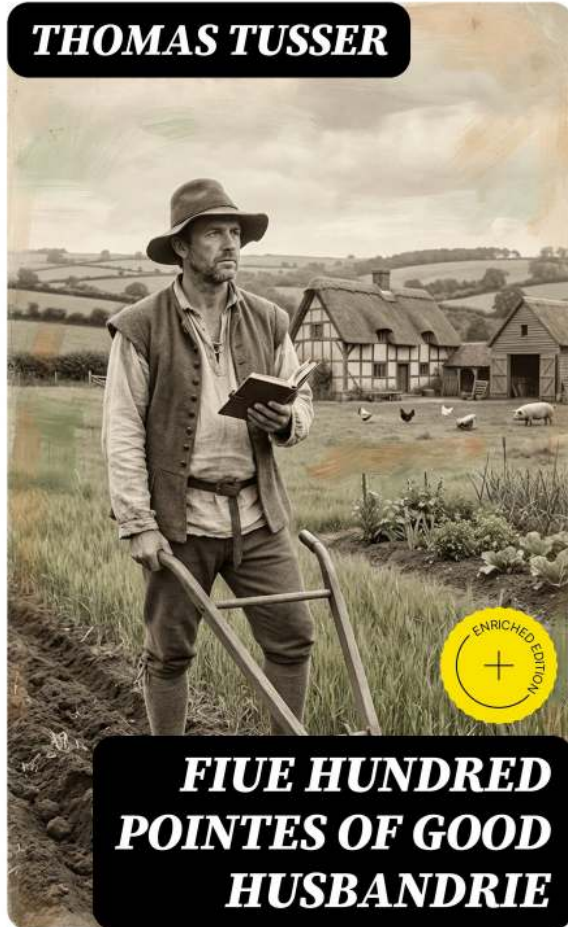


THOMAS TUSSEER



***FIUE HUNDRED
POINTES OF GOOD
HUSBANDRIE***

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HUSBANDRIE**

Thomas Tusser

Fiue Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Nora Caldwell

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Introduction

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Between the stubborn cycles of the English countryside and the careful economies of the household, Thomas Tusser's *Fiue Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* stages a disciplined negotiation in which observation, thrift, and timely labor seek to steady lives exposed to weather, markets, and time, translating the flux of nature into a calendar of tasks, the uncertainties of harvest into habits of foresight, and the claims of community into measures of hospitality, so that the delicate balance between scarcity and sufficiency, order and chance, may be sustained by memory, rhyme, and the steadying cadence of work performed in its proper season.

Written by the English poet and farmer Thomas Tusser in the sixteenth century and printed for a broad readership, *Fiue Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* belongs to the tradition of didactic georgic, a practical manual cast in verse for use in the fields and the home. Expanded from an earlier, shorter collection of points, it reflects the rhythms and concerns of rural England, where weather, soil, and community obligations shape daily decision-making. Its pages present country tasks and household management in a structured sequence, offering guidance suited to smallholders, tenants, and householders who measured the year by seedtime, harvest, and store.

Readers encounter the book as a cycle of months and topics, each section condensing tasks, cautions, and

reminders into memorable rhyming couplets and concise maxims. The voice is plainspoken yet artful, favoring clarity and cadence over ornament, and the tone mixes pragmatism with modest moral counsel. The poems move briskly through ploughing, sowing, hedging, repairs, brewing, dairying, and housekeeping, interlacing fieldwork with indoor economy. The experience is akin to walking a seasoned neighbor's land while he points out what to do and when to do it, the verse working as a mnemonic that helps labor and prudence keep pace with time.

Time and order are the book's governing themes: work belongs to its season, tools to their upkeep, and stores to careful accounting. Thrift is not miserliness but stewardship, aimed at preventing waste while allowing for generosity when custom requires it. The household appears as an ecosystem of fields, barns, animals, servants, and neighbors, where foresight and reciprocity sustain resilience. Weather and chance never disappear, yet Tusser insists that discipline mitigates risk, and that the craft of husbandry includes judgment as well as exertion. Memory, habit, and observation bind the farm year together, forming a culture of practice grounded in place.

