

PRESERVATION OF THE FORESTS.

Modern science has proved the fact, revealed to man in the dawn of creation, that the tree of the field is man's life ; not, as it was formerly understood, as only "pleasant to the sight and good for food," but as the means of holding in equilibrium those forces of nature on which animal life depends. It has been justly remarked that "forests act as a balance-wheel to land climate" in its three most important elements—heat, moisture and wind. The veteran Humboldt says : "In felling the trees which covered the crowns and slopes of the mountains, men in all climates seem to be bringing upon future generations two calamities at once—a want of fuel and a scarcity of water."

Our own vast continent is naturally dry, and is becoming more so by the destruction of the forests. The tendency to an excess of evaporation over precipitation should be counteracted by every possible means. Herschel mentions the absence of trees in Spain as one of the reasons for the extreme aridity of that country. A recent traveller there says : "The Spaniard, and above all the Castilian, has an innate hatred of a tree, and if he does not cut it down for firewood, he cuts it down because it harbors birds that eat his grain. Forests and brushwood alike disappear before the inevitable axe, until, as often occurs in Castile, the traveller may look for leagues over the country without seeing a tree or bush to break its uniformity. This foolish extinction of the forests has been the source of innumerable evils to the country—evils which are continually acting upon and augmenting each other. Unrestrained by any vegetation, the rain rushes down the steep sides of the hills, swells the rivers to dangerous torrents, and the water, for which the country is gaping, is hurried off to the sea, and becomes lost for all useful purposes ; an extreme aridity of the atmosphere is the consequence, a continually diminishing rainfall, and a continually impoverished country."

In Palestine and other parts of Asia, and in Northern Africa (which in ancient times was the granary of Europe), similar consequences have been experienced, and the lands have become deserts from the destruction of the forests—

"Where naught can grow because it raineth not,
And where no rain can fall to bless the land,
Because naught grows there."

On the other hand, examples of the beneficial influence of restoring woods are not wanting. During the French occupation of Egypt, in the time of Napoleon the First, it did not rain for sixteen months ; but since Mohammed Ali and Ibrahim Pasha have made vast plantations there (the former alone having planted more than twenty millions of trees), there now falls a good deal of rain, especially along the coast ; and even at Cairo real showers are no rarity. Almost every one can remember springs and streams which were considered perennial in his youth that have now dried up and disappeared. If he takes the trouble to investigate the matter, he will find that the neighboring woods have been cut off, and no longer act as a screen and reservoir for the rain ;