

FARM AND FIELD.

WALKS AND TALKS AMONG THE FARMERS.—NO. VI.

It is now the time of year for farm auctions, which have become established and important institutions in most parts of Canada. They serve other purposes in addition to the disposal of stock and implements. The auction sale is a sort of farmers' holiday. It is timed at a period of comparative leisure. The crops are in, with the exception of the apple and roots, the fall ploughing is well on, and the cattle are not yet tied in for winter feeding. One can have a social chat with a large number of his neighbours, without much loss of time, by attending a farm sale, and may possibly pick up a bargain or two besides. These occasions are also indications of the state of agriculture. If the price of produce is low, it affects the bidding, while, if the general agricultural market is booming, the auction will boom too. Moreover, these gatherings of farmers are opportunities for the discussion of public questions. They are informal town meetings, at which there is a free and easy expression of opinion on subjects of general interest.

In all really good farming districts, old style implements and poor stock go begging at these sales, even when offered with the inducement of twelve months' credit. So far as implements are concerned, this is often carried to an extreme. At a recent sale, a Scotch plough, rather out of style and the worse of wear, of course, sold for fifty cents. It was worth four or five times that amount for the iron that was in it. An old country two share plough, heavy enough to require three horses to pull it, but capable of doing excellent work, sold for three dollars. Its original cost was upwards of thirty, and it had been but little used. The iron stock in it was worth at least ten dollars. A sulky rake, a little out of fashion, but capable of doing good work, sold for five dollars. A grain drill in fair condition, but not of the latest style, went for ten dollars yet would do nearly if not quite as good work as a new one costing eight times that sum. Young farmers who are crippled for want of capital, might often get an implement that would serve them for two or three years, perhaps more, at a small figure, giving them time to husband their means. But they must have the best at the risk of being laden with debt. The ambition to get the best is all very well if one can afford it, but it is worth some self denial to achieve pecuniary independence. It is the bane of too many farmers that they are always encumbered with debt.

The indisposition to buy poor stock is to be commended. An implement not quite up to the work of the latest improvement, may yet be a profitable thing, but inferior animals are always unprofitable, and should be kept on the farm with the same vigilance as burglars and tramps. I called the other day on a thrifty old farmer, and found he had gone to a sale of stock not far distant. Over a hundred head of cattle, chiefly one and two year olds, were advertised, and my friend thought he might get some worth putting up for winter feeding. He returned very soon after my arrival, and said there was nothing there he cared to bid on. He saw none worth tying in the stall. There was no breeding in them. They had been picked up on speculation in—, meaning a part of the country notoriously behind in stock improvement, and he doubted if the buyer would make his own out of them. They were not fit for this locality. Undersized, unthrifty, badly-bred, there was no money in them, especially in the present state of the meat market. But, at

another recent sale of thorough-bred and high grade animals, good prices were offered for the entire lot, while individuals of special merit went high, some young bulls and heifers bringing as much as \$800 a piece. Poor stock is doomed to extinction in "this Canada of ours," and it is well that all concerned should "make a note on't," and act accordingly.

It has been too much the custom in the past to provide free drinks at farm sales, and often under their influence, there has been, in more senses than one, spirited bidding. Buyers have lost their heads under the influence of alcohol, got up senseless competitions, and paid too much for purchases. It is worthy of notice that John Barleycorn has been "hoist with his own petard" in connection with some country customs. Formerly liquor was provided at raisings and threshings, but so many accidents occurred that were directly traceable to its influence, that, as a precautionary measure, it is now generally banished on these occasions. Said an old farmer the other day, "I was at a threshing once and saw a man lose his arm through being partially intoxicated, and I vowed thenceforth, never to have strong drink at a threshing of mine, nor to let my sons attend one at which it was provided." There are still some farmers who furnish "free drinks" at sales, but they are of "the barser sort." The intelligent bone and sinew of the country feel that business done under the stimulus of alcohol, would be better left undone.

