

OUR FOREST TREES.

BY RUSTICUS.

"Woodm.: spare, oh! spare that tree."

It was with no small degree of pleasure, that I perused your several articles on the subject of trees, wherein you avowed yourself an earnest defender of the policy of giving our forest trees standing room. It is really a matter of regret that they are so ruthlessly swept away; it seems to be laid down as a system, in Canada, to cut down every tree standing on clear ground. So utterly opposed am I to this practice, that I confess a strong feeling of indignation stirs within me, when I see the axe laid at the root of a noble tree, the last survivor, it may be, on the farm, of the ancient forest, and know that it is so applied out of mere sordid love of gain, and for the paltry consideration of the fuel it will afford. The impolicy of such a procedure is very evident. The cattle themselves exhibit more taste and more sense in this respect than their masters, for they gladly seek the shelter from intense heat, which the rich foliage of the trees affords them. It is in the highest degree cruel to confine cattle in an enclosure where they are exposed to the fierce glare of our summer's sun. But even putting out of sight that consideration, the want of shade in a pasture tells against the pocket of the farmer. The cattle are oppressed and enfeebled by the excessive heat, and they roam about from side to side of the field, seeking the partial shelter which the fences yield them. How different is the case in the adjoining field, where a chance tree or two has escaped the axe. There the cattle may be seen lying under the cool shade of the spreading branches, happily "chewing the cud of contentment," and preparing themselves for a vigorous attack upon the grass when the fresh breezes of evening shall have come.

I think I see a smile stealing over the face of the reader at this description, but this is no fancy sketch, and there is assuredly more truth than poetry in the assertion, that cows in a shady pasture will, during hot weather, give more milk than in an exposed one. But even were there not a pecuniary motive to induce the farmer to spare the trees, the desire of "the good man to be merciful to his beast" should alone be a sufficient reason for their preservation.

Again, in a few years, wood will become scarce, as it even already is in some parts of the country, and that, too, where there might have been abundance for many years to come, had not the slashing system been indiscriminately carried out. Such a practice reminds one of the fabled possessor of the goose that laid the golden eggs. The unhappy urehin, dissatisfied with moderate wealth obtained in the natural order of things, overcome by avarice, wished, the fable tells us, to become rich at once, and in order to do so, killed the source of opulence. So it has been and still is with the Canadian farmers; they have in the forest, which so closely covers the virgin soil, an inexhaustible mine of wealth, if "worked" with prudence. But the same over-anxiety to get rich, leads them to commit the same fatal mistake as the boy in the fable. The trees do not yield a direct return, so they are felled and made into firewood, or a more wholesale mode of destruction is adopted, and they are thrown into log-heaps and burnt, preparatory to being converted into pot or pearl ashes. Such a plan certainly yields those who adopt it ready money, and is thus of immediate service to the needy settler, who is in this way often enabled to pay for the lot on which he has seated himself, or "squatted," to use the term common in Western Canada. Though then it is excusable, and even necessary, for the poor man to cut down and convert the trees into ready money, the adoption of this practice will ultimately prove injurious even to him. How is it that farms which, for a few years after they were cleared, yielded abundant crops, have now become almost unproductive? Much of the secret, I am convinced, lies in the suicidal practice of converting all the trees into timber, fire-wood or pot-ash. It may appear anomalous, that ground which was thickly covered with immense trees, and possessed of sufficient strength to maintain them in vigorous growth and health, should yet, within a few years, lose "heart," and become either barren or produce weak and sickly crops. We can only account for it in the following way: When the soil was first stripped of trees, it had been enriched by the gradual decay of fallen trees, and the annual accumulation of leaves shed upon it at the approach of winter, during a long series of years. In consequence, the first crops were unusually abundant, owing to the strength and richness of the soil, caused as above stated, for it had always *received*