

FRUIT GROWING

PAPER READ BEFORE THE
FRUIT GROWING ASSO-
CIATION OF PRINCE ED-
WARD ISLAND

BY REV. A. E. BURKE

O Fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, Agricolas! Virgil, Lib. II. Georg.

Ah, the too happy husbandmen,—if they only knew the blessings that are their's! this cry of the greatest of Roman poets, absurd as it may sound to the ears of many of those engaged, half-heartedly, in the profession of agriculture to-day, is as living and real as when it rang through Italian plains two thousand years ago. And history repeats itself. From the very beginning in the lives of about all the nations of the earth, we find discontent manifesting itself in the agricultural classes, and a strong movement from rural to city life, where the conditions of society permitted,—followed at regular intervals by a return movement, not so accentuated. It is true, but still quite noticeable, from city to country. Our own continent is young; and still, both in Canada and the United States, we have noticed something of the unrest of which I speak. The graves of our general government to-day is its immigration policy. To convince the youth and manhood of the eastern cities and other countries of the advantages the boundless plains of the West afford as locations for happy and prosperous homes, where, following agricultural pursuits, places of honor and responsibility may be worked out for themselves in our natural life, is its most ardent desire. The development of the country and its greatness depends upon the success of such a policy, consequently a great amount of our effort and treasure is behind it, and with it our liveliest hope. In the old provinces the local governments must look to the interest of this important industry or forsake themselves altogether. There is an imperative call for vigorous agricultural action all over the land.

When Virgil wrote his Georgics the same conditions, but to a more limited extent, of course, confronted Augustus Cæsar and Mæcenæus. For the national welfare a great task had to be imposed on the national poet. His was the great duty of impressing upon the agriculturists of the day a proper appreciation of the dignity of their avocation and the necessity of a thorough knowledge of all its complex problems. Hence we find Virgil not only singing the praises of the farmer's life and occupations, but with great care and accuracy writing down, in four books, for the benefit of succeeding generations, the principles which regulate all the different departments of agriculture. In the first book he treats of the different kinds of soil and their tillage, and the planting, caring and garnering of crops; in the second, the culture of vines and fruit trees; in the third, the raising and feeding of animals; and in the fourth, the interesting science of agriculture,—and all with such marvellously correct detail as to readily convince the over-enthusiastic admirer of the all-knowing and self-sufficient present that, after all, there is little that we could have taught the ancients in these matters. Consequently a new force is added to the old saying of the wise man: "There's nothing new under

the sun!"

The necessity of the present, then, is organized instruction for the farming classes. There is great unrest among them. The same old contempt for farm life and agricultural pursuits as gave wing to the poet's song, is everywhere noticeable. Young men and maidens, who, however well qualified for farmer and farmer's wives, are certainly not so well fitted for anything else, long for the day when they may break the paternal fetters and be free to seek fame and fortune in the great cities of their own or other lands. We hear of some of them succeeding, it is true, and merit mention under that hackneyed heading, "Successful Islanders Abroad." But we hear little of the hundreds and hundreds of our young people who, wretched in body and soul, sink into untimely graves, "unwept, unhonored and unsung," in a foreign land,—while the corn waves green, and the blossoms blow, and the birds sing gayly, and the sleek kine low,—for their happy brothers in the old home laved by the dancing waters of the Gulf.

