# The Farmer's Column.

[*Written for The American Union.*]

## The Culture of Pear Orchards.

It is admitted by the experienced in the cultivation of the pear that it is the most whimsical, uncertain, and difficult to manage of all our market fruits. In comparison with other fruit trees of various kinds, the pear may be properly classed a hardy tree; yet, notwithstanding this fact, there are a great many things in its culture which tend strongly to embarrass and discourage, irrespective of soil or climate. The question here arises, Has not the science of American horticulture yet attained a standard of perfection such as will reliably explain the defects and provide a remedy for the evil? It is patent to the mind of every person in the country, who is in the least interested in this relation, that there are a great many gentlemen of experience and scientific theoretical ability who write and discourse freely upon this subject, one criticising and condemning the practices and opinions of the other—all agreeing only to disagree. With this state of facts existing, how is the public to discriminate between right and wrong? How are the inexperienced to safely determine, amidst the discord of their instructors, which really is the best practice? True, doctors *do* differ, and such are their individual and professional rights; and though the experience of the writer, in the successful cultivation of the pear, may not be strictly in consonance with that of some who are older and wiser in that branch of fruit culture, his object is not to ridicule, criticise or condemn, merely for the sake of such employment, but to benefit, if possible, the honest-hearted novice who, with willing hands, is about to enter upon the uncertainties of pear culture.

STANDARD AND DWARF PEARS.

Pear trees are cultivated in the nursery under two general classes, viz: Standards and Dwarfs. The former comprises such as are budded, or grafted, upon pear stocks, and attain large size in the orchard, while the dwarfs are from buds inoculated upon Anger's quince stocks. These terms apply only to the trees and not to the fruit. For finest fruit, some cultivators prefer the one and some the other class of trees. This, though, is somewhat dependent upon the varieties desired, as certain kinds succeed much better as standards than do the same as dwarfs, and in a few instances *vice versa*—more particularly with the Duchess d'Angouleme than any other variety now in cultivation. It has been the practice with propagators in some parts of the country to bud the pear on apple stocks and sell them as standard trees. This answers very well so far as the sale of the trees extends. The growth of the trees when worked in this manner, for the first three or four years, is generally satisfactory, but soon thereafter they decline and either die or stand as an obstinate memento of the fact that there was a business transaction in which the purchaser "paid too much for his whistle." A similar trick in trade identifies itself with the propagation of dwarf pears, the common, or Apple, quince being used instead of the true Angers for stocks; and though a decreasing few still maintain that the one is as good as the other, it is presumable that such arguments are prompted more from a lack of Anger's quince stocks than anything else..

SOILS.

That some soils are better adapted to the successful cultivation of the pear than others will not admit of a doubt. Yet it is equally doubtless that here, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, pears *can* be grown with success, such as insures a paying return on labor and capital invested, if properly treated. No tree will grow luxuriantly where there is nothing in the soil for it to feed upon. As new wood is formed upon the tree, the soil beneath is, in proportion to the growth above, exhausted of fertilizing matter requisite for that purpose; and while the atmosphere furnishes much invisible material, such as by the laws of nature is indispensible to the perfect development of either tree or fruit, the heavier proportion of food required by the tree is derived from the soil. Hence, to guarantee a strong growth, and to sustain the vigor and vitality of the tree when at a bearing age, it is plainly requisite that the soil should be highly enriched or fertilized. To insure good results in growing pears, a *deep, rich* soil is not all that is essential. To have the soil well and thoroughly drained is equally as important. The land should be properly prepared, thoroughly enriched and perfectly drained before a tree is planted in it. What is meant by properly prepared? Where the soil is stiff or heavy and underlaid with a compact subsoil, a good plow, not so as to run deeply, followed by a subsoil plow, loosening in this way the soil to a depth of twelve or fifteen inches, at the season when corn ground is prepared, then worked as the crop grown thereon may require during the summer, clearing it of the crop in early autumn, and cross-working in the same manner as commenced in the spring. After the cross-plowing it may be considered ready for planting. Why work the soil to such an unusual depth? To admit the air, dews and rains freely, and to assist the surplus of the latter to pass off rapidly; also, to better retain a regular degree of moisture and temperature in the hot and dry months of summer. Light, sandy soils, with loose, porous subsoils, of course do not require so much labor in their preparation.

