



*The Field.*

**White Willow Fences.**

We have at length been enabled to fulfil our design of visiting the region of country in which, for some years past, the white willow has been grown for the purpose of a live fence, and after careful investigation we have no hesitation in saying that the experiments which have been made are, thus far at any rate, a decided success. In Lee and Ogle counties, Illinois, there are now growing some hundreds of miles of willow fence, from one to twelve years old, so that a visitor has the fullest opportunity of observing the plant in various stages of growth. The oldest willows are on the farm of Mr. W. L. Smith, of Lee County, Illinois, and consist of a row some forty rods long, which he planted, not so much for a fence as a wind-break. They are now upwards of forty feet in height, and form a solid fence of living tree trunks, many of which, at four feet from the ground, are nine and ten inches in diameter. They answer perfectly the purpose they were meant to serve, affording very complete protection from the winds. The following cut will give an idea of the manner in which these trees occupy the ground. They grew from cuttings of about finger size, and a foot or more in length. From the appearance presented, two or more shoots must have been allowed to grow from

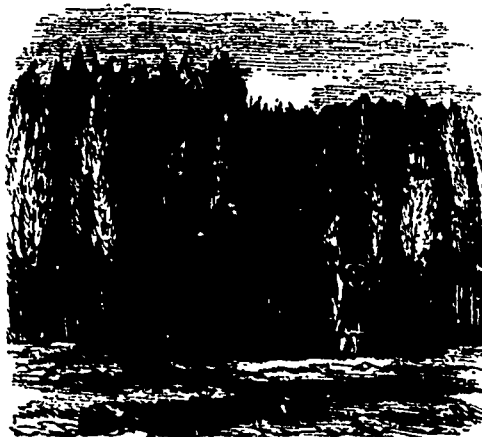


some of the cuttings, and hence an irregularity, which can be prevented by allowing only a single shoot—the one most in a direct line—to grow.

The quick, regular, uniform growth made by this line of willows, suggested the idea of using the plant for fence purposes. Fence-making is one of the greatest difficulties with which the Western farmer has to contend, and for many years past, numerous attempts have been made to grow live hedges, but with only very partial success. The Osage Orange succeeds very well south of latitude 40°, but above that parallel cannot be depended on, as it is liable to be winter-killed. The locust has failed in consequence of the depredations of the borer. Poplar, cotton-wood, and the yellow willow, have all proved unsatisfactory. Under these circumstances, and with the whole prairie population on the *qui vive* for something that would answer as a living fence, it is not surprising that a fever should have resulted from the announcement that the white willow was “just the thing.” The entire West got willow on the brain, and cuttings of all sorts and sizes, living and dead, found ready sale at very high prices. The wonderful novelty was expected to grow by magic, and imagination pictured the treeless regions of the West transformed into a paradise of shrubberies, parks and groves. As might have been expected, these wild

anticipations have not been realized, and yet there is, we think, reason to believe that the white willow is destined to prove a great boon to the prairie farmer.

The best sample of willows, in various stages of growth, is to be seen on the farm of Mr. Edward Cady, Ogle County, Ill., about four miles from Lane Station, on the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad.



Perhaps a better illustration of the utility and value of the plant to a Western settler could hardly be found than this instance furnishes. Mr. Cady has a farm of eighty acres. When he settled on it, six years ago last November, there was not a tree or shrub of any kind upon it. As he expressed it, there was nothing, green or dry, upon the lot. He could not tie his team until he had set a post into the ground, which he had taken the precaution to bring in his waggon. He had firm faith in the white willow, and one of his first steps toward improving his place was to plant out a few rods of cuttings. He has persevered in this direction, until now his entire farm is enclosed with a living fence, and he has several subdivisions of it also effected. He has taken great pains and been remarkably successful. His willows have made a very uniform growth, and through the entire extent of his fence-rows there is scarcely a gap, except where he has left gateways. His oldest lines of willow, of some five years' growth, are quite cattle proof, and those three years old, though an unruly animal might bend the saplings aside and break through them, are well nigh safe and sufficient fences. The above engraving represents a section of his fence, part of which is two, and part three years old, the jog at the top showing the division between the two and three-year-old plants. The height of the trees may be estimated by the figures in front. Those three years old measure about eighteen feet in height. The prairies being level and exposed, are subject to bleak winds in winter, and are liable to sweeping blasts at all seasons of the year. Hence, as wind-breaks, lines of willow are extremely valuable. Mr. Cady has found much advantage already in this respect, in the protection of

his stock during the winter, and preventing his grain from becoming lodged in summer. He has surrounded his barn-yard with a fine growth of willow, and has another enclosure of it within which is a young and thrifty orchard. He has also planted five acres as a wood lot, believing that it will pay to grow willow for firewood. Good judges have estimated that Mr. Smith's twelve-year old trees would now yield a cord of four-foot wood to the running rod. Mr. Cady has tried various experiments with his willows. His next neighbour on one side having complained that the trees shaded his land, Mr. Cady chopped them off level with the ground. During the present summer these stumps have thrown out shoots in all directions, and the growth has very much the appearance of a nice hedgerow, six or seven feet high. Whether it will bear shearing, or whether its rampant habits will admit of its being kept within bounds by constant cutting, remains to be seen. A correspondent of the *Prairie Farmer* says it will never make a hedge, since its growth is so rapid that it would require shearing twice a day, and occasionally between times. We confess to grave doubts if it can be curbed into hedge limits. Mr. Cady took the saplings he had chopped down, and cutting them into lengths of about four feet, drove them into the ground in a straight line, where he wanted a division fence. These stakes have rooted and thrown out shoots; they look very healthy, and from their regular, upright appearance, bid fair to make the prettiest fence on his domain. A party at some distance from the scene of our visit has tried the experiment of cutting off his willow trees four or five feet from the ground, in order to see if they will form a living stockade. The following illustration, taken from a photograph, will give an idea of the present appearance of his trees:—



Mr. Cady's method of preparing the ground and taking care of his plantations, is as follows:—He ploughs up six furrows, three each side, facing each other. He then thoroughly harrows and pulverizes the ground he has ploughed, believing that the land should be as well prepared for the willow as for any other crop. After his cuttings are planted, he tends them with the same care that he would a corn crop, keeping the weeds down and the ground loose. He also uses mulching both as a summer and winter protection. The row being kept clean the first year, but little difficulty is experienced afterwards. In one in-