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AGRICULTURE.

WHAT IT IS IN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC; HOW TO IMPROVE IT. (1)

Agriculture is the most useful, the most moral, the most noble of employments, as it regards individuals; so, as regards nations, it is the only solid base of general prosperity.

A well thought out system of agriculture demands, not only great bodily exertion, but also great mental study.

That this art is of divine institution; that it was the intention of the Creator that man should find his chief employment in its exercise; is clearly shown by the passage:

"He placed him in the garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it." (Gen. 2) The cultivation of the earth was thus an express injunction from God himself; the condition on which man's happiness, his dignity, his very existence depended, before the Fall had rendered all labour painful and disagreeable.

In all ages, and amongst the most celebrated nations, Agriculture has been considered the first and the most honoured of all the arts. Thus, in ancient history, the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, the Romans, as well as the Jews, were eminently agricultural peoples; and, from the beginning of the Christian era up to our own times, the most powerful, the most prosperous nations have derived their riches and their strength chiefly from this source.

That "Agriculture is the very foundation of human life and the nurse of the human species" is a maxim that has never been contravened. If, then, Man is only truly great and noble in proportion to the benefits he confers upon his race, what occupation is more noble and more useful than that of the Husbandman.

The magistracy, the liberal professions, trade, the mechanical arts are of the greatest use to us. Since the Fall, in proportion to the increase of population, the increase of power, courage, wisdom and of knowledge to direct, defend and control society, has been necessary. More energy has been requisite to extract from the bosom of the earth, and from the depths of the waters, their riches, and to utilize and spread abroad those blessings without limit which the Creator has placed at the service of mankind. But what does all this avail without the life of the body? How elevated an art, then, must that be which alone can supply those fruits, those products which, pleasing our appetites and rejoicing our hearts, establish and strengthen the life of Man.

The cultivation of the land must, necessarily tend to raise the mind of the cultivator to a higher moral tone. Throughout his varied toil he feels his immediate dependence on God. Man becomes the docile instrument of the Creator in the continuation of his Creation. The Farmer stirs the earth; he

(1) Prize Essay, by Ed. A. Barnard, Director of Agriculture for the Province of Quebec. Translated from the French by Arthur R. Jenner Fust, Esq., M. A.

waters it with his sweat; he entrusts the seed to its bosom, and then, his part of the work is over; the rest he leaves to God; from whose tender care come the heat, the refreshing dew, the necessary rain and the vivifying light of the marvellous eye of the Great Creator—the wonder-working Sun itself. It is God alone who gives the increase; here ten fold, there fifty fold, there a hundred fold.

All the more manly virtues—sobriety, economy, activity, perseverance, foresight, are the property of the true cultivator. And so, we find amongst the agricultural population, generally speaking, a riper judgment, a purer life, a firmer religious faith and a healthier progeny, than amongst the inhabitants of our towns.

What says Columella on this subject? "A country life is the neighbour, if not the actual parent of wisdom." The wise Cato affirms that: "It is amongst the farming class that the best citizens, the best soldiers are born." Cicero, again, declares that: "Luxury has its origin in cities. Luxury produces cupidity; cupidity, in its turn, shamelessness; and thence spring all those crimes which cannot derive their origin from the sober and laborious habits of a country life. The lessons taught by agriculture are economy, industry and justice. The love of one's country, source of so many virtues, exists in the highest degree amongst the agriculturists who bring up their families on their patrimonial estates. It is there that the bravest of our soldiers are born."

It is indeed a flattering testimony that these Pagan writers bear to agriculture! What then should be the honours paid by Christian peoples to a profession so noble and so useful? Does not the Farmer feel that he, more directly than another, is placed under the very eye of God? Can he ever forget to notice the beneficent action of the Almighty in the result of his different labours? Who feels so acutely as the Husbandman the daily necessity of prayer, that the rain, the heat, the fine weather necessary to the seasonable ripening of his crops may be granted to him? Is there any one who can enjoy, more than he, the beauties of nature? And can he, to whom so much is granted, refrain from offering, from the depths of a grateful heart, the thanks due to his adorable benefactor. Thus, this occupation offers purer pleasures, a more virtuous youth, a better spent life, a happier and more tranquil old age, than any other with which we are acquainted.

We have by no means exaggerated the happiness, the good fortune which fall to the lot of the agricultural population. And yet, what do we see every day? We see educated men who are contemners of agriculture; we see children of Farmers, on whom the only influence of instruction seems to be to make them despise the occupation of their forefathers; we see, lastly, a crowd of persons, more or less distinguished, who can see nothing in the rough, though honourable, labours of the fields, but a debasing employment, unworthy of an enlightened mind; the labour of a slave. Do we not often see Farmers of comfortable means, whose chief ambition, for their