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NEW SERIES.

The Field.

Turnips and their Cultivation

Turnip husbandry has been often called "the sheet anchor of British agriculture," and though our climate will ever prevent us growing them to the same extent as they do in Britain, where they can be fed off the ground by sheep in winter and spring, still they ought to be grown with profit, to a much greater extent than they have yet been done here. On no subject connected with agriculture has there been so much written during the last half century as on the subject of root culture, and principally in regard to turnips. It is a subject on which great diversity of opinion exists. It is not expected that anything new can be said on this topic. Nevertheless, it may not be unprofitable to review a subject of so much importance.

HISTORY.

The turnip (*Brassica rapa*), a well known biennial plant, with lyrate, lispid leaves, the upper part of the roots becoming, especially in cultivation, swollen and fleshy. It is a native of Europe, and the temperate parts of Asia. It is commonly regarded as a native of Britain, although in most cases of its being found wild there, it may be doubted if it has not derived its origin from cultivated varieties. It has been long cultivated, and is to be found in almost every garden of the temperate and cold parts of the world as a culinary esculent. It was cultivated in India long before it could have been introduced by Europeans, and is common there in gardens and about villages. It is rather remarkable that no turnips should have been raised in fields in Britain till towards the end of the 17th century, when it was lauded as a field root as long ago as the days of Columella, and in his time even the Gauls fed their cattle on them in winter. The Romans were so well acquainted with turnips that Pliny mentions having raised them 40 lbs. weight.

We believe it is impossible to say when the cultivation of turnips began in England. Sir Richard Weston, who was Ambassador to the Elector Palatine and King of Bohemia in 1619, and who had the merit of being the first who introduced the "great clover" (as the red clover was then called) into English agriculture about 1645, is sometimes thought to have introduced turnips also. In the third edition of "Blythes' Improver Improved," published in 1662, turnips are recommended as an excellent cattle crop, the culture of which should be extended from the kitchen garden to the field. Sir Richard Weston must have cultivated turnips before this, for Blythes says "that Sir Richard affirmed to himself that he did feed his swine with them; they were first given boiled, but afterwards they came to eat them raw, and would run after the carts, and pull them forth as they gathered them," an expression that conveys the idea of their being grown in the fields.

In Houghton's "Collections on Husbandry and Trade," a periodical begun in 1681, we have the first notice of turnips being eaten by sheep. He says "that some in Essex have their fallow after turnips, which feed their sheep in winter; that sheep fatten very well on turnips, which prove an excellent nourishment for them in hard winters when fodder is scarce, and that by feeding the sheep the land is dunged as if it had been folded." But these early introductions made slow progress, having, no doubt, many prejudices to overcome, as turnips had been very little cultivated in the field until about 1730, at which time Lord Townshend, on his owing home from being ambassador to the States General, gave great attention to their culture—encouraging their growth upon his estates in Norfolk, for which good service he obtained from the wits of the day the nickname of "Turnip Townshend." His success, however, in the growth of turnips, encouraged others in various parts of the country to try them.

The introduction of turnips into Scottish agriculture took place at a somewhat later

period; but when once introduced, their cultivation spread more rapidly than they had done in England. From the "Select Transactions of the Society of Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture in Scotland," we learn that the Earl of Stair was among the first who cultivated turnips in the fields in that country. It is evident that the above named society had exerted itself in a very laudable manner, and apparently with considerable success, in introducing cultivated herbage and turnips, as well as improving the former method of culture. But there is reason to believe that the influence of the example of its numerous members did not extend to the common tenantry, who are always unwilling to adopt the practice of those who are placed in a higher rank than themselves, and who are supposed to cultivate land for pleasure rather than profit.

The cultivated varieties of the turnips are very numerous; but by far the most useful for our country is the Swedish turnip, or "Ruta Baga," which was introduced into Britain from the north of Europe more recently than the common turnip, and has proved of very great value to the farmer. It is regarded by some botanists as a variety of the *Brassica rapa*, but more commonly as a variety of the *Brassica campestris*, a species common in the corn fields and sides of ditches in the north of Europe, and occasionally in Britain. The history of this turnip, like that of other cultivated plants, is obscure. According to the name given it here, it is a native of Sweden; the Italian name for it, *Navonia de Laponia*, intimates an origin in Lapland; and the French names, *Chou de Lapone*, *Chou de Swede*, indicate an uncertain origin. There seems, however, no doubt that it was introduced into Britain from Sweden; but it appears doubtful whether they were first grown in East Lothian or Forfarshire; neither is the time certain when they were first cultivated, but it was somewhere between 1770 and 1780.

CULTIVATION.

In regard to the management of the turnip, I shall draw principally on my own ob-