

PRIZE ESSAY.

The Advantages of Maintaining Township Exhibitions.

BY H. F. HONSBERGER, SPRINGFIELD, ONT.

In order to show the advantages of township exhibitions, and meet the arguments which are brought forward by those persons who advocate their abolition, I shall first enumerate the objects and benefits of agricultural exhibitions in general; and then endeavor to show how these objects may be attained by township exhibitions, and in what respect they are productive of greater results to the farmers in general than exhibitions held on a larger scale.

No person who has watched the improvements of agriculture in our young Dominion, for the last quarter of a century, can fail to notice that our agricultural exhibitions have wielded a powerful influence in its advancement, or deny the fact that our legislators have acted very wisely in aiding them liberally.

The following are the chief objects for which our exhibitions are held, viz.: The encouraging of breeders to import pure-bred stock from foreign countries, with a view to improving the stock of our farmers, and making this branch of husbandry more profitable to them; the improvement of our methods of cultivating the soil by bringing together for competition the products of our farms, and awarding prizes to the best samples; the bringing together of farmers and their families, to vie with each other in producing and exhibiting the best animal or article in each class, whether it be in live stock, grain, fruit, and farm produce of any kind—the result of the farmer's industry, or any article of use or ornament exhibited as a sample of the skill of his wife or daughter; and last, but not least, the promotion of a friendly intercourse between farmers, and the awakening of that interest in their occupation, and ambition to excel in it, which follow as a result of competition for prizes with others, and the emulation of those who are successful.

No one can deny the fact that these objects have been attained in a great measure, as it is shown by the increased interest which is taken in agricultural exhibitions by our farmers, and the superiority of the exhibits. The chief arguments brought forward by those who advocate the abolition of township exhibitions are: "That there are too many of them, and that it would be preferable, and productive of greater results, to have one exhibition for a number of townships, or one for each county."

They tell us that in many townships the number of farmers who take an interest in exhibitions is so small that the amount of money given in prizes is not sufficiently large to induce them to exhibit, and that it would be a great advantage in this respect to have only one exhibition for each county, or at most, one for a number of townships.

Now, we must acknowledge that there is a great deal of truth in their arguments when we look at the condition of many of our township agricultural societies; but the question arises, "is it necessarily so, or is it owing to the fact that the objects and claims of agricultural societies and their exhibitions, have not been impressed upon the minds of farmers as they should be by the officers of societies, nor their advantages fully set forth?"

Having pointed out what I consider the chief objects and advantages of exhibitions, I shall endeavor to show that we cannot derive the greatest possible amount of good from them if township exhibitions are not maintained. Each exhibition, from a world's fair—open to every country of the globe—down to the township exhibition, has its own sphere of usefulness, and does a work which cannot be done by any other exhibition. A comparison of the products of different countries, and competition between them for prizes, or medals, indicative of superiority in their products and manufactures, is certainly beneficial in many respects; and while this is true in regard to the productions of different countries, it is equally true in regard to the productions of farmers living in the same township.

The Provincial and all of our large exhibitions are doing a work which cannot be done by county or township exhibitions.

Our Province would not occupy the proud position which it holds at the present day, nor be so noted for its fine horses, cattle, sheep, swine, poultry, grain, fruits, etc., were it not for these exhibitions, as they encourage stock-breeders and farmers to import superior animals and new varieties of grain and seeds, and, by careful attention, to improve them and surpass each other by taking the highest prizes when competing against the whole Province.

Our Provincial Exhibition has done much towards the improvement of our live stock by breeders, which would never have been done by county or township exhibitions, and yet, I think I am safe in saying that township exhibitions have done a work equally as great, by showing to the farmers in their own immediate localities the advantages of rearing pure-bred animals, and encouraging them to procure them.

But we are told by some persons that one exhibition for each county would be equally as beneficial, or more so, than one for each township. This I claim is a mistaken idea for the following reasons:—

There are, in each county, men who make a hobby of some particular branch of their business. One man gives his whole attention to the rearing of fine horses; another to cattle; another to sheep—each striving to excel in that which pleases his fancy.

Again, we have a man who devotes his whole time to the care of his orchard, and prides himself on his success in raising fruit, while his neighbor, who looks upon him with a certain amount of contempt as he sees him trimming the trees for the better development of his fruit, or searching for the worm which he fears will destroy the tree, chuckles to himself as he thinks of the mammoth squash which he is growing in some secluded spot on his farm, away from the sight of his neighbors, and with which he intends to astonish all who may attend the county fair. Now, this is perfectly right, and we find that those men who follow some particular branch of farming, and give it their whole attention, are most likely to succeed. Yet, the fact that these men generally carry off the prizes at county exhibitions—each in his own line—prevents a great many farmers of a class who most need the encouragement of agricultural societies, from becoming members and taking an interest in them.

