



The Midge Nuisance.

To the Editor of THE CANADA FARMER:

SIR,—There have been a great many speculations offered to the public with reference to the mitigation of this great evil. The latest of these is, I believe, the idea of importing the parasite destructive of midge. Were it practicable to effect any benefit by such an endeavour, in behalf of this great interest of our country, namely, the wheat-growing interest, there is no doubt but the enterprising and liberal local Government we have would, on application, give it their earnest consideration. I think, however, it would be doubtful if success would result from the experiment, taking into account the difference of climate and other things, in transferring insects from one hemisphere to another. Still it might be attended with great results, like many other experiments that have been made with equally unpromising prospects. In the meantime we have to utilise the resources at hand to meet this great evil, which Nature in one of her strange freaks has brought into existence.

It is often found in the economy of Nature, and I am not quite sure that we may not apply it as a general principle, that one evil is brought to counteract another; and it may be found that there are influences now in process of consummation to bring about the result we so much desire, in the gradual extinction of the midge.

I am of opinion that this baneful pest is on the decrease, as far as my limited observation goes. In the great fall wheat-growing sections, the facts may not bear out this impression, but here, where spring wheat is almost exclusively grown on old land, the results are in accordance with the assertion.

It is the general opinion that overcropping with wheat is one great cause of midge, and the natural result of an increased production of barley, stimulated by the high price that has lately prevailed, may have, and I have not the least doubt is having, the effect of decidedly lessening the midge product. The system of sowing Fife wheat late in spring, adopted by farmers formerly to retard its development until after the time of the larvæ-depositing season of the insect, a wise and necessary precaution, is becoming obsolete. For one I have followed that mode, being determined to cut off the means of their subsistence and production, and I hoped the rule would be made general. But many farmers think they get better crops by sowing early, even if the midge does eat a portion. Of course they have a perfect right to pursue that course, but in view of the general interests, and even their own, I have often thought they stood in their own light. I must say, however, that I have found the plan a very advantageous one. Although farming on a very limited scale, I might be pardoned the liberty of furnishing a few examples in support of the theory.

The season of 1860 was one of the most propitious that ever shed its benign favours over Upper Canada. The spring was very early, and although I had my lands ready for wheat seeding on the 20th April, I preferred to defer sowing, as the midge contagion was at its height, until the 10th of May. I then put in my little crop of about fifty-five acres, and harvested and threshed from the same 1,400 bushels, of a sample and quality for milling purposes quite equal to any fall wheat, and I presume there was not over two per cent. destroyed by midge. Since the first appearance of the midge, I have not known a season without great destruction to early sown spring, and a loss of from ten to fifty, and even seventy-five per cent., in fall wheat.

But last year we departed a little from the rule of late sowing of Fife wheat, sowing about the beginning of May, our product being about twenty bushels per acre and free from midge, which I consider a very favourable augury.

The adoption of the midge-proof variety for fall sowing, and the most advantageous methods at hand in reference to spring sowing, are matters worthy the consideration of parties desirous of securing and furnishing this staff of life, the great staple of our country.

I have noticed a phase in connection with midge-eaten wheat fields of late that I do not recollect to have seen in the earlier stages of their history. It is very easy to tell now, in passing wheat that is about ripe, if midge is prevalent, for the heads are literally picked to pieces by birds. There is no doubt that they are in pursuit of the maggots, for the grain is left in the heads. Perhaps the midge parasite has begun its operations. Where this has taken place you will observe the maggots have disappeared. What bird it is that is coming to the aid of the plundered husbandman, I have not seen, but they are doubtless some small birds; still I have no doubt but the ordinary little gray birds would feed upon them, having discerned their whereabouts. I am quite satisfied the evil is not so great in this section as formerly. Whether it has occurred from accidental causes, such as the prevalence of high winds about the time of the depositing season, or from general influences working out their gradual extinction, or an abatement of overcropping, I am not prepared to say. Perhaps the birds are doing the work. We know that all the family of little feathered choristers are insectivora, and we may yet acknowledge them to be classed among the benefactors of the human race.

Our local Parliament, at their last sitting, passed an amendment to an old law for the preservation of game, and I regret there was not a provision included for the protection of small birds, with a penalty against their being killed, and to protect their increase. Of course we except hawks, crows, woodpeckers, wood pigeons, &c. In fact I should have regarded a clause of this kind of equal importance with the entire Bill, for we know that the birds destroy a vast array of insects that are hurtful to husbandry and horticulture.

Should the midge nuisance subside, or even abate, the farming interests of this Province would materially revive, under the auspices of good markets for wheat and other grains. Dairying, too, being on the increase, will have the effect of enhancing the development of our agriculture, by improving the fertility of our better arable lands, and rendering lands of indifferent quality comparatively remunerative at a trifling outlay. The latter might be improved, too, by a liberal application of clover and plaster, and by stocking them with cows. This method would be particularly beneficial to sandy lands. I am fully satisfied that there might be double the quantity of plaster used with good results.

