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The Field.

Cultivating the Thistle.

To the Editor of THE CANADA FARMER:

SIR:—There are two things at this time, in reference to the Canada thistle, of which I would be glad to say a word worthy of your notice. First, before the Thistle Act was passed in 1866, Path masters always mowed down the thistles growing on their respective roads, but the past two years they have ceased to do so (at least in this locality). There are now growing on embankments hideous avenues of thistles, formidable enough to make fences, and they could scarcely ever present a more vigorous growth; the dry weather has had no retarding influence on their perfect development. A few remarks, though having a local reference, might have a general bearing. Then supposing we start from the city westward, we find long before quitting the limits, vacant lots, (as they are called) completely occupied by thistles, all of which might have been cut down the last week in June for a very trifle. Passing on to a little west of the Lunatic Asylum, and joining the Grand Trunk Railroad on the south side of the lake shore road, is a large portion of the garrison common, which some two or three years ago was cultivated, but is now again abandoned, and here you see the thistle in its greatest state of perfection. Some think they might be made useful in the event of an invasion from that quarter, because they could place in ambush several regiments of soldiers, while others think intrenchments would answer as well; however, military authorities ought to know best. One thing is certain, there is enough seed on that one spot to stock the whole Province. The next remarkable thistle forest you come to (still going west) is a little before you come to the Etobicoke river, where is a large field that has been abandoned to the thistle for five years, and they visibly began to deteriorate for want of proper cultivation, and this year they have got it, by the ground being ploughed and sown with barley. Ploughing the ground that is infested with thistles after they have ripened their tops (in the fall or in the spring), is the unfailing way to strengthen and increase their number. Take a large district as a whole, it is safe to assert that in the past seven years the thistles have doubled their numbers. In all extreme cases it is wrong to waste time in the fall or spring, to plough the thistle ground, or sow it with grain (for a season would be comparatively lost); but let them grow till after midsummer, then mow them with the mower or scythe, or with both, and as soon as dry, burn them, after which plough, and if need be, get some help. After this, use the cultivator at least twice, then sow buckwheat, with two good harrowings, and the thistles will be at least three parts subdued, and not one can possibly ripen seed. As soon as the

crop is ripe, cut and remove it, and without loss of time, use the cultivator (not the plough), which will take off the heads of all remaining thistles (let none escape), also it will cause to grow every grain of wheat that might have shelled out, and so avoid future trouble with the next crop. A first class crop of buckwheat will just pay the farmer all expenses, and leave his land in good condition for spring wheat, to be seeded down with clover. All the labour attending the cultivation of the foregoing crop will not in the least interfere with the grain harvest, or cultivating, or collecting the farmer's root crop. We find here now and then, and I suppose it is so everywhere, sapient legislators, who boast and say they can drive a coach and six through any Act of Parliament, and the Thistle Act especially, arguing "a man may grow what he likes on his own land." Well, suppose the thistle grower is allowed to possess this right, then let the legislature come down upon him and spoil his market for this class of produce, by inflicting a fine heavy enough to allow a portion of it to go to the informer, to make it worth his while to look after the vendors of this nuisance. There are some who care not for consequences, and, so long as they can get the same price for thistle heads as for grain, or the same price for the dead thistle plants as for hay, and different sorts of straw (especially pea-straw) they will continue to do so; but let the law plainly designate all such transactions as obtaining money under false pretences, with a bill of pains and penalties attached, and the farmer would quickly give up growing the vile stuff, because there would be no market for it, and the whole community would be benefited by the change, and none more than the farmer himself. Secondly, I wish to say one more word in reference to seeding of the Canada thistle. I have discovered this much, that farmers generally do not know a thistle seedling plant while in its infant stage of two leaves. To all such I would say, beg or buy a pinch of lettuce seed and sow it, for the young seedling is precisely similar to the young thistle, being closely related to each other as species. I have recently received a Chicago newspaper, in which I saw a significant heading to a paragraph, namely, *The Canada Thistle*. The writer implores one and all to lend a helping hand, to spare no expense to arrest and exterminate its presence, for it has made its appearance in three places, at least, in Illinois. The reason assigned for this vigilance is, its presence will depreciate the value of land twenty-five per cent. I was not aware till recently of that general incredulity among farmers in disbelieving the propagation and extension of the thistle by its seeds. To reason from analogy and from facts of every year's experience, I see no reason to conclude that the thistle seed is less certain to grow (when placed in favorable circumstances) than any other weed; and if so it might fairly be inferred there is not one in a million that is not capable of producing a plant. But if they all grew, it would be

woe to the inhabitants of *terra firma*, at least; for to multiply every year's product for twenty-five years by eleven thousand (the product of one thistle) would produce enough to sow thickly the whole globe, and then there would be sufficient left to build a bridge across the Atlantic, although the waters should be miles deep. The learned tell us that one pair of red spiders would soon produce a quintillion, but then there are other animals that would as soon consume them, and birds eat an enormous quantity of thistle seeds. Thistle seeds, doubtless, are endowed with the same powers in common with other seeds, to preserve their vitality when buried deep in the ground, and when divested of their hoary trapping can fall down in cracks in common with other seeds. But I anticipate some will say "let us have facts and not theory." Here they are: Seven years ago I reclaimed a portion of a swamp where no thistle ever grew nor could any animal pass over it. In 1865 I had to abandon part of it (being cultivated with the spade), but in the fall there was a heavy crop of grass, &c. On mowing it (to my surprise) I found it full of thistles half a yard high, and on examining them I found every one of them were seedlings. Every year we make up a hot-bed in the spring, and collect some of the best earth we can get to put on the top, and the seedling thistle has never once failed to be thickly represented among a multifarious mass of weeds. Last year, while walking across a field in company with a farmer, he stooped down and picked up something; it was a thistle head, and full of young plants. He remarked that "some people did not believe they grew from seed, but seeing was believing." I have done the same thing myself without being curious enough to count their number. This spring a neighbouring farmer called on me, and, of course, we had some talk about the thistle. After referring to this fact that farmers did not believe the seeds grew, he said: "I was determined to put it to a test, I took a thistle-head and planted it, and there came up just fifty plants." I live next to a neighbour who don't believe in bothering about thistles at all, and enormous quantities every year go to seed, of which I get a large share. This spring I ploughed up a meadow, having been down five years, and the seedling thistles sprung from the upturned soil by thousands, the seed having lain buried all that time; and if the vitality of the seed was preserved for five years so it would be for fifty, or five hundred. This spring I dug up a piece of ground that had never before been disturbed by plough or spade, from which grew thistles and an enormous lot of mullen. I have now one seedling thistle growing from the top of a stump, which I hope (for a time) to preserve. Before bidding adieu to this subject permit me to refer to friend Peter Shisler's last letter on this subject. He speaks of the seeds of thistles as imaginary foes, but the plant itself as a real one, and asserts: "the most careless could not fail to observe that its principal mode of pro-