[The Mode of Cultivating and Dressing Hemp / Detached Observations on Hemp] Abbe Bralle

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Description

A detailed discussion of the best methods for planting, cultivating, and dressing hemp, with an account of costs and potential profit, followed by observations on the usefulness of hemp in making fabric and employing the poor. Vol. 2, No. 61. Microfilm Reel 8163. Under the name Abbe Brulles, both were also published in Annals of Agriculture and Other Useful Arts, Vol. 14, pp. 359-72 (London, 1790) by the Arthur Young also credited with "Receipt for Making Parmesan Cheese."

Transcription

THE MODE of CULTIVATING and DRESSING H E M P.

By ABBE BRALLE.

Printed by Order of the Lords of the Committee of Council For Trade and Foreign Plantations.

IT is sufficiently known, that land intended for a crop of Hemp must be well manured, well ploughed, cleansed, and gotton fine; and the season being arrived; which varies much according to the soil, weather, and conveniency of the cultivator, extending from the 25th March to the 15th June; sow the Hemp seed, which ought always to be new seed, thin, not exceeding two bushels to an acre, and if you have the advantage of a drill plough, still less will do. After the land is sown, go through the whole with a shovel, and with it make little paths at seven feet distance from each other, the lengthway of your piece, so that at the proper season you may reach the Female Hemp, which you will have occasion to pull out, without trampling on the Male, which must stand at least a month longer to ripen its seed. The Female Hemp (which is that which bears only flowers and no seed) is known to be ripe by the flowers fading, the farina foecundans falling, and some of the stems turning yellow. You must then draw out carefully the whole of the Female Hemp, breaking as little as possible the stems of that which you take, or that which you leave.

IMMEDIATELY as it is gathered, take it in as large handfuls as you can, and either cutting the roots off or leaving them on, as you like best (I prefer cutting them off) hold the root end uppermost, and with a wooden sword dress off the flower and leaves, which you leave on the field, since they assist in manuring; pick out any weeds or spoilt plants; put twelve handfuls or gripes together to make a bundle; then lay the bundles in water: tt is much the best to be a running and clear water, and if shaded and overhung with trees the better: lay poles or planks, or whatever else you have that is suitable, across a large number together, so as to keep them at least two inches under water. Take particular notice which you lay in first, and how you lay the bundles, in order that you may be able to get them out again successively as they were laid in, without breaking or tangling. At the end of six days visit the hemp, and see whether the reed will draw out from some of the bundles. The time required

for soaking depends very much on the nature of the hemp, the weather, and of the water it is soaked in -- from six days to nine, or even eleven. It is a trouble that is not ill bestowed to sort the Hemp for soaking, if it is of unequal sizes, the slenderest generally requiring most soaking.

WHEN you find any quantity sufficient soaked, take it with care, putting the hands under it to prevent breakage, and transport it to a trough or to a table; for there are two methods of working it. If you work it in a trough, you must be provided with one somewhat longer than any Hemp that you mean to work in it--twelve or fourteen inches deep, and of what width you think proper, according to the number of persons you employ at it, as one, two, or four. To this trough must be fitted two pieces of plank, of about a food length, but of such width as to stretch over a bundle of the hemp as it lies opened in the water: these planks must be set on one side with teeth of brass wire, and when the Hemp is ready for drawing, must be laid on it as it lies in the water, to keep it strait and immerged.

IF you work the Hemp on a table, you must, before taking it out of the water, open a little the bundles, and rub the stems between your hands to get off what you can of the slime, and to loosen the rind. You must likewise push the bundle along in the water, with the root end foremost, to loosen the rind at that end where the operation is to be begun. If you do not thus rub and scour your Hemp in the water where you soak it, you must do it in the trough. But in the either case you must be careful to keep an even and steady hand to avoid breaking the reed, which, as many times as it happens, renders the operation of getting the reeds out tedious. If it is wrought on a table, the bundle must be frequently but slightly wetted. If any suitable method could be taken to make water drip gently on it, it would be best. A plank must be laid on the bundle to keep it steady.

ALL matters being properly disposed, either on the table or in the trough, you must begin at the root end to push back a little the rind from the stem, then taking hold of one stem at a time, and rather near the outside than the middle of the bundle, keep your hand and the

weed under water (if you work in a trough) and draw it out from the bundle as strait as possible, you will find it come out clean as a sword from its scabbard. As you proceed you may take two, afterwards four, and up to

six or more reeds at a time, which will draw out still more easily. When you have drawn out all the reeds that you can find at the root end, lift up the spiked plank which was at the upper end, leaving on that which was in the middle, and draw out such pieces of reed as you may find at the upper end, and which have remained after drawing out what you could at the root end, because they were broken. Lastly, take off the plank which laid on the middle, and take out all the relicks of reed you can perceive. If your Hemp was in good condition for drawing, you will now find all your reeds perfectly clean on the floor, and the rind, which is the Hemp, lying in [flat] threads, in the water on the table.