Form and language serve the book's utility. Tusser writes in regular rhymes that favor recall, and he groups counsel by month and subject so that tasks sit where a reader might look for them. The original spelling reflects early modern English, and its cadences carry proverbial brevity as well as occasional humor. The work unites husbandry with housewifery, treating domestic management as integral to rural wellbeing. Some sections offer succinct prompts;

others extend into fuller catalogues of care. Throughout, the verse makes knowledge portable, letting craft live in memory and on the page for those who work with animals, stores, and soil.

For contemporary readers, its relevance lies in the ethic it models: attention to place, an economy of care, and the understanding that food, shelter, and community depend on routines matched to seasons. Sustainable practice today still requires observation, maintenance, and shared responsibility, whether in gardens, supply chains, or neighborhoods. The book offers a counterpoint to abstraction by tying judgment to weather, soil, tools, and time. It also preserves a vocabulary of skills that risk vanishing when work is outsourced or automated, reminding us that resilience often begins with modest acts of preparation, repair, and the wise use of what is at hand.

Approached as literature, manual, or social history, Tusser's work offers a steady lens on the making of daily life in rural England and an artful record of how knowledge travels. Its guidance is rooted in a particular time, but its structure teaches readers to look outward, reckon with constraints, and make habits that turn chance into manageable risk. Engaging the book today means attending to its cadence as much as its counsel, letting the poetry slow our reading so that practices come into focus. In that patience, the distance of centuries narrows to the practical clarity of shared work.

Synopsis

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Thomas Tusser's *Fiue Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* is a sixteenth-century English didactic poem that serves as a practical manual for farming and household management. First issued in 1557 as *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie*, it was substantially enlarged and republished in 1573 under the familiar expanded title. Addressed to working farmers and householders, the book condenses experience into compact verse designed to be remembered and applied. Its counsel ranges from fieldwork to domestic duties, binding technique to moral admonition. The work's governing aim is utility: to schedule labor wisely, avoid waste, secure provision, and keep a well-ordered rural estate.

Much of the volume is organized as a farmer's year, setting out tasks month by month so that work follows season rather than whim. Ploughing, sowing, harrowing, weeding, mending fences, mowing meadows, and bringing in the harvest are placed in practical sequence, with reminders to lay in fuel, fodder, and seed. Tusser stresses timing and foresight: prepare ground early, guard crops in tender stages, and seize dry weather when it comes. The calendar's cadence promotes steady diligence, discouraging idle gaps and costly haste. By pacing labor and storage together, the verse aims to keep household and farm supplied through the cycle.

Alongside scheduling, the work compiles brief points on sound field management. It treats manuring and fallowing as essential investments, urging farmers to build fertility patiently rather than chase short gains. Attention to hedging, ditching, and drainage keeps fields secure and workable, while timely hoeing contains weeds before they multiply. Seed must be clean and suited to ground, and tools kept ready so weather windows are not lost. The counsel is empirical and frugal, favoring maintenance over remedy. By collecting such maxims, Tusser presents husbandry as a craft of prevention, where careful preparation underwrites both yield and stability.

The collection also addresses animals integral to Tudor farms. It notes the differing needs of horses, cattle, sheep, and swine, recommending shelter from wet and cold, clean bedding, and ample fodder through winter. Breeding should be timely and selective, with young stock protected on pasture and boundaries kept sound. Health is guarded by cleanliness, good water, and moderate work, so draught beasts are not weakened when they are most required. Poultry are managed for eggs and meat, provided safety from vermin and weather. The emphasis remains practical: steady care and simple safeguards prevent losses that thrift alone cannot repair.

A substantial portion treats houswifery, pairing the farm's outward labors with interior order. Tasks for provisioning are mapped across the seasons: brewing and baking when grain and fuel allow, churning and cheese-making while milk is abundant, preserving fruit and herbs at their peak, and salting or smoking meats for storage. The book tracks

linens, vessels, and stores, presses for cleanliness, and directs oversight of servants. Domestic thrift is framed as diligent planning rather than privation, with waste curtailed by timely use. In Tusser's scheme, the stable household and the productive field sustain each other through skill, foresight, and measured hospitality.

