AGRICULTURAL.

From the Southern Farmer.

Blind Ditches—Wide Beds in Low Grounds Preferable to Narrow.

MESSRS. EDITORS: I have desired for some time to attempt some reciprocity for the many valuable and interesting essays which have appeared in your useful journal, and can only offer as an excuse for the delay, the want of time and information. An individual can sometimes accomplish much benefit by inciting the exercise of knowledge already possessed, and this is about the extent of my aspirations in the present communication.

I desire more especially to enforce the practice of blind ditching, as an incident of agriculture perhaps less observed than any other of corresponding advantage.

It may seem a somewhat useless occupation to be engaged in digging a ditch and filling it up, or of encountering more labor than is indispensable for immediate purposes. But when we consider that frequently the space occupied by the ditch and a turn-row each side, in the best ground, is saved, and subsequently the labor of keeping these turn-rows and ditch banks clear of shrubs, &c., there is reason to contend for this system as a means of saving much labor. I lately, in cutting a new ditch, encountered a blind ditch known to have been constructed 36 years ago, in a remarkable state of preservation, and performing its functions well. Who can calculate the amount of labor saved in this time, compared with an open ditch and a turn-row each side? I have frequently seen a piece of ground so cut up by these turn-rows and ditch banks, as to lose thereby more ground, than was gained by the operation; not to speak of the appearance and other disadvantages, for the land is frequently so ploughed as to cause an elevation near these ditches. Indeed, when they are at all admissible, I contend for them on the score of economy, if properly constructed; for they require but little subsequent attention, and will answer a much better purpose. The obstructions falling into an open ditch will frequently dam up the water, and cause it to ooze through the adjacent soil, instead of passing off by gentle percolation through the ditch. I am of course only alluding to such situations as allow them; but where you can blind them up to their fountain, it would be surprising to many persons to see how much running water can be conveyed through them.

They can be constructed by placing two long poles side by side in the bottom of the ditch, and by breaking the joint on top by a third one; or billets of wood can be put across the two bottom poles; or where the outsides from a saw mill are convenient, they answer remarkably well to place on the top of these bottom poles. Where the fall does not allow sufficient depth, it is frequently worth the expense of a thin plank on these poles. In each case it is best to put a little straw, or something of the kind, on the materials, before the dirt is put on. Any kind of substance will last a long time thus covered; or if partially decayed will still allow the percolation. But even if the operation should be imperfectly performed, the loss would probably not be so great as the saving in ditch banks, turn-rows, &c.—a calculation requiring some judgment, as every thing else does—and my chief object is to excite the exercise of that judgment, already possessed, in behalf of the recommendations enforced.

In connection with this subject I will refer to a practice not now new in this section, as I believe it is adopted by most farmers where the circumstances allow. It is to discard the plan of narrow beds for corn, &c., and to substitute beds 40 feet wide, never reversed, but always bedded up between the same water furrows. When thus wide they never become too convex, but always sufficiently so to pass off the surplus water into these furrows. The rows for the corn are laid off across these wide beds, and this cross cultivation breaks the ground much more thoroughly; and when bedded up for wheat it is again across the cultivation, and your land is thus much better broken and pulverized. From the convexity of these beds in the centre to the bottom of the water furrow on each side, a distance consequently of 20 feet, the fall is generally from 12 to 18 inches; and to that depth of furrow, but by the gentle descent of the bed, as the furrows need not become so deep as to interfere with the crossing of the plow. And this fall for each row is secured on a surface otherwise level and the water speedily discharged into those furrows. But on the old plan of laying off the corn rows in the direction of the beds, and similar cultivation, I have seen water standing a long distance on the beds where the fall is but slight and the soil somewhat stiff.

It may appear as an objection that this cross cultivation will fill up these furrows. But by a slight lifting of the plow, or even without it, this is not done to such an extent as to cause much trouble to the hoes; and only occurring in 40 feet, the labor of furrow opening is probably diminished.

An objection to a continuance of the same beds is that each side of the furrow is denuded of fertile soil. But this difficulty is obviated by the cross plowing, and had better occur only in 40 feet than oftener.

