

CHAPTER XI.

AGRICULTURAL MATTERS: PLOUGHING MATCHES

IT had been frequently stated that Otago could never be an agricultural country, at least for many years, one man, well up in the Government service, going so far as to state that it would be like the small German States, living and trading simply by barter. How these dismal prognostications have been fulfilled the present position of Otago in the agricultural world amply shows!

For many years the advance in agriculture was very slow, the labour entailed by the primitive implements requiring a great deal of patience and weary work. At first the grub hoe and spade were the only implements used to break up the land. Some of the Clutha settlers adopted the plan taken by the settlers around Dunedin of chipping the ground and sowing the grain, but often more fern than wheat or oats came up, and the crops were lost. Others, again, sowed their grain so thickly that the resulting crop was a dismal failure. Mr. Job Dabinett, an early settler in Wharepa, was so disgusted at the wearisome work that he set his brains to work and, being an ingenious individual, constructed a wooden plough and a set of harrows, and, with the aid of four bullocks, broke up a good part of his land. Bullock traction was slow and expensive, but, as horses were only conspicuous by their absence, was the only means available.

John McNeil was the first to plough land in Wharepa, his charge being £1 a day, driver supplied.

It was no uncommon sight to see a girl leading the near side leading bullock, which had a screw ring in its nose, and another girl whipping the team up on the off side. A very small area could be ploughed in a day, and the cost often ran up to £2 an acre, one instance being given of three acres having cost £12, but this is admitted to have been an exceptional case.

When the crops were ripe they were cut with sickles, threshed with the flail, or in the very early times with a stick over a barrel, and winnowed with the wind. It is said that one settler, whose crop of wheat was ripe, did not know how to reap it. It was suggested that his girls should clip the heads off with their scissors, and that was accordingly done. Many instances could be given where the grain was cut, threshed, winnowed, and ground, and the flour baked in a camp oven or on a girdle, all in one day.

The steel mill was in universal use for grinding purposes. It was driven by hand, and very often after a hard day's work the members of a family had to turn to and grind enough flour for the next day. Mr. Peter Ayson, of Corydon, Wharepa, made a water-wheel, by means of which he worked his mill, the first so worked in the district. When he grew his first crop of wheat and it was reaped, he had no means of making it into flour. Hearing that a settler named Andrew Mercer, in South Clutha, had a steel mill, William and James Ayson set off to see if they could borrow it. Mr. Mercer kindly lent it to them, and then came the job of carrying it to Wharepa. One carried the fly wheel, the other the mill, but the job was no easy one, so, when they came to a hill, William used to roll the wheel to the bottom. At last they reached their destination, tired out and with sore backs. William Ayson declares that carrying the wheel gave him a lump on his back which he still retains—no doubt as a memento of the occasion. Some sacks of flour were ground, after which Peter and James Ayson returned the mill, carrying it in a similar fashion. Some time after this Ayson procured a stone mill, the stones being contained in a box of three divisions, but, as related in a former chapter, the Somervilles already had a stone mill, which they had brought from Anderson's Bay.

At first the mill was driven by bullocks, but John Somerville erected a water-wheel to drive it. He dammed a small creek, and when the dam was full there was enough water to drive the mill for an hour or two. When there was a good run of water in the creek, they were able to grind for seven or eight hours. Once so much water came down that the mill-wheel was upset, and had to be tied up with ropes. Some years later the Somervilles erected a flour mill at Waitepeka, the stones being two feet six inches in diameter.

The price of wheat varied considerably, and ran from 8s. to 12s. per bushel; oats were 2s. to 10s. per bushel; while potatoes were anywhere up to £20 a ton. Mr. Mosley, on Inch-Clutha, grew skinless barley, which, after being ground, was used for making porridge.

After the sickle came the scythe, a big improvement, and the scythemen were paid 5/- a day and found. The men bound the sheaves, while the youthful members of the family made the bands. Threshing with the flail cost 1/- a bushel. By and by reaping machines were introduced. They were followed by seven or eight men. It is generally understood that Mr. Peter Ayson introduced the first reaping machine, a one-horse Nicholson reaper, which was brought out from Home by Douglas Watson for him. Others were introduced by the Somervilles and Wm. Christie, of Keithmore, but it is stated that one was working on Inch-Clutha before these latter arrived. Mr. Ayson had also the honour of importing to the district the first two ploughs, one of which he sold to Sandy Gordon, keeping the other himself.

