

The Farmer's Advocate AND HOME MAGAZINE.

THE LEADING AGRICULTURAL JOURNAL IN THE
DOMINION.

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opened the way to a little talk on the reasons for spraying, and the insects and fungous diseases destroyed thereby, the whole taking place right in the orchard with the spraying outfit, the trees, and the pests explained as an object lesson. The mechanical end of farming is intricate, and it is necessary to master it in order to most successfully apply scientific knowledge. Men who go through an agricultural college, and those who have gone through realize that this is right, require to know first, last and all the time, thoroughly and well, the practical end of farming, and it is much easier for them, in whatever work they may be called upon to do, and particularly if that work is on a farm or in a District Representative office, or in an agricultural newspaper office, or in some other line in which the graduate is continually rubbing shoulders with the farmer and working in his interests, when they know all the little ins and outs of the practical side of agriculture, and particularly that part which we might call farm mechanics. Splicing a rope, putting a spray pump in working order when the valves have stuck and the new beginner does not know why it will not work, adjusting a gasoline engine, adjusting a knotter on a binder, making rope-halters, tying the various kinds of knots required in farm practice, lacing belts, and dozens of other little things which crop up on the farm, might be taught or demonstrated in agricultural schools and colleges to the benefit of all the students.

There may be a hint in this for the agricultural schools and colleges. It is not meant as a criticism of an already good course, but we believe there is something in the suggestion and that it would pay to teach the students how to do a number of these necessary tricks of the farm, not only because of the actual value it would be to them in knowing how to do the work but because of the weight it would carry and the easier it would make the road in opening up opportunities to impart the scientific knowledge gained at the college. While thinking it over, what percentage of the agricultural college graduates can splice a rope, something that sooner or later is necessary on every farm? It is not necessary nor yet advisable that agricultural colleges teach boys to plow and sow or to reap and to mow. They should

know those things when they enter, but how about the mechanics in connection with these and with other things? The boy's father may be a good farmer and yet unable to do many of these things himself. He cannot teach the boy. Then the agricultural school should.

Some Dark Corners in the Potato Market.

If there were a High Cost of Living Commission gathering data now relative to the prices of human foodstuffs, they could obtain some valuable and interesting information regarding potatoes in Ontario and the Eastern Provinces. While the growers were receiving from sixty to sixty-five cents per bushel in Nova Scotia, forty cents per bushel in Prince Edward Island, and sixty-five cents per bushel in New Brunswick, consumers in Ontario and Quebec were paying as high as \$2.00 per bushel, and so firm was the market that growers in the vicinity of the larger centres quoted them at that price even though the buyer would carry them away himself. If the dealers and transportation companies should deduct the price to the farmers from the \$2.00 and divide the remainder between themselves, the hauling and distributing interests would each receive more per bushel than the grower who produced them. When it costs twice as much to distribute an article as it does to produce it, there is something radically wrong. We cannot divide this \$2.00, after Euclid's plan, into three equal parts, for the hauling charge from New Brunswick to points as far West as London, Ontario, ranges around 20 cents per 100 pounds, in carload lots, or about 12 cents per bushel. Thus the grower gets 65 cents and the railroads 12 cents, making a cost of 77 cents. Let us be liberal or even extravagant and allow the buyer and shipper in New Brunswick 23 cents per bushel, which is more than a just profit, so the product laid down in Ontario cities would be \$1.00 per bushel, and it would be less in Quebec on account of the shorter haul. There is still \$1.00 to be divided, and we must confess we do not know where it is going. The small wholesalers and jobbers give no evidence of becoming excessively rich, neither do the corner grocers or dealers. Someone, somewhere, working quietly and unostentatiously must have been receiving the lion's share of the \$1.00 which was divided amongst the distributors.

J. E. A., Biron, Superintendent of the Montreal City Markets, was recently quoted in the Montreal Standard to the effect that he had indubitable evidence of the fact that there was a strong potato trust already in operation, while others, some of which were in process of formation, were controlling the butter, eggs and a considerable portion of the vegetable supplies coming into Montreal. We are inclined to believe that the conditions which prompted Mr. Biron to make this statement do not exist in that city alone. The price paid by the consumer has been out of all proportion to that received by the grower. Someone has been exacting all the "traffic will bear."

If the Commissions appointed to look into matters concerning the cost of living did not return void, why has not something been done to prevent just such a condition as has existed in the potato business this year? The Departments of Agriculture in the various provinces might have reported early in the season as to the character of the crops in their respective districts and what the growers were receiving. The Dominion Department of Agriculture has representatives in every province who could have reported to Ottawa, from whence advice could be sent out. Are our Governments the servants of the people at large or of the few? The Agricultural Departments might at least see to it that the grower received a price for his product consistent with that paid by the consumer. Anyone can say, "the public be damned," and there is no one to tell him nay.