My remarks on this point have been confined to the corn crop and culture, but when the same land is prepared for wheat, the preponderating advantages are greatly enhanced. All who have tried them know the inconveniences of frequent and narrow beds to the cradle, and more especially to a Reaper, as well as incidental loss of land. Where land has for some time been cultivated in narrow beds, you cannot at first get the wide beds smoothly and sufficiently convex.—The indentations of the former furrows will for awhile appear. But when once in proper form, they will continue so.—I can show a body of low land, formerly a mill pond, which had been cultivated over 30 years without having ever been in wheat, because it was considered too low and wet; but which produced a fine crop under this system, though overflown several times. When land is thus thrown into regular waves, water does not lie on them. In one hour after the subsidence of an overflow, you would not find a particle probably on a bed, if these furrows are attended to; and as they occur so seldomly, this is not laborious. To break up land in this way, you should commence in the centre, and finish on the outside of each bed, the earth being thus thrown from each furrow towards the centre; and at each end, from a ditch generally, instead of to it, as is usual on the plan of making two half beds instead of a whole one at a time. It was to this practice that I attended when I stated that the open ditches frequently caused the earth near them to be elevated, rather than depressed, as it ought to be.

At the risk of being tedious, I will also refer to one of the advantages resulting from the effect of getting your land in these wide beds, or in waves as it may be termed, and so as to pass off an overflow, very speedily.

It supercedes, to some extent, the attempts so of fruitless of banking out a freshet. Good management generally consists in the adaptation of a particular system to the peculiar circumstances of each case or position.

I do not mean to condemn, under all circumstances, the attempts to bank out freshets, particularly where you can save one side by exposing the other, and regulating your crops accordingly. But I do mean to hazard the opinion that more money and labor, and crops, and land have been lost by such efforts, than have ever been saved by them.

I scarcely know a plantation which cannot show more injury than benefit from them.

A freshet which such banks will generally control, would do but little injury if allowed gradually to spread over the land, if so prepared as speedily to pass it off, while the usual effect is to draw up the water until, when they do break, it is like the breaking of a mill dam with a sudden and violent current, sweeping every thing before it, and leaving destruction in its train. Still there are circumstances under which it can and ought to be done; but in the general, I would prefer to spend the money, (if it should be required,) in preparing the land, so that if overflown, the water will not remain. There will be occasional freshets which will overleap every precaution; and in any event, it is well to make the provision I suggest.

But I am overleaping the limits which I designed for myself, having been impelled by a desire to discharge a claim I think you have on every farmer, and more particularly every subscriber, for a communication on some subject, a receipt for which it is unreasonable to require without subscribing the proper name.

EDWIN G. BOOTH.

Nottoway, Dec. 20th, 1855.

WHAT IS GOING ON OVERHEAD.

MERCURY.—This planet may be seen for a few evenings not far from the western horizon. On the first of the month, (February) he was at his greatest elongation east. Through the telescope his appearance is that of a half moon. He sets about twenty minutes before seven. It is said that Copernicus never enjoyed a sight of Mercury, owing to the dense vapors near the horizon. Like Venus and our Moon, this fleet traveller presents in the course of his revolutions all the different lunar phases, from the slender crescent to the full orb. His speed in his orbit is nearly one hundred and ten thousand miles an hour, or at the rate of eighteen hundred and thirty miles a minute.

While you are out looking at this sparkling gem, it may be well to lift your eyes a little, and observe a planet of larger magnitude, with his shining cavalcade of satellites, drawn out almost in line, majestically careering towards the margin which will soon hide him from your view. This immense globe has his periods of rotation and revolution, like our own. Jupiter sets about seven o'clock. On the seventh instant these two planets will be apparently near the new moon.

Now, elevate the eye nearly to the Zenith, and you have in view the little cluster of the *Pleiades*, while the mystic number seven bursts into hundreds through the magic class of the telescope. Little farther on towards the east you behold the star-gemmed V, the *Hyades*, reposing listlessly upon its side, with the bloodshot sentinel, *Aldebarran*, at one extremity keeping his eternal vigil, while the miner members of the flock twinkle their sleepless glances through their half-closed lids. Still farther east lies the majestic *Orion*, variegated by his parti-colored four and his martially arrayed three, all brilliants in the winter's pageant. Then the telescope again; sweep it around his sword and make it flash out in lambent flame that mighty nebula which itself contains a full complement of stars. Towards the eastern horizon, too, twinkles, with superior brightness the far famed *Sirius*, gleaming with its slight tint of blue.