The women were not idle in those days of toil and hardship, and perhaps more honour is due to them than to the stronger sex, for it was on them that the privations told most severely. And keen privations they were: want of bread and little flour to make it with; want of clothes and no cloth to repair them with; going a whole winter without stockings; hard toiling work in the bush; then the long hard struggles when the men were away on expeditions or gold-digging. Add to these the difficulties of communication which the men had to overcome, while the women stayed at home; the want of neighbours: must not these have fallen with the greatest severity on the women? And though the women who have come through it all are the ones to say least about it, yet they deserve the higher honour and appreciation at the hands of the present generation. Incidents could be multiplied indefinitely of the hard labour of these self-denying women to show that they did their fair share in assisting to carve out homes in the wilderness, and in advancing agricultural interests in their midst. Mrs. Ayson on several occasions had to cut some wheat, thresh it with a stick, winnow the grain, and grind it into flour before she could get bread for her family's tea. A Mrs. Hislop, with the help of her children, cut her field of wheat with the hook, bound the sheaves, stooked, and afterwards

stacked them, the resulting grain being in splendid order and condition. On other occasions, in various parts of the district, the women showed the metal they were made of by doing similar work. The children, too, had a part in the business, having, as fences were unknown, to act as watchers and scarecrows over the growing crops.

As things began to get into something like ship-shape order, post-and-rail fences were set up in the proximity of the bush, the rails being lashed with vines; then holes were bored in the posts, and the old fastenings thrown aside. Such fences cost about £1 a chain. Out from the bush sod fences, costing from 12/- to 16/- a chain, were erected. In some parts live fences came into being, Messrs. Ayson and Kettle being about the first to sow gorse and broom seed. Felling the bush cost from 30/- to £2 per acre, and logging and burning about the same.

About 1866 the flail was superseded by a portable threshing mill, or "hurdy gurdy," as it was popularly called. The Somervilles were the first to procure one of these. It had a peg drum, and threshed the grain very cleanly. It took four horses to work it, and attached to it was a shaker to shake off the bulk of the straw. A large sheet was placed below the shaker to catch the grain, which was shaken through holes in it. When a large heap of grain collected, it was bagged and stowed away to be winnowed after threshing was finished. This mill travelled a good bit about the district, going to Waiwera and all around Puerua. The farmers usually supplied horses and all the hands but two—a driver and a feeder. One hundred bushels of grain were reckoned a good day's work.

James Rattray and John Crawford erected a peg drum mill in a barn belonging to the latter, and Rattray built a windmill to provide power to drive it. Unfortunately, the venture was a failure. The power secured would drive the empty mill quite well, but when a sheaf was put in it was quite insufficient to set the machinery going. Rattray thought he could get the windmill to drive a chaffcutter, but this, too, was a failure for the same reason.

By and by steam threshing did away with the horse-power mills. The first steam threshing plant in Inch-Clutha was Wm. Grant's mill, while in the outlying districts one Kirk from the Taieri was the first. He was succeeded by Jas. Milne, who was again succeeded by

Cousins and Tosh. A little later the Somervilles brought one of Clayton's mills to Wharepa, and Hay, of Kaihiku, got one about the same time. A. Rutherford was the first to own a threshing plant in the Waiwera District.

The increase of settlement, the importation of the most improved implements and of horses, but, above all, the gold discoveries, led to an immense improvement in the methods of agriculture. Old things gradually passed away, and all things became new, and although the older pioneers regretted many of the changes, their regrets were unavailing, and were no doubt relieved by the reflection that substantial advantage would be reaped from the intruders.

