

COAL.

[*First Article.*]

In all the range of geological study, there is no branch more instructive, than that which treats of the formation of coal. It should be particularly interesting to us from the fact, that New Brunswick, and the neighbouring Province of Nova Scotia, contain the only deposit of this valuable mineral in her Majesty's possessions on this side of the Rocky Mountains, and because that in the future this will be one great source of their wealth and prosperity. For when our woods are exhausted, when the wilderness of forests which now covers British America is inhabited by a mighty nation, these two Provinces will take their stand in the confederation of Colonies, as the great manufacturing emporium, and will owe their pre-eminence in this respect, to the predominance of their carboniferous rocks.

It is a singular fact, that but comparatively few persons are aware of the true nature of coal, the circumstances under which it was deposited, and the signs in neighbouring rocks by which the geologist is enabled, with almost unerring certainty, to indicate its presence. Yet, on no point do geologists so generally agree. We have said that this subject should always be interesting to us from the large development of the coal measures in this Province; and we think it would be particularly so at the present moment, from the singular discoveries of oil-bearing coal (?) in the County of Albert. We purpose to devote a few articles to the subject, in which we will endeavour to explain, with as few technics as possible, the true nature of coal, how it was formed, and what is the probable commercial value of the late discoveries in this Province.

The crust of the globe is divided by the geologist into certain clearly defined parts, as a book is divided into chapters. Each part is supposed to indicate a period in the history of the pristine world, very different from that which preceded, or succeeded it. The rocks forming these parts are distinctly defined, and easily discovered by the predominance of the peculiar fossils belonging to them. And they show that there was an age of volcanoes and of mountains,—that there was a time when a mighty ocean rolled over almost the whole surface of this earth,—a time when great continents prevailed, dotted by enormous lakes, and traversed by great rivers. They also tell of an age of great bony fishes,—of horrid reptiles,—of animals of extraordinary form,—and of plants. Each had their sway. Each in turn held this sceptre of almost universal dominion.

In these divisions of the geologists, coal is placed in what is called the carboniferous series, which comprehends the age of plants. The term carboniferous is derived from two Latin words—"carbo" coal, and "fero" to bear, and includes those rocks containing or bearing coal, and a marine deposit called the mountain limestone. Those rocks containing coal, are known as the coal