Had the people of Ontario and Quebec known what the crop was bringing in the Maritime Provinces, it would have been difficult to rob them to the extent of \$2.00 per bushel. They would have gotten together and obtained their supplies independent of the distributing service now extant. Not knowing, they go quietly on paying what is charged them. "What is everybody's business is nobody's business," so the consuming population does not interfere with the operations of the distributor. Too much law is objectionable, and it is not wise for a Government to go meddling with any business when unnecessary.

We expect them to turn on the light, and the people will attempt to do the rest. Previous to the time of writing the grower has been receiving sixty-five cents and less for an article which has retailed at \$2.00 and, in some instances, as high as \$2.20. There are surely some dark corners in the potato market. Mr. Biron would probably call them "Trusts."

Nature's Diary.

A. B. KLUGH, M.A.

One of our most interesting animals is the Canadian Otter. This animal is really a big water Weasel, about forty inches in length; weighing about eighteen pounds, with a heavy coat of dark-brown fur and a thick layer of fat under the skin. Its range originally included the whole of the Dominion, from coast to coast and as far north as the Arctic circle, but because of the high price which its fur commands it is extinct in thickly settled regions and is scarce in many other parts of its range. The Otter is pre-eminently aquatic, as a swimmer and diver no mammal or bird is its equal, and by its swift progress and sudden turnings under water it is able to out-manoeuvre even the lightning-swift trout and salmon. For long distances it can swim at the rate of over six miles an hour, and it can swim a quarter of a mile under water without coming to the surface to breathe. Though most at home in the water it is a good traveller on land, and in winter takes long journeys in search of rapids and falls where the water is unfrozen. When travelling in the winter it bounds along for some distance and then throws itself forward with its front feet folded backwards and slides through the snow for a distance of several yards, thus making a very characteristic trail. The main food of the Otter consists of fish, though crayfish, frogs, clams, muskrats and water-fowl are also found on its menu. The Otter mates in February, and the young, which are usually from one to three in number, are born in the middle of April. The nest is made of grass and leaves, usually at the bottom of a burrow in the bank of a stream, but sometimes in the bottom of a hollow standing tree or in a hollow log. The young remain with the mother until December, by which time they are full grown.

So much fictitious nonsense has been written about the ways in which animals train their young, that we have to be extremely careful as to what statements we accept regarding such performances. There seems to be, however, plenty of good, sound evidence that the mother Otter does teach her young to swim, dive and catch fish. Seton, writing of this training of the young says, "It seems as though in very ancient forms retaining primitive habits the young need little or no instruction from parents. Thus an incubator duck will take to the water or snap at a fly when a day old. On the other hand, those animals with highly specialized habits are slow to learn, and need some sort of stimulus. The young hawk or weasel speedily learns to seize a bird, but the young Osprey and Otter have departed farther from the ancient way and are more in need of teaching. Whether this be conscious or unconscious on the part of the parents depends on our definition of these terms." An interesting fact which supports this idea of training is that young Otters raised in captivity and then set free do not seek their food in the water, but on land after the manner of a weasel, and only after a long time do they seem to find out that they are fitted for an aquatic life.

But the most interesting trait of all in connection with the Otter is the manner in which it indulges in the sport of tobogganing. Where steep banks slope down into a river or lake these animals make slides, in the summer in the mud and in winter on the snow. They climb up the bank and slide down these chutes into the water, one after another, in rapid succession. They never indulge in this sport alone, and as a rule it is a family, either a mother with two or three young, or two adults sometimes with two or three young, which are observed thus engaged. On this point Audubon and Bachman write, "The Otters ascend a bank suitable for their diversion and sometimes where the slope is very steep, so that they are obliged to make quite an effort to gain the top; they slide down in rapid succession where there are many at a sliding place. On one occasion when resting ourselves on the bank of Canoe Creek, which empties into the Ohio, a pair of Otters made their appearance and, not observing our proximity, began to enjoy their sliding pastime. They glided down the soapy-like, muddy surface of the slide with the rapidity of an arrow from a bow, and we counted each one making twenty-two slides before we disturbed their sportive occupation." Godman, quoted by Seton, after referring to their slides in winter, says, "In the summer this amusement is obtained by selecting a spot where the river bank is sloping, has a clayey soil and the water at its base is of a comfortable depth. The Otters then remove from the surface, for the breadth of several feet, the sticks, stones, roots and other obstructions, and render the surface as level as possible. After a few slides and plunges the surface of the clay becomes very smooth and slippery, and the rapid succession of the sliders shows how much these animals are delighted by the game." Play is indulged in by the young of most of the higher animals, but the Otter is the only animal of which we have any knowledge that has an organized pastime which is enjoyed by old and young alike at all seasons of the year.