Agricultural Societies were formed in various parts of the district, and ploughing matches instituted, both of which did much to improve matters. Ploughing bees were a feature of the districts, and seemed to be the natural accompaniment on the arrival of a new settler. The remembrance of the days when these first took place is now lost in the dim past, but early settlers state that one of the very first took place in Inch-Clutha, somewhere near the head of the island; another was held on Porteous and MacCaig's farm at Wharepa, when fourteen teams turned up and ploughed twelve acres of land. Still another was held at a later date in Waitepeka, when the only double furrow in the district was used. No doubt many others were held, but sufficient has been said to show the hearty goodwill of the old settlers to the new arrivals.

With regard to ploughing matches, it is to be regretted that information about the formation and carrying out of many different fixtures cannot now be obtained, but the accompanying accounts of the first matches held in Waiwera, Port Molyneux, and Wharepa may be of interest, the accounts being extracts from the "Bruce Herald":—

"A ploughing match between Mr. Matthew Curry and Mr. David Hudson for £20 aside came off on Saturday, 14th October, 1865, on the grounds belonging to Messrs. Douglas, Alderson and Co., at Pomahaka. The conditions were that each man should plough half an acre within six hours, the furrows to be 8½ inches wide and 4½ inches deep. Mr. James McNeil, senr., of Clutha Ferry, and Mr. A. Calder, of Pomahaka, were selected as judges, and in the event of not agreeing were to choose an umpire. The

competitors commenced at 10 o'clock a.m. precisely. Hudson made a splendid start, and the first six bouts were done in a masterly style. He then altered the coulter of his plough (with the intention of making the plough work easier), after which he gradually showed worse work, and, although he tried all in his power, made a bad finish. Curry, on the other hand, did not make a good start, but improved as he proceeded, until the last three or four rounds, when he made a very indifferent finish. The judges could not agree, and ultimately chose as umpire Mr. Telford's ploughman, who decided in favour of Curry. The work was completed in twenty minutes under the specified time. A large number of spectators was on the ground, and each man having his backers, a good sum of money changed hands."

September, 1866.—"Amongst other cheering indications of progress and improvement, abundantly apparent to the observant traveller on the Main South road, in the district of Waiwera and Kaihiku, was the successful carrying out of the first ploughing match in this district, which was held on a paddock belonging to Mr. Robert Telford, to whose energy and enterprise the furnishing of such an opportunity for ploughmen in the neighbourhood to test their skill and workmanship was mainly due. The valley through which the Waiwera runs, signifying in the Maori language 'red water,' is formed of rich alluvial deposits, and is fitted to produce very fine crops of all kinds, and although usually at present there are wanting indications of a numerous population being resident in the neighbourhood, the lands being only recently purchased, yet at no distant date, we are safe in assuming, from its natural capabilities, that as the result of industry and capital it will become a 'strath' of great richness, supporting both a thriving and numerous population. Early on the morning of the match considerable numbers of the neighbours and competitors began to arrive, who seemed to enter into the prospect of a day's amusement 'Con amore,' and from the abilities of the different ploughmen being well known, a fertile field for speculation was furnished and taken advantage of in guessing who was to be the champion of the day.

"After the ground had been marked off, the entries were made as follows:—

Ploughmen.	Owners.
1. Hugh McFee	Mr. R. Telford
2. Charles Ritchie	Mr. John Anderson
3. Joseph Allanby	Mr. Wm. Telford, Clifton Station
4. James Sinclair	
5. Andrew Rutherford	
6. David Ballingall	
7. James Borthwick	Mr. Wm. Telford, Clifton Station
8. David Peat	
9. George Brown	
10. William Pagan	

The rules read and lots drawn, the signal for starting (the report of a gun) was given, and ten teams entered upon the contest with spirit and a determination on the part of each ploughman to do his best to win.

“The land was rather too dry, the soil too rich, and the want of a sword of grass made it difficult to show neat work; the furrow slices broke a good deal, but, notwithstanding these drawbacks, some good specimens of work were produced, quite equalling anything we have seen done where a much larger gathering of ploughmen was present.

“When the time for luncheon was signalled, no delay occurred in doing justice to the store of good things provided and prepared, which were dispensed and discussed with great celerity and ‘gusto,’ then work was resumed with renewed vigour and care.

