

FIRST ADDRESS

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WHAT GOOD SOIL CULTURE HAS DONE FOR SASKATCHEWAN.

What Early Settlers Found.

Agriculture, either scientific or otherwise in the Province of Saskatchewan, has a history of but a brief twenty-seven years. Prior to that the buffalo, the Indian and the Hudson's Bay Company practically reigned supreme. With the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway through this empire province, which contract was entered into in 1881, settlers in large numbers followed in the wake of that great enterprise. While these settlers were drawn largely from the agricultural classes, still, the conditions on the prairie were so entirely different that farming operations for many years afterward were anything but successful or remunerative.

It was noticed by the observing ones that the first crop on either back-setting or early done breaking was generally a bountiful one, yet the second, after fall or spring ploughing, would invariably be only about half as good, and there would sometimes be produced very little or no crop at all. Owing to the half-breed and Indian rebellion of 1885, many of the settlers were taken from their homesteads to transport supplies to the soldiers. As a result of this a great deal of land was not sown to crop that spring. After the suppression of the rebellion many farmers returned to their holdings and ploughed the land that they had not sown. It was found that this ploughing being done late and with very imperfect machinery was anything but first class summerfallow. Notwithstanding this, however, the following year showed splendid results from the land thus treated. This season (1886) was one of the driest in the experience of the country, not over two inches of rain falling during the growing season, and yet on land that was thus summer-fallowed or on back-setting well done, there was a crop of from fifteen to twenty bushels of wheat to the acre; but fall and spring ploughing resulted in total failures. This was a great mystery to the early settlers. It was quite clear that the satisfactory results came from a certain system of tillage and yet the reason was not apparent. The principles of capillarity and soil physics were not very well understood at that date, while packing the land for the best results in cereal growing was scarcely heard of. Thus, largely by accident, did many of the early settlers discover the advantages of a crop rotation that included summer-fallowing as its main stay and chief corner stone, and although they were somewhat slipshod at first, improved methods were adopted as farmers learned the secret of the success that attended this system of tillage.