

THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY IN THESE TIMES¹

By FAIRFIELD OSBORN

PRESIDENT OF THE NEW YORK ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

It is during the days of confusion and crisis in human affairs—not in the days of tranquility—that the value of any public institution can best be determined. "Measure one's strength in the hours of storm, not in the lull of a summer's noon."

It is therefore extraordinarily gratifying to report that, for the Zoological Society, the year 1940 was one of unusual progress and development. I take this as a symbol. It is no accident. It is affirmation of the fact that the Society, through the two great institutions under its management, through its scientific work, through its educational activities, is providing the public not only with things in which people find enjoyment or recreation—but with influences that must become more and more a part of people's conceptions of life as a whole. Man, to his own distress, is obscuring many of the truths which affect all life—including his own. Expressed in its broadest terms, the Zoological Society exists in order to tell people the story and meaning of life on this earth as expressed through the myriad and varied forms of living creatures. It is a symphony of vast and powerful undertones—millenniums of time, evolutionary changes, adaptations to environment. It is, at the same time, a symphony of overtones—of beauty, of strangeness, of gayety—even of humor. Some day, if our plans and visions may be realized, the words "zoo" and "aquarium" will attain a broader significance, one which to-day we can but dimly be aware of.

We are proceeding on the principle that while the present vast preparations of the nation to cope with world conditions are paramount, it is, at the same time, necessary—in a sense more necessary than in normal times—to carry forward those activities which bring recreation and mental enjoyment to the public. Further, our organization is an interpreter of nature, and who is to say that the troubles civilization is cursed with to-day do not arise, in large part, from a lack of comprehension of nature's laws?

There is, of course, another reason for pressing forward vigorously with the work of institutions such as ours. Only in this hemisphere can it now be done. There is a saying of the Ancient Greeks, "Keep the torch alight!"

There is not time here to present you with any detailed report as to our affairs. These will come out in our Annual Report, which will be sent to you. On the other hand, I do want to touch on some immediate realities and to inform you in what respects the

year 1940 has proved so important in our development. Let me summarize the highlights. I shall commence with a report as to the "necessary element," shall we say the "sinews of progress."

Cash donations amounted to \$121,000. Here is a significant fact. All these funds were received from men active in affairs who are keenly interested in forwarding our purposes—as distinguished from funds received through legacies. Further, all this money came from trustees and members of the society. In this is included the magnificent gift from an individual who wishes to remain anonymous. This gift has made possible the building of the new African Continental Exhibit in the Park. I might point out that the 1940 donations are the highest received in any one year since 1928 and the highest received for actual improvements, as contrasted with funds designated for general endowment within the last twenty-five years.

I am in danger of creating a misunderstanding. Endowed funds are obviously vital for our long-term planning, and a legacy for whatever purpose—well, need I say more! Yet the nature of the past year's support is most attractive. It is good for men to live to see the progress that their generosity makes possible!

Why should we receive funds and for what new purposes will they be used?

First, we have evolved and devised new conceptions of what a zoological park or aquarium should be. For the first time in any zoological park here or abroad, we are carrying out plans, on a broad scale, of exhibiting our live collections according to their distribution by continents. This is a basic change, and will provide the public with an infinitely clearer understanding of the history and relationships of animal life on this earth.

Further, we are determined, in so far as possible, to take our animal collections out "from behind the bars." In a few moments you will see some moving pictures of lions taken only last week in their new freedom in the Zoological Park. I haven't the least doubt that from now on you, our members and friends, together with the public at large, will agree that we must, to the greatest extent possible, liberate our unique collections from many of their present types of cramped enclosures. The animals are entitled to it, and the public will get a far better conception of the beauty and behavior of animal life if we carry through a general program of exhibiting our collections in areas expressive of freedom and of natural

¹ Read before the annual meeting of the society, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York, January 14.

environment. From the point of view of public psychology this is of vital importance.

We are making another departure, which can best be described by telling you that on the great entrance walls to the new African Exhibit there will be written the story of the development of life on the continent of Africa through tens of millions of years. We believe this plan will prove to be an example of popular education in zoology in its most effective form. Here again, as far as we know, no such ideas have ever been carried out by any other zoological park. The treatment we have in mind will not find its parallel in any museum. I must take this occasion, however, to express our deep gratitude to our sister institution, the American Museum of Natural History, for the invaluable help it has given us in the preparation of the material involved.

Now, as to scientific objectives. Perhaps we can best illustrate our intention of pressing forward with our scientific work on all fronts by informing you that in 1940 the Board of Trustees voted a larger amount of money for the encouragement of our scientific work than in any previous year in the history of the society. There is one new angle concerning which I wish to tell you. We are working on plans to make the society a clinical center, not only as regards the greater City of New York, but for the country as a whole, for the study of animal diseases in their relationship to human disease problems. Raymond Dochez, whom we have had the honor to elect to our Board of Trustees to-night, is, with many others, helping us in formulating this program. And we hope to gain the financial support during the current year which will enable us to get this program under way. Its significance in connection with human health of the future may well be greater than any of us can now foresee.

I have been speaking of plans at the Park. Do not think that we are lacking for many new ideas in regard to the Aquarium. The solid walls of that century-old building prevent the application of most of them. Only through the medium of a new Aquarium building can justice be done to the miracle of marine life, presented through modern exhibition technique.

The World's Fair already seems like yesteryear. Our Exhibit Building provided enjoyment and instruction to 399,000 visitors. This enterprise has proved of great value to the society in many different ways and should be a matter of lasting satisfaction to that generous group among our trustees who made it possible.

Our new general director, Mr. Jennings, with his able assistant director, Mr. Sweeny, is bringing to our problems not only the abilities which come from wide experience in the administration of a public institution, but also a high degree of intelligence and enthusiasm in connection with the development of our popular education and scientific objectives. It is not possible to do justice to the enthusiasm and creative work which is being done by our entire staff.

Mr. Jennings in his report has given you some idea of other activities which are going forward. The continuity of really liberal support by the city government will depend, obviously, upon how effectively we function as a public institution serving our millions of visitors each year. I remind you that we have an enormous annual visitor list, running to five million persons a year, far greater than that of any other institution of its kind in the greater city, or for that matter, in the country.

I wish also to express appreciation for the cooperation we are receiving from the city government. Commissioner Moses and his assistants in the Park Department are showing us the finest cooperation. The same, we are extremely glad to say, holds true for the attitude shown us by the mayor, the budget director and other city officials.

One word as to membership. I do not think you realize how you, yourselves, can help in drawing to us new members and friends. We greatly need that help. I wish also to tell you that at an early meeting of the board we intend to amend our by-laws to provide for a junior membership for children up to the age of 18, at a reasonable annual fee. We entertain great hopes in building up a following through the years to come, among the youth of the city and neighboring communities.²

OBITUARY

DAYTON CLARENCE MILLER

Things are where things are, and as fate has willed, so shall they be fulfilled.

—*Browning*

WITH sadness, the world of physics notes the passing of Dr. Dayton Clarence Miller, who died at his home in Cleveland, Ohio, on February twenty-second of this year.

Son of Charles Webster Dewey Miller and Vienna (Pomeroy) Miller, Dayton Clarence Miller was born in Strongsville, Ohio, on March 13, 1866. His father,

² In his closing remarks President Osborn stated that the Zoological Society of the future intended to place greater and greater emphasis, in connection with the unrivaled collections both at the Zoological Park and the Aquarium, upon the interpretation of the meaning of animal life—in other words, the extension by every means possible of the processes of popular education in zoology.