WHEAT-BREEDING IDEALS.

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Wheat is the ideal bread cereal. The physical character of its proteins is such as to impart bread-making qualities, while the nature and variety of the amino acids of these proteins give the maximum food value. Wheat is worthy of the high position assigned it by Sir William Crookes in his presidential address before the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1898, as “the most sustaining food grain of the great Caucasian race.” Any improvement that can be effected in wheat is of the greatest benefit to mankind.

The early history of wheat is shrouded in mystery. Presumably somewhere in Mesopotamia where modern man was nurtured, wheat had its origin. It has been stated that if wheat were not seeded and garnered by man it would soon become extinct, since it cannot exist as a volunteer crop. It would seem that man, in recognizing the great value of wheat as food, had taken in hand its propagation, and that nature had intrusted to him its care since it has lost the power to fend for itself.

Some of the greatest of men have taken a deep interest in wheat improvement. General Washington, while active in the war for independence, had time to think of wheat. In one of his letters he says: “The wheat from some of my plantations by one pair of steelyards will weigh upwards of 60 pounds, and better wheat than I now have I do not expect to make.” Referring to this same wheat some years later he wrote: “No wheat that has ever yet fallen under my observation exceeds the wheat which some years ago I cultivated extensively, but which from inattention during my absence of almost nine years from home, has got so mixed or degenerated as scarcely to retain any of its original characteristics properly.”

During its thousands of years of domestication, wheat must have undergone some changes in both botanical structure and chemical composition, and it would seem that its development should be continued and that it be still farther improved.

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