Proper manuring is the next consideration. To what extent must the soil be enriched to grow pears succesfully? Such land as will yield a No. 1 crop of corn, or other grain, is strong enough, kept in this condition by the application of proper manures, such as lime, wood-ashes and ammoniacal matter, well rotted or decomposed.

Next is the drainage of the soil, which, in no case, should be overlooked or neglected. Underdrains are greatly preferable for many reasons, obvious to every thinking mind. A laborious and expensive process, is, perhaps, the first thought that will suggest itself to the reader. But it must be remembered that, after the ground is thus prepared for a pear orchard, it is not, as with grain or vegetables, an annual operation, but it is to last a life-time, perhaps, so far as deep tillage is concerned, for when fairly started the orchard should not be subjected to deep plowing, thus tearing and destroying the roots of the trees; better worked level and sowed in grass, to be kept mowed off, and occasionally top-dressed with some fertilizing matter, or, if not in grass, mulched with litter of some kind, to keep the surface cool and of mean temperature, stirring the soil with a shallow-running implement only when ammoniacal manures are applied in order to mix the same with the surface soil and thereby economize their value.

Expensive? Ah! but is it not equally expensive to buy pear trees, plant them and cultivate them several years only to see them decline and die from improper management? Thousands of dollars have been expended annually for the last fifteen years for pear trees, with results just of this kind, purchasers getting neither pears nor pay for their time, land or labor. The case is plain; look at it and decide accordingly.

One more figure in the expenses, or rather labors, and that is the pruning. This is as frequently *over*-done as too much neglected. I have seen persons who pretend to understand this branch of the labor who, when beside a fine, healthy and vigorous-growing dwarf pear tree, with pruning knife in hand, seemed to be possessed of no other feeling than that of cutting the tree to pieces, and year after year treat all trees that come under their care as though they were herbaceous in nature. If a particular shape is sought after, prune prudently and skillfully with that object in view, beginning when the tree is small and young, for "as the twig is bent the tree is inclined." When an increase of growth is desired, let early spring be the season for this work, but if to promote fruitfulness is the desire, summer is the time; but repeated *severe* annual prunings, without regard to season, are detrimental and destructive to the vitality and health generally of trees of any kind.

DISEASES.

After battling against the labors, expenses and accidents incident to orchard culture of the pear, until your trees have arrived at a bearing age, and to all appearances are well established, there are still in store some formidable difficulties and adversities to be encountered—the most alarming of which is the summer or fire blight, a disease such as in the space of a fortnight may *undo* and totally destroy the labors of a careful and judicious cultivator to the performance of which years may have been devoted. The cause of this disease, which can easily be detected by any one from the sudden change of the foliage and bark of the tree, or, more generally, part of a tree from its natural color to that of a dark brown or black, looking as though a flame of fire had come in contact with them and scorched them, may be chiefly attributed to the condition of the soil. Its ravages, commonly, are greater in wet, low soils, though not confined exclusively to such; but where the surplus water is not drawn from the soil, by means of drains, and by this neglect suffered to keep the soil saturated for too great a time, the blight is almost certain to do its devastating work to pear trees.—The only remedy now in practice amongst pear growers for this disease is, as soon as a limb or bough of the tree blackens up with its effects, to lop or cut it off, say six inches below any marks or indications of the disease; keep a careful watch and give it battle in this way, wherever seen, taking the affected limbs as they are dislodged from the trees, out of the orchard and burning them. The barklouse sometimes does considerable injury to pear trees. It is, as the latter part of its name indicates, a very small insect, protected by a grayish skin or cob-web-like covering, clinging with leech-like tenacity to the bark of pear and other fruit trees; sometimes they are so numerous as to nearly cover the bark of the young shoots, and in this manner retard the growth and impair the health of the tree. A wash made by dissolving one pound of potash in one gallon of water and applied by means of a stiff brush, rubbing briskly the trunk and limbs thus affected, will exterminate that intruder. An annual washing of the trunks of young trees with this solution will be found to be very beneficial to the general health and thrift of the orchard. It clears the bark of insects and keeps it smooth and clear of rough mossy matter that not unusually is seen to cover, *with no good effects*, the bodies of young trees. Spring is the best season to apply the wash.

