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To-day the farmer's life is a comparatively easy one, made so by modern improvements in agricultural GOSSIP

FARMING IN JAPAN

Slowly, so that it was easy to observe small details, even down to the coarse fibers in the farmers' garments, I trav-eled through 120 miles of cultivated land in Japan, says a writer in the Manches-ter Guardian. No greater contrast could be imagined than that between our billowing fields of waving corn and these flat, mathematically diagram-

and these flat, mathematically diagram-matic little plots. With few exceptions, the whole of the land under grain of any kind is absolute-ly flat. If it is not so by nature the Jap-anese farmer levels and banks it up till it is horizontal. In the narrow valleys there are elaborate series of terraces running up the slope of the hills till the fields become so small as to accom-modate but a double row of plants. modate but a double row of plants. The more typical grain country, how-ever, lies in broader valleys or along the coast, where there are many wide plains which were once beneath the water. If one looks down on these from a slight elevation they appear like some elabor-ately designed mathematical figure, or as though a cloth had been spread over the earth with mosaic patterns in gold and green. Each little field is as and green. Each fittle field is as nearly rectangular as circumstances will allow; many of them therefore, are perfect rectangles, for where the plain is broad it is easy to fit into it small fields of twenty or thirty feet in length. Many of the plots are even less than this; some barley fields are only six feet by a dozen or so, and the nursery patches for young rice still smaller.

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The pattern of this mosiac is vividly marked out by the coloring of the vari-ous crops. To-day the barley is ripe and stands golden in the sunshine. The rice fields, however, are only bare expanses of mud or water, for the rice is not yet planted out, but is growing in small, oblong fields by itself, which shows a vivid emerald green growth of little plants only three or four inches high. At the end of May some of these farmers are beginning to reap their ripe barley and wheat, and when this is value finished they will be free to plant out what is to them the much more important crop, the rice, Reaping and planting of grain together! One may see it in the same acre, as I did to-day, when a man was cutting his barley, while his wife, with handfuls of young rice, was setting them into the soft slush of the neighboring field. There is no broadcast sowing of grain here; each seed grain has an individuality and is separately tended. The barley is. anted in rows, perhaps three or feet long, and each row is a foot or eighteen inches from the next, so that a worker can pass between the rows to tend and weed and finally to reap each individual plant. In many cases each row grows on a little semi-circular ridge four or five feet horizontally and about a foot high, so that the barley is well drained, though the next little field may lie under several inches of water. In the whole district I traversed there was only one of the ripe fields ''laid'' by the wind, and that was one of the larger-nearly thirty feet across. It is not to be inferred from this that the Japanese farmers do not have to contend with heavy winds and pitiless, beating rains. Japan is a particularly windy country and this year has been a bad season, for even in April there was heavy snow-snow so thick that it entirely disorganized the telegraphic and railway communications for a few days. The wheat and barley are all sown in the autumn, so that they get the benefit of the winter sunshine, which is clear and brilliant and very hot. This of course is the chief cause of the early ripening of the grain, for from the time it is sown till the time it is reaped it never has a spell of dull weather that lasts more than a few days. The rainy season comes in the middle of June, by which time it is all harvested. * * *



implements.

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