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VOL. 82

FRIDAY, AUGUST 9, 1935

No. 2119

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SCIENCE: A Weekly Journal devoted to the Advancement of Science, edited by J. McKEEN CATTELL and published every Friday by

THE SCIENCE PRESS

New York City: Grand Central Terminal

Lancaster, Pa.

Garrison, N. Y.

Annual Subscription, \$6.00

Single Copies, 15 Cts.

SCIENCE is the official organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Information regarding membership in the Association may be secured from the office of the permanent secretary, in the Smithsonian Institution Building, Washington, D. C.

CONSERVATION OF MINERALS¹

By Professor C. K. LEITH*

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

As an abstraction the idea of conservation of natural resources is widely accepted by the public. In fact, active opposition to the idea is almost nonexistent. It is a safe and attractive phrase for publicists, politicians and party platforms, as well as a plausible caption for many laws. Yet for most people conservation remains a vague profession of faith, not tied down to realities or practical programs. To specialists in forests, parks, game, recreation, soils, water resources and minerals, conservation means many different things. In a recent survey at the University of Wisconsin it was found that conservation was receiving attention in twenty-seven different

courses, in nearly as many departments, and that in no two of them was the subject defined in the same terms. The many so-called conservation laws in our state and federal statutes reflect an equally chaotic condition. Text-book definitions of conservation, in the very nature of the case, must be so generalized that they fail to convey any clear notion of the practical problems involved. To illustrate the difficulty of simplifying the concept of conservation I quote to you an attempt made by the twenty-seven units of the University of Wisconsin to agree on a general platform:

Conservation is the effort to insure to society the maximum present and future benefit from the use of natural resources. It involves the inventory and evaluation of natural resources; calls for the maintenance of the renewable resources at a level commensurate with the needs of

¹ Address presented at symposium on conservation jointly sponsored by the University of Minnesota and the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Minneapolis, June 27, 1935.

* Vice-chairman, Planning Committee for Mineral Policy, Washington.

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