

A FORGOTTEN INDUSTRY.



THE majority of the youth of our country know very little about the customs and life of our pioneer forefathers, who carved their homesteads out of the unbroken forests which at one time covered Ontario and Quebec. Fortunate are the few who have heard from the lips of a grandfather or great-grandfather a description of that life! They will certainly cherish the memory of those unselfish men and appreciate, more than others can, their early struggles. A few authors have given us in their stories a pretty good idea of life in those early times, but much more could be written, which would make very profitable reading, and serve to inspire the rising generation with a greater reverence for their ancestors. In those early times there were no luxuries. Men had to work very hard to raise enough on their small "clearances" to sustain their families, to say nothing of making improvements on their properties. Money circulated very slowly, as the requirements of life were so few that they could all be supplied from the characteristic village store, and purchases there were mostly made by barter. However, there was one industry, a natural one, which gave the farmer the opportunity of acquiring a little ready money, and that was the manufacture of potash, pearl-ash and saleratus from crude ashes.

There was no loss to the farmer in this industry; it was all clear profit. He was under the necessity of clearing his land for cultivation, and the operation placed more wood at his disposal than he needed for his own use, while for the overplus there was no market as the lumber trade had not developed sufficiently. The farmer burned his overplus of timber and in the ashes thereof he found a means of gain. Later on, when a demand for timber arose, only the branches and such wood as could not be sold were burned to produce the money-making ashes.

The market for this product was usually the nearest village. Here some wealthy man had located, in what he considered a promising business locality, and had erected what was called an "ashery." The ashery proprietor was an all-round business man, in Lower Canada he was generally the seigneur; he owned a