“The allotted quantity of ground, half an acre, was completed about 3.30 p.m., when the judges (Messrs. Roy, Moffat, and Glendinning, of Kaihiku) declared their decision as to prizes, which were awarded as follows:—First prize (£5), James Allanby, ploughman, Waiwera, Clifton Station (bullock team); second prize (£4), James Borthwick, ploughman, Clifton Station (horses); third prize (£3), A. Rutherford, ploughman and owner, Popotunoa; fourth prize (£2), James Sinclair, ploughman and owner, Wharepa; fifth prize (£1), George Brown, ploughman and owner, Popotunoa. From the nature of arrangements made in ploughing, showing two feerings and one finish, an excellent opportunity was given to display to advantage these two essential features of good ploughing.

“A large number of those present adjourned to the Waiwera Hotel, where a sumptuous dinner was prepared.

and every preparation made for spending a pleasant evening, which was certainly done, as it was only at a late hour those present could be prevailed on to separate. After tendering a hearty vote of thanks to R. Telford, Esq., for his liberality as host and energy as secretary, the company dispersed, all highly gratified with the success of this first match."

October, 1867.—"On Monday, the 19th ult., a meeting was held in the Commercial Hotel, Port Molyneux, on the subject of having a ploughing match in the district. The night was very stormy, but still the meeting was well attended. All agreed as to the desirability of the match, but there was considerable difference of opinion as to the rules to be observed. This was only what was to be expected, considering that the settlers were drawn from all parts of the Old Country. It was ultimately decided that the furrow should not be less than five inches deep, that horse teams should be allowed at the rate of 14 hours to the acre, and bullock teams three hours longer, and that each man should make one feering and one finish. The match was fixed to take place on Tuesday, the 27th. This early date was agreed to, as the spring season was wearing on, and it was thought that if the match were delayed longer farmers would be unwilling to send their teams. As so short notice was given, only eleven ploughs turned out, four being bullock teams. In new districts there is always an undesirable proportion of these teams, but, as agriculture advances, these give way to horse teams, as in the Taieri and Tokomairiro. Had the matter been taken up earlier, advertised in the papers, and better circulated in the district, there can be no doubt that the turnout would have been much larger. However, it was a beginning. It will help to stimulate the young men to do their best, and it will direct the attention of the local blacksmiths to the form and setting that is best adapted to the district. We have heard it said that at Home ploughing matches stimulate the smiths quite as much as the ploughmen; and we do not see why they should not have the same beneficial effect here. The match took place on the farm of Mr. Brugh, Cloan. He had a piece of old lea, very suitable for the purpose, which he kindly placed at the disposal of the committee.

"There was a large concourse of spectators. It was admitted on all hands that the work was exceedingly well executed, the deficiencies being more attributed to the

ploughs than to the men. This is not wonderful, considering that in this young district the ploughmen have been almost entirely accustomed to breaking up or cross-ploughing rough land, when it is almost impossible to tell whether your plough is working right or not. The judges were Mr. Downie, Mr. Dunlop, and Mr. Thomson, Cloan. They appeared to have considerable difficulty in arriving at a decision. But ultimately the prize list stood as follows:—

1st prize, £4. A. Haddo (horses); owner, W. Dalgleish.

2nd prize, £3 5s., R. Sinclair (horses); owner, A. S. Begg.

3rd prize, £2 5s., J. McLay (bullocks); owner, W. McLay.

4th prize, £1 15s., W. Davidson (bullocks); owner, McLoskey.

5th prize, £1 5s., A. Watt (horses); owner, H. Livingstone.

6th prize, £1, A. Anderson, jun. (bullocks); owner, A. Anderson, sen.

Youngest ploughman, A. Anderson, jun., £1

Best feering, James McLay, 12s. 6d.

Best finish, W. Davidson, 12s. 6d.

“A whip, presented by the saddler at Clutha Ferry, for best kept harness, was awarded to Alexander Ledingham. We had almost omitted to mention, and we should have very much regretted the omission, that both ploughmen and visitors were amply provided with refreshments by Mr. Brugh, the owner of the land.”

