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AGRICULTURE.

REPORT ON THE AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITIES OF THE PROVINCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK.

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CHAPTER I.

Preliminary Observations.

Two very different impressions in regard to the Province of New Brunswick will be produced on the mind of the stranger, according as he contents himself with visiting the towns and inspecting the lands which lie along the Seaboard, or ascends its rivers or penetrates by its numerous roads into the interior of its more central and northern Counties.

In the former case, he will feel like the traveller who enters Sweden by the harbours of Stockholm or Gothenburg, or who sails among the rocks on the coast of Norway.—The naked cliffs or shelving shores of granite or other hardened rocks, and the unvarying pine forests, awaken in his mind ideas of hopeless desolation, and poverty and barrenness appear necessarily to dwell within the iron bound shores. I have myself a vivid recollection of the disheartening impression regarding the agricultural capabilities of Nova Scotia, which the first two days I spent in that Province around the neighbourhood of Halifax conveyed to my mind. Had I returned to Europe without seeing other parts of that Province, I could have compared it only with the more unproductive and inhospitable portions of Scandinavia.

A large portion of the Europeans who visit New Brunswick, see only the rocky regions which encircle the more frequented harbours of the Province. They must therefore carry away and convey to others very unfavourable ideas, especially of its adaption to agricultural purposes.

But on the other hand, if the stranger penetrate beyond the Atlantic shores of the Province, and travel through the interior, he will be struck by the number and beauty of its rivers, by the fertility of its River Islands and Intervales, and by the great extent and excellent condition of its roads, and (upon the whole) of its numerous bridges. He will see boundless forests still unreclaimed, but will remark at the same time an amount of general progress and prosperous advancement, which considering the recent settlement and small Revenue of the Province, is really surprising. If he possess an agricultural eye, he may discover great defects in the practical husbandry of the Provincial farmers, while he remarks at the same time the healthy looks of their large families, and the apparently easy and independent condition in which they live. If he have travelled much in other Countries, one thing which will arrest his attention more than all, will be the frequent complaints which meet his ears, of the slowness with which the Province advances, of the condition of its Agriculture compared with that of Scotland or England, of the want of capital among its land possessing farmers, and so on; complaints which would be made regarding New Brunswick with very much less urgency, were the rate of its own actual progress better known to its inhabitants, and its own rural and economical condition in comparison with older countries, better understood and appreciated.

For my own part, in taking a general survey of the actual condition of the Province in connection with the period of its earliest settlement, and with the public Revenues it has possessed from time to time as means of improvement, I have been much impressed with the rapid progress it has really made, and with the large amount of social advancement which is every where to be seen. The Roads, the Bridges, the Churches, the Schools, the Colleges, besides the numerous other Public Institutions excellent and liberal in themselves, assume a very large magnitude in the eyes of the impartial observer, when it is considered that they have been made, built or established and provided for by a population even at present amounting to a little more than two hundred thousand souls, less in number than one of our third rate English Cities, and in the short space of sixty or seventy years. When I have heard natives of New Brunswick complaining of the slowness with which this Province advanced, I have felt persuaded that the natural impatience of a young people to become great, like

that of a young man to become rich, was blinding them to the actual rate at which their country went forward, a rate so different from what is to be seen in any part of the old world, with the exception of the Island home from which we all come.

In justice to New Brunswick, I must add another remark. In every part of the world it has been my fortune to visit, I have met with numerous individuals who were more or less interested in, and were anxious to promote, the agricultural improvement of their native country. But in New Brunswick a more general feeling appears to prevail on this subject, among all educated persons, than I have ever before met with. Whatever other differences may exist among them, a universal desire is expressed to contribute some little help towards the general prosperity and agricultural advancement of the Province. It is the very intensity of this desire, in some degree, which causes them to undervalue the actual progression of the country.

The development of the agricultural resources of a country, and the improvement of its practical Agriculture, are by no means synonymous terms, for though every improvement in practice must more fully develop the inherent fertility of the soil, that is, the agricultural capabilities of the country, yet these may be largely developed under a system of agricultural practice, which is not only rude at first, but which for generations remains almost entirely stationary. This latter form of development was seen in this Province during those years which brought the largest number of Emigrants into its Ports, and it is now going on rapidly in those new Western Territories of the United States into which the tide of Emigration is now setting.—Unskilled hands are now clearing the forests and sowing grain, unguided by any knowledge of those principles by which the existing fertility of the new land is to be either husbanded or maintained.

In the Province of New Brunswick, whatever defects its Husbandry may exhibit, and they are many, it has been satisfactory to me to find that a development of its agricultural resources by the improvement of its agricultural practice, and independent of Emigration, has begun distinctly to manifest itself. Improved implements, and breed of cattle and sheep, imported grain and grass seeds, skilful ploughing, the preparation of composts, with experiments in draining, in the use of lime and gypsum, in the growth of green crops and feeding of stock, these and other similar forms of improvement which have come under my notice in the Province, show that there are some at least who not only advance the general condition of its husbandry, but who are aware also of the first steps which ought to be taken to promote this advancement.