You will perceive that among the Hemp there is a great quantity of gum left looking like a jelly; this you will wash out as if you were washing any long strait piece of cloth, observing not to displace or twist the threads, which would thwart the future operation of dressing or heckling. The finer and whiter you desire the hemp to be, the more waters you will run it through, squeezing it out at each time of washing; but I think it always right at the last to run it through a water in which a slight quantity of soft soap has been beat up, after the rate of an ounce of soft soap to three pounds of the Hemp when dry. Do not squeeze it out from this soap water, but hang it to drain, and when a little stiffened, open a little the bundle, and lay it to dry on a grass plat or floor; the former is preferable. This soap water is not absolutely necessary, but is certainly of great use for softening the hemp, and rendering it pleasant and easy to dress: but may be dispensed with where it is very inconvenient, and where the Hemp is intended for coarse purposes. It is obvious that all these operations would be carried on to the most advantage near to some running stream or large lake, if it be a standing water, on account of the great use that is made of that element, and to save a great deal of the trouble of transportation.

WHEN thus dried, the Hemp is proper either for dressing or storing: if the latter, particular care must be taken that is be thoroughly dry, it will otherwise heat and spoil. As the Hemp peculiarly intended to be hitherto spoken of is the Female, or Flower-bearing Hemp, which is intended for fine uses, it is to be observed, that it must be worked with heckles or hatchels, such as are used for Flax dressing, and may be brought to an extreme fineness; and the Shorts, having no pieces of straw or reed among them, may be carded and spun, and brought into use for all the same purposes as Cotton, and the same methods used for bleaching and softening. It is likewise

requisite to work this Hemp as soon as pulled, without which the greatest softness and whiteness cannot be obtained; and as this sort generally falls ripe between hay time and harvest, when the weather is warm and fine, and the women most at liberty, it will be a suitable occasion to draw and cleanse the Hemp--the dressing may be reserved for winter.

I now proceed to speak of the Male Hemp, which bearing a more considerable crop, cannot all be worked as fast as it is pulled or cut. It is known to be ripe enough by the stems becoming pale; for if you stay till the tuft containing the seed appears ripe, or the stem turns brown, the Hemp will be in a great measure spoiled. When it is come to a proper maturity, you must get a good number of hands, so as to expediate the business, because such as remains standing after it is ripe, will have its rind fixed to the reed, the gum turned hard and dark coloured, and the whole operation of drawing becomes difficult, troublesome and ungrateful. The leaves are to be stripped off with a wooden sword, in the same manner as those of the Female Hemp, as are likewise the seed, the branches which grow literally, and even the tuft bearing seed at the top: but if this latter should not come off clean, it must be chopt off with an iron instrument. All this must be done over a cloth, or on a spot of ground in the field, well levelled and smoothed, to avoid losing any of the seed. And it is proposed, and said to be successful, to leave the seed abroad, covered with the leaves, &c. to preserve it from birds, in order that it may heat and be thrashed in the field, and the leaves and chaff brewed on the land. This certainly saves trouble, and is practiced in many parts, but seems to me slovenly, and I should rather take it home to a barn; but I would certainly burn all the roots, and such parts as are too hard to rot easily, and strew the ashes as well as the leaves, and such other parts as will easily rot, up[o]n the ground, as these matters are reckoned to go half way towards manuring the land for next year's crop. The Male Hemp, thus stript of leaves and seed, will generally dry for storing in 24 hours; but at any rate must not be left long abroad, but rather taken into sheds to dry, which, when thus stript, it will speedily do. Sun and rain would soon spoil it. That which can be wrought green must be treated as before set forth for the Female Hemp; and it is obvious that is is a great advantage to work it in this manner, rather than to dry and store it, which causes much trouble and expence, and produces less and worse Hemp; but where the crop is considerable, and the hands few, it is unavoidable. --If, however, much rain comes, it is imprac-

ticable to dry it for storing without spoiling, as every year's experience shews in the present received method; whereas the working the Hemp green entirely avoids this disadvantage and inconveniency, and the hands engaged may continue their employment under the shelter of trees, or of a temporary shed made of a few rough poles and hurdles, covered with straw, reeds, &c.

ALL the same procedure is to be used with the Male as with the Female Hemp, as to drawing, scouring, &c. but as the reeds of it are less brittle, and the rind coarser, it requires more soaking, but is easier to draw, and produces much more and stronger Hemp. What is stored must, when wanted to be wrought, be soaked, peeled, washed, and in general treated as before said. In cold weather it takes long soaking.

The CALCULATION of EXPENCES and PROFIT of an ACRE of HEMP in this Country. [England.]