Interwoven with instruction is a social and moral frame that anchors practice in community. Tusser urges fair dealing, payment and hiring at proper times, respect for custom, and care for the poor at seasons of plenty. He acknowledges communal labors and festivities surrounding seedtime and harvest, treating hospitality as both duty and prudent investment in goodwill. Cautionary points warn against idleness, rash borrowing, and quarrels that drain a farm's strength. The result is a portrait of husbandry that extends beyond technique, binding the farmer's prosperity to orderly conduct, piety, and the rhythms that tie household, parish, and field.

As verse, *Fiue Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* uses rhyme, repetition, and proverbial brevity to make rules memorable, forming a compact georgic handbook for memory as well as reference. Historically, it preserves a closely observed snapshot of Tudor rural practice and domestic economy, bridging oral instruction and print at an early stage of English agricultural writing. The book was enlarged from an earlier edition and subsequently reprinted, sustaining its practical reach. For modern readers, its enduring interest lies in the seasonal logic it sets out and the social ethic it assumes, showing how literary craft can carry everyday knowledge across time.

Historical Context

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Thomas Tusser's *Fiue Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* appeared in Tudor England, first as *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie* (1557) and substantially enlarged in 1573. Written in rhymed, mnemonic verse, it offers month-by-month counsel on farming, household management, and rural customs. The author drew on years of practical experience in East Anglia, one of England's most commercially dynamic agrarian regions, and on education acquired in cathedral and school settings. Published within London's vigorous vernacular book market, the manual addressed yeomen, husbandmen, and gentry intent on orderly, profitable management. Its structure mirrors the agricultural year that governed sixteenth-century village life.

Mid-sixteenth-century English agriculture operated through open-field farming, common rights, and manorial courts that regulated labor, land use, and gleaning. Copyhold and leasehold tenures bound many husbandmen to lords while allowing significant autonomy over day-to-day practice. East Anglia combined arable production with sheep-corn systems that supplied England's thriving cloth industry, especially in Suffolk and Norfolk. Parish churches structured social life, from tithe collection to seasonal observances, and parish officers increasingly mediated poor relief. In that milieu, practical handbooks circulated as tools for maintaining order and productivity. Tusser's calendarized

advice aligns with these institutions, reinforcing customary rhythms while emphasizing disciplined oversight.

The period was marked by enclosure, as landlords consolidated holdings and converted arable to pasture, provoking statutes, inquiries, and unrest. Royal commissions investigated depopulation and illegal enclosure under Henry VIII and Edward VI, and Norfolk saw Kett's Rebellion in 1549 driven partly by agrarian grievances. Although Tusser does not write polemic, his recommendations on hedging, ditching, and balanced tillage and pasture acknowledge contested boundaries and mixed farming economies. He advises careful stewardship of both corn and livestock, a practical response to structural change. The book thus mediates between communal custom and more market-responsive estate management without romanticizing either.

Demographic recovery after late-medieval crises and an expanding money supply produced sustained inflation known as the Price Revolution. Between roughly 1540 and 1600, English grain prices rose sharply while wages lagged, and dearth years in the 1550s exposed household vulnerability. For smallholders and renters, careful provisioning, storage, and diversification were essential. Tusser's counsel on granaries, gleaning permissions, dairy, bees, and kitchen gardens reflects prudent hedging against price and weather shocks. His emphasis on thrift, timely payment, and avoiding waste accords with a wider concern for household economy in an era when cash obligations, rents, and taxes weighed more heavily.

The English Reformation reshaped rural institutions. The dissolution of the monasteries (1536–1541) ended monastic almsgiving and redirected land and tithes, while the Elizabethan Religious Settlement (1559) established the Book of Common Prayer and a uniform parish framework. With ecclesiastical revenues reorganized, parishes assumed greater roles in local discipline and relief, anticipating later Elizabethan poor-law statutes. Tusser's verses interweave practical tasks with moral counsel on charity, hospitality at seasonal feasts, and sabbath order, reflecting a culture that linked godly governance of the household to stability in the community. His calendar preserves traditional festivities yet channels them toward moderated, productive uses.

