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The Month.



FEBRUARY is a somewhat milder month in our climate, than January. This is not the popular impression, but it is nevertheless the fact, as established by the unimpeachable testimony of the thermometer. The popular impression may, perhaps, be accounted for to some extent by these two things: first, there is no thaw at the beginning of February to mitigate for a little the rigour of the season; and secondly, in addition to steady cold, we are liable this month to have storms, which make the weather seem more severe than it really is. The study of climatology is as yet in its infancy in this country. Careful meteorological observations have not been taken at many points for a sufficient number of years to give us a trustworthy average. So far as ascertained, the following are the mean degrees of cold at the several Canadian points named, during the months in question.

	Jan.	Feb.
Stratford.....	18°.42	20°.06
Hamilton.....	22°.80	23°.90
Battle.....	15°.50	18°.64
Toronto.....	20°.70	22°.50
Bellefleur.....	17°.61	20°.34
Montreal.....	12°.10	22°.00
Quebec.....	7°.20	15°.80
St John, N. B.....	14°.37	21°.42
Halifax.....	20°.00	25°.00

Winter begins astronomically about the 22nd of December, viz., at the time of the winter solstice, as it is termed. Then the day is shortest. But curiously enough, winter does not often fairly set in until after the sun has turned the corner, and is daily shining higher and higher in the heavens. Hence the proverb, "As the day lengthens, the cold strengthens." D. Holmes observes, "We do not commonly feel that winter is thoroughly in earnest until after the Christmas holidays, which include the 1st of January. And inasmuch as on the 14th of February our thoughts are led, by the ingenious fiction of St. Valen-

tine's day, to look forward henceforth to spring, which is at hand, we may say that the white pill or marrow of winter lies locked up in the six weeks between these two festivals." Another sprightly writer says:—"There is an old artistic tradition which puts the month of January in the guise of a young babe, (typical of the New Year of course,) making a bold front of it, and not like Shakespeare's babe—

'Mewling and—'

to the great discomfort of the nurse. For my own part, I can never think of January as a babe, whether methodical in its habits or the contrary, but rather as a fine old gentleman with frosted beard, who has seen his best days, and is content to take his ease by his own chimney corner. And if I were to symbolize February, it should be as a decorous, white-haired, venerable lady—something shorter than January—who is not over-clamorous for rights, but yet has her storms, and who is most effective when most serene."

So we have got past mid-winter, and may look forward, not to deepening cold and strengthening frost, but to the mysterious and mighty, yet gentle and gradual loosening of the chains that bind universal nature as a prisoner. But stop; we recall that adjective—"universal," for there is a degree of freedom and life left, and it is not quite correct to say that all nature is in the thralldom of wintry death. The flowers indeed are held close prisoners, the forests are bare and leafless, but the staid, prim, evergreens, the pines, firs, and spruces, are green and fresh as in the bloom of summer. Let no man be willing to die until he has planted, somewhere or other, at least one evergreen! There is always something astir in the animal world all winter long. Quite a number of birds give us their company all the year round. The solemn rook is always at hand to officiate at the obsequies of poor Cock Robin, who often lingers with us through the winter. The sparrow, chickadee, snow-bird, and others, enliven the winter with life and liberty. The owners of young orchards know, or ought to know, that mice travel about under the snow, and will gnaw the fruit-trees if they can. Thwart them, Oh man expectant of apples, by tramping the snow round the base of the young trees. The squirrel and fox, the hare and rabbit, the mink and musquash, are lively and stirring through the winter. "How these manage to live all through the desperate cold and famine-breeding snow," says a writer already quoted, let Mr. Emerson's "Titmouse"—as charming a bird as has talked since the days of Esop—tell us from experience;—

"For well the soul, if stout within,
Can arm impregnable the skin,
And polar frost my frame defied,
Made of the air that blows outside."

The farmer needs the dauntless energetic spirit of this heroic "Titmouse," to push along the several branches of winter work on the farm, of which we spoke in our 1st of January issue. We can add nothing to the brief practical directions then given,

and if we could, should hardly have the heart to do so after perusing the following article which we copy from the *Rural New Yorker*, of Jan. 25th., and which certainly puts in a powerful plea in behalf of that oppressed and over-worked being, the farmer, to whom, like the wicked, there is no rest nor peace all the year round. We quote the more readily, because our contemporary slyly gives an admirable summary of winter farm work, which is doubtless meant as an ingenious reminder to those whom the wily advocate appears to be defending from over-work and hard usage.

"The agricultural press is prolific in suggestions and advice about winter work—the *Rural* gives its share,—and, from reading the whole, a tyro in farming would come to the conclusion that this season of the year is one of almost infinite time to the husbandman, and that it is really difficult for him to find proper employment to occupy his leisure. Reflect briefly on the quantity of work laid out; there is the wood pile to be heaped up for summer use; the manure pile to be spread from the sled to forward operations in the spring; the forest to be stripped of fence and building timber; muck hauled from the swamp, stone from the field, if the weather admits; ploughing forward, where the climate allows; visits exchanged; farmers' clubs organized and sustained, and the agricultural journals subscribed for and read. Saying nothing about feeding and stabling cattle, hogs, sheep, and horses, getting them to water and making them generally comfortable, we think the amount of work mentioned sufficient, if done, to keep most farmers from suffering any illness that is begotten of idleness.

"But really in these Northern latitudes, where snow and frost chain the earth in their icy bonds for more than a third of the year, and when darkness throws his mantle over the body of Time, leaving scarcely the venerable gentleman's extremities to be illumined by daylight, how much of all this programme can the farmer get through with? Care to the dumb animals, which depend on him for their daily food, claims his first attention; the mid-day feeding follows close on the chores of the morning, and the evening's labours must begin early to avoid working in darkness. Then there are stormy days, and cold ones, too, when it is advisable to house one's self by the fire rather than encounter the severities of the weather. Considering all this, if the farmer dispenses with a 'hired man,' what can he accomplish aside from his necessary work of caring for stock?

"Much of the farmer's winter work, obviously, should be intellectual, consisting of reading, comparing, investigating the various questions which arise in his calling, and in laying plans for the future. Nature seems to hint at this in the opportunity given by stormy days and long evenings.

The foregoing recapitulation, though full enough "to point a moral and adorn a tale," omits an important item of winter work, which it may be well just to mention, lest our readers, after all, should not turn up our own article in the 1st January issue. We refer to what may be called *shop-work*, the making, repairing, painting and putting in order of various implements and conveniences for the spring and summer campaign, the busy season when these things are sure to be wanted, and when it is very convenient to have them ready to hand.