius of Pergamum, Aristandrus of Athens, Bacchius of Miletus, Bion of Soli, Chæresteus and Chæreas of Athens, Diodorus of Priene, Dion of Colophon, Diophanes of Nicæa, Epigenes of Rhodes, Evagon of Thasos,

books into the form of dialogues to make them entertaining (“and what is the use of a book,” thought Alice in Wonderland, “without pictures or conversations.”): for the same reason he was careful about his local colour. Thus the scene of this first book, which relates to agriculture proper, is laid at Rome in the temple of Earth on the festival of the Seed Sowing, and the characters bear names of punning reference to the tilling of the soil. Varro was strong on puns, avowing (*Cicero Acad.* I, 2) that that form of humour made it easier for people of small intelligence to swallow his learning.

## ROMAN FARM MANAGEMENT

Euphronius of Athens, and his name sake of Amphipolis, Hegesias of Maronea, the two Menanders, one of Priene, the other of Heraclæa, Nicesius of Maronea, Pythion of Rhodes. Among the rest whose countries I do not know, are Andiotion, Æschrion, Aristomenes, Athenagoras, Crates, Dadis, Dionysius, Euphiton, Euphorion, Eubulus, Lysimachus, Mna-seas, Menestratus, Plentiphanes, Persis, and Theophilus.

All those whom I have named wrote in prose, but there are those also who have written in verse, as Hesiod of Ascra and Menecrates of Ephesus.

The agricultural writer of the greatest reputation is, however, Mago the Carthaginian<sup>1</sup> who wrote in

<sup>1</sup>The story is that when Scipio captured Carthage he distributed the Punic libraries among the native allies, reserving only the agricultural works of Mago, which the Roman Senate subsequently ordered to be translated into Latin, so highly were they esteemed. Probably more real wealth was brought to Rome in the pages of these precious volumes than was represented by all the other plunder of Carthage. "The improving a kingdom in matter of husbandry is better than conquering a new kingdom," says old Samuel Hartlib, Milton's friend, in his *Legacie*. It is a curious fact that as the Romans derived agricultural wisdom from their ancient enemies, so did the English. Cf. Thorold Rogers' *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*. "We owe the improvements in English agriculture to Holland. From this country we borrowed, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the cultivation of winter roots, and, at that of the eighteenth, the artificial grasses. The Dutch had practised agriculture with the patient and minute industry of market gardeners. They had tried successfully to cultivate

## ROMAN FARM MANAGEMENT

the Punic tongue and collected in twenty-eight books all the wisdom which before him had been scattered in many works. Cassius Dionysius of Utica translated Mago into Greek in twenty books (and dedicated his work to the prætor Sextilius), and notwithstanding that he reduced Mago by eight books he cited freely from the Greek authors whom I have named. Diophanes made a useful digest of Cassius in six books, which he dedicated to Deiotarus, King of Bithynia. I have ventured to compress the subject into the still smaller compass of three books, the first on the husbandry of agriculture, the second on the husbandry of live stock and the third on the husbandry of the steading.

From the first book I have excluded all those things which I do not deem to relate immediately to agriculture: thus having first limited my subject I

every thing to the uttermost, which could be used for human food, or could give innocent gratification to a refined taste. They taught agriculture and they taught gardening. They were the first people to surround their homesteads with flower beds, with groves, with trim parterres, with the finest turf, to improve fruit trees, to seek out and perfect edible roots and herbs at once for man and cattle. We owe to the Dutch that scurvy and leprosy have been banished from England, that continuous crops have taken the place of barren fallows, that the true rotation of crops has been discovered and perfected, that the population of these islands has been increased and that the cattle and sheep in England are ten times what they were in numbers and three times what they were in size and quality."

## ROMAN FARM MANAGEMENT

proceed to discuss it, following its natural divisions. My information has been derived from three sources, my own experience, my reading, and what I have heard from others.

### *Of the definition of agriculture*

#### *a. What it is not*

II. On the holiday which we call *Sementivæ* I came to the temple of *Tellus* at the invitation of the *Sacristan* (I was taught by my ancestors to call him *Æditumus* but the modern purist tells me I must say *Ædituus*). There I found assembled *C. Fundanius*, my father-in-law, *C. Agrius*, a Roman Knight and a disciple of the Socratic school, and *P. Agrasius*, of the Revenue service: they were gazing on a map of Italy painted on the wall. "What are you doing here?" said I. "Has the festival of the seed-sowing drawn you hither to spend your holiday after the manner of our ancestors, by praying for good crops?" "We are here," said *Agrius*, "for the same reason that you are, I imagine—because the *Sacristan* has invited us to dinner. If this be true, as your *nod* admits, wait with us until he returns, for he was summoned by his chief, the *ædile*, and has not yet returned though he left word for us to wait for him."

"Until he comes then," said I, "let us make a

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:  
**Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature**  
which can be purchased on our **Website :**

[www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :

**Brainfly Inc.**

**5100 Garfield Ave. #46**

**Sacramento CA 95841-3839**

## **TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:**

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website ([www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

[webcomments@brainfly.net](mailto:webcomments@brainfly.net)