

CLIMATE, SOIL, AND PRODUCTIONS

OF

UPPER CANADA,

From an official Report of an Agent of His Majesty's Government, laid before a Select Committee of the House of Commons, in 1823,
by His Majesty's Under Secretary of State for the Colonial Department.

THE CLIMATE of Upper Canada is considerably milder than that of the lower province, and the winter shorter in the same proportion. In both these respects it improves as you proceed to the westward; so much so, that although the frost generally sets in in November at its eastern extremity, and continues in that neighbourhood till the middle of April, it rarely commences on the shores of Lake Erie before Christmas, and it usually disappears between the 25th of March and the 1st of April.

On a comparison with the climate of Great Britain, the heat in the summer months is somewhat greater, but never oppressive, as it is always accompanied with light breezes. There is less rain than in England, but it falls at more regular periods, generally in the spring and autumn. The winter cold, though it exceeds that of the British Isles, is the less sensibly felt, in consequence of its dryness, and seldom continues intense for more than three days together, owing to the regular fluctuation of the wind between the north-west and south-west points. It may be observed that the winter season is the most favourable to land-carriage, as the roads then admit of sledging in all directions, which is a very expeditious mode of conveyance, and attended with but little draft; so that one horse or ox can, in this manner, easily draw double what he can upon wheels. It is hardly necessary to state that in a country so overspread with timber there can never be a deficiency of fuel. As the forests disappear the climate improves.

SOIL.—Upper Canada is blessed with as productive a soil as any in the world, and it is easily brought into cultivation. The nature of the soil may be invariably discovered by the description of timber it bears. Thus, on what is called hard timbered land,

where the maple, beech, black birch, ash, cherry, lime, elm, oak, black walnut, butter-nut, hickory, plane, and tulip tree, &c. are found, the soil consists of a deep black loam. Where the fir and hemlock pine are intermixed in any considerable proportion with other trees, clay predominates; but where they grow alone, which is generally on elevated situations, sand prevails. This also happens where the oak and chestnut are the only trees. These sandy soils, though naturally unfavourable to meadow and pasture, are found to produce the brightest and heaviest wheats, and can, with the assistance of gypsum, which abounds in many parts of the province, be made to bear the finest possible crops of clover and Indian corn. In moist seasons the clays furnish the greatest burthen of grass. Perhaps there does not exist in any quarter of the globe, a country of the extent of Upper Canada, containing so small a quantity of waste land, either of marsh or mountain, yet there is not any deficiency of water; for, independently of the numerous rivers and streams which flow through the country on every side, good springs are universally found either on the surface or by digging for them.

NATURAL PRODUCTIONS.—The timber most esteemed in Upper Canada for building and farming purposes is the white oak (very similar to the English); the yellow pine, a sort of deal which cuts up into excellent boards, as does also the tulip-tree, which there grows to an immense size. This latter timber is by many considered the best for weather boarding, from its superior facility in taking paint, and being of the poplar tribe, it is less liable than most other woods to accidents from fire, as it never blazes; the oak and hickory are principally used for ploughs, cart-wheels, &c.

The black-walnut, cherry, and curled maple, work up into durable and beautiful furniture of all sorts. From the maple, the settlers, by a very simple and easy process of tapping, obtain in a few days a sufficient quantity of sugar to supply their families for a year; many, indeed, manufacture a considerable surplus for sale. Soap may be made in any quantities from the wood-ashes, with the addition of a certain proportion of tallow or grease of any kind. Plums, cherries, crab-apples (which latter yield an excellent preserve), gooseberries, currants, strawberries, raspberries, grapes, cranberries, walnuts, chestnuts, and filberts, grow wild in the woods, where game is sufficiently abundant; consisting of red-deer, hares, pheasants, woodcocks, snipes, and quails, with many other birds, good for the table; in which enumeration should not be omitted the wild pigeon, which, at certain periods of the year, migrate from the westward in flocks of such magnitude as surpasses all description, and are excellent eating.

GRAIN, &c.—The grain grown in Upper Canada consists of spring and winter wheat, oats, barley, rye, buck-wheat, and Indian corn, the last of which is a most important article of consumption. Peas are the only field pulse cultivated there; the summer heats being considerably too great for beans. There are potatoes, turnips, pumpkins, clover (red and white), and timothy grass. Both flax and hemp grow remarkably well.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES.—All the fruits and herbs, common to the English kitchen-garden, thrive well in this province; and several of the former, which cannot in all seasons be had in perfection, in England, without forcing, succeed there in the open air; melons, in particular, which are excellent.

There is also a great variety of apples, pears, plums, &c. of the finest quality which are known to European orchards. The stone-fruit is also raised on standards.

AGRICULTURE.—Course of crops: the soil being of such a nature as not to need manure, the same attention is not there paid to the regular succession of crops as in Great Britain. After wheat, which is generally harvested in the month of July and beginning of August, rye can be sown on the same ground in the autumn to advantage; the rye crop is frequently laid down with clover or grass seed, which, unless the farmer is pressed for ground, will continue to furnish good meadow and pasture for four or five years, otherwise it is ploughed up before winter, and in the spring put into pease, spring wheat, Indian corn, barley, oats, or buck-wheat, all of which answer very well; the two first rather benefiting than impoverishing the land. The leaves and tops of the Indian corn are likewise excellent winter food for cattle, particularly milch-cows. After any of these latter crops, wheat may be sown again; potatoes and turnips succeed well upon newly cleared land, as a first crop; potatoes being put into the ground with a hand-hoe, from the beginning of May till the middle of June; turnips are sown about the first week in August, after the greatest heat has subsided, and, at which time, the fly has disappeared, simply requiring the harrow. It is to be understood that the new land is never ploughed for the first crop. Timothy is the grass most cultivated, as it affords a large burthen of the best hay, besides good after-grass; however, it is best mixed with clover, to which it serves as a support, and prevents matting.