

FARM AND FIELD.

FOR THE RURAL CANADIAN.

WALKS AND TALKS AMONG THE FARMERS.—NO. IX.

An ashery man called at my place the other day. "Have you any ashes?" he asked. "Yes," was the reply. "Well, I'll take them," said he. "I don't think you will," said I. "Why not?" he asked. "Because they are worth far more to me than you are willing to give for them," I replied. "How much are they worth to you?" he enquired. "At least twenty-five cents a bushel," I said. "What for?" he asked. "As manure to my land," I answered. The man stood in mute astonishment, looking very much as though he considered me a lunatic, so I asked him how much he would give me for the ashes, and he replied, "five cents a bushel." He left me with the air of a person greatly wronged. Since this conversation, I have noticed in my drives about the country, several teams laden with ashes on their way to the country town, where there is a large ashery. The behaviour of my visitor, and the sight of these loads of ashes would seem to indicate that it is the usual thing for farmers to sell this valuable fertilizer, instead of keeping it wherewith to eke out the always insufficient manure supply.

My estimate of twenty-five cents a bushel as the value of wood ashes for fertilizing purposes, was a very low one. Prof. Kedrie, one of the best agricultural authorities on the continent of America, says:

"Among the most common and most valuable of special manures I place wood ashes. The amount of ash and its relative composition vary with the kind and part of vegetable burned, but we may safely take the ash of the body of a beech tree as representing the average composition of wood ashes. One bushel of ashes represents about two tons and a half of dry body wood. Wood ashes contain all the required elements of plant nutrition except nitrogen. One hundred pounds wood ashes contain sixteen pounds of potash worth eighty cents, three pounds and a half of soda worth two cents, sixty-seven pounds of lime and magnesia worth eight cents, and five pounds and a quarter phosphoric acid worth twenty-six cents. If we had to buy in market in the cheapest form the manurial materials contained in one hundred pounds of ashes the cost would be \$1.16. Can you afford to throw away such valuable materials, or sell them for sixpence a bushel to the soap-boiler? No argument is needed; here is the value and there is the selling price. Draw your own conclusions."

A bushel of common hardwood ashes weighs about fifty pounds; hence Prof. Kendrie values this fertilizer at more than twice the price I named in my talk with the ash-peddler.

SPENT, or leached ashes, though, of course, inferior to unleached, are still of great manurial value, especially under certain conditions of soil exhaustion. In the course of a lecture tour during the winter of 1878-9, I met with a remarkable instance of their efficacy in restoring impoverished land. A farmer named Peter Wright, living near Drummondville, had fifty acres of rented land adjacent to another fifty which he owned. Eight years previously, when his tenancy began, this land was in a beggared state. Mr. Wright was carrying on an ashery, and spread leached ashes over the worn-out place at the rate of twelve loads per acre. He pursued a thorough system of husbandry, and in 1878 harvested 585 bushels of wheat from fourteen acres. This was within a trifle of forty-two bushels per acre. The leached ashes were not the sole means of this amendment, but they were the chief contributor to it. Leached ashes have

great "staying power," and seem to put backbone, as it were, into an impoverished soil.

I REMEMBER that some years ago, a big mound of leached ashes in a certain Ontario town went a-begging. The proprietor of the ashery was willing to give them away to all comers, but hardly any of the neighbouring farmers thought them worth hauling. After awhile, some sharp down-Easters came along, and commenced shipping that pile of ashes all the way to New Jersey, as an application to the market gardens in the vicinity of New York city. When this got wind, the farmers in the neighbourhood of the ash-heap began to find out their mistake, and before very long leached ashes were at a premium, and readily commanded, at first twenty-five cents, and subsequently fifty cents per load.

I HAVE NO DOUBT there are similar mounds of leached ashes in various benighted parts of Ontario that may be had for the hauling. Any reader of THE RURAL CANADIAN who is sighing over the scarcity of manure, and will take the hint here given, will own that his dollar subscription to this journal for 1885 was one of the best investments he ever made in the whole course of his life.

BUT what shall we do for soap, if people will not sell wood ashes to the potash manufacturers? Well, it will take some time before this practical difficulty comes to be felt. If all who subscribe for and read agricultural journals were to stop selling ashes at once and for ever, it would hardly raise the price of soap a cent per pound, for the great bulk of the people in town and country will remain in the dark, and go on as now selling the product at one-tenth of its value. By the time a general revolution is wrought in this direction, some substitute will probably be found for potash or soap, for the world still moves, and before it comes to an end there will be many more discoveries and inventions to meet the wants of society.