VARIETIES.

A careful regard should unexceptionally be paid to the selection of suitable varieties in planting orchards of any kind, and more especially in pear orchards. Locality and soil are subjects both of which should have careful consideration. That certain kinds succeed well in certain sections and soils, while in others the same is totally unworthy of attention, is a fact, bought at a high price, by a great many people. Plant plentifully of only such kinds as you know from your own observations and experience, or by that of a reliable friend in your own vicinity, do succeed well, and produce fruit possessed of such quality and appearance as will *sell* it when sent to market. After all that has been said and written by various eminent fruit growers in different parts of the country, it is safe to say that three-fifths of the pear trees that are planted now are purchased altogether at random respecting the adaptability of the variety to the soil and climate.

That the hints and suggestions in this article, relating to the general management of pear trees, the labor, expense, reverses, &c., attendant upon the same may be of some benefit to the reader, is the desire which prompted its preparation,

J. W. KERR.

DENTON, Feb. 21, 1870.

COMMUNICATED.

*To the Editor of The American Union:*

DEAR SIR—The long winter months bring much time for thought, and the low price of grain makes it necessary that farmers should improve that time so that, when the growing season comes upon us, we will have our plans thoroughly digested, and be fully prepared to put them in execution. It is evident to every one that we, of this section of the country, cannot grow wheat at $1.00 to $1.25 per bushel, and corn at 70c to 90c per bushel, and live, with labor at the price it now is, unless we raise other crops. The question then arises, what other crops shall we raise? The answer covers a very wide range of industry. Let us raise peaches, apples, pears, berries, potatoes, pea-nuts, onions and "truck" of all kinds. "But," some one will say, "we do not understand 'trucking,' hnd if we did we could not sell it for enough to pay expenses." My friend, you are mistaken, at least in the latter part of your answer, for *first-class* fruit and vegetables will almost always command a good price; and if you would invest more money in agricultural books and papers, *and read them*, and less with itinerant venders of "county rights" for "Patent Corn Plows," &c., you would understand how to cultivate your land so that it would yield you a better profit than it now does.

I do not approve of specialties in farming. The man who plants all potatoes, or all peach trees, or who makes a specialty of any one crop, is not the man who makes the money, as a rule, but he who is occupied with varied husbandry; if one one crop fails him, or the market is "glutted," it is very probable that some other crop will just suit the season, or the market, or, possibly, both. But if our farmers still insist on raising nothing but grain for market, let them lay off, say one acre for carrots, beets or rutabagas, and four acres for potatoes, in a thirty acre field which they intended to put to corn; that would be one-sixth of it. Now let us see the result.—Land manured so that it will grow fifty bus. of corn an acre will grow, with a fair season, eight hundred bushels of carrots per acre, or two hundred and fifty bushels of potatoes. With corn at 83c, potatoes at 63c, and carrots at 53c, (what they are now quoted, less expenses), twenty-five acres of corn would yield $1037.50, four acres of potatoes would yield $637, and one acre of carrots $424, making a net balance in favor of the one-sixth of the field in potatoes and carrots of $16.90.

With these facts before them, let our farmers consider whether or not it will pay to plant at least a small piece in roots for their stock, if not for market.

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