THE POTATO ROT—ITS CAUSE AND REMEDIES.

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The use of the microscope in the fields of scientific research has revealed much that is of importance to man. Many forms of disease, about whose origin little was known, have had much light shed upon them since this instrument was employed in their study, both among animals and plants. We find now that man is constantly lashed by invisible foes—some attacking himself and others the food which he eats. During the past summer and fall a striking example of this occurred in the prevalence of the so-called "potato rot," which has proved a great loss throughout the Province and in many parts of the United States. In the bulletin issued in November from the Bureau of Industries, we learn that the "rot" prevailed throughout the whole southern belt of the Province. In many cases one-half to three-fourths of the crop was destroyed, and in some it was not worth digging. With such disaster around us, the questions are naturally suggested, what is the cause of the "rot," and what remedies can be adopted?

Cause.—This disease has received a great deal of attention from botanists since the days when it became a scourge in Ireland and other parts of the British Isles; and it is now conceded to be the result of a minute fungus, *Phytophthora infestans*. This attacks all parts of the plant—leaf, stem and tubers. By those ignorant of the life history of this tiny parasitic plant little attention is paid to its appearance on the tops, and no alarm is experienced until the potatoes are affected. But being very contagious, its presence on the leaves should become a serious matter, especially when we remember that it spreads with great rapidity. It is usually indicated by the tops presenting a blotched, brownish, spotted, dead appearance. A close examination of the potatoes showing this will discover innumerable slender stems growing up out of the surface of the leaves and stems of the affected plants. These branch and swell out at the ends into pear-shaped minute bodies (spores), which are produced by millions. When ripe they separate from the stem and being exceedingly light pass into the atmosphere, where they are wafted about, many of them finally reaching the ground or settling upon plants. Under favourable conditions of moisture and heat, the contents of a microscopic spore may push out a long minute tube, which can penetrate into any part of the potato plant, and give rise to the fungus; or may separate into several distinct portions (swarm spores) which burst though the spore-wall and become the source of the parasitic plant. The mature plant which lives in the tops and tubers is very minute, and can be seen only by the aid of the microscope. It consists of many colourless, branching, thread-like structures. These penetrate the tissues of the potato and feed upon the juices, so that it soon weakens and begins to waste away. From the thread-like structures tiny stalks arise, assuming beautiful plant-like forms and bearing upon their branches the spores already referred to. They live but a short time, but the thread-like structure is perennial and hardy, and from fragments of it new fungi may arise. It is said by some that another kind of spore is produced which can winter, and thus give rise to the organism in another season. These are the so-called resting spores, apparently for the purpose of keeping the species over certain periods, while the spores already considered are produced rapidly, so as to hasten the spread of the fungus under favourable conditions. This minute microscopic plant is certainly a low form of vegetable life, incapable of manufacturing food from the mineral kingdom, but fastening upon other plants and feeding upon their juices. A wet season supplies conditions well adapted for its development, and hence we find the "rot" associated with such weather. There is no doubt that many spores are always more or less present, but they are prevented from being a source of trouble, because the weather is not suited for their growth.

Remedies.—The "rot" usually appears about the first two weeks in August, and if the weather is favourable its spread is very rapid, for as soon as the thread-like structure which arises from the spore is developed, it immediately becomes spore-bearing. Hence the importance of examining the plants for the appearance of the brownish spots that indicate the presence of the fungus.

1. As soon as discovered, dig the potatoes. Delay will allow it to spread to the stems, and thence to the tubers. If it reaches these and damp weather comes, "rot" will certainly appear.

2. After digging, the potatoes should be put in a cool, dry place, thus surrounding them with conditions unfavourable for the growth of the fungus, if any happens to be upon them.

3. Growing early varieties is worthy of consideration, so that they may mature before the season arrives when this parasite is likely to affect the crop.

4. All potato stalks, in affected lands, should be gathered and burned, so as to destroy the millions of spores which may be upon them.

5. Use none but good seed. If at all affected, reject them; and plant in well-drained land. If the potatoes to be used for seed have been taken from cellars where affected ones were kept, they are likely to have the microscopic spores on them and escape notice. It would be best to get seed from unaffected districts.

6. It is scarcely necessary to remark that it would be injudicious to plant potatoes in the same field the following year, after a visitation of the "rot," inasmuch as the ground may retain the germs of the disease.

7. Avoid planting upon heavy clay soil, but prefer a light and dry soil. This presents the fewest conditions suitable for the growth of the fungus.

The nature of our climate is not so favourable for the development of this injurious fungus as that of Britain; yet as we are sometimes visited by it, and although scarcely viewed as a scourge, it is well that we should remember its nature and habits, and always be ready to guard against failure if it appears. As last summer was favourable for its propagation, great care should be exercised in the selection of seed this spring.