



The Field.

Harvesting Grain.

A great difference of opinion exists between the theoretical writer and the practical farmer, as to what is the best period of time at which wheat and other grain should be cut or harvested.

The theorists say wheat should be cut while green, or some fourteen days before the grain becomes fully ripe, and not only advance many plausible scientific reasons for the utility of this practice, but also give the results of numerous experiments as tending to confirm their theory. They argue that both the straw and grain contain starch and sugar, a portion of which would become converted into woody fibre, or into bran, were the crop allowed to ripen on its roots; while if cut while green they would remain unchanged, and the grain would then yield a larger proportion of flour, and the straw be of greater value as food for stock.

This sounds very fine, but like a great many other theories, does not seem to bear the test of actual experience, as if it did, farmers are too practical not to have found it out long ago, and acted accordingly. Still, it must be admitted that they often go to the other extreme, and leave the grain standing till it gets over-ripe, in which case serious loss may occur from the shedding of the grain during the process of harvesting, and removing to the barn. This is especially true of barley and those varieties of wheat that are smooth-headed and beardless. Barley may be, and often is, cut at an earlier stage of the ripening process than other grain. The colour of the grain in barley has so much to do with the value put upon it, that, in order to have it of a clear bright colour, it often needs to be harvested a little before it is ripe, and left to ripen in the shock, or cock, as the case may be, and great care taken not to allow it to become exposed to a continuous or soaking rain, which is very apt to give the seed a streaked and discoloured appearance.

This renders it necessary that the farmer should watch the weather, cut his barley crop and put it under cover, as quickly as he can, and get it harvested while the days are full of sunshine and warmth, at the season of the ripening of this crop.

Rain hurts barley less when it is standing on its roots than when it is cut, and less when it is lying in the swath than if it is bound or raked up. Barley should never be stacked, in this country, and is better to be put away where it can be readily got at in the barn, to thresh it out as soon as harvest is over, for it generally commands the best prices in the fall, while the season of navigation lasts.

The best time to cut wheat is as soon as the berry is solid, and the straw turned to a yellow colour. The general use of reaping machines now renders it a comparatively easy matter for the farmer to so manage his work as to cut and carry every field of wheat as fast as it ripens, so that there is no excuse for delaying harvest operations a day longer than is absolutely necessary. In these days of progress, a farmer who takes an agricultural paper, and watches the market, sees the turn it is taking, and often finds it profitable to harvest, thresh out, and market his fall wheat at once; or if he has a crop of some new variety, to get it ready in good time to dispose of for seed before seeding time comes. When wheat is cut just at the right period, no time need be lost in waiting for it to dry out, so as to thresh well, as would be the case when it is cut in a semi-ripe state, entailing also a necessity for the crop standing out in the field for a length of time, at the risk of becoming injured should a spell of wet weather come on before it is fit to go into the barn or stack.

Oats are and can be cut at an earlier period of ripeness than other grain, not only without injury, but with manifest advantage, as they are not only so peculiarly liable to shell out from the stalk when cut fully ripe, but the straw contains a larger percentage of saccharine juice than any other, which can be in a measure retained by early cutting, the straw then being of more value as fodder for stock.

In Australia, the bulk of the hay used for feeding to horses in the cities and towns is made from oats cut when in full bloom, or just enough past it to give an admixture of half ripened grain with the fodder.

Every farmer does not grow grain enough perhaps, to make it worth his while to purchase, or even use a reaping machine; but the introduction of these great labour-saving implements enables those who need to depend on manual labour to secure their grain crops, to get more of it than they otherwise could, and by concentrating their available labourers on one harvest-field at a time, to have it cut and got under cover in a short space of time. In this way the small farmers reap a great advantage from the employment of horse-power in harvesting, though they may not themselves make direct use of labour-saving machinery.

Binding and Carrying Grain.

Many of the reaping machines now in use are so constructed as to allow a self-raking attachment to be put on them at a small additional expense. This, if it works well, is a great saving of labour to the binder, as it does away with the necessity of his carrying a rake, or employing a boy to rake up the straw into sheaves for him. Still, it must be admitted that more loss of grain occurs under such a system of rapid work, than where hand-raking is resorted to; and it is only on farms where there is a large crop of grain to be cut, and the work requires to be done rapidly, with but few hands, that it will prove profitable to employ self-rakers. Binding is a part of harvest work that not only requires a skilful hand to accomplish it well, but is also so very fatiguing to the laborer employed, that only the highest wages will tempt men to engage in it. All attempts to construct a machine, or fix an attachment to a reaper, that would accomplish the very difficult task of binding the sheaves, have