

# Farmer's Advocate

## and Home Journal

REGISTERED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1875

December 25, 1907

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA.

Vol. XLII. No. 796

### EDITORIAL

#### A White Elephant.

Now that the ripple caused by the projection of the rural free delivery pebble upon the sea of Dominion politics has subsided, it is probable that that subject will remain dormant for a time. The fact of the matter is that the country is not ready for rural free delivery. There are too many other more important subjects that require the expenditure of all the money and energy available in the post office department. It will require the next twenty-five years to properly organize and equip the postal services in rural communities to give even ordinary satisfaction. At the present time there is no department of the administration that is in more need of improvement in detail than the post office department and to attempt to load it with a large undertaking is simply to make the present postal conditions even more bothersome.

These things are not realized by most of our Eastern M.P.'s who probably like most M.P.'s, are alert for the "main chance" irrespective of the welfare of the nation as a whole. A perusal of the resolutions passed at farmers' conventions the past few years both west and east should indicate what those most interested in rural delivery think of the scheme. Upon the subject there is silence. No one realizes more fully than the average farmer what an immense expense it would be to drive through the country delivering mail. It would undoubtedly be a great convenience but the cost of it would be altogether out of proportion to the benefits that would accrue. Let us have improvement in the postal department but let that improvement be steady and thorough.

#### Proving the Seed Supply.

A report of germinating tests of samples of western grain has been circulated widely throughout the country by the seed branch of the Dominion Department of Agriculture. The report needs to be read with extreme care. Reference is made to the percentage germination of frosted wheat and oats, from which it is inferred that frozen grain may be used for seed with a fair chance of success. The danger of this inference is that many men with seed frozen so badly that there is no possible hope of it producing a crop, may be induced to sow it. True a slight amount of frost does wheat very little and sometimes no harm, but we are not to assume by this that "frozen grain" will grow. Nor should the man who has to buy seed be misled by certificates of germination. Our notice has been called to a case of a man who tried to sell wheat, that could not possibly grade above two feed, for seed on the strength of a certificate he had obtained from the seed branch for a sample he had sent them, probably of last year's crop. The only safe thing to do is to test samples. It is a simple matter to place one hundred kernels between two pieces of flannel, keep it warm and moist for four days and then see what number had sprouted. And then it might be better longer to see what vitality and strength there might be in the germ. In the tests made by the Seed Branch the conclusion is emphatic that any seed that may be on hand from last year's crop should be utilized for seed this year. This is especially the case with oats.

Those who have had experience with frosted oats know the futility of sowing seed that is touched and how seriously a slight frost will damage oats. The 1907 oat crop has been badly damaged and we should not overlook it. It is a rare thing indeed to find oats that germinated as high as is ordinarily expected. The seed division offers the following suggestions for identifying frosted oats:

"Oats that have been killed by frost may be easily detected by separating out the kernel and examining the germ or embryo with the point of a pin. Good fresh live seed has an embryo of a pale yellowish tint, devoid of brownish coloration, and the kernel possesses considerable elasticity. The embryo of frosted seed presents a brownish discoloration and usually a dark threadlike streak below the embryo or germ. The kernel is more brittle and sweeter."

There are a lot of men who are fortunate in having oats left over from their 1906 crop and wherever possible these oats should be used for seed next spring. Oats from this year's crop should be well fanned before sowing even when they do appear to be a good sample. Each man will also have to decide for himself after testing how thick he should sow and provide his seed accordingly.

Another thing that will have to be guarded against is the danger of infection and pollution by weeds. It is unfortunate that seed will have to be distributed so widely but every one should do his best to minimize the evil by giving the seed he may have to buy an exceptionally thorough cleaning.

In connection with the report referred to the Seed Branch announces that its seed laboratories at Ottawa and Calgary will be devoted almost exclusively to the testing of samples of Western grain. These samples should be placed in strong cotton or paper bags, the name and address of the sender enclosed, and addressed to Seed Commissioner, Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, or from the Province of Alberta, to Seed Laboratory, Calgary. Samples addressed to Ottawa will be carried free by mail. Postage must be prepaid on all samples addressed to the Calgary laboratory.

