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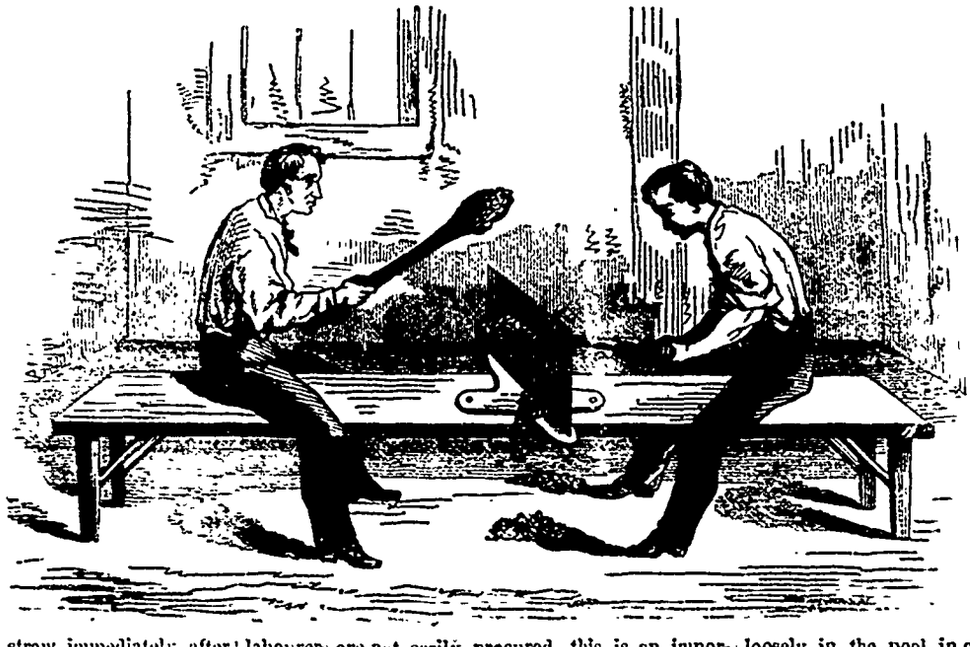
The Field.

The Harvesting and After-Treatment of Flax.

THE leading points to be observed in the successful culture of the flax plant, have been pretty elaborately set forth in the articles and communications on the subject, which from time to time have appeared in our columns. If these instructions have been carefully observed, by those of our readers who have sown a patch this season, their labour can hardly have failed to be rewarded by a fine vigorous crop. We have seen a variety of samples, ranging from forty-six to fifty inches in length, in which the fine clean stalk and well-bolled head plainly showed that nothing beyond careful harvesting, at the proper time, and subsequent judicious treatment were wanting to render the flax crop in this country a profitable one. In order to obtain the maximum return from this crop, it is necessary that both the seed and the fibre should be turned to the best account. The rich nutritive qualities of the former are well known, and the producer cannot use it to better advantage than for purposes of stock-feeding. Linseed in any, and every form, constitutes a valuable and healthy cattle food. Given in moderation with other fodder, it promotes the production of fat and muscle, and preserves a healthy action of the bowels. In districts where flax manufacture has been commenced, there will be little difficulty in disposing of the straw immediately after the crop has been harvested, if such a course is desired. But in localities remote from a manufactory the want of an available market that would ensure to the producer a remunerative price for his straw, is likely to limit the cultivation of this important staple for some time to come. Since the large proportion of nearly 1,500 lbs. in every ton is all but useless, it is obvious that it will not bear the expense of exportation in bulk, to any great distance. Consequently if there is to be a market for the straw in its crude state it must be a home market where the producer and consumer will be brought together. This desirable consummation may be eventually realized. In the meantime, however, it is desirable that our farmers should essay the steeping and scutching themselves. The much reduced bulk of the cleansed fibre might then be forwarded like wool to any destination. Indeed whether the producer be situated near to, or remote from, a flax mill, we are inclined to the opinion that, in all cases where practicable, it would be the most profitable course to scutch the flax before it is marketed. Moreover, fibre could then be submitted to market competition, and its value determined by its quality and absence of impurities, like other agricultural products. Without further urging this point, we will briefly describe the treatment of the crop from the time that it is removed from the ground until it is ready for the manufacturer.

PULLING. It is generally admitted that hand pulling is the only satisfactory method of harvesting the flax crop, when the fibre is intended for spinning purposes. Modern ingenuity has been repeatedly directed to the construction of a machine which would efficiently perform this operation. In this country, where farm-labourers are not easily procured, this is an important desideratum, and one which we hope some inventive Canadian mechanic will ere long supply.



RIPPLING. This operation is frequently performed in the field. The handfuls of pulled flax are laid across each other diagonally, so as to be ready for rippling, previous to its being bound up in sheaves. There is a saving of trouble and expense by causing this important operation to go on at the same time as the pulling, while the sheaves are, of course, more easily handled when the seed-bolls are removed. The ripple consists of a block of wood, into which a row of iron teeth about 18 inches long are inserted. The teeth should be formed of half-inch square rods of iron, placed with the angles of iron next the ripplers, 3-16ths of an inch asunder at the bottom, and tapering to half an inch at the top. The construction of the ripple and the mode of using it are well shown in our first illustration. A winnowing sheet should be placed under, to receive the bolls as they are struck off. When flax is removed from the field to the barn before it is rippled, the straw becomes dry and rigid by keeping. In this case the seed-bolls are best separated by a "beater." A sheaf of flax is divided into two, spread out, and laid on the barn floor with the two head ends together, and then beaten with flat headed mallets. By this means the seed vessels are broken, and the seeds fall out. It is, of course, requisite that a little caution be exercised lest the fibre be broken or injured by unnecessarily rough treatment.

The subsequent processes have for their object, the separation of the fibre from the stalk. For this purpose it is necessary to remove the gummy and resinous matter, by which the fibres are glued together in the bark of the plant. Partial rotting or decomposition, either by steeping or dew-rotting, is produced to effect this result. Each of these processes we will now succinctly describe.

WATERING OR STEEPING.—"This process requires the greatest care and attention. River water is the best. If spring water must be used, let the pond be filled some weeks before the flax is put in, that the sun and air may soften the water. That containing iron or other mineral substances should never be used. If river water can be had, it need not be let into the pond sooner than the day before the flax is to be steeped. The best size of a steep pool is 12 to 18 feet broad, and 3½ to 4 feet deep. Place the flax loosely in the pool, in one layer, somewhat sloped, and in regular rows, with the root end underneath the tie of each row of sheaves to reach the root of the previous one; cover with moss sods, or tough old lea sods, cut thin, laid perfectly close, the sheer of each fitted to the other. Before putting on the sods, a layer of rushes or ragweeds is recommended to be placed on the flax, especially in new ponds. As sods are not always at hand, a light covering of straw may do, with stones laid on it, so as to keep the flax just under the water; and as the fermentation proceeds additional weight should be laid on—to be removed as soon as the fermentation ceases, so as not to sink the flax too much in the pool. Thus covered, it never sinks to the bottom, nor is affected by air or light. A small stream of water, allowed to run through a pool,