

The Farm and Fireside.

Our Fences.

More than thirty years ago the writer of a paragraph in the Philadelphia Public Ledger listened to an agricultural address delivered by the late Nicholas Bidle, at the annual exhibition of the Agricultural Society of that city. He was particularly struck with two things he then enunciated. One was that fences were made to retain cattle within the particular premises enclosed, and not to shut them out from such enclosed premises. The idea, though seemingly a very simple one, was new, and against the almost universally received opinion of farmers and the public as to the purpose of fencing. It was believed up to that time that the highways were public pasture grounds, on all of which any one and everybody were free to graze their stock at pleasure, and, indeed, on the adjoining premises, unless the owner saw fit to protect them by legal fencing. For statute law prescribed their height and character. Even then a larger privilege than this was accorded the pastures, as the highways were sometimes designated. Accidents or death resulting from this wandering of the stock at large was not at the risk of the owners, but at the cost of the railways, whose trucks might be invaded with damage to the roving herd. The price of the injured or killed cattle was considered an equitable claim that it was paid invariably without question. From the date of this memorable address, delivered by Mr. Bidle, from a rural platform in the presence of a company of intelligent, sunburned farmers, the sentiments to which he then gave utterance have gradually spread, not only all over this country, but all over the world, and are now the recognized law of the courts as well of the highway. The cost of fencing is not to be borne by the owner of the stock, but upon private property, nor is the penalty upon the railway companies when cattle roaming at large are injured or killed. The loss is to the owner, and in some instances the courts have gone farther, and put penalties on the owners of the stock for the damage done to the property of the railway companies and their passengers by throwing the train from the track. It is a wholesome and most equitable change, and we can now but wonder that the old custom was so long endured. And yet this great and important revolution in public sentiment was first put in motion by a man whose name is now being mentioned in a position, it is true, but before a comparatively few and unimportant citizens. The other startling fact made by Mr. Bidle was the fact that he was invested in his fencing. In the State of Pennsylvania alone, he said, a careful estimate showed that at least a hundred millions of dollars were invested at that time in fencing. Much attention has since been given to this branch of the than new thought, and great economy has been effected, but still the amount of capital is greatly beyond the estimate of any one who has not given the matter special attention. Cheaper material for fences has been found, and morable fences for the necessary division of fields are common. In addition to this, instead of laws passed by the Legislature prescribing the height of a fence to turn outside cattle, we have now statutes which protect the farmer's property in the absence of fencing. Fences cost enough in cities, but that cost bears a small proportion to the charges for them in the country at large. When city people go to the country, they see little to admire in the post and rail, the worm fence, the rough stone wall, the highly strung wire, or the white railing of the village. The fence in the American institution and habit, and a costly one it is. Illinois is said to have ten times the fencing of Germany, and Duchesne county, and New York, more than all France. These marks show that these brown and dingy divisions, marks, overgrown with weeds and thistles, are all enormous investments in the industry of the country, and all to keep stock from trespassing. Some of these days, under the careful tillage of the old world, fences will disappear, and hand boundaries will be marked with fruit and shade trees, or neat hedge rows, and the country will present a more improved appearance.—Chas. C. Blatchley.

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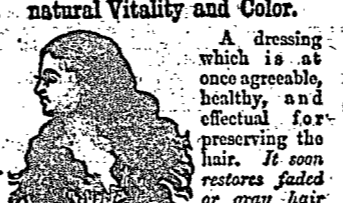
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