	£.	s.	d.
Rent 20s. per acre - - -	1	0	0
Manure the first year more than others, But it is most advantageous to sow after a turnip crop--say 401. -	2	0	0
Three times ploughing and harrowing	0	18	0
Seed a bushels--price unknown, but in France 5s. - - - -	0	10	0
Pulling the Female Hemp, and trimming	0	10	6
Cutting Male, and trimming for putting in water. - - - -	0	7	0
Getting from the reed, and washing the Female 7lb, per diem at 9d.--50 bundles containing 125lb--160d : 5 -	0	13	6
Getting the Male from the reed, and washing 14lb. Per diem at 9d--375lb--241d - - -	1	0	1
Soap 10lb, at price in France 3d. -	0	2	6
Thrashing feed - - - -	0	2	6
Total expence - -	7	4	1
Female Hemp, 125lb. At only 1s. but worth in the rough much more -	6	5	0
Seed 16 bushels, at 5s.--supposed undervalued. - - - -	4	0	0
Male Hemp 375lb, at 7d ½ per lb. -	11	14	8
Faggots - - - - -	1	0	0
Total produce - -	22	19	0

Total expence - -	7	4	1
Total profit - -	15	14	11

Suppose the expences under-rated 20s. Per acre, and the gain over-rated 4l. 15s. there still remains 10/. clear gain; to which is to be added, that the further improvement of the material in dressing and spinning, employs the poor, and particularly women and children, who are a heavy burthen to the farmer in all countries.

DETACHED OBSERVATIONS ON HEMP.

IT is capable of being cultivated on all kinds of land; the poorer land producing the Hemp finer in quality, though smaller in quantity, and the rankest land producing strong and long, though coarse; and this fort being the easiest to draw and work in the new mode, the quantity of manure requisite in the first instance is not above half of that for wheat, and the subsequent years not above half of that half, and the Hemp still improving in quality. All the work in the new method, not even excepting the dressing, is fitter for women than men, and may be practiced advantageously by every cottager.

No bleaching is wanted for the linen made of Hemp prepared in the new methods and it is nearly certain, that if the Hemp be fine, well managed, and dressed with the finest Flax, hackle, it may supercede almost all the use of Flax, which Flax is a more uncertain and less abundant crop, requires more culture and better land, which it exhausts; whereas Hemp grounds increase in goodness. If the Male Hemp intended for cords has been treated with little attention, and but little scoured or bleached, the Shorts which come from it in dressing may be scoured over again to render them more useable. The hackle, and even the Hemp itself, may be a little oiled in the dressing, which will much facilitate that business, and instead of fouling, will rather assist in bleaching the threads, when they come to be washed.

The greatest injury that can befal Hemp is that of sun-baking. But after all the greatest injuries that can be done to Hemp, the new operation may be performed on it; though with less success, yet sufficient to render it better than that which is procured by any other operation, hereof I have, at this moment, the proof under my eye. The greatest whiteness can never be procured but by working it green. If stored, the greener it is got

in, the whiter it will be. The more the colour is changed, the worse will be the colour of the thread.

Fifteen pounds of Male Hemp may be gotten off in a day by one person; only seven pounds of Female. It is It is [sic] necessary to pick the the Hemp plants over at several different periods, in order to avoid having any bad stems among the good, which might spoil a whole parcel, especially if intended for fine linen.

There is a great reason, from a slight attempt that has been made, to think that a dye might be procured from the water in which the Hemp is scoured, after that it is gotten off from the reed.

It is likewise thought that an instrument may be imagined for drawing the reeds from the threads or rind, or else the rind or threads from the reed, more expeditiously. A few bundles have been cleared with a common rake.

In France it is common, at the time of pulling the female Hemp, to scatter turnip seeds in among the stems of the Male Hemp, which are left standing, and these turnips frequently produce a good deal of seed for sheep or cattle after the Male Hemp is taken off. It is obvious that whatever has this effect, has, besides the benefit of supporting the stock of a farm, that of aiding to manure the Hemp grounds, especially if it be sheep that are fed on it; therefore if this method fails, it would be prudent, immediately as the Hemp is off the ground, to plow it up, and sow turnips, cole-seed, rye, or any other thing proper for sheep feed, which can be gotten off early in the next spring, so as to be able to till the land well in time for receiving the Hemp seed.

It is a less injury to the Hemp to pull the plants before they are ripe enough, then to leave them too long standing. It is a less injury, in soaking the Hemp, to leave it too long in the water than to take it out before it is sufficiently soaked.

The more the Hemp is cleansed after getting off the reed, the finer it becomes, and the finer dressing it requires: nothing but experience can mark the degrees.

The most advantageous time to begin the culture of Hemp on any land, is immediately after a crop of turnips; --exactly the same as if you were about to sow barley.

The coarsest black soap, which costs in France only three pence per lb. will suffice for making the suds through which the Hemp should pass.

It is asserted from experience, that putting the clusters

containing the Hemp seeds to sweat and heat, causes many of the seeds to come to perfection, which, in the common method, would wither and become dead; and that it of course improves both the quantity and quality.

The Mode of Cultivating and Dressing Hemp / Detached Observations on Hemp recipe from Early Modern Maritime Recipes: https://emmr.lib.unb.ca/recipes/237