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978-1-107-43327-4 - The Care of Natural Monuments: With Special Reference to Great Britain and Germany: With Ten Illustrations

H. Conwentz

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

The expression “natural monument” or “monument of nature,” from the German “Naturdenkmal,” is new to the English language, and it is necessary, therefore, to explain its meaning. First, what is meant by the single word “monument” or “Denkmal” must be defined. The term is usually applied to anything established in commemoration: there are monuments erected in remembrance of eminent persons, such as Darwin, Nelson, Scott, and Shakespeare, of brave deeds, and of famous incidents. Further, standard works of literature and music may be called monuments of literature. Ancient buildings, such as cathedrals, castles,

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and monasteries which have a historic or an artistic value, are spoken of as monuments of architecture and of art,—in German “Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler.” The expression is also applied to prehistoric remains, such as lake dwellings, stone circles, dolmens, and burying mounds which are spoken of as prehistoric monuments.

All the above-mentioned objects are the result of man’s activity ; but nature too has her monuments. Just as the ornamented stone obelisk is a monument of art (Kunstdenkmal), and as the rude stone, erected by man in former ages to the memory of the dead, is a prehistoric monument, so too the erratic block, transported in past time by natural forces, constitutes a natural monument. Again, just as an artificially erected wall or mound of an earlier period may be a prehistoric monument, so the natural moraine or

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prominent hill produced without the help of man is a monument of nature. Moreover, examples of beautiful scenery, characteristic soil-formations, interesting associations of plants and animals, and rare species of the indigenous flora and fauna may all be classed as monuments of nature. A virgin soil-formation, however, is not often to be found in densely populated countries, most portions of which have been under cultivation for many centuries. For that reason the term "natural monument" is occasionally used in a broader sense.

It may also be mentioned that old big trees had been spoken of as "monuments de la nature" by Humboldt¹ ninety years ago, but latterly the term has fallen into disuse.

¹ Humboldt, A. de. *Voyage aux régions équinoxiales*. Tome II. Paris, 1819, p. 59.

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NATURE THREATENED

Anyone travelling in England and Germany, or, in fact, in most parts of the world, may see for himself that the constant cultivation of the land and the growth of industrial undertakings have threatened, and in many places considerably damaged, interesting tracts of country as well as natural monuments. From the economic aspect, this is immaterial; and it would even be justifiable, from such a point of view, if man were to bring under his control almost the whole realm of nature. But, on the other hand, from the scientific and aesthetic standpoints, it is much to be regretted that so many types of scenery and of the vegetable and animal worlds should pass away irrevocably. In his book “Unto this

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Last” John Ruskin says: “As the art of life is learned, it will be found at last that all lovely things are also necessary; the wild flower by the way-side, as well as the tended corn, and the wild birds and creatures of the forest, as well as the tended cattle; because man doth not live by bread only...”

IEWS

There are many beautiful hills and mountains on which buildings of various kinds have been erected to the disfigurement of the neighbouring scenery. Surrounded as we are in large towns by man’s works, in the mountains, at least, we might be allowed the enjoyment of nature in its entirety.

Again, certain famous views in Germany, Switzerland, and other countries are crossed by railways,

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which disfigure the scenery, and are, in many cases, quite unnecessary. It was proposed to construct funicular railways and lifts to the Hexentanzplatz and the Rosstrappe in the Hartz mountains, as well as to the Bastei in Saxony; but the Prussian and Saxon government refused to entertain any such proposals, in order to preserve those famous view points in their original state. Again, a beautiful valley in Thuringia, the Schwarzatal, was threatened with a railway which was to have been constructed along the valley. The government of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, however, refused the necessary permission, on the ground that this magnificent natural scenery ought to be preserved inviolate. Hence the railway now follows a more circuitous route.

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WATER

The utilisation of water power generally yields a fair profit. Falls and rapids in particular are utilised by industrial undertakings, as on the Tivoli Falls in Italy, on the Rhine Fall in Germany, and on the Niagara Falls in America. Perhaps no other place of natural beauty in the whole world is so utterly disfigured as the Trollhätta Falls in Sweden. These Falls are now surrounded by numerous manufactories such as electrical works, engine works, an iron foundry, an oil factory, cellulose works, and carbide works. Moreover the opposing rock is disfigured by glaring advertisements. Hence this beautiful monument of nature has become her caricature. The Swedish government endeavoured to buy out these establishments, but to no purpose. In the year 1899, a

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Waterfall Committee for the registration and charting of all the public falls and rapids in Sweden was instituted by Parliament. In the report of the Committee, it was proposed not to utilise every one of the falls for industrial purposes; but to reserve, from the beginning, a few falls or rapids as natural monuments¹.

ROCKS

Then, again, remarkable rocky districts are frequently disfigured by stone-quarries. On the western and eastern coast of southern Sweden, granite is quarried for paving-stones, which are exported chiefly to the continent. On some parts of the coast, the quarries are rather extensive,

¹ Betänkande afgifvet den 17. mars 1903 af den för utredning beträffande vissa staten tillhöriga vattenfall af kungl. Majestät den 9. juni 1899 tillsatta kommittén. Stockholm, 1903, p. 117.

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as for instance between Karlshamn and Karlskrona, a distance of about thirty miles. It is, no doubt, owing to this fact that the whole stretch of coast has been changed, and even scientific rarities have been destroyed.

In England, the once beautiful Miller's Dale, in Derbyshire, and the famous gorge of Cheddar, in Somerset, are similarly disfigured (C. E. Moss).

In Saxon Switzerland, on both sides of the Elbe, there are nearly 300 quarries, owing to which some examples of the most beautiful scenery in Europe have been destroyed. Between the Bastei and Pirna, the quarrying of sandstone takes up more than half the bank of the river.

Of course, the stone industry yields a very good return. From it, Sweden obtained in 1901 an income of more than £500,000, and Saxony more than

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£200,000. Nobody expects that such a profitable industry should be stopped solely for the preservation of natural monuments; but it is highly desirable that here and there its sphere of action should be restricted. The Saxon government has recently determined not to lease quarries on the bank of the Elbe, and also not to establish new ones there again.

Not only the rocks of the mountains, but also the boulders of the plains are threatened by industry. The larger ones are worked into pillars and other objects, and the smaller ones into paving stones. Thus, many low lying districts are already deprived of their erratic rocks. The Sarsen Stones on the Marlborough Downs, well known as the Grey Wethers, were thus endangered, in consequence of a recent change of ownership. Steps were therefore taken and an appeal