Annals of Agriculture
and
Other Useful Arts
collected and published
by Arthur Young Esq.re F.R.S.
Extracted by the King

Vol. 7. Young's Annals page 65. Extract of Ralph Robinson's of Windsor's letter Jan. 1st. 1787. On Mr. Duket's mode of Cultivation.

The Farm at Peterham rented by Mr. Duket has now been nineteen years in his possession, and at present in a most flourishing state, though three of his Predecessors failed on it.

When he first entered on it, all the land, except the meadows appeared to be hungry sand, and several Acres covered with gorse and brambles, which now produce excellent crops of Corn.

As his modesty prevents his appearing among your correspondents I will attempt to describe his mode of cultivation, rather than it shall longer remain unnoticed in your Annals.

His system is a medium between the Old, and Drill husbandry, which he practised six years prior to his coming to Peterham on a small Farm at Esher, and also at the late Duke of Newcastle's Villa of Claremont, where he used his three ploughs but at that time hand hoed all his Corn.

His course of husbandry consists in employing Clover, Turneps, and Rye as feeding Crops, and intermediate ones between, Wheat, Barley, Oats and Rye, changing these occasionally according to the nature and state of the land. Of these intermediate Crops, those which serve only to fill up the Winter interval are of the greatest use, for winter and spring

food

food, and these take from the ground is amply resupplied by the dung and treading of the Cattle which feed on them, thus his ground though never at rest is continually replenished by manure, and unites the system of continued Pasture with Cultivation.

His implements are, a trench plough which requires four horses, and when he means to plough very deep six horses; he ploughs an Acre in one day; no additional strength would be required in strong soils, as they need not be ploughed so deep.

A two share plough, which with four horses ploughs two acres in one day.

A drill, which he calls a plough, as at seed time it answers the purpose of one, on which account he prefers it to any drill of late invention that drops the seed*; it requires but two horses; it will work three Acres in one day, although it makes five drills, it only completes two at every bout.

The first and second ploughs he thinks answer all the purposes that can be wanted of ploughs in husbandry. One deep ploughing with the trench plough to every other, or every

* since this was published Mr. Duckett has added a seed box to his Drill which succeeds admirably.

every third crop, with very shallow intermediate ploughings with the two share plough, is the best method of using them, and from which he has received the greatest benefit.

The advantages arising from this mode of practice he thus describes; the deep ploughing brings up fresh earth for the nourishment of the Plants; by not repeating it too often the moisture is retained in the soil; being not too loose to draw off the wet, and yet not too hard to impede the penetration of the roots of the plants into it. The shallow ploughings with the two share plough loosen the soil sufficiently for the seed to take root, untill it has sufficient strength to penetrate into the first broken earth. Frequent ploughings he thinks bring up the buried seeds of annual weeds so abundantly, that in a grain crop it is difficult to destroy them. When the land is constantly ploughed to the same depth, the rain water is lodged between the loosened and unmoved earth, where it stagnates and injures instead of assisting the vegetation.

He thinks if he can finish ploughing two or three months before seed time and harrow it, the land may lay thus to the time of sowing, taking the advantage of rains and other elementary

aids

aids to settle and consolidate the soil; the annual weeds have time to grow, which the drill in preparing the soil thus managed for the seed entirely destroys, and the crop of grain is kept during the summer, cleaner from weeds than it would otherwise be. He has reaped by this method in a dry summer fine crops of grain, when others not so treated, have perished through drought.

He prefers narrow furrows, his ploughs being constructed only to turn the furrows nine inches wide, consequently do not perform so much work in a day as some common ploughs; but the ground is better broken, better prepared for the drill, and the grain finds more nourishment.

He drills for all his crops, but sows the seeds broad cast (turnips excepted) as the seeds fall naturally into the drills, or what escape the hoe eradicates; turnips when eaten by the fly are well renewed by drillings; he has had good crops after the first sowings have been destroyed by the fly. Clover drilled among the corn he finds very advantageous, much seed being saved, and the crop better secured from the fly, which feed on this plant as well as on turnips. If the clover fails, he sows beans broad cast when the corn is near in the ear, which, from the ground being loosened by the preceding drillings, are by the first rain washed into the earth, and ensure him a crop of grass; but he prefers a crop of clover alone, being the better preparation for wheat.

His

Further remarks on Mr. Duckets
mode of Cultivation

Sir

The early attention You have given to my attempt of laying before the Publick through Your useful Channel Mr. Duckets system of Agriculture, fully entitles You to expect from Me a compliance in the request You have intimated in a note at the end of that publication, that a particular account should be given of the courses of Crops usually adopted by that original Cultivator, as well as his sentiments on fallows, and his mode of treating a field when full of Couch Grass.

