

JOHN JOHNSTON OF GENEVA.

The *Country Gentleman*, of January 16th, gives a portrait and memoir of this distinguished agriculturist, from which the *Globe* makes the following collations, mainly to show young farmers how much can be gained by bringing brain work to bear upon the hard realities of farm life, and how necessary it is, if the farmer desires to succeed, when once he has put his shoulder to the work, to persevere in well doing to the end.

Born in New-Galloway, Scotland, in the year 1791, Mr. Johnston married in 1818, and came to the United States early in 1821. In October of the latter year, he took possession of the farm where he has since lived, on the border of Seneca Lake, within a few miles of the village of Geneva. It was a stiff and uncompromising clay, some of it swampy, and, though favored in many respects as to situation, (a more charming site could hardly be chosen), offering at the time a much better prospect for hard work than for a comfortable living. The new owner, however, had a genuine Scotch fondness for work, with the national perseverance to back it, and undertook the task in earnest. Twelve years later, in 1833, Mr. Shirreff, a well known Scottish agriculturist, visited this country, and published a narrative of his journey on his return, in which he spoke of Mr. Johnston's "sixty acres in wheat" as "equal to any crop of similar extent" he had ever examined. At a day when little attention was paid to unusual methods of promoting fertility, Mr. Johnston had constantly used lime and plaster (gypsum), which were admirably adapted to the soil, and, in connection with judicious management elsewhere, they brought him large returns. He began with them on a small scale, until the experiment proved that they were suitable for the purpose.

When underdraining began to be earnestly discussed in Great Britain, Mr. Johnston felt at once a deep interest in the subject. He became convinced of its advantages, and that it was precisely what a large portion of our land requires to enable it to bear the vicissitudes of the season and perfect its harvests. In the year 1835 he sent for a tile, from Scotland, as a pattern, and became the pioneer of tile draining in America. This necessitated a heavy expense that could only be met on borrowed capital, and people about thought the Scotchman was a little crazy then. However, in this, as with lime and plaster, his judgement was amply vindicated in the result.

The use of the draining tile, wherever laid, very much ameliorated Mr. Johnston's land, and added to its productive area some fields that were before too wet to be of any real value at all. The winter-killing of the wheat was much reduced or wholly

obviated; the grass, which, perhaps, appeared no more thrifty to the eye, was found thicker on the ground, with a heavier burden to go to the barn; quack, which it seems almost impossible to kill on wet land, was much more easily exterminated; the fertilizers applied, whether manure from the barnyards, or lime and plaster, seemed more efficacious than ever, and in these and other ways, the "crocker" soon repaid the loans, and its effects are still visible for good.

Applying an active and thoughtful mind to the work of the farm, and knowing the importance of manure, he followed the Scotch practice of buying stock in the fall and feeding them through the winter, to sell for the butchers in spring. Exercising a sound judgment in the selection of stock for the purpose of feeding to advantage, he also showed skill in the choice of their food. He used oilcake largely, but his chief dependence was upon Indian corn, finely ground and moistened, along with well cured early cut hay. As he thought it wiser to raise three hundred bushels of wheat on ten acres rather than on thirty, so, in buying cattle, he preferred such as would attach the most pounds of flesh to a single stomach, rather than have two digestive systems at work to produce but little larger net results. He has fed sheep more exclusively than cattle, and with even greater advantage. Of course very large quantities of manure were made, and to this day the old gentleman's eye has a quiet twinkle when you lead him to talk of what dung will do for the land.

One of his great innovations was the applying of manure to the soil in the fall. In this practice he for a long time stood nearly alone, it being so contrary to popular notions, as well as opposed by scientific men. But the results of his practice, especially the spreading of composted manure on winter wheat, proved so signally successful, that the practice extended, and even science had to own that for once she was behind hand. The early cutting of grass for hay, was steadily practised for years by Mr. Johnston, and he was too shrewd a Scotchman to stick to it unless he found it more profitable than the practice too generally followed by farmers, of leaving the grass seeds to ripen before cutting the grass.

He took great interest in advancing the knowledge of agriculture among the masses, and often gave his methods of procedure, as well as the results of his practice and experience, to the world, through the columns of the old *Geneva Farmer*, and afterwards through those of the *Country Gentleman*.

During the past ten years Mr. Johnston has been gradually withdrawing from the direct management of his farm—very gradually, however, as long habit is interwoven its labors and problems we might almost say, into the whole web of his thoughts and existence—and he still retains quite an area under his own superintendence. The sudden death of his wife, some time previously, from a stroke of lightning, while standing just before her own door, was a sad bereavement; but otherwise, the autumn of his life had been for him a peculiarly happy and honorable season. Grandchildren and great-grandchildren have come in turn to nestle in his arms, and long may he be spared to tell them stories of his own youth and of the great-grandfather in whose arms he in turn was fondled, so many years ago, in "bonnie Scotland."