But we must not forget our other brother in the solar system, the ringed, belted, and satellited *Saturn*. You will find him nearly over head, little to the left of Orion, while you are looking eastward. His is a steady and rather dull appearance to the unassisted eye; but, through a good glass, he brightens up like a mass of burnished silver. While you have the telescope in hand it may not be regretted if you swing it along the heavens westwardly and nearly overhead to the very dense cluster in the sword-haft of *Perseus*. A single glance at the crowded mass of stellar glory, with its myriad beams of light, as it were, dancing to the music of the spheres, well repays all trouble incurred in this item of our survey. And now, since it is becoming quite cool and rather late, we will not wait for *Mars* to rise, but postpone our view of him till about the first of April, when he will be in opposition to the sun, and exhibit a round disk for our inspection. He will then rise earlier, and be in a more favorable position for observation. After a comfortable night's rest, if you rise from bed about six o'clock, you will find the splendid Venus an hour and a quarter high in the eastern heavens, and the moon's slender crescent about three hours high. This planet will be visible in the morning till the middle of July; soon after, that, it will be an evening star for nearly ten months.

Having bestowed so much attention on these phenomena as to gain a fair idea of them, we will leave the subject for the present; and at another time, for another lesson, we may be able to give them another look and observe other peculiarities. The sun we will reserve for some future period, recommending our juvenile readers to survey occasionally the heavens above as well as the earth beneath their feet. The human eye was obviously not designed to be forever down-cast.

Boston Post.

First trip of the First Locomotive in America.—William Wurts, Esq., of Carbondale, Penn., communicates the following paragraph, clipped from an newspaper, to the Carbondale *Transcript*. This paragraph confirms the statement of R. F. Lord, Esq., published in the Port Jervis *Union*, a few weeks since, and apparently settles the question as to whom belongs the credit of having run the first locomotive steam engine on the American continent.

The Trial Trip of the First Locomotive.—Major Horatio Allen, the Engineer of the New York and Erie Railroad, in a speech made during the recent festival occasion, gave the following account of the first trip made by a locomotive on this continent:

"When was it? Who was it? And who awakened its energies and directed its movements? It was in the year 1828, on the banks of the Lackawaxen at the commencement of the Railroad connecting the Canal of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company with their coal mines—and he who addresses you was the only person on that locomotive. The circumstances which led to my being alone on the engine, were these: The road had been built in the summer, the structure was of hemlock timber, and rails of large dimensions notched on caps placed far apart. The timber had cracked and warped from exposure to the sun. After about three hundred feet of straight line the road crossed the Lackawaxen Creek, on trestle work about 30 feet high with with a curve of 350 to 400 feet radius. The impression was very general that this iron monster would either break down the road or it would leave the track at the curve, and plunge into the creek.—My reply to such apprehensions was that it was too late to consider the probability of such occurrences, there was no other course but to have a trial made of the strange animal, which had been brought here at great expense; but that it was not necessary that more than one should be involved in its fate; that I would take the first ride alone, and the time would come when I should look back to the incident with great interest.

As I placed my hand on the throttle valve handle, I was undecided whether I would move slowly or with a fair degree of speed, but believing that the road would prove safe; and preferring, if we did go down, to go handsomely, and without any evidence of timidity, I started with considerable velocity, passed the curve over the creek safely, and was soon out of hearing of the cheers of the vast assemblage. And the end of two or three miles, I reversed the valve, and returned without accident to the place of starting, having thus made the first railroad trip by locomotive on the Western Hemisphere."

Pride and Humility.

We proud! of what? Of our ancestors? They were driven out of paradise. Of our patrimony? "Sad inheritance!" Of our wisdom? Hath not God made it foolishness? Of our wealth? It is not current beyond the grave. Of our earthly honours? They die in their birthplace. Of our worldly influence? "The prince of this world" has more. Of our virtues? They cannot atone for one sin. Of our mansions? They point to a cold grave. Of our relatives? "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister." Of our power? Death laughs at it. Of our immortality? Without Christ it leads to everlasting destruction "from the presence of the Lord."

