DELIGHTS OF A ROUGH GARDEN.

IN offering suggestions on gardening to the enthusiastic beginner it is usual to lay down at the outset a few unmistakable rules for his prudent guidance: Undertake no more than you can care for with thoroughness. Neatness is the first essential. Be content with small beginnings, and so on indefinitely.

The pleasures of the opposite plan, the rich satisfaction of a big, rough garden, in which beginnings and complete successes are somewhat loosely connected, and yet where freedom and beauty do live together in harmony, these attractive possibilities seldom find an advocate. On the strength of an experiment now in its fourth year I beg leave to put in a plea for the garden in which neatness is not a first essential. It seems quite possible to make a kind of treaty with Nature, in which she consents to do for a rough, yet much-loved garden filled with all sorts of tentative beginnings of loveliness, that which she does with so much charm for any old abandoned garden left wholly to her possession. The lover of wild beauty, who loves tamed and cultured beauty also, may find an opportunity for gardening upon this scale on any little country place of a few acres . . .

One of the delights of a rough garden is its continual surprises. With the habit of tucking in seeds, cuttings, roots and bulbs, as occasion serves, planting and sowing without formality, there is something very delightful in the apparent spontaneity with which unlooked-for bloom and beauty often come to light. Broad mixed borders in which hardy plants are irregularly grouped (not without a constant study of the advantages of contrast and relief) make this the simplest matter possible. The Iris or the Lily bulb is buried, the seed is sown and the ground occupied staked to prevent accidents; suddenly, as it seems, a new shape of delicate beauty greets the eye. A big rough garden gives an encouraging opportunity to experiment . . . Not annuals and biennials merely, but shrubs and trees also increase and multiply with extraordinary ease in the rough garden, where the discipline is not too severe. Fruit and flower, shade and fragrance, homely use and stately adornment mingle happily here in the garden held in partnership with Nature . . .

Amherst, Mass. D. H. R. Goodale

[Garden and Forest 9(1896): 303-304]

FARMING ON VACANT CITY LOTS.

URING these times of agricultural depression the profits realized by farmers, even under the best conditions, are meagre enough, and, therefore, when Mayor Pingree, of Detroit, first conceived the idea of utilizing vacant city lots for the growing of potatoes by the unemployed of that city—that is, by men who were generally quite ignorant of the theory and practice of cultivating the soil—the experiment was looked upon as visionary, if not ridiculous. The result of the first year’s cultivation, however, which enabled nearly one thousand families to support themselves through the winter by their crops alone, stimulated certain public-spirited citizens of New York to make a similar effort here, and the result is published in No. I of the periodical Notes, published by the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. Of course, the philanthropic aspect of this experiment is the one of prime importance. The result proves that
many persons who own vacant land would prefer to have it cultivated instead of lying idle and unproductive, and that a very limited area will suffice to raise enough vegetables to contribute largely to the support of a family through the winter. It proves, too, that very many of the destitute people in tenement-houses are willing to work and can be made to support themselves with a very little help advanced as a loan. Besides this, the project offers a natural plan for giving to the people who dwell in stifling tenement-houses opportunity to work for themselves in the open air and under healthful conditions. It gives mothers the advantage of taking their children out of the heated houses and giving them a taste of rural life. It enables the superannuated and partially crippled to support themselves. In addition to these advantages, the entire scheme has a substantial business basis, with none of the odious and depressing suggestions of a charity.

Naturally, however, the educational side of this vacant-lot farming will have a special interest to readers of a journal devoted to the art of cultivating the soil... In every city where this vacant-lot farming has been successful the soil has been cultivated in accordance with the teachings of science... Every process from the very beginning to the end was carefully supervised, so that this vacant-lot farming, apart from its direct pecuniary profit, had a much more important function as a school of agriculture...

We cannot but assume that many of these tenement-house farmers who have had the advantage of this year of schooling will discover that there is a happier and wholesomer life for them outside of the congested districts of great cities... If, under capable instruction, agriculture can be made profitable in city lots, and if the good example of experiment stations is visible in better farming all about them, why should not actual instruction in agriculture be made a part of the curriculum of rural common schools?...

[Editorial. Garden and Forest 9 (1896): 91-92]

SENTIMENTALISM AND TREE-FELLING.

A writer in a late number of the Springfield Republican finds his sensibilities wounded by the tone of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's book, entitled, Art Out-of-doors, and especially by the advice to cut down trees, given in the chapter entitled "A Word for the Axe." It is not our purpose to enter into any defense of the book, which must stand on its own merits, any farther than to say that we know of no work where more sound doctrine on the subjects treated is given in the same space. On several occasions, however, Garden and Forest has advised the cutting down of trees, and a good many of them, in pleasure-grounds and elsewhere, and have been met with this same protest made by the writer in the Republican that no true lover of nature would think of such sacrilege. Now, we have no inclination to retort upon a critic of this sort that his own love of nature may be conventional and fictitious. We have no doubt that this writer, and many other good people who are distressed whenever they see or hear of the felling of a tree, love nature most sincerely after a sentimental fashion. But we believe that many people, whose practices they condemn, love nature quite as sincerely, and in a much more robust, and certainly more intelligent, way...

[Editorial. Garden and Forest 6 (1893): 311]