But should the nuisance continue, I know of no other means than those to which I have referred to stay its progress. I offer these views with some hesitation, knowing what an enterprising, practical body of men our farmers are; but I believe them to be safe in practice. J. H.

Hope, March, 1868.

Homely Hints.

To the Editor of THE CANADA FARMER:

SIR,—We find many people, especially among our rural population, who do not recognize "order" as being "heaven's first law," while the merchant and the mechanic, generally, are systematic. If farmers only knew how much they lose by the careless manner in which many things are managed about the farm, they would be more systematic in business. Have a place for everything, and then keep everything in its place, and always in good working condition.

Not long ago I saw a plough where it was last used in the fall, while the reaping and mowing machines were allowed to remain in the fields in which they were last used. It could not be expected that, when these costly implements are left out all winter, the minor ones, such as spades, hoes, horse-rakes, &c., should be properly housed. These, of course, are also scattered over the farm where last used. The wood shrinks, cracks and decays, the iron-work rusts, and implements thus neglected are disagreeable to work with. They will, moreover, depreciate in value from five to ten per cent. in addition to the ordinary wear; and again, the time and trouble lost in looking for and getting them repaired is considerable.

Every farmer should have a box for old iron. How convenient it would often be to get such things

as we wanted out of this receptacle, instead of having to look all round the buildings for something which we require, and often fail in getting; and then, after all our time is lost, we have to go to the smith's shop. Much also is lost to a farmer by not taking care of pieces of timber fit for such purposes as axe-handles, repairing hay-rakes, or any trifling but necessary repairs, which his implements from time to time may require. Instead of having suitable material at hand, he has to go to his more provident neighbour or to the waggon-maker for every little piece of wood he may want, while very likely piles of timber, once suitable for such repairs, are lying about the farm decaying. How easy it would have been to have laid a piece of wood in some dry place for future use. Besides, such timber is becoming scarce and valuable, and cannot always be obtained from a neighbour for nothing. Such an extravagant manner of living has, moreover, a bad effect on one's family and on the whole neighbourhood in which a man lives. But there should also be a time for doing everything. The farmer attending to this would save a considerable amount in a year. By the neglect of putting the fences in proper order before the seeding time in the spring, much precious time is lost in putting up the fences while we ought to be getting our seed in early, and consequently our crops are likely to be a little lighter. In passing a place lately, I saw the barn-door swinging on one hinge, the gate broken, and some of the out-buildings out of repair: very likely some of the cattle have been in the barn and destroyed much grain, with a risk of killing themselves, while some of the stock may have strayed off the place, causing much loss of time and expense in recovering them. If a nail had been driven, or any other little repair done at the right time, much of this time, trouble, and expense would have been saved.

Let not the reader suppose that only the lazy farmer is here alluded to. Though this undoubtedly applies to him, it also has reference to some of our hard-working and industrious farmers, who have not learned to do things in the right time and proper manner, or rather, have not perceived the advantage of this rule. Now, just try it for one year, and you will save money, not have to work so hard, and it will be better for your children than if you had given them some extra hundreds of dollars.

CULTIVATEUR.

March, 1868.

A Trio of Queries.

JOHN DODDS, of Beverly, wishes to know in reference to what formerly was a black ash swamp, but is now drained, if apple or pear trees would be suitable to plant—if so, what kinds? Also, what method should be taken to put an old hive of bees into a patent hive, similar to the Thomas hive? Further, if bone dust or phosphate of lime would be sufficient for turnips or corn, without barn-yard manure?

ANS.—We cannot recommend a reclaimed swamp as a good place for an orchard. However well drained, such a locality is low, apt to be moist, and is not nearly so well adapted for fruit-growing as a higher situation. It is always best to plant an orchard on high ground. We know of no kinds of apples or pears adapted to such a place.

To transfer a stock of bees from a common box hive to a moveable frame hive, first smoke the bees a little, then turn the old hive up-side down and take a box of some sort, about the size of the old hive, place it over the inverted hive and commence rapping on the sides of the old hive. The bees will leave the old hive and cluster in the previously empty box. When all, or nearly all the bees have changed their quarters, carefully take the old box-hive apart. Fix the combs by means of pins in the frames of the new hive, fitting them as neatly as possible. When this is done, and the hive is ready for the reception of the bees, hive them just as you would a new swarm. If it be a Thomas hive put it on a table, drop the bottom board, empty the bees in front of the opening, and they will soon take possession of the new hive.

Bone dust or super-phosphate would, doubtless, be beneficial to a crop of turnips or corn applied alone, but their beneficial effects are increased if applied along with barn-yard manure.