

The Weed Menace and its Control

BY

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WEEDS are rightly called robbers, for they deprive the soil of both food and moisture. As a rule, the soil of the west can spare some of its plant food, but, owing to the comparatively light rainfall we need all the moisture obtainable. For this reason, noxious weeds are perhaps a greater menace here than in any other portion of Canada. Owing to the extremely rich soil of the Red River valley, certain very noxious weeds, such as sow thistle and Canada thistle, thrive and spread in a most remarkable manner and frequently completely smother the crop of grain.

Farms are too large A large proportion of the farms in all parts of the province of Manitoba are too large, and they are frequently owned by non-residents, who have very little personal interest in keeping the land clean. Tenants with short leases are often very indifferent about the condition of the land, and are a source of trouble to the inspectors. In common with all new countries offering cheap land, many inexperienced men undertake to farm for themselves, instead of first gaining experience with a successful farmer. Such men are badly handicapped from the start, and their land quickly becomes weedy. Much low-lying land, only fit for hay, is broken up each year, often in a very indifferent manner, and seeded to flax. Such fields quickly become a mat of sow thistles and other noxious weeds.

Of late years, the scarcity of farm help, high wages and inferior labour have prevented farmers from giving their land the cultivation necessary to keep down weeds. The demand for increased production since the war started has led to the cropping of fields that should have been summer-fallowed. Land in the western part of Manitoba is rapidly losing its vegetable fibre, and can not be cultivated thoroughly without leaving the soil in a condition for drifting, hence weeds thrive. The remedy for this is, of course, more grass land. Our roads are wide, and, unless the untravelled portions are broken up and seeded to grass, they soon become weedy and are a menace to adjoining farms.

Reeves and councillors of certain municipalities are very indifferent regarding the enforcement of the Noxious Weeds Act, and frequently change their weeds inspectors every year or two and pay low salaries. For instance, about one-third of the weed inspectors in Manitoba this year are new men. And last, but not least, the average Canadian farmer resents any interference in the management of his land, and is often not willing to take suggestions from others.

Control of Weeds While an efficient Weeds Act, wisely enforced, is necessary, there must also be hearty co-operation between municipal councils and inspectors and the farmers, real estate owners, trust and mortgage companies, the different railways and both the Federal and Provincial Governments and their officials.

Control of weeds is largely a matter of education. Unless farmers learn to distinguish the different varieties of weeds, and are acquainted with the most approved methods for their eradication, there can be very little progress made in