#### What of our Seed?

As more definite reports of crop conditions are made public, it becomes evident that something must be done to distribute seed to those sections where frost did considerable damage last August. Present knowledge of the situation reveals the fact that there are whole districts that will have to get their seed wheat, oats and barley from outside. Some of the farmers in these districts are in a position to enter the open market and buy sufficient seed for their own requirement and in some cases will no doubt help their neighbors whom they care to befriend. Others apparently are contemplating sowing the best seed they can get in their neighborhood and to make up for the damage by frost will sow much thicker; others, and there is a large number of them, know no other apparent supply than very badly damaged seed which cannot possibly produce an ordinary crop. This is particularly true of oats and barley. Needless to say such a condition of affairs does not promise well for the season of 1908.

This question was discussed at the convention of agricultural societies at Regina where the general opinion seemed to prevail that officers of the Dominion Government should lend their assistance and the Government some financial aid in distributing seed. Provincial organizations, such as agricultural societies, might also co-operate in the work and it would not be out of place for the banks, railway companies and elevator companies to lend every possible assistance in getting seed distributed where it is needed. All these institutions are intensely

interested in the distribution of the wealth that the country produces but if there is a shortage in the wealth they will be among the first to suffer a set back. Just what part each should take in this work is the difficult matter to decide. Probably it would facilitate matters if representatives of the interests mentioned could get together and arrange some understanding. Each has command of certain facilities for the rapid and safe distribution of seed and if the whole were systematically organized a lot of land would be sown to crop that would otherwise be fallow and a lot of good seed would be used in place of that in which the vitality is destroyed. The case is urgent and by the beginning of the new year some definite action should be taken. It is a case of where work on the part of banks, elevator and railway companies and Governments would be repaid a hundred fold in a very short time, but for which little can be expected in the way of immediate returns.

#### Fakes or Fairs.

The Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture for Alberta dropped a bombshell into the quiet deliberations of Saskatchewan agricultural society delegates at Regina last week, when he blandly informed them that the agricultural fair as ordinarily conducted, so far as educational value was concerned, was a farce and a failure; that a good deal of Government aid granted to such was simply money wasted. Mr. Harcourt's criticism of existing conditions was severe, perhaps more so than circumstances warranted. His suggestions for the improvement of fairs were radical in the extreme, a good many of them altogether too revolutionary to be soon adopted, and yet there was more truth and good hard common sense in both his criticism of fairs and the remedies he recommended for their improvement, than has ever been given by an authority on these matters in this country before. His conclusions are founded on fair conditions as he finds them in his own province and as they exist in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It is an undoubted fact that with all the advancement made in agricultural educational methods during the past fifty or one hundred years,—and the fair is an educational institution, maintained for none other than educational purposes—the agricultural fair has been departing more and more from its true function, becoming weaker in the lines it was developed to work on and stronger in those features that amuse but do not instruct. No thinking man but knows that the farmer of the present day goes less to the fair to inspect the farm products and live stock exhibited there than he does to be entertained by the non-agricultural features, which the management partly for financial reasons, find it expedient to make a part of their show. What then is the remedy and how best may it be applied?

There is something in the charge that the fair is obsolete, and there is much in the argument that people regard it less and less as an educational institution. But are the remedies which Mr. Harcourt suggests workable and likely to improve matters? Frankly we believe that a good many of them are rather too revolutionary in character to be adopted entirely and at once, but we like the spirit of the whole article, the clear cut strain of originality that runs through it, and the unmistakeable desire to make every feature of the fair as strongly instructive as it is possible for an agricultural show to be.

Mr. Harcourt has given this matter of fair improvement considerable study and thought and his article should be carefully read. Our readers may not agree with him in all the sweeping changes he advocates in the prize lists and management of fairs. A good many of us despite this gentlemen's lucid arguments to