

# *The National Park of the Abruzzi*<sup>\*•</sup>

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## I



PROFESSOR PIROTTA, of the University of Rome, has launched through the instrumentality of the Federation Pro Montibus a plan for a national park in the Abruzzi, and has done it in a simple yet eloquent form worthy of a man of science of the good old time when it was a matter of pride to clothe a scientific conception in a literary form and to animate it with artistic sentiment. To many, to most perhaps, in Italy the words "national park" will sound new; to many, also, will appear strange in the unhappy days that we are traversing—and during the hard trials especially to which ancient woods and sylvan shades and smiling parklands have been subjected these last years—the eloquent and poetic words in which Professor Pirotta tells of the beauties of nature, and the noble idealism of his plan for preserving them from further destruction. To me it seems, however, that the proposal for this national park has come at a

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It is a pleasure to print this as a record of the first Italian effort to set aside for the people a tract of land for the enjoyment of all and which, as custodians of the beauty of nature, we have no right to allow to degenerate through private caprice or greed. Readers of the JOURNAL will remember Mr. George B. Dorr's account of the Sieur de Monts National Monument near Bar Harbor, Me., the establishment of which was due to his efforts. His interest in this work has led him to kindly translate for the JOURNAL this account of a similar attempt in Italy.—ED.



truly opportune moment, when the discussion of an object of such kind was needed to raise up our national spirit, too much embittered and cast down by unmerited disasters; and because it is a work of wisdom in the midst of vast destruction, be it wrought by an enemy or imposed by necessity, to save what one still can of natural treasures "that are truly," as writes Professor Pirotta, "the artistic and scientific patrimony of our nation."

The idea of a national park in Italy is not new. Publicity was given it some years ago by the Swiss commission for the protection of natural beauty and our own Government in connection with a plan for the establishment of a park to the north of the Valtellina, and east of the Bernina Mountains, in extension of that splendid and recent park creation made by Switzerland in the Lower Engadine. But nothing came of it finally. And this perhaps was well; for, placed there, alongside of a greater park of similar character beyond our border, such a park would have added little of independent value, the aim of the Swiss commission in proposing it being one rather of practical advantage, to protect their park against Italian poachers.

The idea of a national park, however, was not abandoned. It remained in the minds of a number of our leading men of science as a germ in good earth, awaiting favorable conditions to sprout and grow. Early in the year 1913 a national league for the protection of nature monuments, similar to that in Switzerland, sprang from the initiative of the Italian Botanical Society, and although it also led to no result it kept the idea alive. Nor, indeed, could Italy remain passive in the presence of the world movement for the protection of the flora, the fauna, the geological documents, the beautiful and significant aspects of the earth, threatened with inexorable destruction—a movement spreading through all the civilized nations of the world from Europe to America, which the war has suspended but has not suppressed and that once peace is made will retake its course with added vigor. One of the pioneers of the movement, the leading one perhaps, certainly the one who speaks



with the greatest authority and has taken the most active part in it in Europe, is the eminent Swiss naturalist, Paul Sarrasin: "Upon the heels of the geographic exploration of the earth," said he at the International Congress of Geologists at Graz in August, 1910, "which may be looked upon as ended, has followed with gigantic strides the impoverishment of its riches, and the destruction of its living beings, attacked in their happy and obscure existence. Industrial vandalism, sweeping the world, has disturbed everywhere the natural associations of living things, sacrificing to the greed of men and temporary gain the exquisite and splendid beauties of our hospitable earth." And in the name of posterity, who will one day anathematize us for having left them desolation for an inheritance, he invited the naturalists of the whole world to abandon books and laboratories and run to the defense of nature, in ever greater danger: "Awake!" he exclaimed, "The world is conquered; let us provide for its preservation."

The proofs he brought to this congress of the wasteful and systematic ferocity with which greedy speculators pursue, year after year with ever greater fury, the destruction of precious animals to obtain from them oil, skins, ivory, feathers—objects, in general, not of need but of luxury—were indeed appalling; and it was in reference to these, and others scarce less tragic relating to the destruction of the flora—the Alpine flora especially—by florists, by collectors, by conscienceless botanists, that the congress voted to establish an international conference on the subject in which all civilized states should be invited to participate officially. This conference took place, on the invitation of the Swiss Government, at Berne in November, 1913, Italy participating through the medium of her diplomatic minister. An international congress for the protection of nature resulted from it, and engagements were entered into by the states most deeply interested.