The wide-awake farmer, who figures most prominently at the county exhibition, does not need the stimulating influences of an exhibition as much as the farmer who is not so ambitious, and takes an interest in them only when he expects to be repaid by winning prizes, and the latter is therefore far more likely to be benefited by a township exhibition than by one held on a larger scale, where his chances of success are far less.

Another reason why township exhibitions are more beneficial to the class of farmers who most need their advantages, is that in many counties there is a vast difference between the different townships composing it, in the quality of the soil and circumstances of the farmers who inhabit them; consequently those who labor under these disadvantages very often take little or no interest in a county exhibition, whereas they would take a lively interest in a township exhibition, and derive its benefits, as they would then be on an equal footing with all competitors. Again, the majority of our farmers are more easily persuaded to become members of an agricultural society in their own township, than of one at some distance from their homes, as there is less trouble and loss of time in conveying articles for exhibition, and they are more interested in competing with those persons with whom they are acquainted, and are more likely to be encouraged and follow the example of successful farmers in their own neighborhood than of others.

Let it not be understood that I am opposed to county exhibitions, for this is not the case, as I am of the opinion that they are instrumental in doing much for the advancement of agriculture; but for reasons already given, I claim that township exhibitions benefit a large number of farmers belonging to the class already referred to, who would take no interest in a county exhibition.

The want of success of many agricultural societies is not owing to a lack of advantages which might accrue from them, but may be ascribed to the lack of interest on the part of farmers who do not realize the advantages which they and their

children might receive from them. If we as farmers realized the benefits derived from exhibitions, and were fully alive to our own interests, there would be no falling off in the number of members of our agricultural societies, as is often the case, but an increasing interest, which would convince any person that township exhibitions are productive of much good. Another chief cause of the failure of some township societies, is the fact that our sporting men figure too prominently among the list of officers, and consequently the exhibition is turned into what might be called an "Agricultural Horse Trot," in which fast horses are the chief attraction, and a great part of the prize money is devoted to that class, while other animals and farm products are a secondary consideration. Nothing is more certain to break down a society, or lessen its usefulness, than this course.

The majority of our farmers are not very deeply interested in fast horses, and have the good sense to decline giving their support to a society whose officers have for their object the enjoyment of a good day's sport, at the expense of those whom they can induce to become members.

I do not condemn the giving of prizes for speed in horses, but mention this as I am satisfied from my own observations that the carrying to excess of this state of affairs has caused the ruin of more than one society. The officers of our agricultural societies should be the men who take the greatest interest in the advancement of agriculture, and who will spare no pains in building up the society and carrying out its objects.

If we wish to make our exhibitions what they should be, and derive from them the benefits for which they are intended, we as farmers must learn that we should encourage and take an interest in them, not only for the sake of winning prizes, but for the advancement of our noble occupation, and for the encouragement of our young men whom we expect to be the successful farmers of the future.

When this is the case our agricultural societies will prosper, and we shall not be at a loss to know the advantages of maintaining township exhibitions.

Poultry.

Old Hens.

The old hen seems to be attacked from all quarters, and the objections to her are based upon two reasons, the first of which is that a hen will not lay as many eggs after the first year she begins laying, and the second is that disease is more liable among old hens than pullets. The first objection is not always a potent one, and very often the hens lay better during the third year than the second. Much depends upon the time of hatching the pullets. The pullet hatched as late as May will be beaten her first season of laying by the old hen badly, and if she commences her second year it will be with the disadvantage of moulting when the weather is cold. Old hens have been known to lay well and regularly until quite advanced in age, and the calculation which has been made by some genius and given forth, that old hens are unprofitable as layers, has been accepted more on faith than observation. Our experience teaches that some old hens will lay more than pullets, and that some pullets will lay more than old hens. The trouble with old hens is that they are liable to become too fat on very high feed, but if they are fed with judgment they will equal the pullets without doubt. So far as being more liable to disease than pullets there are also exceptions, and if the matter can be given a fair test it will be found that the chances are equal.

As to which are better for breeding we venture to say that more eggs will hatch that are laid by old hens than by pullets, and this is a great deal in favor of the old hens. We think hens should be kept until the spring in which they become three years old, not that they are then useless, but because the pullets have reached a more mature age, and this plan of dividing the hens into three periods, instead of two, will no doubt be found better. The breed, also, has something to do with the merits of pullets and old hens. A Leghorn or Hamburg pullet will lay more eggs in a year than an old hen of the Brahma, Cochinchina, or Plymouth Rock breeds, but an old hen of the Leghorn breed will also lay more than the pullets of the larger breeds. Crossed hens will often be found good layers for a long period, but the cross should be a judicious one.