

THE BRITISH AMERICAN CULTIVATOR.

"AGRICULTURE NOT ONLY GIVES RICHES TO A NATION, BUT THE ONLY RICHES SHE CAN CALL HER OWN."—Dr. Johnson.

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THE CULTIVATOR.

"Agriculture is the great art which every government ought to protect, every proprietor of lands to practice, and every inquirer into nature improve."—Dr. Johnson.

Toronto, November, 1842.

In a late debate in the Legislative Council on the "Duty on Wheat Question," the Hon'ble Mr. DeBlaquiere is reported to have said, "He believed the interests of the Western Trade did not yield even to those of agriculture." If such are the views entertained by the members of the Legislature who we thought were the most favourably disposed to our agriculture, we may indeed despair of any effectual encouragement being afforded to Canadian industry by our Legislature. It is well understood that agriculture is the only means of subsistence for nine-tenths of our population, and notwithstanding this fact, it is considered by our legislators to be second in importance to the carrying trade of the produce of a foreign state. We fear it is in vain to expect any particular attention to be given to our interests, so long as they are regarded as second in importance to every other interests in the country. There is not a merchant or a tradesman in Canada who are not protected in their business by duties on foreign manufactures, &c. Even the learned professions are protected so far that no foreigner can practice here without a license. With what consistency then, can those classes whose interests have every reasonable protection, oppose the granting of protection to the interest of agriculture? Every shilling, we may safely say, that is expended by agriculturists, is paid to the other classes of this community; but if these other classes meet in our markets with a foreign agricultural produce, they purchase it in preference to that which is the produce of Canada, if the most trifling advantage can be gained either in price or quality. We do not condemn this proceeding: it is perfectly fair under the existing state of the laws. We wish, however, that these laws should be altered so as to give equal protection to the interests of all classes. Let duties be altogether abolished, and we shall not ask for any more favour than others will have. It is very well for legislators and others to say that Canadian farmers can compete with those of the United States. We deny, however, that there is any fair competition existing at present between the farmers of both countries when disposing of their produce in the Canadian markets. We have in former numbers of this Periodical endeavoured to show wherein this competition is unequal.—

The farmer of the United States sells his produce in our markets as free from all duty and charges as our Canadian farmers, and may take home the full amount of the proceeds in cash to be expended in promoting the industry and improvement of his own country. The Canadian farmer on the contrary, cannot go the United States with the proceeds of what he sells in our markets, and purchase in that country what he might require or find profitable, and bring them into this country without paying a duty upon them. No.—We must purchase all we require here, and all that we do purchase has paid both British and Colonial revenue, direct and indirect, to the amount, perhaps, of one-third of their entire value. Under these circumstances, can any man show that the Canadian farmer can fairly and equally compete with the foreign farmer in our markets? There are many other circumstances which make the competition still more unequal and against the Canadian farmer. If this were a country that did not possess a good soil and favourable climate for agriculture, it would be wrong to employ the great bulk of the people in that business. They should rather employ themselves in some other way, in the production of articles which they could exchange for food. But when we are certain that we do possess a good soil and favourable climate for agriculture, on what principle is it that we do not offer the most decided encouragement to our agriculture, that it may be abundantly productive in corn, cattle, pork, butter, cheese, hemp, and flax? In what other way could our population be employed that they could acquire their subsistence? None certainly that we are acquainted with. We therefore humbly conceive, that the interests of agriculture are of importance above all other interests in this country, and should be so regarded by the Representatives of this population, in any question of the interests of separate classes that would come under discussion in our Legislative Assembly.—The population of every country should be employed in that way that will produce them the largest quantity of the comforts and conveniences of existence, either directly from their labour, or by exchanging the produce of their labour for the produce of other countries. Unless in agriculture how could the inhabitants of Canada employ themselves to acquire the means of obtaining the smallest possible amount of subsistence?—This country must be unsuitable for the residence of man, if unsuitable for agriculture! If it be admitted that it is suitable for agriculture, can any one doubt that four acres of cultivated land of good quality—which we have at present for each inhabitant, men, women, and children—would not be able to yield them a sufficient agricultural produce for their subsistence in every way? In the British Isles there is not more than half that quantity of cultivated land for each inhabitant, and we believe they never required, in any one year, to import provisions for one month's consumption for the whole population. The principle we advocate is, that we should do all that is possible to encourage the improvement, and promote the prosperity of the land we live in, in preference to foreign countries. Any man acquainted with Canada must be convinced that there is great necessity for improvement in our system of agriculture. We take upon us to say, that without some protection and encouragement this necessary improvement will not be effected; because there is no inducement to expend capital in the improvement of land and stock, so long as the proceeds from them will not remunerate.—

The whole matter is perfectly plain and easy to understand. If farming remunerated for capital, skill, and labour, more of all this would be attracted to that business, and we would soon find it become a fashionable profession. But so long as the returns from agriculture are so inadequate as at present, in consequence of the competition of foreign produce, raised under different and more favourable circumstances than our own; so man that can avoid it will invest or employ capital in agriculture. This state of things will act as effectually to check agricultural improvement, as if there was a positive law against improvement. Remunerating prices will be the most effectual encouragement to the progress of improvement. We are not advocates for high prices. Moderate prices and certain markets will always be the most profitable for farmers. Moderate prices, however, are those that would fairly remunerate for capital invested in land, stock, implements, seed, for skill and labour. If low prices were the result of abundant production in our own country, and not produced by importation from a foreign country, we would not complain. But extremely low prices, resulting from the importation of foreign produce to an unlimited extent, and without any duties being imposed, we look upon as unequalled injustice towards the producing classes of Canada. We have under such a state of the law, no certainty of market that would encourage us to produce, because at any time our markets may be filled up with a foreign production. It is very different with us from what it is in England. In that country there are cities, towns, and villages in every direction, and both them and the country are filled with population, and an immense quantity of food is required for them all. Here we have few towns and villages and a very thin population, with boundless extent of excellent land to provide food for them; and with all these advantages our legislators think it expedient that we should be supplied in part by a foreign country with food! We know several farmers in this neighbourhood who stall fed cattle last winter, and when they were fit for sale in spring the market was filled with foreign cattle, so that our farmers lost all the winter-feeding. There is so little inducement to fatten cattle on grass or in the stall, that hay is now selling in the Montreal market at prices that will scarcely remunerate the expense of cutting, curing, and bringing to market, without having one shilling per acre to the farmer for his best land. Are not the labourers at our public works and troops in our garrisons partly fed on foreign produce, and hence the large expenditure of English capital will partly go to enrich a foreign country instead of our own. Even our breweries and distilleries purchase largely of the inferior species of foreign grain, that could be produced to any extent in Canada; and though beer and whiskey made here are protected by duties. We say without hesitation, that this would not be so if reasonable encouragement had been given for some years past to Canadian agriculture. We regret that we should feel it our duty to occupy so frequently the columns of this paper with our complaints, when they should more appropriately suggest new and improved modes of cultivation, &c. As we before observed, the best and most effectual encouragement that can be given to agricultural improvement, will be certain markets and remunerating prices, and without these we are well aware, that all we can say or write in suggesting or recommending of improvement will be unavailing. It is from this conviction that we so constantly advocate agricultural protection, as the only possible means of producing the improvement and prosperity of agriculture in this country, circumstanced as it is.