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EDITORIAL.

ALFALFA, THE BONANZA OF AGRICULTURE.

If correspondence be any indication, a good many Canadian farmers are becoming impressed with the wonderful merits of alfalfa as a crop and feed. This is gratifying, because, leaving fruit-growing and vegetable soils out of consideration, it is safe to say that land adapted to alfalfa is worth more per acre than any other. That is not to state that alfalfa land is the highest-priced. It is not, because as yet this truth is unappreciated. That does not alter the fact of worth.

Why is alfalfa so valuable! Because a good stand on suitable soil will yield three cuttings a year, amounting to from five to seven tons of hay per acre. This it will do year after year, suffering less by drouth than any other hay crop, with no expense for cultivation or reseeding, and little or no expense for fertilizers. Harvesting is sometimes an inconvenience, and once in a while the first crop may be lost, but the second and third insure a good fair season's yield. The hay is similar in composition to clover, but richer. It contains a considerably larger percentage of protein than clover, and is therefore eminently adapted for feeding along with the common classes of farm roughage, such as timothy, corn silage, corn fodder, and oat, wheat and barley straw. Some go so far as to claim that alfalfa equals wheat bran, pound for pound, but the larger percentage of crude fiber it contains makes this statement somewhat extravagant. However, out in the Western States there are great mills grinding alfalfa into meal, which has become an important commercial product in the United States, being used to a considerable extent in place of bran. There is not a doubt but that, by growing alfalfa more largely, we could save a great part of our millfeed bills. Those who have tried alfalfa hay with corn silage for dairy cows, are enthusiastic regarding the results in milk production. Alfalfa has a large, though as yet scantily-recognized, place to fill in the economy of the Canadian stockman. It is valuable for cattle, horses, sheep, hogs and poultry.

Not the least advantage of alfalfa is its unexampled merits for soiling—i. e., cutting to use green as summer feed. Probably few of us can remember a year in which there was not from one to eight weeks in midsummer when the pastures dried up, cows shrank in their milk flow, and beef animals made poor gains. At such times almost everyone is persuaded that it would be wise to make provision for summer drouth, but when next spring comes we neglect to plant anything, and suffer seriously for it. The man who has a field of alfalfa is prepared for this emergency with the best of all summer feeds.

Alfalfa, by means of the friendly bacteria working in the nodules on its roots, extracts free nitrogen from the air to build up into its tissues. At the same time, its deep-ranging root system is searching the bowels of the earth for moisture and for the mineral elements of plant food. Thus, without drawing too heavily on the surface soil, the plant converts a large amount of atmospheric nitrogen and subsoil fertility into its tissues, and when these are fed and worked over by animals, the result is a manurial residue decidedly richer than that from animals fed on timothy or straw. The man who grows a large acreage of alfalfa, uses it to stock, and applies the manure carefully to his other fields, is building up his farm in the simplest and cheapest way possible. The alfalfa will never require much manuring, except per-

haps an occasional and comparatively inexpensive application of bone meal and wood ashes, with occasionally, perhaps, a dressing of lime. And this alfalfa field, when plowed up, will be richer in available fertility than when seeded down. The decay of the sward and alfalfa roots will fill it with humus, and it will also have been subsoiled in the only economical way—that is, by plant roots.

If buying a farm to-day, we would look for one with a field or two that had a fairly good slope, affording free surface drainage. Here alfalfa should thrive, and if it did, that field, discounted probably because hilly, would become the most profitable part of the farm. So great are the merits of alfalfa that every man with 100 acres of land should try it at least on a small scale, and if possible, get 10, 15 or 20 acres seeded down. Sow alone or with a very light seeding of spring grain on clean, well-drained land, cultivated to a fine tilth. Some disk the seed in, but harrowing is preferable. Sow fairly early if the ground is in condition, but if it is not, better delay seeding a few days and work up a first-class mellow seed-bed. Use 20 pounds good seed per acre. Before sowing, examine for weed seeds and test for germination. Over the field, it is a good plan, if possible, to scatter a load per acre of surface loam from an old-established alfalfa field.

A successful stand of alfalfa is a small bonanza. It is worth persistent effort to secure. If at first you don't succeed, try again. The second attempt is nearly always more successful than the first.

THE HAPPY MEDIUM.

