

CULTURAL PREPARATIONS FOR LAYING DOWN LAND TO GRASS.

(PART II.)

Supposing land is prepared by feeding off a crop of rape with sheep, it may happen that the rape has to be supplemented with meadow hay. If so, it is important that the hay should be only such as has been cut very early in the season, otherwise the ripe seeds of the grasses will pass the sheep undigested, and in due time will spring up and make the pasture foul. Whether the rape is fed off during the fall by sheep, or whether it is carted off the field, in either case the plough should be put into the ground as soon as the crop is off. This first ploughing should be deep and thorough, and should be followed soon after by another ploughing to lay the land up rough for the winter. In the spring get the harrow and the roller upon it until the seed-bed is fine and firm.

It should be more generally known that few grass seeds will grow at a greater depth than half an inch even in very fine soil.

Young grasses cannot obtain a proper foothold upon a loose or hollow soil and therefore it is very important to have a firm seed-bed. It is no unusual thing to see a fine plant of grass all around the headlands of a newly sown field, while the centre is thin and bare. This is because the greater traffic over the headlands created a firmer seed-bed for the grasses than they had elsewhere in the field. (1)

Even after the land has been fully prepared for the seeds, it will be all the better if allowed to lie untouched for a few days before sowing; but if the season is advanced don't wait. Otherwise the delay offers two advantages. It allows the soil longer time to settle down, and also gives the annual weeds a chance to start, so that by a final turn of the harrow they may be killed before the grass-seeds are sown. Annual weeds, unfortunately, are sure to come only too plentifully, and will demand constant attention when grass-seeds are sown without a grain crop in the spring.

As a preparation for autumn sowing, no other crop is equal to an early variety of potato. The earthing up of the rows exposes a great surface to atmospheric influences and this materially aids

in the desintegration of the soil. Another point in its favour is that the crop is often lifted by hand, and thus the soil is subjected to a course of spade-husbandry, which, as a preparation for grass, is superior to all other modes of cultivation.

We often hear of people wanting to let go to grass some old piece of land that has been neglected for many years until it has become a perfect mat of couch-grass. In such cases good results are practically impossible until the land is in a state of thorough cleanliness and proper cultivation.

Probably the best way to sow grass-seeds in the spring is to seed them down with a wheat crop. The wheat should be drilled nine inches apart, thinly seeded (1) and horse hoed in the spring. If planted without a grain crop in the fall the seeds run the risk of being killed by drought or smothered by annual weeds. If planted with barley or oats the crop will be often badly damaged by the grain "lodging." Some skill is required in sowing grass seeds. The actual work of sowing grasses is simplicity itself, but as the germination of the seed and the equal distribution of the plant depend upon the accuracy of the process, the details should be carried out with due regard to the serious loss which failure certainly entails. The necessity for making the seed-bed fine and firm has already been spoken about. At sowing time the additional requirement is a soil dry enough to allow the implements to work freely without any tendency to clog on the roller. Very often waiting to sow will tax the farmer's patience greatly, but it is no use to contend against nature, so it is best to wait for good weather and until the land is in proper condition for seeding. The first business is to run the harrow over the land to prepare it for the seed, and the sowing may be either performed by hand or by means of the common seed-barrow.

Some men are skilful in spreading seeds equally by hand, and on a still day their work answers well. But grass seeds are light, and it does not need a very high wind to make the sowing irregular. The heavier seeds will fall near to the

(1) And we have seen a field of wheat, near Soid, scourged by the wireworm, the headland alone being untouched. Pressure is the sole cure for the ravages of this beast.—Ed.

(1) Of course, this refers to districts where fall-wheat can be grown. As to thin-sowing helping the grass-seeds, we differ from our friend Mr. Bunbury, because, if the land is in good fettle, the tillering of the plant in spring will make as much or more shade as if thick sowing had been practised.—Ed.