We all bewail this condition of affairs. There is, however, no use in repining. We must set ourselves the task of remedying it, as far as in us lies. The root of the whole evil is in the family, in the farmer's home,—indeed with the farmer himself; the branch is in the school. There is nothing more likely to breed discontent in others than discontent itself and contempt of avocation. From a disgruntled farmer, O Lord, deliver us! One can reconcile oneself to the grumbling and dissatisfaction of other callings; in the life of a farmer there is no room for such abhorrent anomalies. With his fruitful field stretching out before him, in which those wonderful mysteries of germination, vegetation, fructification are ever going on, with the rich and diversified scenes of nature, the shades of luxuriant trees and the blossoms of the orchard inviting him to calm repose, with the kindly presence of flocks and herds, the very assurance of full and plenty for the present and future, how can he be filled with discontent himself or capable of communicating a feeling so mischievous to those about him? Surely cupidity, the desire of fickle and uncertain fame or the seductions of a life of false and fatal pleasure in the world, are not the causes of his dissatisfaction. I think not. In nine cases out of ten the farmer is unhappy because he does not understand the dignity of the work he is engaged in—a dignity beyond anything else—and is not familiar with the best methods which lend charm to it and make it especially remunerative. The want of system at home has early taken away from the boy the natural delights which attend work in the fields; and in the school, as at present constituted, he has heard everybody else praised—the churchman, statesman, soldier, sailor, merchant-man, mechanic—and not a word of the farmer whom, easily, by inference he comes to regard as beneath notice. Little thinking that those others all depend upon the tillers of the soil, he tires of home and makes the mistake of his life in delivering himself over to the pursuit of shadows. How different the home where the intelligent, industrious, contented husbandman, leading a life of virtue, labors with his family in the proper cultivation of his fields; in the ten-

ding of his cattle, in the planting of trees, and the beautifying of his steading! There is no more blessed place than this to live in. No discordant note is ever heard there, either from parents or children; and the latter, accorded every reasonable privilege, never chafe under the restraints imposed upon them for their ultimate good. In their family the young people are fairly impressed with the excellence of their calling—one sufficiently complex to develop the intellect to its greatest capacity and responsive enough to the fostering of the greatest qualities of the human heart. They have overcome adverse school influences by an intense home enthusiasm. They gladly grow up with the country, and are the country's pride.

This much about our condition: for upon agriculture depends its minor adjunct, horticulture, in this Province at least, prospering only as it prospers. Everybody knows that the farmer who grows the best grain and roots, who raises the best horses, cattle, and pigs, who is the best patron of the cheese factory, is also the most successful fruit raiser. Intelligence and system counts every time, and the latter acquired in one detail of farm life extends itself to all. Thus orcharding goes hand in hand here with general farming, and is the very salt of farm life. It will readily be recognized, then, as the day of the State, especially in provinces like this, where it is the only resource, to stimulate agriculture in all its departments, thus marking its appreciation of the science itself and elevating its standard.

Co-operative work is now the most effective teaching influence we have. Notice all over the province that the settlement in which a co-operative industry has sprung up is away ahead of others where there is none. Why is this? Besides being a guarantee of the enterprise of the people, the factory has been a centre from which instruction and emulation flowed as naturally as water from a fountain. This is the age of co-operation, and certainly no class more so than our agriculturists require its advantages. Theoretical instruction is good; practical, better and more readily acquired. The Federal authorities, by sending the excellent professors of the Experimental Farms a broad and spreading throughout the Dominion, much valuable literature have done an immense amount of good and advanced our methods very appreciably in the last decade. The few farmers' associations have accentuated the teaching of the professors and brought within its influence individuals who otherwise could not have been reached. Your excellent fruit-grower's association has found the ground only broken in the particular science of horticulture, and I doubt not but that it will be of much use in extending the knowledge upon which successful fruit growing depends. Everybody is in need of some special knowledge, and by coming together regularly and discussing all matters relating to fruit growing, fruit packing and fruit marketing, a more exact and profitable understanding of this intricate business will be acquired. The value of such work to the province must be very great indeed, ultimately.

When Professor Graig came amongst us and spoke upon the general principles of orcharding, we were all agape at many of the simple lessons he

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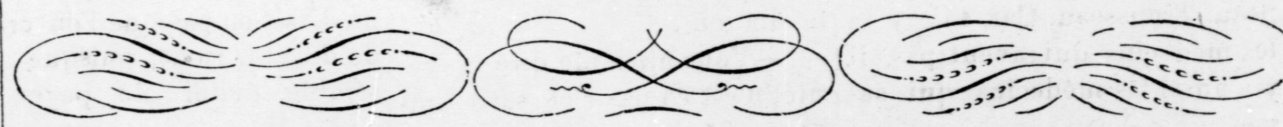