Climate variability in the Little Ice Age brought late frosts, wet summers, and occasional harvest failures, making timing and diversification central to survival. East Anglia's lowlands demanded attention to ditches, banks, and water management, and common-field cooperation remained vital for ploughing, fallow, and pasture. Tusser's month-by-month sequencing—ploughing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, hedging, and ditching—encodes risk management through rotation, cleanliness, and preventative maintenance. He urges forethought in seed choice and storage and the coordinating of labor at peak moments. Such methodical routines translate environmental uncertainty into actionable schedules, revealing how experience and communal practice mitigated weather-driven volatility in Tudor farming.

Five Hundred Pointes belongs to a vigorous vernacular print culture that spread practical knowledge. London's

presses issued inexpensive manuals for law, medicine, and agriculture; Anthony Fitzherbert's *Boke of Husbandry* (1523) had established the genre. Tusser's innovation was to cast husbandry in rhymed couplets and a monthly calendar, enhancing memorization for readers and listeners in partly oral communities. First printed in 1557 and expanded in 1573, the book was repeatedly reissued, testifying to sustained demand among literate farmers and the rural gentry. Its proverbs and maxims align with humanist pedagogy, translating experiential know-how into portable rules for everyday practice.

Set against Elizabethan regulation, such as the Statute of Artificers (1563) governing service and wages, Tusser's household model stresses clear contracts, hired help at proper seasons, and fair dealing. He advocates diversification across corn, pulse, and livestock, with attention to malt, dairy, and bees, echoing incremental innovation within customary frameworks. The book neither celebrates aristocratic estate grandeur nor radical change; it dignifies competent management, neighborliness, and steady improvement. By versifying the year's labors, Tusser memorializes a social world anchored in parish and manor yet increasingly oriented to markets. His practical maxims thus register, rather than lament, the measured transformation of English rural life.

FIUE HUNDRED POINTES OF GOOD HUSBANDRIE

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PREFACE.

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While for all who take an interest in the customs and life of our ancestors Tusser's writings must always possess considerable interest, to the Members of the English Dialect Society they are especially valuable for the large number of dialectic words and forms which they contain. The Glossary has therefore been made very full, possibly, in the opinion of some, too full; but as this is the most important portion of the work to the Society, I have thought it better to err, if at all, on the right side.

With regard to the preparation of this Edition a few words may be necessary. As the Members of the Society are aware, the task was originally undertaken by Mr. W. Payne. Ill-health unfortunately prevented him from carrying the work to a completion, but to him the Society is indebted for the supervision of the reprint of the Edition of 1580, which he collated most carefully with the editions of 1557 and 1577, and to which he added several pieces from those editions, thus making the present reprint more complete than any yet published. Mr. Payne also compiled a very complete Index of Words, which has been of great assistance to me for purposes of reference, and in preparing the Glossary. The notes also from Tusser Redivivus (marked T.R.) were for the most part extracted by Mr. Payne.

A reprint of the First Edition of 1557 was not included in the original programme, but after the work came into my hands an opportunity was presented through the kindness of Mr. F. J. Furnivall, who lent for the purpose his copy of the

14 Lammas — a traditional English feast on August 1 (from Old English 'loaf-mass') marking the first wheat harvest; in rural practice it often signalled changes in animal management (for example, stopping or reducing milking of ewes) tied to the harvest season.

15 Archaic spelling of a temporary field shelter or small stack-shed (similar to 'hovel'), set up on forked posts and covered with poles and straw to keep hay, grain or animals dry during harvest.

16 A variant spelling of 'tumbrel' or 'tumbrell', meaning a two-wheeled cart or large wheelbarrow used in early modern agriculture to carry produce or muck; the term commonly appears in period guidance on field work and transport.

17 A popular uprising in 1549 (centered in Norfolk and Suffolk) led by Robert Kett protesting the enclosure of common land; it resulted in a large revolt against local landowners and was suppressed by royal forces.

18 Parcels of formerly enclosed 'common' fields that were traditionally opened for communal grazing around Lammas Day (August 1); the practice and rights associated with such 'Lammas' or 'half Year Lands' varied by locality in early modern England.

