

CULTIVATION OF FLAX.

BY J. A. DONALDSON.

Government Emigration Agent, Toronto.

The importance of the cultivation of this valuable plant in Canada has, of late years, occupied a large share of my attention, more especially since the failure of the Wheat crop, which has unfortunately become so general. It will be acknowledged by all that agriculture and home commerce are the pillars of national prosperity; and when success attends the plough, the labourer and the artisan are employed. In proportion as agriculture is depressed, all the dependent branches of trade suffer; and Canada being entirely an agricultural country, and labouring at present under great depression, universally acknowledged to be from the general failure of the wheat crop, it behoves, not only the farmer, but every member of the community, to apply himself and see if some remedy cannot be found, that may in some measure meet this serious evil. The farmer is recommended to try many other descriptions of crops. Among these, hemp and tobacco present themselves.—Both, no doubt, can be cultivated to great advantage, but flax has already been introduced to a very considerable extent, and for the benefit of those who may not have given this valuable crop a share of their attention, it may be as well to state, as an inducement to others to follow the example, that not less than eight to ten thousand acres were devoted to this crop in Upper Canada last year, and a number of enterprising parties have embarked not only in its cultivation, but in manufacturing the raw material into manufactured goods fit for consumption in our own country.

The Messrs. Perine Bros. & Co., of Doon, whose operations extend nearly throughout the County of Waterloo, distributed seed to the farmers for sowing to the extent of nearly three thousand acres last year. Colonel Mitchell of Norval, County of Halton, also furnished seed to a large number of farmers in his neighbourhood. Parties desirous of going into the cultivation or manufacture of this product, would do well to visit one or other of these establishments. At St. Mary's, St. Thomas, Elora, Stratford, London, Woodstock, Goderich, Weston, Whitby, Uxbridge, Cobourg, Belleville, Kingston, Brockville, Mirrickville, Newcastle, Matilda, and many other places, a good beginning has been made. Linen manufactories are also springing up. This branch of enterprise is certainly the greatest boon of all to this country, converting as it does, the raw material into manufactured goods of a description so much in common use in Canada, such as linen for bagging, brown holland, drills, toweling, bed ticking, shoe threads, saddlers' threads, wrapping twine,

and cordage of every description. All these articles have hitherto been largely imported, and we have been paying upon them a duty of twenty per cent.

Cottonizing the fibre is also engaging the attention of the skillful artisan. This process may be seen at the Doon mills. A two-fold benefit will arise from the production of this new class of goods. First, it will take the place of cotton batting, which, like all articles of that class, is at war prices. Secondly the farmer will be relieved of the most objectionable part of the labour which attends flax,—that of pulling, as it can be cottonized when taken from the field in any shape, without regard to its being made into sheaves, as is required if used for scutching, and producing a fibre fit for spinning into yarn.

While endeavouring as briefly as possible to point out the most economical and profitable mode of cultivation and after treatment of the flax crop, it is necessary to caution parties intending to give the new product a trial, not to expect too much at least for the first year. In order to success, the directions about to be given must be carefully observed. If they cannot in all cases be followed to the letter, beginners should keep as near them as possible. At the same time, there can be little doubt that experience from year to year will enable the farmer to make many improvements on the rules herein laid down. This has been the case in all flax growing countries, and Canada will hardly prove an exception.

I will now proceed to point out the description of soil best calculated for a crop of flax. All parties that have written on this subject are of opinion that a good clay subsoil, with a friable deep loam, is the best for this plant; but I have seen it grown in Ireland on almost every description of land. My belief is that in every county in Canada there are large tracts well adapted for flax. All the valleys along the rivers are admirably suited to its growth. Mr. Beck of Baden, County of Waterloo, where a scutching mill has long been established, sowed flax three successive years on a piece of rich flat near his mill, and the crop produced the last year was the best of the three.—In order however to succeed in getting a good crop on any land, parties must not imagine for a moment that they can dispense with careful attention and thorough cultivation. The land should be well ploughed in the fall, twice if necessary, taking care in every case to pick off all the weeds or roots that may in any way obstruct the growth of the plant. After a preparation of this kind, when the land is in good tilth, many prefer sowing on the winter face, but at any rate a light ploughing will answer in the spring, or the application of the cultivator. Before sowing you require to harrow well with a heavy harrow; next the surface should be rolled;

then pass a light harrow on the land; and lastly roll again. Let the ridges be as wide as possible, with as few furrows as can be made, since the flax is likely to be of unequal lengths when there are many furrows. With regard to the time for sowing, about the tenth of May is the best time ordinarily, but this is a point to be determined by the season and the state the land is in. Weeds are among the the worst enemies we have to contend with in the culture of this crop, but we do not suffer so much in Canada in this respect as do cultivators in many other flax growing countries. Vegetation is so much quicker with us, that if the crop is got in in good season, the flax plant comes on so rapidly that it outgrows the weeds, chokes them down, and renders them of such a delicate nature as not to injure the fibre to any extent when prepared for scutching.

It is often asked, Will it do to seed down with flax? This has often been done to great advantage, and some of the most experienced agriculturists prefer it, as they maintain the clover plant is moulded by the pulling of the flax. Those who have not tried it have fears that the young clover plant will be pulled with the flax.—This is not the case, however, for, as all farmers are aware, clover has a very long root, and is difficult to pull out of the ground. This is a matter for the agriculturist to experiment on for himself, and settle to his own satisfaction. In Ireland, land is considered best for a flax crop when it has been many years either in meadow or grass. It is usual, after breaking up, first to take off a crop of oats, and then sow flax. This will be found to answer well in this country, but it must not be forgotten that flax must not be sown the same year land has been heavily manured. After turnips, potatoes, or any root crop, the best crop of flax is likely to be had; or when a crop of fall wheat has been killed by the frost early in the spring, with careful cultivation, if the land is clean, a good crop of flax may be expected.

Before leaving this part of the subject, I would venture a suggestion from a fact that came under my notice last year.—While passing a field of Mr. Howland's, near Dundas street, which had been sown with turnips, I observed that the crop looked remarkably well, except about two acres which had been so completely destroyed by the army worm, that not a leaf was to be seen. This was about the latter end of June or beginning of July. It occurred to me whether a crop of flax could not be had on this ground. It might be worth a trial in such cases. If a crop of fibre could not be had, half a crop of seed might be obtained. As flax only requires from eighty to ninety days in the ground to come to perfection, it might be worth a trial under such circumstances.

We now come to the pulling, the great bugbear with most of the farmers. I only