

ON THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF AGRICULTURE.

[From President Gouget's *Origin of Laws*, vol. 1. p. 86. &c.]

HUSBANDRY, or the culture of grain, is an act so toilsome, tedious and complicated, and requires such great attention and such various knowledge, that it is no wonder it was so long unknown to the greatest part of mankind. It is difficult to conceive how men attained at first the knowledge of corn and other grains which are cultivated. We do not see at present any wheat, rye, barley, oats, or rice, growing spontaneously on our commons. Are we to suppose then, that certain kinds of herbage, which grow in all countries, include in them the essence and principles of all the kinds of grain which make our principal food at present? Shall we say, that culture makes them unfold their latent qualities, brings them to perfection, and at last, by reiterated efforts, raises them to wheat, rye, barley, oats? &c. Experience indeed has taught us, that culture renders some fruits much more beautiful and excellent than they naturally grow; nay brings them to so great perfection that they will hardly be taken for the same species. But it is ingrafting makes this great change in the nature of fruits; and this is an operation cannot be performed on grasses. As to simple cultivation, it is a great mistake to imagine, that it can ever change the fundamental essence and species of grains. Some authors, it is true, have formerly advanced this;^a but the contrary is at present universally known and acknowledged.^b Grains were created such as they are at present. The ancients even tell us of some countries where corn grew spontaneously.^c And that we know not any ultimate at present, that produces wild wheat, rye, barley, or of oats itself, is probably owing to want of diligent inquiry. Nay, if we may believe some modern relations, these grains grow naturally in some places at this day.^d

Agriculture is one of those arts which the deluge did not destroy entirely. The scriptures tell us that Noah understood

and practised it; and it is highly probable he would instruct his posterity in the knowledge of it. The knowledge of husbandry among the Babylonians was ancient as their history.^e We cannot doubt the great antiquity of this art in these countries. Moses tells us that Nimrod and Assur built several cities: It is impossible to imagine how they could do this, without the assistance of agriculture. The Phœnician traditions, supported by scripture, represented husbandry as known among them in the remotest ages.^f It is said that Isaac, when he dwelt in Palestine, sowed and reaped an hundred-fold.^g The Egyptians gave the honour of this discovery to Isis, and her husband Osiris.^h Husbandry must have been very early known in that country. We see that Abraham in a time of famine retired into Egypt.ⁱ Jacob sent his sons thither to buy corn in the like circumstances. The Chinese may dispute with any of these nations, the antiquity of their acquaintance with this art, for they pretend to have learned it from Chin-nong, the successor of Fo-hi.^j However this may be, it was from these countries, no doubt, and some others, that the art of cultivating grain was brought in process of time into other climates. The Greeks, for example, said they learned agriculture from the Egyptians.^k The Romans believed this art had been brought into Italy from Africa and Greece.^l

The first husbandmen tilled the ground by mere strength of arm; their tools were extremely clumsy and imperfect.^m Such was the state of the Peruvians at the discovery of that country. They had no ploughs, nor beasts of burden. They turned the soil with a kind of shovel; and when it was properly prepared, drop the seed into little holes made with the end of a stick.ⁿ There are a great many nations even at this day who know no better method.^o The savages of New France till their ground with a wooden instrument, not unlike the hoe of our vine dressers.^p

^c Gen. c. 9. v. 20.

^f Herod. c. 1. p. 28. 29.

^g Sanchon. ap. Euseb.

^h Gen. c. 26. v. 12.

ⁱ Gen. c. 12. v. 10.

^j Martini, *bist. de la Chine*, l. 1.

^k Diod. l. 1.

^l Diod. l. 1.

^m Festus, voce *Lyblent campus*.

ⁿ Diod. l. 3.

^o *Conquête de Pérou*, t. 1. p. 47. *Histoire des Incas*, t. 2. p. 83.

^p *L'hist. gen. des voyag.* t. 3. p. 117.

^q *L'escartot, bist. de la N. France*, p. 778. Some

^a Theophrast. *bist. plant.* l. 2. c. 3. Plin. l. 18. sect. 20.

^b Dubamel *traité de la culture des terres*, p. 145.

^c Plato, in *Menex.* Arist. *de mirab. exscult.* Theophr. *bist. plant.* l. 4. c. 5. Diod. l. 1. Strabo l. 15. Plin. l. 18.

^d L'escartot, *bist. de la N. France*, p. 251, 255, 261. Lettr. édif. t. 25. p. 61.