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ROBT. T. HOLMAN

Summerside Dec. 9th 1896

taught. Verily a prophet had arisen again in Israel! We all went back to our homes satisfied that something had been learned from his lectures that would make our few trees dearer to us and their cultivation much more profitable. Still, the wonder at those few simple truths, as they fell from the Professor's lips, in view of the general knowledge of them by the ordinary farmers of Virgil's (40 B. C.) time in Italy, was but an honest acknowledgement of our ignorance and a full and complete arraignment of the system under which we were educated. The reflection that the great majority of the farming community do not know the common principles of agriculture and its subordinate sciences as well as the Romans did hundreds of years before the Christian era is certainly not calculated to inflate to induce a consciousness of duty done by the country we live in. If the revenues of this island of farmers are not being used to procure requisite agricultural instruction to the people what are they being used for? you will naturally ask yourselves.

The time is now at hand when the enormous production of the ever newly opening-up regions in the west will force us into the keenest competition in all branches of agriculture. Production, for us to live and hold our own, must be considerably cheapened, and this can only be brought about by a thorough knowledge of our profession. It is evident, then, that there is plenty of work ahead. The most ignorant swain in any European country to-day, because of the persistent fostering agriculture is receiving at the hands of the governments and the regular transmission of knowledge from father to son, is fully abreast in most matters with our specialists. Turn again to Virgil's Georgics and those matters which we call the result of advancing science; the propagation of fruit bearers by grafting, budding, layering; the

planting out of orchards in the quincunial arrangement, the cultivating and growing and protecting of the orchard, are all spoken of as clearly and precisely as if written to-day. So you see we have still a peace to make to catch up with even the distant past. Only in the matter of pests and their remedies do we find that, unfortunately, we have forged ahead. The bark louse, codling moth or aphid were unknown to ancient fruit-raisers.

There can be no doubt but that Prince Edward Island, from end to end, with few exceptions of places, is well adapted to general orcharding and the growth of small fruits. Your association has a great work before it, in testing the different varieties and reporting upon their adaptability to our soil. It is quite clear, too, that certain kinds of fruit will do better in one portion of the province than in another and all kinds best in the favored west. Amateur fruit-growers—and all must be that at the start—are greatly confounded by the purchase of trees that are not true to name. It is certainly too bad to have to plant a tree, wait years till it bears, giving it every care, and then find that it is absolutely worthless. Of course top-grafting will suit the requirements of the case, but in nine cases out of ten, nothing is known of this simple process, and the labor and care of years are lost. I do hope then, that your association will be able to impress upon the government the necessity of a money grant for the spread of horticultural notions in the country, and also the necessary legislation to protect us from fraud. In Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, a substantial sum of money is paid into the treasury of the association, the officers of which are ever ready with word and pen to help along the industry. There is nothing so badly needed, to my mind, in our government, as a Department of Agriculture. Under it, all this needed work would here, as elsewhere, be

pushed with grand results. In other provinces, a return of the acreage of farm crops, the number of fruit trees bearing and the fruit matured, etc., is regularly made. One can see at a glance what is being done. The government should be interested in all its great resources; and this is the stock taking process. Here we are groping in the dark, both as to what is attempted and the results obtained. It is to be hoped, then, that the fruit-grower's association will help on to the possession of all those necessary aids, by drawing the attention of our rulers to the value of the industry it represents, and its imperative needs.

At the eleventh hour, Mr. Secretary, you ask me for a paper on fruit growing. Regretting my inability to be with you, because the late day of the week of your meeting would not allow me to return home in time for my ministerial duties, I send you these imperfect pages as an earnest of my deep interest in, and sympathy with, your Association. I hope anything I have written in my haste and desire to avoid everybody's else ground may not prove an apple of discord to your deliberations; but rather be accepted as the apple was with the ancients; an omen of good for your nascent association.

Could we only make our people such agriculturists as the intelligence and opportunities in this fair Isle seem to warrant, ah then, the words of Virgil were doubly appropriate: O Fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint, Agricolas!

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