

Our Native Trees — XI.

By G. U. HAY.

THE OLD OAK TREE.

Outpost of some primeval wood,
More than two hundred years it stood,
And watched benignantly the ways
Of men in these strange latter days.
And if the gnarled old tree but knew
All those on whom its shade it threw,
What a great, various company
It sheltered in its memory!

It caught the sunbeams as they strayed
Among its leafy boughs, and made
An oasis in the traveler's way,
How many a sultry summer day!
It kept, mayhap, his courage good,
As midway of the towns it stood,
A way-mark he could measure by,
And know his journey's end more nigh.

It gave the children acorn-cups,—
Such have they where Titania sips,—
And its brown, bitter nuts it poured
To swell their homely, winter hoard.
Its boughs were wont to interlace,
To make a neighborly meeting-place.
While sometimes lovers' trysts, maybe,
It saw,—this silent, friendly tree!

It gave the birds a home, and we
Were happier for their minstrelsy,—
No sweeter, though, than its own rune,
When west winds were with it in tune.
It gave a sense of calms and joys,
Beauty and strength in equipoise;
A hint of life outdaring ours,
As the russet leaves its showers.

And then beside our winter fire,
We watched the cheerful flame aspire,
As its stout heart to ashes turned,
While willingly for us it burned,—
Still free to serve as when it made
A hospitality of shade.

And who of us can hope to be
Of sweeter use than this oak-tree?
Shade, shelter, dial, meeting-spot,
Giver of song, hope, warmth, and thought!

—Selected.

Three species of Oak are said to exist in the Maritime Provinces, of which the red oak (*Quercus rubra*) is the commonest. It is a rapid grower, and its wood, which weighs 41 lbs to the cubic foot, is less valuable than many others, being softer and so full of sap that it is difficult to remove it by drying. For this reason it makes poor fuel. It is short-lived, in comparison with other oaks, but grows to a large size and has a spreading habit, giving abundance of shade. In a forest of red oak,

which may sometimes be found on slopes facing the sun, there is usually plenty of room for smaller plants, quite different from what one finds in the denser shade of a beech forest. The flowers which appear with the leaves in spring are of two kinds on the same tree (as with other oaks), the staminate flowers (each containing about eight stamens) in catkins and the fertile ones, like tiny little pink knobs,—both growing in terminal or axillary clusters on recent shoots.

The oaks are among the last trees to put out their leaves in spring and they retain them late in the fall. The leaves of a forest of red oaks, with their rich red and purple colours, are a beautiful sight when the brighter colours of the maples begin to fade. The heart wood of the red oak is reddish in colour, splits easily, shows a beautiful grain, and is much in demand for making furniture. It is used for plank-ing for the decks of vessels, for strong barrel staves, and for bridge posts where there is exposure to water.

The fruit is a large, somewhat bitter acorn, enclosed in a shallow open cup, very abundant. In some districts where there are forests of red oak, swine are fed on the acorns which are known as "mast." The acorns ripen and fall at the end of the second season.

The beautiful shape and spreading habit of the red oak make it very desirable as an ornamental tree, but it requires plenty of room and sunlight to reach the majestic proportions to which many of these trees attain. The trunk soon becomes lost in the large and numerous branches which spring from it in curves. Most of the limbs are knotty and crooked.

The bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) is not a common tree in the maritime provinces. The bark of the trunk and branches is an ash gray, darker than that of the white oak. This tree does not here attain the size which distinguishes the red oak, but its trunk is more erect, and its branches less spreading. It is found in deep rich soil in river valleys; grows much more slowly than does the red oak, and is more difficult to transplant.

A variety of the scarlet oak (*Quercus coccinea*) has been found in at least one place in New Brunswick by Dr. Brittain. It is smaller in size than either of the preceding forms, its foliage is also more deeply cut, shining green in summer and a brilliant scarlet in autumn, making it a very desirable tree for ornamental purposes. The young trees are said to be lacking in symmetry, but they make a rapid growth in any light well drained soil.