Mr. Ducket has no fixed rotation of Crops, he seems to think that every Farmer ought to study in cropping his land, what Grain will pay him best, which is the only rule he follows unless prevented by bad seasons. All he requires is to get a feeding Crop between those of Grain, and renew his soil by alternate deep and shallow ploughings. He does not regard crop-cropping his land; yet would avoid sowing Wheat after Barley, nay thinks Wheat after Wheat less prejudicial; he does not object to Wheat after Oats, but Oats after Oats and Wheat following Barley, he thinks are ever weak Crops, and that a continuation of such successions would at last produce nothing. On the Contrary Barley after Barley does very well, indeed he has known Barley succeed well with alternate deep and shallow ploughings,

and

and proper dressings when sown two years successively.

If land requires rest, he lays it down with grass seeds, which prepares it after proper culture to produce the Grain most called for in the Market.

He seems of opinion that the most profitable plan of Culture a farmer can follow, is to examine which sort of Grain will pay him best, and to vary his changes of Crops according to the demand of that particular kind of Grain instead of laying down a regular rotation of Crops.

An untoward season may prevent his following the rotation or succession of Crops he had proposed; but he deems it as one of the material advantages of his mode of Culture, that his land is ever ready for the reception of such Grain or seeds he may on such an occasion judge best suited to supply the place of the original intended Crop. He therefore recommends the use of his Ploughs and his mode of Ploughing with intermediate feeding Crops: then Grain may be cultivated in any variation or succession, but he does not think his mode of croping ground can succeed if attempted by the common Method of husbandry.

As an Experiment he for three Years successively sowed Siberian Wheat on the same land, and is convinced it

will

will answer, and if the price of Wheat was so high as to pay better than other Grain, he would reduce it to practice, but does not imagine this mode of Culture can be successful but with Farmers who work his Ploughs and practice his method of using them. He recommends the Siberian Wheat as the only species that will answer to be thus cultivated, as it is of quicker growth, does not exhaust the soil so much as common Wheats, and nourishes Grass Seeds sown among it, equally with other Spring Grain.

He has reaped Siberian Wheat on the 25th of July, which has given him a good Season for Turnips as an intervening Crop, which being fed off by Christmas, he has sown the ground ~~again~~ immediately with Siberian Wheat and by pursueing this method has taken off the same land three Crops of Siberian Wheat successively.

If the harvest is likely to prove late, he sows his Turnips when the Wheat is in full Ear, and has large Turnips at Christmas. He sows this Seed broad Cast among the Corn, when there is a prospect of Rain, which varies it sufficiently in the Ground to produce Vegetation without other assistance. His method of alternately deep and shallow ploughing the Ground with his French and double Furrow

Ploughs

Ploughs, contributes to the success of this practice, by furnishing every other Crop with fresh food and a new soil, which when assisted with proper dressings and an intermediate feeding Crop, will he thinks prove successful in taking Siberian Wheat many times successively off the same land.

He thinks fallows necessary for strong soils, as the clods of earth cannot be well broken to pieces without laying sometimes exposed to the air, but would in general reject this practice on light soils as feeding Crops are better, from the Cattle while consuming the Crop, treading the soil, and rendering it more compact and firm, which a light soil requires. He would not let the ground lay any longer idle than while preparing for the feeding Crop. This enables the Farmer to keep a larger stock of Cattle, which encreases his quantity of Manure.

Many soils may be improved by Winter fallows, this may be practised by ploughing immediately after the Grain Crop is off, in a dry season, and by being well Water furrowed during the Winter and proper dressings in the Spring; but he does not think this method equal to a feeding Crop of Rye, Turnips, or Tares.

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The method he constantly pursues for destroying Couch Grass, is by Trench Ploughing it into the Ground, where it dies when buried deep; that left on the Surface is destroyed by hoeing.

Grain of quick and luxuriant growth sown on the Trenched ground, also assists very much towards the destruction of this troublesome Weed, E ~~A Crop of Rye~~ ~~if a good one will prevent Couch~~ ~~Grass growing, and in a great~~ ~~measure destroy it. A Change~~ ~~of Rye, Tares and Turnips will~~ ~~also entirely destroy it~~ ~~destroy Couch Grass entirely when~~ ~~cultivated~~ [illegible] ~~produced by his mode of culture~~ ~~whe~~ ~~will most effectually destroy Couch Grass~~

E. but a Change of Rye, Tares and Turnips when produced by his mode of Culture will the ~~most~~ effectually destroy Couch Grass.

He ~~is aware~~ confesses that his practice which he has successfully pursued for many years is condemned by many persons, yet he is convinced it answers perfectly, is less expensive, and quicker done than by any other method.

I have wished to be as pointed as possible in attempting to answer Your enquiries which may have led me into greater length than I should have wished, I shall therefore only add that

I am
Sir Your most humble
Servant
Ralph Robinson

Windsor
March 5th
1787.