It would be unfair to judge at the rate of agricultural progress in the Province by the amount of product raised during any of the last four years, which have in nearly all Europe and America been more or less distinguished by remarkable failures in the root or grain crops. Before these failures commenced, however, I find in the Report of the Restigouche Agricultural Society for 1846, that whereas in the two years 1839 and 1840, the quantity of breadstuffs and other provisions imported into the County of Restigouche was valued at £36,500, the quantity imported in 1844 and 1845 was valued at £13,000 only. In that brief period therefore, and supposing the consumption not to have at all increased, the production of food had been augmented to the value of about £12,000 a year in that County alone.

In the County of Gloucester again, in 1832, only about 700 bushels of grain of all kinds were raised, whereas in 1844 upwards of 50,000 bushels were grown, the estimated value of which, along with that of the potatoes, turnips and hay, was upwards of £40,000. Part of the increased produce in both these cases, especially in Gloucester County, may be ascribed to the increased population, but part of it also, as the Reports of their Agricultural Societies show, to a better appreciation of the capabilities of the soil and climate, and a better adjustment of the practical processes to the circumstances of the several localities.

But though undoubtedly every where progressing, the pace is unequal, (as it is in other countries,) with which the Agriculture of the several Counties advances. Nothing is easier to discover than striking defects, while instances of apparent stagnation are unfortunately too frequent.

Thus my friend and fellow-traveller, Mr. Brown, in reporting to me his observations made at the end of October upon the practical farming of the River border between Gagetown and the Oronto, makes the following most just remark:—"Through the whole of these settlements, if we except Gagetown and its immediate vicinity, there has been comparatively little done in the way of farming in

view of a crop for another year. Indeed there are no proper farming tools. Their ploughing is wretched, and so alas are the ploughs. It is common to see the ploughman carrying his plough in his hand like a chain, or on his shoulder like a handspike, or holding by a pin stuck through a single upright handle. The fact appears to be that most of these people have a portion of Island or Intervale property, from which they annually obtain, with little trouble, a quantity of hay. This gives them a decided advantage over the farmers in the interior, and enables them to plod on without attempting to adopt any of the improvements now going forward in the northern part of the Province."

I could myself, from my own observations, draw many such pictures of ignorance, indolence, and apparent mental stagnation; and it such were to serve any useful purpose, might place the entire Agriculture of the Province in a sufficiently ridiculous light. But he who is best acquainted with the history of agricultural progress in the most skilfully cultivated countries, and with the actual state of Agriculture in other parts of the world, will be prepared to make the largest allowances for what he sees amiss in a new country like this. He will look out for movement rather than stagnation. It will please him rather to praise and stimulate the skill and industry he may perceive, than to expose and reprehend the more frequent want of knowledge and of energy which may fall in his way.

As a consolation and a source of hope to those who unduly vex themselves regarding the condition of the Provincial Agriculture, as if it were something unnatural or before unheard of, or which preclude all reasonable hope of amendments, I take the liberty of adverting for a moment to the condition of Scotland about a hundred and twenty years ago. That country in which Agriculture is now so far advanced, was then almost entirely unenclosed, was considered poor, barren, and inhospitable in its climate. By a Scottish writer in 1729, it was represented as "already many ages behind the rest of mankind in its husbandry." Hertfordshire, in England, he says, "is famed for the best plowers of their ground. Some of their best day labouring plowmen would much reform ours who by ill and ugly worked lands spoil a deal of good ground." Of the mode of fattening cattle then in use, he says,— "Nor can it be otherwise in the supine ignorance our farmers are in, in the method of choosing the right ages of putting up to fatten their beasts, and the want of every provender fit to raise them. For they generally never stall any but such oxen as are no longer fit for the yoke; or cows, but such as the good woman tells her husband are no longer good to breed or milk. These for eight or ten weeks they blow up with scalded barley, chaff and malt grains; that lean rickie of bones is all the butcher can pick up in Fife and Lothian from Candlemas to June, even for our metropolis, and no other town is so well served. And if our gentry have them fatter they cost them very dear, because to have them so they give them a great deal of corn, and I oblige that a gentleman shall cheaper eat two beves fed abroad in his enclosures on fog, hay, and turnips, and much better beef than he can one of these stall fed." After recommending a better method of selecting and feeding, he adds,— "Our over-sea trading merchants who have occasion to send their ships far voyages will find in their own Mercats beef that will bear salt, which our own half fed beef heretofore would not do; and the ships were forced to call at some town in England or Ireland to have beef and pork to make a Mediterranean or American voyage, or endanger the loss of their crew with the thin, lean hard beef their own Mercats could afford." And of the general ignorance of agricultural principles and practice, and of the consideration in which farming was held, he speaks thus,— "I have indeed met with gentlemen of but indifferent small estates very little known in the management of their ground, and if they were asked any question about Husbandry, as if it was an affront to his rank to know, he would coldly answer, his servant John or Tom could tell, meaning his bailiff."

These extracts present a very graphic picture of the condition of Scottish Agriculture in the early part of last century, and I have selected them, mainly because they very nearly represent the condition of New Brunswick now, in regard to the several points to which they refer.— At present, Scotland is regarded throughout Europe as the home of skilful agricultural practice. Its climate has been tamed and deprived of its terrors. Its most worthless portions in Caithness, and even the Orkney Islands, have been subdued into the culture of wheat. Its plowmen are ranked among the best in the world; its turnip husbandry is universally praised; and the fat cattle and sheep from its northern Counties, are now regularly shipped for the London market. Instead of indifference and contempt, the art of culture is now treated with respect, and almost