

## Notes

### Preparing the Manuscript of a Garden Journal:

The poem began almost as a “found poem” from gardening notes as I sketched plots and made studies in companion plantings and wide-row planting. I planned twelve individual plots around my garden shed. The shed was built in the fall, and I spent all my spare moments through the winter in it, writing poetry and working on my novel *The Natchez Treasure*, which was completed the following winter. As spring approached I turned my attention to gardening. I began reading guides by master gardeners, and these made me desire to read again the ancient agricultural traditions recorded in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, Vergil’s *Georgics*, and St. Walafrid Strabo’s *Hortulus*.

All the time that I spent in making these notes was interrupted by the spectacular bird activity in the trees along the creek throughout the day, and I soon found myself including sketched descriptions of their behavior among my field notes. By then I knew I was working on poetry.

All writing activities were suspended during the season of preparing the beds and planting, which was also the season of Lent. Moments of rest were given to prayer instead of writing. But I have confidence in my Muse. Prayer and labor are the experience of inspiration, which bears the fruit of better poetry in the appropriate season.

### *The Song of the Plowman:*

Bootes is said to be among the most ancient of the constellations. He is known as The Plowman because of his invention of the plow - as great a gift to the ancient world as any. He is known as The Wagoner because he drives the Wagon, an alternate depiction of the Great Bear - the seven stars of the Bear, more commonly known now as the Big Dipper, are the seven oxen pulling his plow. His myths attach him to the inmost circle of the constellations, nearest the north star, with the greater and lesser bears. These myths are Arcadian, linking him to pastoral traditions, to the era of innocent shepherd songs and idylls. His name, on the other hand, links him to Boeotian tradition, the land of Hesiod, who sings the song of the plowman. The Greek provinces of Arcadia and Boeotia, both inland, both concentrating on agricultural traditions rather than on sea-going, city-building empires, are home to ancient indigenous peoples unmixed with the new conquerors, the bronze-age Dorians; and their lore also is more ancient, pastoral, and peaceful.

The plowing of the earth and the secrets of agriculture, essential to survival, without which the city and civilization cannot be maintained, are among the most sacred mysteries sung by the ancient poets. Hesiod makes...