THE ground is bare, and I see on many farms the cattle and sheep abroad in the fields picking up a scanty dole on the bare, brown pastures and meadows. Poor policy this, especially in the case of sheep, who bite close and will infallibly nip the crowns of the grass and clover plants, wherein are stored the germs of next year's growth. Farmers think they save a little fodder by this means, but, if they do, it is mainly by their cattle and sheep getting off their appetite in consequence of obtaining a taste of green herbage. Moreover, exposure to the cold blasts makes a further draft on the fodder mow to keep up the animal warmth wasted while wandering in the fields instead of being comfortably housed in stables and barn-yards. This is what John Bunyan would call being "penny wise and pound foolish," or as the Americans would say, "saving at the epigot and wasting at the bung-hole."

I FIND that many farmers in the vicinity of towns and cities are selling off their timber for firewood and other purposes, and taking to coal for fuel. In a financial point of view, I have no doubt it pays not a few to do this. During the brief space of good sleighing we had recently, I knew of three tons of coal being hauled ten miles in a single load, which was no heavier than many a load of green wood, which is taken the same distance. The coal cost \$6.40 per ton at the yard, and it was only a pleasant day's outing to haul it with a team that was fresh and lively from having little to do. A ton of coal is equivalent to at least two cords of average hard wood. Dry wood brings from \$4.50 to \$5 per cord in the

town where the coal was bought. Putting that and that together, it was a "good spec" to exchange the wood for the coal, especially in view of the small trouble and great comfort connected with a base burner stove.

THE days of open fire places and gleeful wood fires are, I fear, numbered, though, as long as this deponent liveth, there will be at least one to "blaze away" every winter. But already black, gloomy box stoves have well nigh supplanted the cheerful fire on the hearth, and the base-burner, with its pretty little mica windows through which the glow of red hot anthracite can be seen, is a great improvement upon these. Really, though, must "the fireside" become a figure of speech and a thing of the past? Are "back-log studies" to be pursued no more? Any one who has read and entered into the spirit of the Marvel's book on this subject, will feel a pang of regret at the ant-open fire-place revolution that is going on. But I question if it can be stayed.

I WAS TALKING with a farmer the other day who has fifteen acres of good uncultured bush. Probably he could make \$1,600 or \$1,800 clear profit by converting that timber into firewood. The interest of the lesser sum would far more than pay his coal bill every year, and he would have fifteen acres of land added to his farm of one hundred acres. Plainly, "there's money in it," and yet one shrinks from the idea of a clean sweep being made of all the forest contiguous to towns and cities, where there is a ready market for fire-wood at high prices. If the rainfall is affected by denudation of the land of its living timber, then we ought to pause before sweeping off all the bush, and by planting shrubberies and parks around our houses, setting out shade trees along the highways, and making artificial forests of all rough hilly places unfit for culture, do all in our power to counteract the evil consequences of a too general removal of the native woods. This is a subject of great importance, and should receive careful consideration, not only at the hands of our farmers, but also our legislators. W. F. C.

MIXED FARMING.

Though in some favoured localities, and under particular conditions, mixed farming may not be the most commendable, yet, under the present circumstances of the great majority in Ontario, it must be applied for some time to come. Farmers living near large towns can profitably go into the production of specialties for consumption; but those with plenty of room, cash and talents for it may give their attention to breeding stock, with both pleasure and profit; all the strong men do not reap the harvest, so this class will be in the minority for generations to come. The average farmer, with no more than one hundred acres of land, must keep to the old plan of raising a little of everything, with slight deviations to meet exigencies of the times and seasons. What had been the leading commodity in past years may have to fall back to the second or third place, and others formerly of minor importance come to the front. One thing is certain, that grain-raising, except for feed on the farm, will have to be diminished very much in the near future when, by the aid of the Canada Pacific Railway, the prairie farmers of our vast North-West can pour their wheat into our mills at a price that will keep Ontario out in the cold. By the Scott Act movement, barley will be in much less demand, so these two grains, which in many localities formed the main staff on which the farmer leaned to meet his liabilities, cannot be trusted in future as the crops for the market, and