

WHAT I KNOW OF FARMING.

BY HORACE GREELY.

XXXVI.

STONE ON A FARM.

This earth, geologists say, was once an immense expanse of heated vapor, which gradually cooling at its surface, as it whirled and sped through space, contracted and formed a crust, which we know as Rock or Stone. This crust has since been broken through and tilted up into ranges of mountains and hills, by the action of internal fires, by the transmutation of solid bodies into more expansive gases; and the fragments, torn away from the sharper edges of the upheaved masses of granite, quartz, or sandstone, having been frozen into icebergs floating, or soon to be so, have been carried all over the surface of our planet, and dropped upon the greater part, as those icebergs were ultimately resolved, by a milder temperature, into flowing water. When the seas were afterward reduced nearly or quite to the present limits, and the icebergs restricted to the frigid zones and their vicinity, streams had to make their way down the sides of the mountains and hills to the adjacent valleys and plains, sweeping along not merely sand and gravel, but bowlders also, of every size and form, and sometimes great rocks, as well, by the force of their currents. And as a very large, if not the larger, portion of our earth's surface bears testimony to the existence and powerful action through ages, of larger and smaller water-courses, a wide and general diffusion of stones, not in places, but more or less triturated, smoothed and rounded, by the action of water, was among the inevitable results.

These are sometimes a facility, but often an impediment, to efficiency in agriculture. When heated by fervid sunshine throughout the day, they retain a portion of that heat through a part of the succeeding night, thereby raising the temperature of the soil, and increasing the deposit of dew on the plants there growing. When generally broken so finely so to offer no impediment to cultivation, they not merely absorb heat by day, to be given off by night, but, by rendering the soil open and porous, secure a much more extensive diffusion of air, through it than would otherwise be possible. Thus do alaly soils achieve and maintain a warmth unique in their respective latitudes, so as to ripen grapes further North, and at higher elevations, than would otherwise be possible.

The great Prairies of the West, with a considerable portion of the valleys and plains of the Atlanticoles, expose no rock at their surfaces, and little beneath them, until the soil has been traversed, and the vicinity of the underlying rock in place fairly attained. To farmers inured to the perpetual stone-picking of New England, and other hilly regions, this is a most welcome change; but when the pioneer comes to look about him for stone to wall his cellar and his well, to underpin his barn, and form the foundations of his dwelling, he realizes that the bowlders he had exulted in leaving behind him were not wholly and absolutely a nuisance; glad as he was to be rid of them forever, he would like now to call some of them back again.

Yet, the Eastern farmer of to-day has fewer uses for stone than his grandfather had. He does not want his farm cut up into two or three acre patches, by broad based, unsightly walls, which frost is apt to heave year into greater deformity and less efficiency; nor does he care longer to use them in draining, since he must excavate and replace twice as much earth in making a stone as in making a tile drain; while the former affords shelter and impunity to rats, mice, and other mischievous, predatory animals, whose burrowing therein tends constantly to stimulate its natural tendency to become choked with sand earth. Of the stone drains, constructed through parts of my farm by foremen whose will proved stronger than my own, but two remain in partial operation, and I shall rejoice when these shall have filled themselves up and been counted out evermore. Happily they were sunk so low that the subsoil plow will never disturb them.

Still, my confidence that nothing was made in vain is scarcely shaken by the prevalence and abundance of stone on our eastern farms. We may not have present use for them all; but our grandsons will be wiser than we, and have uses for them which we hardly suspect. I reinstate that land which is very stony was mainly created with an eye to timber growing, and that millions of acres of such ought forthwith to be planted with Hickory, White Oak, Locust, Chestnut, White Pine, and other valuable forest-trees. Every acre of thoroughly dry land, lying near a railroad, in the Eastern or Middle States, may be made to pay a good interest on from \$50 up to \$100, provided there be soil enough above its rocks to afford a decent foothold for trees; and how little would answer this purpose none can imagine who have not seen the experiment tried. So thickly that you may begin to cut out poles six to ten feet long within three or four years, and keep cutting out (but never cut-

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In the edges of these woods, you may deposit the surplus stones of the adjacent cultivated fields, in full assurance that moth and rust will not corrupt nor thieves break through and steal, but that you and your sons and grandsons will find them there whenever they shall be needed, as well as those you found there when you came into possession of the farm.

I am farther confident that we shall build more and more with rough unshapen stone, as we grow older and wiser. In our barns, capricious climate, walls of stone-concrete afford the cheapest and best protection alike against heat and frost, for our animals certainly, and, I think, also for ourselves. Let the farmer begin his barn by making of stone, laid in this mortar, a substantial basement story, let into a hillside, for his manure and his root cellar; let him build upon this a second story of like materials for the stalls of his cattle; and now he may add a third story and roof of wood for his hay and grain, if he sees fit. His son or grandson will probably, take this off, and replace it with concrete walls and a slate roof; or this may be postponed till the original wooden structure has rotted off; but I feel sure that, ultimately, the dwellings as well as the barns of thrifty farmers, in stony districts will mainly be built of rough stones, thrown into a box and firmly cemented by a thin mortar composed of much sand and little lime, and that thus at least ten thousand tons of stone at each farm will be disposed of. It may be somewhat later still before our barnyards, fowl inclosures, gardens, pig-pens, &c. will be shut in by cemented walls; but the other sort affords such ample and perpetual lurking places for rats, minks, weasels, and all manner of destructive vermin, that they are certain to go out of fashion before the close of the next century.

As to blasting out stone, too large or too firmly fixed to be otherwise hauled, I would solve the problem by asking, "Do you mean to keep this soil in cultivation? If you do, clear it of stone from the surface upward, and for at least two feet downward, though they may be as large as haycocks, and as fixed as the everlasting hills. Clear your field of every stone bigger than a goose-egg, that the plow or mower may strike in doing its work, or give it to timber, plant it thoroughly and leave its stones unmolested until your descendants shall have a paying use for them.

A friend deeply engaged in lumbering gives me a hint which I think some owners of stony farms will use. He is obliged to run his logs down shallow, stony creeks, from the bottom of which large rocks often protrude, arresting the downward progress of his logs. When the beds of these creeks are nearly dry in summer, he goes in, with two or three stout, strong assistants, armed with crowbars and levers, and rolls the stones to this side and that, so as to leave a clear passage for his logs. Occasionally he is confronted by a fellow, which defies his utmost force; when, instead of drilling and blasting, he gathers dead tree-tops, and other dry wood of no value, from the banks, and builds a hot fire on the top of each giant bowlder. When the fire has burned out, and the rock has cooled, he finds it softened, and, as it were rotten, on the top, often split and every way so demoralized that he can deal with it as though it were chalk or cheese. He estimates his saving by this process, as compared with drilling and blasting, as much more than fifty per cent. I trust farmers with whom wood is abundant, and big stones super-abundant, will give this simple experiment a trial.

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