I have attended some of these farm sales during the present fall, and have been struck with the prominence of the Scott Act as a topic of discussion. It has appeared to be the question of the hour. The fact that this Act is being voted on here and there partly explains the interest taken in it, but does not fully account for the upheaval of the public mind in relation to the liquor traffic. That, as now carried on, is a national curse, is pretty generally admitted, even by those who are not ready to cry out. "O reform it altogether!" At a sale which I attended the other day, an old and well-to-do farmer whom I have repeatedly seen "slightly elevated," if not more, by alcoholic stimulants, astonished me by exclaiming. "Well I'm going to vote for the Scott Act when I get the chance. I don't exactly like it, I think it goes too far, but I like the license system far less. Why, it's a constant temptation to drink. It lures our boys into the way that leads to drunkenness. If we want the next generation to be soberer than this, we must do something, and the Scott Act is our only alternative in the meantime. Let us pass it, and then mend it, until we get it right." I think this man voiced a very prevalent state of mind among the moral population of Canada. There are many who are not prepared to adopt the principle of total abstinence, are not converts to the theory of prohibition, and will not sign a petition for the submission of the Scott Act who will nevertheless vote for its passage, impelled by a sense of their duty to do something to check intemperance, and egged on by the fact that this is the only remedial measure to which under existing circumstances, we can have recourse. It was noticeable that at the sale in question, the present license system had scarcely a defender, although there were many present who were known to be what is called "moderate drinkers." There is no class of people who suffer more injury from the treating system than farmers. Many who are usually sober, almost invariably get more or less intoxicated when they go to market in the adjacent country town. They meet their acquaintances, are urged to take "a social glass," one and another treat, and the result is inebriety. Treating is the inseparable

concomitant of the liquor traffic as now carried on and any law that will abolish it will be an incalculable gain to the farming community. It will benefit all classes of people, and none more than the agricultural class. W. F. O.

MARKETING THE WHEAT CROP.

Growing large crops is doubtless the most important part of farming, but a good deal depends in these days in knowing how to dispose of them to the best advantage when grown. On this subject there is comparatively little in agricultural journals, and that little is mainly summed up in the advice of commercial papers to sell just as quickly as the crop is ready to market. Farmers do not follow this advice, and taking everything into consideration it is quite as well that they do not. The granaries and elevators of our large cities could not begin to hold the five hundred millions of bushels that will be threshed and stored between this and December. Europe could not take it except at such immense reductions in price as would be ruinous to the seller. Somebody must hold at least a part of it. We believe in many, and probably in most cases, the producer is better able to do this than anybody else.

Wheat is now lower in price than it has been at this season in many years. It is true a large crop is in sight, but supplies on hand all over the world are rather smaller than usual. The large crop has been pretty freely discounted by speculators already, and there is little probability of a very heavy decline from present low prices. If farmers who can do so should hold back their wheat until after the first of January, it is pretty certain that prices must harden. There are many more contingencies looking toward higher prices than there are for lower rates for this important crop.

In the first place wheat is one of the cheapest, as it is acknowledged to be the best, of the cereal foods in all parts of the world. Many more people are now using wheaten bread than ever before. It is in some parts of our country used as food for stock, and when it gets on this basis there is no limit to the amount that we can consume without relying on export for a market. Should wheat go lower still than now, farmers would at once stop selling and begin to feed to hogs in place of corn. This may be fairly called "rock bottom" in estimating values for wheat.

The corn crop is not secure and in many places there have already been frosts that will considerably shorten the yield. These are not localities where much is produced beyond the requirements of home consumption; but it will require considerable corn from other places to make good losses in this crop already incurred. It is certain that with good weather the next three weeks we shall not have such abundance of corn as to make it very cheap. If frost comes before the 20th of September we shall have a deficiency and at least fair prices. All this cannot fail to have its effect on the market for wheat and other grains.

It is more difficult to make people believe in the possibility of better prices for wheat, because with a deficient harvest a year ago we had last season a nearly constant decline through fall, winter, spring and summer. Prices were kept down by the fact that there was a large amount of old wheat left over, and by the further fact that the crop of 1883 was of poor quality as well as deficient in quantity. Neither of these causes operate now. There is little or no wheat in farmers' hands of the old crop, and what they have of now is so plump and good that it will easily grade No. 1. It is good wheat to keep, while last year's wheat was good neither to keep nor to sell. Another reason why those who conveni-