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July

The Warning of the Wind!

1918

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ONCE upon a time, in a class of youngsters, the word "intangible" came up. They were a bright little lot of boys and girls, and if their vocabulary of big words was somewhat restricted, it was evident from the answers some of them gave, or tried to give, that they "knew" all right if they couldn't express it. "It's something you can't feel or take hold of," one little maid suggested, and then the teacher, very nearly to his own discomfiture, asked: "Is the wind intangible?" The question brought things to a deadlock, which at last was forced by the ubiquitous Billy Jones answering bravely: "No, Sir!" "Why, Billy?" "Well, Sir, you know them oats that father sowed on last year's summerfallow? Well, there ain't none left—the wind took hold of them."

Very few people who have lived in or travelled over Western Canada this year will fail to grasp the significance of this boy's observation on the oat crop that *wasn't*. Wind-storms and soil drifting have been among the commonest experiences of prairie life, but this year, as it happens, they have been abnormally severe in particular districts. And those particular districts are localities in which the soil is unusually light, sandy, or of so fine a texture that it seems to have no "binding" quality. What the actual damage will mean in the aggregate we cannot say, but to many individuals it will spell a clean sweep of the season's crop. Mere comments are useless, and we are not in a position to give advice because we make it a rule never to advise on a subject about which we are hopelessly ignorant.

There is a mass of material on soil drifting on file in every collection of "clippings," but the spring of 1918 has demonstrated in the most depressing manner how valueless all this must be if the information or advice it contains has been carried out in practice. If it has (which is doubtful), then something more has got to be found out. Is the annual recurrence of soil-blowing at seeding time and before the blade has got a sufficient start something that can be overcome, or is the soil of the affected districts like the wind itself—something that is utterly beyond the control of human effort? From observation and the statements of men who have suffered, who have experimented and won out, we dare to say that at least the greater part of the mischief can be arrested.

We submit this, however, with extreme deference, because the little we know is comparatively so very little, we dare not

say that it can be the general experience. It is a matter on which experience and counsel is earnestly sought, and there is "good money" and far more in human gratitude coming to the man who can give some reasonable solution of this most serious problem. We get complaints from friends who have successfully met the case, so they had hoped, on their own farms, but the next-door neighbor hadn't tried. He left the gate open, so to speak, and when the wind came, it blew his soil on top of "next door and a bit beyond." Some co-operative effort surely can do something towards pinning the soil down to its own section.

But the warning of the wind is many-sided, and one phase of it points distinctly to the necessity on the part of the affected districts of raising more live stock. It was our lot this season to spend a few days in the very heart of the light soil portion of Manitoba, when the wind was doing its very worst. The day of the plowing match at Beresford, for example, would give a fair idea of what a free conference of wind and soil could accomplish, and one could well imagine "the devil was in the wind that day." And it wasn't the first day, nor was it the worst day of the season.

And yet, in the midst of all the tornado, and within close range of its worst effects, there were men who had suffered—in many years—but who looked on calmly and undismayed; who did not whine about their own losses, but had a "tear in the eye and a sob in the throat" as they referred to what it must mean to some of their neighbors. But then, you see, those men had learned in time that in farming anywhere, but especially in Western Canada, it is an extremely risky thing to carry all one's eggs in one basket. They had a fine herd of pure-bred cattle, and in one case a choice flock of prolific "Shropshires," who are by no means over-dainty or expensive boarders. It is a benediction of satisfaction and new hope to spend a day on the farms of these men—to spend one hour in their inspiring presence.

We are seeking for information—from any one who has really made an effort, abortive or otherwise, to "fix" the soil at blowing-time. Whatever means you have employed, let the country have your experience. Write in the crudest form if you can't write in any other way. It isn't fine epistles we ask for or expect, but plain facts from actual experience, set out in that language you can most effectively use—short of swearing.

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