

THE CULTIVATION OF GROWING CANE.

(Paper by C. H. MUNKS, Darnall.)

The Chairman stated that a letter had been received from Mr. C. H. Munks saying he was unfortunately laid up with fever at his hotel and would not be able to read his paper. The paper however was in the possession of the Secretary, and if time permitted it would be read by the Secretary during the afternoon. In any event it would appear in the Congress Number of "The Sugar Journal." It was subsequently read by the Secretary.

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I have some trepidation in putting forward my views on this subject as, though I am intensely interested in the growing of cane and have tried various methods in an effort to discover what cultivation really suits cane best, yet it is impossible to say definitely that any certain method of cultivating growing cane is the best because the method found to be best in the case of heavy black soil might have indifferent results in high sandy soil and vice versa. I am therefore simply going to explain the method I have found best on my estate which is composed chiefly of heavy black soil.

Plant Cane.—As soon as the plant cane begins to shoot, scarifying should begin. This keeps the rows between the cane lines clean but it will be found necessary to hand-weed the lines themselves, as well, in order to keep the weeds from smothering the young shoots, as this greatly handicaps their growth. Care should be taken that hoes are not used for this purpose. I keep the shallow scarifiers going until the cane is about four feet high. Then I discontinue this, and go back to hand weeding. My reason for doing this is because I believe that scarifiers used in cane higher than four feet do more harm than good. I have noticed that a large number of canes grow out at the sides of the rows at an outward angle and the scarifier (often handled by a careless driver) marks the sides of the canes and injures them so that on a windy day they are liable to break. I have observed this myself.

I am not in favour of scarifying as compared with hand weeding, but unfortunately, in most cases, neither the exchequer nor the supply of labour will permit exclusive hand weeding, and scarifiers are certainly useful if not set too deeply. However, I strongly recommend that they should not be used on very hilly ground as it is almost impossible to prevent the implement sliding down on top of the canes and destroying a large number.

Ratoon Cultivation.—If the Plant Cane has in the first place been carefully planted, using only good sound canes and manuring with good fertilizer, the cultivation of the ratoon crops is a very simple matter and not as expensive as in the case of plant cane.

My best result has been obtained from the following method: Immediately after cutting apply a light dressing of lime (I believe very strongly in the frequent use of small quantities of lime), then plough between the rows of burnt cane with a No. 17 Hill-side plough, throwing the soil over the stools. This must then be disc harrowed, which will pulverise the soil and level the rows, rendering the soil soft and able to absorb moisture. It also cuts up all the network of old roots that have done their duty.

Following this treatment I usually find it necessary to hand weed twice with hoes. It is my strong conviction that the less the ground is disturbed after the harrowing, the better are the results of keeping the weeds down with hoeing rather than with cultivators or scarifiers. However, as I have already said, many farmers are not able to do without the implements, and in such cases I advise as shallow cultivation as possible.

In one experimental block I found that this treatment gave me very much better results than the method of only pony ploughing between the rows and then scuffling the weeds, handweeding once only.

It is hardly necessary to point out that weeds should never be allowed to seed if possible, nor that clean weeding is absolutely essential in order to have good cane. I once heard two Farmers discussing the subject: "I can't afford to weed" said the first. "My dear fellow, I can't afford not to" rejoined the second. I agree with him.

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Before proceeding with the business, the Chairman stated that he was pleased to say Mr. H. H. Dodds had arrived and was with them that morning. His arrival was probably the most important event that had occurred in the Sugar Industry for many years. They were one and all most anxious to work with him and to assist his labours in every possible way—(Hear, hear)—and to provide the funds to enable them to get the best value out of the sugar cane.