19 An early-morning Christian prayer service, usually called Matins or Mattins, forming part of the canonical hours; in Tudor England it denoted pre-dawn devotion and here marks the approach of daylight when cocks crow.

20 A traditional English custom marking the resumption of agricultural work after the Christmas season; it is typically observed on the first Monday after Epiphany (the

'Twelve Days'), and historically involved communal ploughing, processions, and local festivities.

21 An early-modern spelling of 'Calvary' (the hill outside Jerusalem), the site in Christian tradition where Jesus was crucified.

22 Variant spelling of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea in the early 1st century CE who, according to the New Testament, presided over Jesus's trial and ordered his crucifixion.

23 A variant spelling of Asmodeus, a demon figure found in Jewish and Christian tradition and medieval demonology; the name commonly appears in early-modern texts as a personification of lust or other vices.

24 Tiburne (modern Tyburn) was the principal site for public executions in London from the medieval period into the 18th century; the phrase 'Tiburne play' here refers to the spectacle of executions (i.e., being put to death at Tyburn).

25 Richard Tottel was a mid-16th-century London printer and publisher (active around the 1550s), noted for legal works and for issuing the 1557 poetry collection known as Tottel's Miscellany.

26 This Latin imprint phrase means 'with the privilege to print alone' and indicates an official or royal printing license granting exclusive rights to print the work.

27 'Skarborow warning' (Scarborough warning) is a proverb meaning a sudden command or urgent order allowing no delay; its exact origin is uncertain, though 16th-17th-century writers associate it with Scarborough Castle or local practices of immediate punishment.

28 An older spelling related to 'Ember' (as in Ember days): quarterly periods of fasting and prayer at the change of the seasons, traditionally fixed by the Council of Piacenza (Placentia) in 1095.

29 Early-modern spelling of 'dovecote' (a structure for keeping doves or pigeons); such dovecotes were often a customary privilege of wealthier landowners, and appear in the 1549 Norfolk and Suffolk rebels' grievances (Kett's Rebellion) as an example of restricted local rights.

30 Macer (often cited as Macer Floridus) was a medieval Latin writer on plants and remedies, author of a herbal poem usually dated to the medieval period (roughly the 11th–12th centuries); his verses on herbs were widely quoted in later manuscripts and herbals.

31 Penny Royal is a traditional mint-family herb (commonly *Mentha pulegium* or related species) long used in cooking and folk remedies; early sources also call it Pudding-grass and recommend it for flavoring, preserving or distilling into a water for topical or culinary use.

32 Refers to the plant *Archangelica officinalis* (often called archangel), whose tender blanched stalks were historically eaten like celery and supplied to confectioners; it was commonly cultivated near London in the early modern period. Some contemporary sources also ascribe medicinal uses to it (for example, remedies for rabid dog bites are mentioned in period works).

33 A medieval English silver coin (also spelled 'gros' or 'grote'); in the note it refers to coinage reforms of 1349 and is described as being worth about three and a half silver pennies (i.e. slightly less than four pence).

34 A common name for *Artemisia absinthium*, an intensely bitter herb used in Early Modern and medieval medicine and flavoring (including in wines and digestive drinks) and traditionally employed as an anthelmintic to expel intestinal worms.

35 Bridewell was the name of a 16th-century London house of correction and prison (originally the former Bridewell Palace, refounded c.1553) used to punish and reform petty offenders, vagrants, and disorderly poor by confinement and hard labour.

36 A high-backed wooden settee or settle placed beside the kitchen fire to shield sitters from drafts; in Tusser's usage 'skreene' is essentially equivalent to a fireside seat and was a common feature in older English farmhouses (notably recorded in Cheshire).

37 A Latin phrase meaning "composed water," used in early modern pharmacy for a compounded medicinal water or distillate made by infusing or distilling herbs and other ingredients in water or spirit; it appears in period pharmacopoeias and might refer to a variety of specific preparations.

38 A variant of 'Ember-days,' the quarterly three-day periods (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday) in the Christian liturgical calendar set aside for fasting, prayer and ordinations, observed after key seasons such as the first Sunday in Lent, Whitsuntide, and in September and December.

39 An early modern verb literally meaning "to grasp"; in usage it could mean to save or be niggardly (a miserly