

WHEAT IN THE NORTH-WEST.

The peculiarities of the climate in the great wheat producing territory of the North-West, are a subject for the deepest consideration to the farmers of that locality. The danger of early frosts is a matter of interest, as the comparative shortness of the growing season calls for an early maturing variety of grain, and the special use to which the grain is best fitted requires a certain quality to secure such a price as will compensate the farmers for the enforced idleness during the winters in which little or no occupation is found. The time may come when, by the change of climate produced by the more complete occupation of the land and the shelter afforded by large areas to be planted with protecting forests, the present exigencies of the farmers may be greatly modified. This has happened in other localities, as in western Kansas and Colorado, where the cultivation of the land has largely increased the amount of rainfall, and made a mixed agriculture and a variety of crops possible, where pasture only was practicable previously. This result was foreseen and prognosticated by experts at the first occupation of that arid region, and the same principle upon which this expectation was based prevails in the great North-West. Climate is undoubtedly modified by the cultivation and the planting of the land, and the protection of the crops in the late summer, by the sheltering forests and the warmer soil, may be looked for as a result of the more complete occupation and covering of the soil.

But in the mean time efforts are being made by the energetic farmers to find relief in the introduction of new varieties of wheat, that may be more suitable to the soil and climate than the kind grown further South. This kind is the Scotch Fife, a hard spring wheat long known in the North-Western states, and now mostly grown in the countries further north, but which is subject to injury by frosts on account of the lateness of its ripening. It is quite possible, and probable, considering how plants are changed in habit by new environments, that the Fife wheat may in time become better suited to the short seasons of the more northerly locality, and equally that some new kinds not now so well adapted to this climate, may become gradually acclimated and reconciled to the shorter growing season, and the present difficulty removed. This has been frequently experienced in regard to many other agricultural plants, and why not to wheat, which has hitherto shown itself to be as easily modified by new environments as any other plant; but farmers cannot wait for this necessarily slow change. They must live meanwhile and, therefore, it is an interesting matter to know what has been done so far in regard to the introduction of new varieties of wheats from foreign sources, and what measure of success has been reached, remembering always that the quality of wheat is an important factor in the question. For it is almost as bad to have an unsaleable wheat as to have none at all.

In regard to this it has to be said that the wheat lately introduced from Russia, known as Lagoda, from its inhabitant on the shores of the great lake of that name, in latitude 60, and north of St. Petersburg, has been reported as having an inferior quality as compared with the Red Fife. As the wheat ripens ten days earlier than the Fife, and retains this earliness in the North-West, and thus fulfills one of the indispensable requirements of the North-West farmer, it is a matter of great concern to test its milling quality in a satisfactory manner. This has been the effort of the Dominion Department of Agriculture which has tested the quality recently at Minneapolis, where this kind of wheat is extensively milled, and submitted the results to various experts and Boards of

Trade in the Dominion. It is admitted that the quality of the Lagoda wheat is somewhat inferior to that of the Fife, but it is to be taken into account that the Red Fife is the best wheat in the world for the special use for which it is preferred, and that it is a most productive variety. That the Lagoda has a slightly yellower shade of color, and yields only a little less than the unsurpassed Fife, is a hopeful result, knowing what has been accomplished in the improvement of wheat by persistent effort of skillful wheat growers. Indeed, one of the objections to it, viz., that it is subject to rust, indicates very clearly that its present inferiority is due to its change of locality and climate and, perhaps, soil as well; for attacks by rust go to show that some unfavorable environment attacks the plant, something that tends to weaken it and render it less robust and unable to resist attacks of parasites.

This points to the necessity for higher cultivation, and the need for that protective treatment of the seed (by steeping it in a solution of blue vitriol) which has been found a specific remedy against this fungus parasite. Higher cultivation with selection of seeds has always been found effective in the improvement of grains, both as regards hardness and yield, and the Lagoda wheat has been found to fail only in these two ways. Quality of the grain is also improved by cultivation, so that the farmers of the North-West should either by personal effort, or by proxy, in some way undertake the necessary means to improve the grain for seed by "breeding" the precise character required, as this process of improvement is and may rightly be termed. Plants are as susceptible of improvement in this way as animals are. The English farmers have their pedigree varieties of all the small grains and roots, and there are many enterprising farmers who give their sole attention to this business. The late Mr. Arnold, of Ontario, did much in this way, and his success was pronounced. Not so much has as yet been done in the United States in this way, but some of the most advanced farmers have undertaken experiments in crossing wheats, for the purpose of improvement. But so far, little has been done on this side of the Atlantic to improve the character and quality of the various small grains by selection of seed and high cultivation of crops.

In the North-West, where the wheat producing lands cover hundreds of millions of acres, but the climate is suitable only for the earliest maturing varieties or the improvement of quality. Yet here is a vast region that may be made to support many millions of farmers with all the accompanying population, whose existence depends on the cultivation of a variety of wheat which may be suitable to the short growing season, or the slow, but sure, change of climate that results from occupation of the soil by forests, farms and crops. At least we may say nothing, considering this great work, and in a practical sense. The Dominion Government has, however, led the way by the introduction of this Russian wheat, which is naturally adapted to the whole North-West, and if it can be only improved to a trifling extent it seems to be all that can be wished. So far the results are exceedingly valuable and encouraging, and continued efforts promise to meet with success.

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