

Is Farming a Business?

By way of dignity, farming has often been styled a profession, and justly so, when it is considered that in its highest type it demands a deep and systematic knowledge of its principles, and that men of wealth and rank are not lowered by engaging in its pursuit. But a business pursuit is also a respectable occupation, so the question arises—Is farming a business? Certainly it is; but very few farmers make a business of it—or a profession either. A very small number of farmers know from what source their greatest profits are derived; indeed, they often manage certain branches at a loss without knowing it. The only thing they are sure of is that a quarter or half a century ago they had barely the necessities of life, while now they have a bank balance, or are able to store in a few luxuries. Their soil should be their banker; and, having consumed the interest, if they infringe upon the capital, bankruptcy, in this or in the succeeding generation, is inevitable. In partnership affairs, a knowledge of business principles becomes a necessity. Why do farmers not take their sons into partnership with them like other business men, giving them a definite percentage of the profits? By these means they would be enabled to devote their attention to those branches of their industry for which their farms are best adapted. We would not advise every farmer to get in a complete set of dockets all at once; this would require the employment of an expert; but he ought to commence book-keeping on a small scale, and common sense will introduce him to the best system for his particular business. In this way he would soon acquire business habits, and find pleasant and profitable employment to relieve the monotony of his dreary evenings.

Live Stock Boom.

So one boom follows another in endless succession. This contagion, from which the farmer used to be entirely free, has affected every department of his industry. No time is allowed for a lull in the market; no time for reflection until the unwary are swept off by the plague. Merit yields to design. The Shorthorn boom, the Poll boom, the Jersey boom are all to be now no more. In our folly we understood it to be an axiom that dairy cattle were required for the dairy, beefing breeds for beef, the guiding principle being the greatest possible division of labor. Away with such nonsense when a new breed is discovered which casts all others into the deleterious shade! Permit us to predict that the day is near when our Canadian cow—that old "scrub"—will be boomed up to the top of the list, and enchain the attention of the world.

So the Devon's day is come. For quantity and quality of milk it is now said to be equal to the Jersey, and for beefing properties, not inferior to the Shorthorn. If this isn't quite so, it can, of course, be easily improved up to this standard. It is a stylish animal, and so admirably suited to this æsthetic age! But it is not our purpose to decry the Devon; we believe it has an important part to play in the history of breeds. It would require nice discernment to be able to rank it as a milker or as a beeper. The South Devon is not to be snubbed on account of its size, nor as a means of

improving the North Devon. Undoubtedly the quality of its beef is superior to that of the Shorthorn, but then it is a much slower maturer, which is a great obstacle in these days of quick returns. Its hardiness is undoubted; and with regard to freedom from disease, it has no peer amongst breeds. Its foraging instinct is a source of astonishment; and as a mother and a thriver it is hard to be surpassed. One other merit has been too much overlooked with regard to its adaptability to many parts of Canada, and that is its utility under the yoke. It far excels any other breed in this respect. In judging it by the system of standard points, which is the only correct and reliable basis, it stands at the head of the list of breeds, when both beefing and milking points are taken into the calculation; but it is its great mediocrity in every point, and not its predominance in any great feature, which gives it this rank. This breed will also be in good demand in Canada wherever pet or family cows are eagerly sought, and possibly also by those farmers who uphold starvation pastures; but for the great beef and dairy industries of the country, its asserted adaptability is to be regarded with suspicion.

Spring Tillage.

There is no influence or condition that affects the natural productiveness of the soil so much as tillage. The spring operations depend greatly upon the management of the land in the previous autumn. Deep versus shallow plowing has been a much debated subject, the difficulties having arisen from adopting false standpoints. If the organic matter of a previous vegetation be allowed to remain on the surface, its process of decay is checked, and the mineral constituents of the subsoil lose the beneficial action of winter exposure. The disintegrating effect of rain and frost upon the particles of soil and coarser fragments of rock is nature's fertilizer, the plant food being liberated from its insoluble combinations and prepared for more immediate use. Hence the chief argument in favor of fall plowing is made plain; and it will also be seen that the mode of plowing which exposes the greatest area to the action of the weather is the best. This is accomplished by laying the furrow-slices at an angle of 45°. The depth is best regulated by the character of the subsoil and the character of the drainage. If the subsoil, by nature or by drainage, is porous, so that no obstruction is offered to the downward course of the roots, comparatively shallow plowing is the preferable mode in cases where the supply of manure is scanty, the object being to supply the young roots with an abundance of food while they are near the surface, so as to give them early size and strength to work their way to the richer stores below. Under favorable circumstances some of the roots of the cereal crops will penetrate the soil four or five times the depth of ordinary plowing, so that the absurdity of attempting to loosen the soil for the free scope of the roots will at once appear. In most other cases deep plowing and even subsoiling is recommended. If the roots cannot find depth, they should have scope for the greatest possible extent of lateral growth. From these principles it will also be seen that the poorer and stiffer classes of soil can scarcely receive too much cultivation.

With regard to spring tillage a very injurious system is very apt to prevail. It will now be seen from what we have said that if the winter weathered tilth be plowed into the subsoil, all the pains taken in the autumn work will be in vain; for all the nourishment required for the young plant will be placed beyond its reach, and the soil, though perhaps rich under proper management, would be condemned as unproductive. Hence the advantage of acting from well founded principles. Spring tillage should therefore consist in cultivating and harrowing—not in plowing, the depth depending upon the nature of the seed, the larger seeds requiring, as a rule, a deeper cultivation than the smaller; but the main object is to obtain a smooth seed-bed of uniform depth, so as to promote regular germination and growth. A certain consistency of the soil is also required. It must be compact enough to support the plant and to retain the necessary quantity of moisture. The roller will effect this condition, closing the pores where evaporation is too active. But rolling a stiff soil, especially when wet, is a most injurious practice.

Improving Native Stock.

It is to be hoped that the check given to the importation of pure bred stock, owing to the existence of disease abroad, will not lessen the interest of stockmen in other departments of their business. The true inwardness of the art of breeding has been lost in the mania for speculation, and now they have a leisure moment for reflection. Now is the opportune season for a Bakewell to arise. Our much neglected native cow holds no mean rank amongst her competitors for dairy supremacy. Is there sufficient cause for the pedigree mania? What is there in a name? The greatest beefing breeds of the world have come down to us by systematic improvement; but it is to be feared that the keenly trained eye for selection has grown dim. Those who understand the law of atavism or reversion feel the risk of degeneracy to an objectionable peculiarity in an ancestor more or less remote; and the measure of this risk should determine the value of a pedigree. When it is considered that this predisposition has manifested itself after the lapse of many generations, it will be seen that some of our most valuable breeds are in reality hardly yet thoroughbred. Add to the keen perception of the trained eye a knowledge of the physiological laws which govern breeding, and an intimate acquaintance with the principles of feeding and management, and it will be seen how much is to be learned before improvement can be undertaken with success. Notwithstanding all these obstacles, they are by no means unsurmountable; and the improver has brighter prospects than the importer. We have in our native cow all the most desirable elements of a substantial foundation for our conditions. Why then not let home industry prevail and home talent and enterprise be encouraged and awakened?

In order to bring this about most effectually, our mode of judging live stock must be revolutionized. All the energies of our breeders should first be concentrated on this point. Wherein the strong points of the sire make up for the defects of the dam should be