October, 1867.—If any one event more than another may be said to depend upon fine weather for success, it is a ploughing match. The determination of the Clutha settlers to carry out their arrangements for the match in spite of the threatening clouds and a bleak sou-wester proved the ripeness of the district for such an association as the event was intended to inaugurate. “At the time of my arrival on the ground (Mr. Christie’s farm, Wharepa),” says the narrator, “about half the work had been got through. No judge myself of such matters, I endeavoured to find someone competent to initiate me in the mysteries of furrows, feerings, and riggs. In answer to all my applications for information I was told to look at the work in any part of the field. ‘You can’t go wrong to look for good work,’ said one of the best judges I knew, ‘in all my experience I never saw such a general average

of first-class ploughing.' Considering that there were twenty-six ploughmen competing, and, as was frequently remarked, 'not a duffer in the lot,' speaks sufficiently of itself for the agricultural skill in the district, and must have made the office of judge as unenviable as honourable." Considerably before "gunfire" all the competitors had finished the work assigned to them, and shortly afterwards Mr. Somerville announced the judges' (Messrs. Kemp, Thomson, and McFarlane) decision as follows:—

1st prize, £6, J. Taylor; owner, John McNeil; maker, Barrowman.

2nd prize, £4 10s., A. Rutherford; maker, Barrowman.

3rd prize, £3 10s., J. Cousins; owner, J. Rattray; maker, Rattray.

4th prize, £2 10s., A. Peat; owner, D. Peat; maker, Barrowman.

5th prize, £1 10s., H. Hogg; owner, H. Hogg; maker, Stenhouse.

6th prize, £1 1s., J. Crawford; owner, J. Crawford; maker, Grey.

Junior Class.

1st prize, £1, J. Sheddan; owner, J. Sheddan; maker, John Halley.

2nd prize, set swing trees, G. Polson, jun; owner, G. Polson, jun; maker, Leller.

Best feering, Henry Hogg.

Best finish, J. Stewart.

A ploughing match without a dinner would be like an egg without salt. The promoters of the Clutha Agricultural Association determined not to have their introduction into the world of societies spoiled by a niggardly bill of fare, notwithstanding that the unusual difficulty of there being no hotel within six miles of the field presented itself to the committee. Mr. Crawford's barn as a dining hall, and Mr. Crawford as host, were pressed into service. A more fortunate selection of man and barn could not have been made. About sixty gentlemen sat down to dispose of the good things provided for them. It is only superfluous to talk about doing justice to eatables after a ploughing match. Dinner over, the chairman, James Thomson, Esq., M.P.C., in proposing the first toast, "The Queen and Royal Family," said, in calling upon the company to drink the health of the first lady of the realm, he knew well how heartily it would be responded to. In some matters—even in matters pertaining to our own



MR. AND MRS. J. W. THOMSON.

interest—we sometimes fell away, but never in loyalty and strong feelings towards monarchical institutions. The Queen had ever exercised a beneficial influence on society, and, as a mother, had brought up her family in a manner befitting them for the high sphere of their destiny. He was glad to notice how creditably the Prince of Wales was taking an active part in public ceremonies at Home, supplying, in a great measure, the loss the country had experienced by the death of his lamented father. The Duke of Edinburgh, he might remind them, was now on his way to Dunedin. It would be a pity if he should visit the metropolis without visiting the Molyneux. He would see here, and be able to take Home with him, a testimony to the efforts that had been made to reclaim the wilderness. (Loud applause.) The toast was drunk with great enthusiasm.

The Chairman next proposed “The Army, Navy, and Volunteers.” He need hardly, he said, remind them of the giant dimensions the Volunteer movement had attained. He had every confidence that, in the event of war and the regular army being called out, the Volunteers would prove their value as an auxiliary force. (Cheers.)

Mr. Ralston briefly responded.

The Vice-Chairman (Mr. J. H. Jenkinson) had no doubt that the toast he was about to propose would meet with a cordial reception. It was “The Superintendent and Provincial Council, coupled with the name of our worthy Chairman.” It was always desirable on such occasions to eschew political considerations, but in drinking the health of the Superintendent the late proceedings in the House of Representatives had invested the toast with a special claim upon their sympathies. (Hear, hear.) In coupling Mr. Thomson’s name with the toast, it was only due to him as the representative of the district in the Provincial Council, in the performance of which duties everyone would give him credit for his honesty of purpose. As he was present, he would not flatter him too much; but would call upon them to drink the toast he had the honour to propose. (Long-continued cheering.)