We are in receipt of a communication from an Eastern reader protesting against the purport of a letter by a Nova Scotia farmer on page 389 of our issue of March 7th. This letter, it may be remembered, strongly commended our editorial "The 'June Conditions' Fad." Our private correspondent urges that "Farmer's" views are, similar to those expressed by a number of Maritime Province men who, he says, know more about grumbling at circumstances than trying to make the best use of facilities at hand. He thinks "Farmer" may have over-interpreted our editorial, taking it for granted that we are opposed to all such modern improvements as stabling, the growing of roots, and, in fact, the feeding to cows of anything else but straw, a little hay and pasturage.

Knowing "Farmer" for a well-informed and progressive-spirited man, we are able to exonerate him from the charge of being a carping critic. At the same time, it will do no harm to restate, for the benefit of others, our position and purpose in writing as we did. A careful perusal of our article will show that it did not oppose comfortable stabling, good feeding, nor the provision of succulent food, such as roots and silage. For years we have consistently urged the erection of good stables, the liberal feeding of stock, the erection of silos wherever corn succeeds, and the growing of more roots. What we were driving at was the tendency on the part of some agricultural leaders to place exaggerated value on some of these things, to advocate stable temperatures it was unwise or impracticable to maintain, and, in some cases, to recommend unnecessarily laborious methods of preparing feed. This tendency lays them open to criticism from those who are of the old ways, and thus hinders, instead of helping, the gospel of improved conditions for stock.

Only a very few stockmen and dairymen have gone to extremes in seeking to provide June con-

ditions in winter, but if the advice of some lecturers and writers had been followed, much money would have been spent, with poor prospect of return, in attempting to reproduce summer conditions in winter. Leaders should take care not to become carried away with fads. The more sensible and moderate their recommendations, the greater the impression they will make on hard-headed men. There is a happy medium in these things, and while the majority of us are still on the near rather than on the far side of the medium, it is in the interest of progress to readjust our ideas of the relative importance of things, occasionally, in the light of plain common sense.

INCREASE CROPS BY BETTER TILLAGE.

So much faith in the virtue of thorough cultivation of the soil in the preparation of the seed-bed and its after care had the sage of the past century, Jethro Tull, that, in his enthusiasm, he declared "tillage is manure." The farming world of succeeding generations have been surprisingly slow to appreciate at its true value the import of that axiom. Canadian farmers, as a rule, are blessed with a class of soil that responds generously to even imperfect cultivation, and are too often content with a partial yield of crops, when, by more thorough tillage, the return from the same acreage might be made much greater. In favorable seasons, when rains in sufficiency fall at the most opportune periods in the life of the crops, the importance of cultivation is not so evident, the growth being fairly satisfactory. But when a protracted drouth comes at a critical juncture, the imperfectly-tilled fields make a poor showing in contrast with those having received more thorough cultivation and care. British farmers, who, as a rule, have much less naturally fertile soil to deal with than we in Canada, have learned from long experience, much more thoroughly than we, the value of tillage, and their yields per acre make ours look small, though they have seasons of drouth as well as we. The most successful of our market gardeners and fruit-growers have learned the same lesson, and profited by its practice.

The soil of the average Canadian farm is well supplied with the natural mineral elements of fertility, and requires only proper tillage and the maintenance of a reasonable proportion of vegetable matter to enable it to hold moisture and balance the supply of available plant food, in order to produce profitable crops, equal to any in the world. But we are falling sadly short of our privilege in that regard by a slipshod system of cultivation of our land. The usual preparation of the seed-bed for spring-sown grain on fall-plowed land is a single stroke of a spring-tooth cultivator or a disk harrow, which rarely moves all the surface soil, but is largely an operation of "cut and cover," especially on the higher-lying portions of clay lands—a mere apology for tillage—the consequence being imperfect germination of a large percentage of the seed sown, and imperfect nourishment of all, leaving the plants unable to partake of the food locked up in the soil, and the land in no condition to hold moisture or to resist the influence of drouth, the consequence being a weak and struggling crop, yielding, in many instances, less than one-half what it is capable of doing under proper preparatory treatment.

The writer recalls the practice of the most successful farmer in his neighborhood in the cultivation of the land for spring grain crops, which was to follow the teams, testing the work by drawing his boot through the ground to see that