

THE FARM GARDEN.

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TOMATOES AND BLIGHT.—A RETROSPECT.

At the time of writing—12th May—we have just gathered the last ripe tomatoes of the season. Frost has killed the plants, or there would have been a few more. Blight is very common in this district every year. The crop just over is the eighth I have grown at the Weraroa Experimental Farm, but only once have I been troubled by blight. Last year, when the crop was two-thirds gathered, it suddenly appeared during some very wet weather. Very little spraying is done in these parts—the plants being sprayed sometimes once, but generally not at all. There were absolutely no tomatoes in the district during two seasons except at this farm. The reason for this immunity is, I believe, because I have always worked on the plan advised by this Department—viz., I never manure at the time of planting. All the manuring done is the giving of a dusting of superphosphate and bonedust after the first fruits are set. The fertilizer is hoed in with a flat hoe, or with a sharp rake. Inquiries made from people who have lost their crops through blight have always elicited the fact that the plants were well manured, and, in some cases, frequently watered. The general opinion appears to be that, being a strong-growing plant, the tomato requires a lot of feeding. Thus every means are taken to build up the very thing that should be most avoided—a soft, gross plant. What is really required is a tough, firm growth. We should aim, in fact, to correct the natural gross habit of the plant, by growing it in only moderately good ground, and also, by constant repression of shoots, to prevent a lot of growth. There is another source of blight worth mentioning. All efforts to grow a hard-wooded plant may fail if the surroundings are not conducive to that state. A perfectly open situation and full exposure to sun are necessary. And an otherwise open situation may be completely altered by growing the wrong crops in close proximity to the tomatoes. A case in point: A plot of ground, through which ran a row of tomato-plants, was sown with partridge peas, to be dug in as green manure. The peas made strong growth, covered all the ground, and stood up about 15 in. above the surface. At early morning the pea-haulm was reeking with moisture, and the sheltering growth kept the ground wet all day, thus creating a