In replying to the toast, Mr. Thomson said he could assure them he was much pleased at the manner in which it had been received. There was an old saying, “We are all John Thomson’s bairns.” Since he had represented the district he had endeavoured to deserve the confidence

of the Clutha. He would observe just now, because the time was very fitting, that the opinion of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce had very considerable weight with Otago members at Wellington. With a similar association here, composed of a few intelligent men with whom he and other district members could communicate, much of what was overlooked would be attended to. He would instance, as a proof of such a necessity, a case in point. The Government had only lately been selling at 10s. an acre land that ought not to have been sold. He was not clearly posted up in the matter before the sale, but now he had no hesitation in saying it was a gross blunder. If such an association had existed here, he would have been advised of the evil, and possibly might have prevented its consummation.

Mr. Christie proposed "The Agricultural, Pastoral, and Commercial Interests," coupled with the names of Messrs. Brugh, Curtis, and Barr. The three interests were so closely associated, and so dependent on each other, that a person having a stake in one might be said to have an interest in all. No doubt the agricultural interest was not in a flourishing condition just now, but there was as little doubt the balance of trade would in due time restore the market to a healthier tone. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. Curtis rose with pleasure to respond to the toast on behalf of the agricultural interest. He hoped shortly to see the time when agriculturists would be more flourishing. He hoped, too, that the society they had that day met to inaugurate would be the means of improving the condition of the agricultural interest generally.

Mr. Brugh hoped they would excuse him making a speech; he was no hand at it. He would call upon Mr. Barr instead for a song. (Laughter.)

Mr. Barr was much pleased to think he had deserved at their hands the honour of having his name coupled with the toast just drunk. Latterly his attention had been directed from agriculture. He was therefore equally surprised and pleased at the unqualified success that had characterised that day's proceedings. He believed every day would help to confirm the opinion he had always entertained, and that twelve months hence it would be found that there was no healthier district than the Clutha in the Province of Otago. (Great cheering.)

The Chairman next proposed "The Clutha Agricultural and Pastoral Society." He would just remark that

their meeting that night was intended to be a conversational one. As the night was fast wearing away it would perhaps be better to leave future matters in the hands of the committee. He believed a world of good would result from the society he had the honour to toast. Farmers wanted to meet each other, to be brought together occasionally, to see each other's cattle, and so on. It had been said the proposition to have an Agricultural Show at the Clutha was premature. He did not believe it, and had every reason to believe the second would be better than the first. A show was one of the best things that could be suggested for improving the breed of stock in the district. Most of the settlers about here were owners of only 50, 100, or at most 200 acres, the better reason why they should have good stock instead of scrubbers. There were other matters pertaining to such societies of great benefit to producers. A market once or twice a year was one. Any of them having now a beast to sell took it to the Ferry, and to get rid of it it was saddled with a heavy commission that would be a profit to a man. By having periodical markets, buyers and sellers would be brought face to face. The speaker concluded an eloquent speech by calling upon the meeting to drink the toast, coupled with the name of Mr. Crawford.

Mr. Crawford said he was very sorry he could not make a suitable reply. He could only assure them that to hear his health drunk by such a meeting was very pleasing to him. He had done no more for the society than he considered his duty as a member.

Mr. D. P. Steel next proposed "The Successful Competitors," coupled with the name of Mr. John McNeil. From the marked success that had characterised the day's proceedings, he felt they had every reason to be proud of the skill possessed in the district. He believed it was almost an unprecedented fact that from such a large number of ploughs such a general average of good work should have been turned over. He was in favour of following the Chairman's suggestion to leave future matters in the hands of the committee. As to low prices at present ruling for agricultural produce, he thought there was not too much reason to complain; it was the first check the interest had received. He preferred looking forward to better times, and such associations as these were preventatives to such checks.