

Special Contributors.

A Chatty Letter from the States.

(FROM OUR CHICAGO CORRESPONDENT.)

There is a good deal of complaint among the farmers of the States just now about the lack of profit in nearly all branches of their work, but there is really more complaint than is warranted by the situation. They have been accustomed to have such wide margins that they have in many cases not been compelled to exert every effort and employ every resource in order to reap fair profits. When necessity does call for closest management, the "times" are blamed for being dull. But then it is true that prices have lately been comparatively very low.

Speaking of low prices: The Jim River valley in Dakota, which has been noted for its richness as a wheat country, is being converted, in large part, into a stock or mixed farming country. Last year, for instance, farmers who sowed 500 acres of wheat, will this year put at least half of it into corn to feed to the stock. The late prices for wheat have not paid the growers, and they cannot be blamed for wanting to divide their attention between crops, all of which can hardly fail.

As a general thing it has been pretty clearly demonstrated that no matter how safe may seem a certain kind of crop or crops, it is always better for a farmer to raise a little stock. Without raising stock the substance of the farms is exhausted too soon, and it becomes necessary to resort to commercial fertilizers or permit the ground to be impoverished a little more each year. Cows, pigs, and a few sheep ought to be found on nearly every farm. They utilize much that would otherwise be wasted, and furnish a reliable source of income.

The severity of the past winter, which greatly reduced the profits of stock feeders, has been followed by an unusually cold and late spring. It was generally thought that the natural compensation for a hard winter would be an early bursting of buds and springing of grass; but these hopes have been dashed. With a heavy snow and freezing weather in the middle of the spring season, the much wanted grass was held in check, and full winter feeding had to be kept up by farmers for several weeks longer than usual, thus making the production of live stock more troublesome and costly than it is wont to be in ordinary years. All farm work is of course delayed, and those luckless, careless farmers, who are seldom ready to commence a given work until it ought to have been well under way, are considerably behind in their spring work.

It is surprising to see to what extent the centre of fine stock supplies has moved westward in the last few years. Take it five years ago; if a man wanted to buy thoroughbred Shorthorns, and lived anywhere west of Illinois, he only knew one place where they could be had, and that was in Kentucky. The great blue grass State was for many years the chief source of the best cattle, as well as of other kinds of live stock, but now the buyers of the west are beginning to think that it is not necessary to come this side of the Mississippi, as they can get very good stock well west of that historic stream. Missouri, Iowa, and Kansas are rapid-

ly growing out of the habit of replenishing their herds from old Kentucky, as they have in late years bought so many fine animals that the seeds are now being sown broadcast, and they expect rather within the next few years to have cattle to sell to those who remain in what were once the hot beds of fine stock.

Even Colorado and Nebraska, and some of the Territories, are beginning to raise fine bulls to supply the western range trade, offering the not inconsiderable inducement that the stock does not have to undergo any acclimatization.

The assertion was made to the writer a short time since, by one of the oldest stockmen at the Chicago market, that there are not now as many good cattle in proportion to the whole number raised in Illinois as there were a score of years ago. To be sure there are many more extra good cattle in the State now than ever before, but he claims that the proportion of good cattle prepared for market in the State is growing smaller rather than larger. The reason he gives for this is that the feeders of the "sucker" State do not depend as of old on raising their own cattle, but buy all their feeding cattle chiefly outside of the State, and largely from the sections to the north, where the calves are raised on skim milk, and are large bel-lies. It is claimed that feeders cannot afford to raise their own young cattle when their acreage is limited and land is worth \$40 to \$85 per acre. This may all be very true, but one thing is certain: it does not pay for feeders to put their time and money and high priced grain into inferior cattle. There is a saying that the breed does not matter much if there is a good man to look well to the feed. This may be true to a large extent, but it is usually poor policy for owners of high-priced lands to buy the so-called cheap cattle to feed and care for. It is not consistent.

The amount of change that is going on in the sources of supplies as well as demands of trade is truly wonderful. The tastes and habits of the people are changing. The Americans are now growing more and more to be mutton eaters. It is true that as yet they do not have a great deal of very choice mutton to eat, but the grade has improved very remarkably with in the past few years. It is well that there is a better home demand for sheep, because the advent of the Australian frozen mutton trade in Britain offers a competition that cannot be met by the American exporters.

Producers are almost each year confronted with some new difficulty in the shape of new sources of supply, or adulterations of products, etc., which call for closer margins of profit. There is a continual pressure brought to bear on producers, and it behooves them to be sharply on the lookout for changes. A farmer or stockman to be up with the times these days is compelled to watch his chances closely and make the very most that is possible out of every resource at hand.

The southwestern sheep raiser can no longer grow wool and utterly disregard the mutton possibilities of his sheep. The profits on wool are too slender to stand that, and so he is now looking for sheep that will yield a good fleece and then convert into mutton.

Prices for fine breeding stock have been somewhat lower than growers have expected, and in some cases stock has been withdrawn from sale on that account, but as a rule the decline in

prices for fine breeding stock is not greater than the shrinkage in values for other kinds of stock and farm products, unless one dates from the boom prices of two or three years ago on certain strains.

Now is certainly the time for stockmen to improve their herds if they ever intend to do so, as it is the opinion of good judges that while the day of exorbitant prices for fine stock may be over, good useful animals of reliable strains are not likely to be any cheaper than at present.

What is Agricultural Science?

BY MARSHFIELD.

An agricultural writer having recently asserted that science is truth, is my apology for inflicting this article upon your readers. If agricultural science is truth, we cannot have too much of it, and the more it disorganizes practice the better.

Several years ago neighbor Jenkins settled in our locality, and upon his arrival the report soon spread that he came from "down below." Many farmers in the neighborhood, myself included, took a bad meaning out of this phrase, but as soon as it became known that one of the remote eastern counties was meant, all fear was dissipated, even from the minds of the wives and children. Jenkins seemed to have had a mission—that of an agricultural reformer, and he preached the "down below" principles of farming just as vigorously as he practiced them. That neighbor Jenkins had more style in his methods than his backwood comrades was true, and those of us who regarded him as an oracle promptly fell into his system. But before many years had elapsed Jenkins and his adherents were forced to adopt the *up above* principles of farming; and even to-day, when he is twitted about his foreign methods, he good-naturedly replies, "All depends upon circumstances."

This lesson proved to be of more practical value to us all than anything we had previously read in agricultural papers. Since the occurrence of this episode, we, as neighbors, learned much from one another; but the experience of farmers in other localities, as published in the papers, we have always been willing to accept under the limitation that "All depends upon circumstances."

Now agricultural science is the offspring of experiments conducted at the stations of different countries. One experiment usually proves nothing, for several, conducted under the same conditions, often produce conflicting results. Let us suppose that an experiment is repeated a thousand times, and that in a large majority of instances the results have been identical, then there is strong presumptive evidence of the truth or falsity of the theories originally advanced; but the practical utility of the truth established, which may now be called science, is restricted to farmers who either labor under exactly the same conditions, or know to what extent the other stated conditions affect its validity. This brings us to the most vital questions of the issue: Who shall now decide how many experiments are required to break down the theory, if false, and establish the truth? Who will assert that all the principles upon which the experiment was based are sound? Who will deny that a multitude of theories have