

THE PROTECTION OF NATURAL
MONUMENTS

ABOUT a year ago I caused to be distributed broadcast in this state a circular inviting local public attention to the importance and desirability of protecting our natural memorials. Though behind this call there has been neither organized effort nor public funds, there is good evidence that in some instances the suggestions embodied in the circular have been seriously entertained and perhaps may have had some practical result. Such efforts, it would seem, must be essentially localized at the start and perhaps, to effect the best results, should remain so.

The conservation of especially interesting natural monuments comes somewhat late in the development of the sentiment of a community, with the increase in the appreciation of nature's works. There are lovers of birds who see with profound regret the disappearance of certain of their friends once common in the region, but gradually driven away by the encroachments of commerce upon their nesting places. There are lovers of plants who know the few remaining spots where rare flowers bloom or rare ferns may be found. What comparison does a loyal citizen make between a noble tree which has seen the centuries roll by, which has stood sentinel over the community since the cradle days of the settlement, and the light or telephone company which lops off one of its branches to let a wire go through or thrusts an ugly pole into its boughs? A wooden telephone pole with its cross-trees is to-day in our cities and villages the cross on which every sentiment of good and decent taste is crucified. There are persons in almost every community who can be better spared than some of its venerable trees. It is not only the age of a tree that entitles it to guardianship; there are some which have especial associations with distinguished personages of the past, others may be the last survivors of a race which once abounded but whose companions have disappeared under the woodsman's axe. A great glacial rock boulder projecting alone from some meadow or hillside, tells a romantic age-long story which

should not be menaced by the workman's sledge. There are bits of swamp still profuse in rare orchids, and clumps of woodland where rare birds still nest but which will soon be robbed of their possessions if measures are not taken for their protection.

No part of any of our states is without such objects which appeal to the thoughtful citizen for protection—the lesser objects which could not be well brought within the supervision of societies of national scope, like our American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, or even of recognized state organizations. In my circular I undertook to indicate some of these minor objects which had come to my notice within this state as entitled to protection either for their intrinsic character or their historic associations, such as the rock bridge over the Perch River; a burlesque chestnut near the village of Freehold, unique in the state; an arbor vitæ of enormous size on Lake Colden; the extinct volcano near Schuylerville, which served as "Stark's redoubt" in the campaign of 1777, and so on. It would be no difficult matter to complete a census of such objects which might serve as a guide to local interest and contribute much to the general attractiveness of any community. Our American culture does not run easily to sentiment and opportunities for conserving such natural memorials lightly pass, only to be followed by regret for their loss; for the opportunity once gone, it is forever too late; the damage once done can never be repaired. And it is worth while saving these things, for lovers of nature and the out-of-doors, students of science and of history, intelligent members of every community in this and in the generations after us, will approve the doing.

In such a movement we have to take our lesson and inspiration from the older and higher culture of Germany, where substantial progress has been made in protecting such objects of natural interest. There the methods employed and the results achieved are interesting. An old fir tree gnarled with years in the forests of Luenenburg is set apart and protected for its very age and fascinating ugliness. A little patch of dwarf birch, a

rare survivor of the postglacial flora, is preserved and protected in the vicinity of Hamburg. A considerable area of forest near Münster is protected because of its profusion in certain rare species of lichens. In Schleswig a great glacial boulder resting on a low knoll has been set aside, the ground immediately about it acquired and a road laid out to it. In Brandenburg a little lake with its swamp, the Plage, has been reserved on account of its botanic interest and in Marienwerder a bit of lake and woods where rare water birds nest. A local society in Gotha has acquired a small pond and swamp and has transferred to it rare plants threatened with extinction and has also introduced new plants foreign to the region, such as our common *Sarracenia* or Pitcher-plant. Such results as these have been attained largely through the activity of local societies and are the outcome of local pride and intelligent appreciation, but Prussia has an official duly appointed by the Cultus Minister as State Commissioner for the Care of Natural Monuments, Dr. H. Conwentz, director of the Provincial Museum at Danzig, and through his activity aided by the official forestry organization, much has been possible which would be more difficult here without such aid. The methods employed by Dr. Conwentz have enlisted a more than local interest and the Cambridge Press has recently published his address on his work delivered by request before the British Association last year.

It is not likely that any American state will very soon accord recognition to this movement by following the example of Prussia in designating an official as its apostle to arouse local loyalty and supervise such conservation but the whole matter, it would seem, might with entire propriety be embraced within the scope of the national conservation movement whose official support could be so enlisted and so delegated as to efficiently enforce the subject on public and local attention and even on private munificence. I am not aware that the functions of the National Conservation Commission are so restricted as to restrain it from

taking cognizance of this growing favorable sentiment toward such conservation as I have indicated and if such authority may properly be assumed by it, it would be no difficult matter to find some active spirit in each state to whom the moral and official support of the commission might be given in the furtherance of so laudable an undertaking.

JOHN M. CLARKE,
Director, Science Division

ALBANY, N. Y.,
June 16, 1909

THE DARWIN CENTENARY AT CAMBRIDGE¹

THE Darwin celebration, which began on June 22, is a remarkable event in university annals. Commemorative festivals, held at one or other ancient seat of learning, have been frequent in recent years; but their object has been to celebrate the foundation of some famous institution in the distant past. And there have been festivals of a different kind in honor of one or other of the great names on the roll of intellectual achievement, whose glory has been established and consecrated by the long lapse of time. But no such academic tribute as the present festival has ever been paid to the memory of an individual within so short a time of his own life.

The great and ancient University of Cambridge is devoting three days to it, and the whole learned world from Chile to Japan is joining in homage to the memory of an Englishman who was with us but the other day. Some of those who will be present were his comrades, most of them have been in some measure his working contemporaries. Two hundred and thirty-five universities, academies and learned bodies at home and abroad have nominated delegates to represent them; and of these 167 are situated in foreign countries and British dominions outside the United Kingdom. Thirty of the most famous institutions in Germany, thirty in the United States, fourteen in France, ten in Austria-Hungary, eight in Italy, as many in Sweden, seven in Russia and lesser numbers in seven other foreign countries have honored the occasion by naming some of their most distin-

¹ From the *London Times*.