

Selected Articles.

FLAX CULTIVATION IN CANADA.

In the present aspect of affairs, attention is being turned to other staples than cotton for a supply of fibre suitable for textile fabrics. The soil and climate of Canada are well adapted to the cultivation of flax, and it is to this fibre-producing vegetable that the thoughts of farmers should now be directed. We intend to publish, in successive numbers of this journal, short articles* on the preparation of flax, leaving the details of its cultivation to the pages of the *AGRICULTURIST*, in which numerous articles on the preparation of the soil necessary for this valuable plant have already appeared, and which should be carefully studied by those who intend to grow it. As there are no other products of the farm which promise so fairly as the one under review, it is not improbable that flax cultivation may become general in Canada.

Sowing.

The seed generally preferred is Riga; it seems adapted to most soils. Dutch is occasionally used with great success; but the American seed does not generally suit well, being apt to produce a coarse, branchy stem, which skilful flax-growers aim against as much as possible. *A tall, tapering, firm stem, with few branches, and those not spreading, are considered good signs in a crop of flax.*

If the American seed be used, it should be sown in a deep, loamy soil. In selecting seed, care should be taken that it is plump, shining, and heavy; and if it be of foreign growth, the character of the merchant from whom it is purchased, and the brand by which its quality is known, ought both to be attended to. Care, as we have just observed, must be taken to have it well sifted, to clear it of the seeds of weeds which are often mixed with it, and which, if not removed, cause a great deal of subsequent labour when the crop is growing. The process of separation is generally effected by fanners and a wire-sieve, which has twelve bars to the inch. Home-saved seed is occasionally used, and produces excellent crops; but it is highly necessary to select a good quality, otherwise the result will be anything but favourable. The time, however, will come, it is to be hoped, when the bulk of home-raised seed can be used for sowing instead of foreign.

The produce of seed averages about twelve bushels the statute acre; so that the seed off one statute acre would sow about five. When flax is thinly sown it produces much seed; it is therefore better to sow thick, which causes, in general, the stem to grow tall and straight, with only one or two seed capsules at the top. The fibre is also much superior, in fineness and length, to that produced from thin sown flax, which grows coarse, branches out, and bears a great quantity of seed. Under good cultivation, after the ground is pulverized and well cleaned, it is rolled and sown; and,

if laid without ridges, it is marked off in divisions, eight to ten feet broad, in order to give an equitable supply of seed. After sowing, the ground is covered with a seed-harrow, which goes over it three times—once up, once down, and once across, or anglewise, in order that the seed should be equally spread, and the small drills made level by the teeth of the harrow. The ground is finished with a roller, which covers the seed about an inch, the depth generally considered the best for growing freely. When the ridges are too much raised in the centre, at the time of sowing, it is liable to injure the crop, preventing it from growing equally; but when the land is properly drained, no ridges are required. The sowing of clover and grass-seeds along with the flax is rarely considered judicious, and ought, if possible, to be avoided, as those plants injure the root-ends of the flax. Carrots are occasionally sown in drills, in suitable soils, which enables the individual pulling the flax to step over the rows, which are afterwards hoed and cleaned, and receive some liquid manure. In the case, however, of rolling the ground, after sowing, care should be taken not to roll when it is wet, as the mould is liable to stick to the roller.

Pulling.

The time for pulling the flax is a point of great importance. The fibre is in the best state before the seed is quite ripe. If pulled too soon, though the fibre be fine, there is great waste in scutching and hackling, which renders the crop unprofitable; and if pulled too late, the additional weight of the fibre rarely compensates for its coarseness. The best time for pulling, however, is when the seeds begin to change from a green to a pale brown, and the stalk to a yellow colour, to about two-thirds of its length. When any portion of the crop is lying, and suffering from wet, it should be pulled as soon as possible, and kept separate from the other. Whenever the flax is of unequal length, from the land being imperfectly drained and levelled before sowing, each length should be pulled separately, and steeped in a separate pool, or kept from the other in the same pool. If there be a large second growth, the flax should be caught by the puller just underneath the bolls, so as to leave the short stalks behind; and if there be not many of the latter, it is better to leave them on the ground, as the mixture and discoloration are apt to deteriorate the crop. If the ground has been thoroughly drained, and laid out evenly, the flax in general will be all of the same length; but it is necessary to keep the flax even at the roots, which increases its value both to the spinner and to the grower, and amply repays the trouble bestowed upon it.

Rippling.

The handfuls of flax, when pulled, should be laid across each other diagonally, to facilitate the process of rippling, which should be carried on at the same time, and in the same field. Rippling the flax not only renders it easier to be handled, but saves the seed, which is a valuable portion of the crop. If the seed be sold for the oil, it realizes about £3 to the acre; but if used for feeding purposes, it is worth about £4. The ripple is composed of a row of iron teeth, screwed into a block of wood; when used, it is taken to the field where the flax is pulled, and screwed down to the centre of a nine-foot plank, resting on two stools.

* Richardson's Rural Handbooks.