But look at humility! It adorns humanity; it dignifies its possessor; it ennobles his intellect; it blesses his heart, and makes him a blessing to all with whom he associates. Is he intellectually gifted? His fellow men approach him with composure, while his lips feed many. Are his graces conspicuous? They shine upon others, that may be benefitted. Has he been intrusted with wealth? He feels that he is a steward, and that he must occupy till the Master come; and he relieves the necessitous, clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, and causes the widows heart to sing for joy. Is he poor among men? There is a treasure laid up for him in heaven, of which he has heard by that gospel which tells him that he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Has he few companions on earth? He has communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Is he a solitary wanderer to his Father's house? The angels are sent forth to minister unto him. Is he despised by the proud? His body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and Christ reigns in his heart. Is he unknown in the world's palaces? He has a mansion in the skies. Does he serve for a piece of bread? He is Christ's free man, and his name is written in heaven! Happy disciple! Enviable lot! Who would not lie low in the dust, and humble himself before the high God, if that be the appropriate condition and a necessary characteristic of the man of whom those things are predicted! *Leask's Moral Portraits.*

FROM THE PRESBYTERIAN.

THE BETTER LAND.

"They were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly.—HEBREWS xi. 13, 16.

The golden orbs that gem the sky
With every beaming ray,
Proclaim as on their course they fly,
"They soon must pass away."

The little flowers that lift their head,
And in the zephyrs wave,
Before the circling year has sped,
May blossom o'er my grave.

The snow, whose fleecy robes enfold
Cold Winter's icy breast,
Shall sparkle o'er this earthly mould
When I have gone to rest.

And I shall then forgotten be;
A tear—a fleeting sigh—
A passing thought of memory—
Are all, when I shall die.

Immingled with my parent dust,
As though I ne'er had birth,
Life's sweetest ties and pleasures must
Forever cease on earth.

But Hope foretells a happier land,
A more exalted sphere,
Where we shall meet the sainted band
We loved and lost while here.

Faith's piercing eye beyond the tomb
Discerns that distant shore,
Where clustering joys immortal bloom,
To fade and die no more,

Where friendship's bonds, with charms divine,
In permanence endure,
And souls reposed in glory shine,
Of endless bliss secure.

No withering change that region knows,
No tears of woe are found,
No storms to blast the heavenly rose
That grows on Eden's ground.

Then seek, my soul, that holy way
Believers ever trod;
By faith the Saviour's words obey,
And thou shalt rest with God.

MARY.

HOWE'S COTTON HARVESTER.

The above machine is one of great value to the cotton grower. It is the invention of Mr. George A. Howe, of Cleaveland, and is the result of practical observation and experiments in the cotton field. By this invention Mr. Howe has accomplished a result which, in importance, must rank with the great improvement of Whitney.

Harvesting the crop is the cotton grower's greatest difficulty. Harvest time is his crisis of labor for the year. The bolls of cotton in a field do not all ripen and open at once, but continuously from about August 1 and January 1.

As fast, however, as the bolls open and are exposed to the washer, they must be picked. It often times happens that the supply of labor is wholly inadequate to secure the crop, even though every available hand is mustered into service.

This improvement enables one field hand to pick more cotton than five to eight hands by the old method, and the value of this invention to the producers of the great Southern staple may be estimated, when it is considered that the average American cotton crop is valued at two hundred and fifty millions of dollars.

Another advantage belonging to this improvement is, that it leaves the cotton in better condition than that picked by hand.

The machine is simple in its structure, and not liable to get out of order, being composed of geering, and an endless revolving chain, the whole weighing less than six pounds.

It is suspended from the right side of a person by a strap, passing over the shoulder, and is kept in motion by means of a lever or crank operated by the hand or fingers. By presenting the tubular point to the cotton boll, it is immediately seized by the chain and conveyed to the opposite end, where it is freed by means of a stripper, and deposited in a bag suspended at the bottom. The bag is rapidly filled and emptied. For any information in regard to the Harvester, address George A. Howe, the inventor, Cleaveland, Ohio.—*Ohio Farmer.*

A Yankee editor says that the girls complain that the times are so hard the young men can't pay their addresses.