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The Month.



APRIL may be said, in this climate, to be the

first month of spring. It brings us fairly out of winter; unlocks the ground so that the plough can gain admittance; wakes all nature from slumber; and calls man to the tug of active out-door farm work. Now indeed begins the busiest season of the year, and it usually comes with surprising suddenness, inasmuch that we can hardly credit the fact that a transition of such magnitude has actually taken place. Winter holds undisputed sway in March, sometimes all through the month;—at other times the sceptre of the ice-king is broken, and his abdication rendered imminent, before the month is more than half through. But whatever may be the character of March, Spring is ushered in by April. It scarcely answers to the description of the month current in Britain, where “March winds” and “April showers” are reputed to “bring forth Mayflowers.” We have often more of the stormy March than the showery April during this month. Indeed it is very variable in its characteristics, being sometimes dry, sometimes wet, and often exceedingly pleasant and seasonable. One feature, however, it always has,—it is far milder than March. The weather moderates but gradually from January to March, but in April it makes a sort of jump toward temperateness and geniality. One would scarcely think the advance toward summer so rapid as it really is in April, were it not for the testimony of the thermometer, for we have now and then chilly days which make us ask, when will the winter be over? But this is our impatience, as well as the natural effect of the fine, pleasant days we occasionally have, and which are so delightful that we naturally wish to have more of them. It will be interesting to compare the mean temperature

of April given below with the table for March, and to note the great progress indicated for the present month.

Stratford.....	44°55
Hamilton.....	46°04
Barrie.....	43°02
Toronto.....	43°90
Belleville.....	45°85
Montreal.....	41°80
Quebec.....	41°40
St. John. N.B.....	39°10
Halifax.....	40°00

We may mention that the past winter has been more than usually severe. The records of the Toronto Observatory show a lower average temperature for January and February than at any period during the last twenty-five years. On March 2nd, which will long be known as the cold March Monday of 1868, the thermometer stood at 15°06, a point never before touched in March during the period just named—twenty-five years. A steady cold winter is generally regarded as the precursor of an early spring, and a good season. When snow falls early and lies long, wheat, clover, the grasses, and vegetation generally, are well protected, and come out better in the spring than when we have mild turns, which melt off the snow and leave the surface of the ground exposed to alternations of freezing and thawing. In this respect our neighbours in the Province of Quebec have a great advantage; for though their winters are severe, they can always count on an early and abundant snow fall, so that often, perhaps generally, the frost penetrates to a less depth into the ground there, than it does in the milder Province of Ontario. This is one of nature's compensations, of which there are so many interesting examples in various parts of the globe.

It is almost too soon to speak with confidence as to the state of the fall wheat fields and meadows, as injury may yet be done, should the weather prove extreme; but so far we believe they promise well. Fruit, however, is thought to have sustained some damage by the keen frosts we have had. Peaches are said to be a failure in the Niagara District, though we should judge, from some intimations, not a total failure. Fruit growers in that region complain of a change in the seasons, so that they cannot count with the same confidence as formerly on a peach crop. May it not be want of shelter? The natural forest has disappeared; has it been replaced by evergreen belts and artificial groves? We fancy not. Bitter experience is teaching us that it will not do to strip the country naked. There is nothing equal to leafy shelter, and we must have it either naturally or artificially.

As already hinted, out-door work on the farm begins in earnest now. Attention to fences is one of the first things practicable. So long as we are obliged

to keep up our present system of fencing, this will be a serious tax on the time and means of the farmer. It should be a motto and maxim that every necessary fence is to be kept impregnable,—“man-high, bull-strong, and pig-tight,” as some one has tersely said. Board fences need looking after, and all loose or broken places made tight. Rail fences must be closely watched and kept in good repair. Let there be no shaky, weak-looking spots to invite attempts from breachy cattle. Next to the fences is the care of pastures and meadows. It is a great mistake, but one often committed, to let cattle and horses roam at will through the fields in early spring. *Cui bono?* Where's the good of it? If it be for exercise, the roads are better. As for food, they can get none of any account, while the wet, spongy ground is cut up by hoofs and iron shoes, to the great injury of grass roots. Pick stones from meadows, and roll them when the land is dry enough. It is desirable to get the land as level and smooth as possible. Seed bare spots afresh, top-dress with well rotted stable manure, sow plaster and artificial fertilizers. Ploughing is now the order of the day. Let it be deep and thorough. Take the best care possible of the teams. Feed well. Groom faithfully. Look out for harness galls and collar sores. Many a valuable animal is put to needless pain and rendered half useless by neglect, when the busy season comes on. It is easy, by passing the hand over breast, shoulder, and back, to find out if there is any sign of chafing, and it should be at once guarded against. It is a reproach to be caught working with a galled beast, for either cruelty or neglect are evinced thereby. Spring work should be pushed forward energetically. Much depends with some crops on getting them into the ground early. Especially is this the case with oats, barley and potatoes. A little tardiness is often dearly punished. Clover may be sown this month, either alone or on winter grain. It is a good time to pull out red root and cockle from among wheat. New milch cows and their calves, ewes and their lambs, must be well attended to, if they are to do well. Manure should be turned over, compost heaps made, and dung fit for use carted into the fields. Orchards should be pruned, fruit and shade trees planted, tent-caterpillar nests and other insect dangers rooted out. Garden as well as farm work begins in earnest this month. Hot-beds must not be deferred longer than the early part of this month. Early potatoes and peas must be planted, so soon as the ground is dry and mellow. Rake off the coarse litter from asparagus beds, fork in fine dung and dress with salt. Cold frames and hand glasses will be in requisition. Prune grape vines before the sap starts. Uncover strawberries, plant out grape, gooseberry, currant and other cuttings. Draining, manuring, path-making, transplanting and sowing, should be pushed on vigorously. Bee-keepers will need to see that their little insect friends have food enough this month.