

Plowing Matches

Pointers for the Plowman



Some splendid plow teams lined up before the commencement of the Carroll Plowing Match, 1910

Looking back over the past twenty-five years, those who have followed closely the developments of farm machinery will have noted a vast improvement in implements of practical use on the farm. The modern drill has replaced the old broadcast sower; the subsoil plow has replaced the roller; and the manure spreader has taken the place of the old-fashioned method of scattering manure with a fork. Numerous other instances might be cited where methods of agriculture have been completely revolutionized through improvements in old-style machines, not to mention machines of high-class development, like those of which were unknown a quarter of a century, or even half that period ago.

Among agricultural implements the plow is the oldest. Pictures of the primitive ages reveal the farmer seeking to turn over the tough soil with a crooked stick drawn by the faithful ox. With the discovery of iron, the steel share soon replaced the wooden point, and the curved moldboard turned over the soil infinitely better than the old implement without this necessary. For ages man walked behind the steel share, and not until recent years has there been any material change in the construction of the plow other than the addition of a seat and wheels which rendered plowing easier and much more inviting to the average man. The modern gang plow, drawn by four fine horses or the gas tractor has lessened farm labor immeasurably. Yet there has been invented nothing in the implement line to successfully take the place of the steel share and the moldboard. The plow has been improved for the accommodation of man, but the principle remains ever the same.

The modern plow, in the hands of a skilled workman, does its work effectively and well; yet, on the other hand, placed under the guidance of a careless or indifferent individual, the casual observer might remark that there was room for improvement in the implement. Not such a remark would come from the old Scottish farmer: "No room for improvement in the man behind the plow," would be more like his canny saying.

Plowing, as seen in the Western fields today, is much better than that of twenty-five years ago; not only are straighter furrows noted, better weed-covering and even surfaces but squarer ends with well trimmed headlands lend a cleaner and neater appearance to the fields. This improvement has emanated from several sources; the influx of noxious weeds, and the gradual deterioration of the soil through constant cultivation, has caused the farmer to pay stricter attention to plowing. But there is still another cause which has aided directly the improvement of the character of plowing in many districts of the West and this is "the plowing match." In every district where plowing matches are annually held there is shown a marked improve-

ment in the plowing over those sections of the country where plowing matches have, as yet, not been introduced.

Scottish Game

The plowing match is an old Scottish game. A game it may be called, because the contestants entered into the



W. Turner, Provincial Champion Plowman

struggle for supremacy with as much spirit and enthusiasm as was manifest in any of the games, peculiar to the race, which called for feats of strength or skill. The champion plowman was the hero of the day, and the district which he represented and won honors for was probably prouder of him than any other man—soldier, politician or athlete. The man who could put his plow in at one end of a field and take it out at the other end, leaving a furrow so straight that a rifle bullet might travel down the same and kill a rabbit at the far end, was the pride of his countrymen.

Introduced to Canada

It was natural enough that plowing matches should be introduced to old Ontario and from that province to the West where there are to be found the stalwart men of the "Land of the Heather."

Plowing matches were first introduced in Manitoba by the grain growers of Douglas; but, strange to say, the match was not continued after the introduction. Why plowing matches were discontinued in following years is hard to tell, but probably the starting of plowing matches at Rhyth, a prosperous district some ten miles south of Douglas and which drew many plowmen to each annual from a wide radius, including several from Douglas, was indirectly

responsible for the lack of interest in the home match by the Douglas farmers.

For some thirteen years successful plowing matches were conducted under the auspices of the Rhyth Farmers' Institute; they were, however, discontinued in 1906, the farmers of the district having considered that the results for which the match was inaugurated were attained and the purpose was served. Several years, however, before plowing matches were discontinued at Rhyth other districts began to see the good results that emanated from this annual match, and various other matches were started in which, perhaps, Portage, Carroll, Wawanesa, Bird's Hill and Carberry were among the most noted in the province. Not only in Manitoba did plowing matches gain favor, but in the two provinces to the West they were introduced and are still growing yearly.

Provincial Match

The provincial match decides the championship of the province. This match for the Manitoba championship was formerly held at the experimental farm, Brandon, but, more recently, it has become the custom for the match to be held at the district which is the home of the holder of the championship.

to do work that will approach a perfect work.

Points for the Beginner

There are many points to be learned by the novice regarding plowing before he can hope to carry off provincial honors; even those who have won this proud title, yearly are gaining knowledge in the craft behind the handles. Besides doing good solid work, as it were, the plowman, to get a share of the prize money, must do his work neatly and, when the job is completed, his work should show style and finish.

To commence with, the plowman must have a steady team and have his plow shining like a piece of burnished steel; it would be useless for a plowman to enter for competition with a dull share and a rusty moldboard. Granted the plow is in first class condition, the first consideration is the feeding. A good crown should be slightly higher than the rest of the plowing—only a fraction—as the tendency is for the crown to settle more than the rest of the plowing. However, the crown is generally made a little on the high side even by the best of plowmen, for the simple reason that it is a difficult matter to make it the ideal height and have all the weeds well cut and the furrows well closed in.

The best results may be obtained by the plowman following out as nearly as possible the following rule: Make the first furrow as shallow as possible, just taking sufficient ground to cut the weeds. The second furrow—that is the furrow that is thrown out on the return—should also be lightly skimmed, leaving a narrow strip in the centre. The great secret in making the crown just right is to have a wide trough in which to throw the crown furrows. By leaving this narrow strip in the centre a wider ditch is made. Of course the plowman must make an extra round to cut this strip, as all land must be plowed. During the whole performance the plowman must exercise all the power at his command; he must keep an eye on the team, raise and lower the plow occasionally and perhaps alter the width of the implement to secure a furrow that will mate the others in height—this, in particular, when the furrows are thrown back to complete the crown. The work is rendered more difficult because of the tendency of the plow not to clean on account of the extra heavy furrow with a loose top which is caused by the first two thrown-out furrows.

After the first two crown furrows have been successfully rolled over, the plowman, for the following two or three rounds, must increase his depth, gradually getting lighter, till he finally is holding to the depth as called for on the official score card. If this is properly done the feeding may be made almost perfectly level.

Covering Weeds

Covering weeds is by far the most important part in plowing, and it is



Fred Paterson, age 12, a winner at the Carroll Plowing Match, 1910