Among the various representatives who attended it was Professor Hugo Conwentz, Director of the Museum of Danzig, who described the truly splendid organization that he—first on his own initiative and then as head of an official commission



established by the government to make a study of the natural beauties of Germany—created for the protection of nature, distributing the work in various branches; geology, water courses, botany, zoology, and prehistoric antiquities. He founded associations which extended beyond the Empire into all countries where German was spoken; distributed questionnaires by thousands; promoted regional and general congresses; published illustrated documents rich in plant topography—created, in fact, such a movement of ideas, activities, and provision for the future, such an atmosphere of living interest in the protection of nature, or rather of the “Native-land” (Heimath), from which one of the most powerful associations took its name—as to set in motion an undertaking for the establishment of three great national parks, similar to those already long since established in the United States of America. According to this plan, three great tracts were to be set aside, one in the south, among the Alps, the second in central Germany, a third in the north, in the heathlands of Luneburg, with the intention of preserving, or reintroducing, in them the native animals of Germany, such as the beaver and the wild ox.

## II

This idea of national parks showed itself, at once, to be the most practical and efficacious way of rescuing from total destruction a number of races of animals and species of plants, of preserving intact characteristic geological features, of preventing the destruction of certain unique aspects of nature which have claimed, and will always claim, the attention of men in an almost religious sense.

The more widely this idea has spread, the more clear it has become that legal enactments alone are not enough. The Canton of Soleure in Switzerland established in 1894 a fine of ten lire (\$2) for the benefit of the schools of Oltingen, against the gathering of *Daphne Cneorum*, *Daphne alpina*, and *Linaria rediviva*; similar provision was made in 1903 by the Communal Council of Schwytz to prevent the extirpation of *Rhododendron ferrugineum* on the Righi, and by the Councils of Andelfingen



and of Bex to prevent that of *Pyrola umbellata*. In Bavaria severe penalties were established against picking Edelweiss. In the Island of Borneo, in certain districts, it is forbidden by a law passed in 1895 to gather orchids under penalty of a fine of \$500. And similarly, for certain species of animals that are continually becoming more rare to the point of extinction, penalties against hunting, of more or less severity, have been widely established. But none of these have proved sufficient. The Proclamation of 21st September, 1821, by the Government of Sardo to secure the conservation of the wild goat did indeed result in protecting that precious ruminant of the Alps in the Val d'Aosta, but we do not know how large a part in this was due to the fact that this animal was always held to be game reserved for the Princes of the House of Savoy, and whether the Royal Preserve of the Gran Paradiso did not give more protection than the law.

In England they have laws that prohibit the destruction of wild birds, but these not proving sufficient, various organizations have united to acquire island shelters where the safe nesting and reproduction of the migratory birds may be secured.

In its colonies, more especially in central Africa, the English government has had recourse to an indirect means to save from destruction animals whose species are threatened with extinction: it has imposed a very high tax on hunting permits, which limit moreover to but very few the animals that may be hunted. And in the United States, where special reserves were established many years ago at the expense of the government to preserve the last remaining bison, a proclamation by President Roosevelt in 1903 created the Federal Reserve of the Pelicans along the Indian River on the eastern coast of Florida, to preserve the existence of the black and white pelicans. Individual species, it is true, may be protected now and again by legal enactments but the primitive aspect of nature produced in the course of centuries by the reciprocal action of indigenous plants and animals can only be safe-guarded, even approximately, in regions as yet undisturbed by man or but slightly altered, by the establishment of absolute protection



in a complete reserve, a sanctuary for every living form created by nature that belongs to it and has been saved to our time; thus only can we hope that native life threatened by the intervention of man can be preserved and continued on to future generations.

From such reflections sprang the conception of the Swiss National Park of the Lower Engadine, which became a fact in 1913. It had however antecedents—in America especially, where the so-called “practical” people have not launched, as with us, their bolts against the sentimentality of those who believe it necessary that the interests of art and science should once in a while be preferred to those of material advantage. In the United States it was sufficient that certain travellers like Doane, Langdorf, and Hayden should send to the Federal Government enthusiastic reports on what they had seen in the regions bathed by the springs of the Yellowstone and the Missouri for a law to be passed—approved by Congress on the first of March, 1872—proclaiming a national park a stretch of territory 55 miles by 65 miles, “which,” it was stated, “during a relatively recent geologic epoch has been the seat of the most tremendous phenomena recorded in our country.” This Region of Wonders, as it was called, would speedily have been taken possession of by speculators—so the account goes on to tell—if by this admirable act of legislative foresight it had not been consecrated to the benefit of science and the enjoyment of the people.

But America did not stop here. After the institution of the Yellowstone Park, Lord Dufferin, the Governor-General of Canada, interested himself in the threatened impoverishment by industrial use of the Falls of Niagara, and suggested to his colleague of the State of New York the acquisition by the two governments of the lands along the river, on both sides; and to this the sum of 300,000 pounds sterling was devoted. More recently, these same United States, again to prevent industrial exploitation, acquired the wonderful Petrified Forest of Arizona, making it also public property. In sequence to this yet other acquisitions were made, till today



the Federation counts twelve national parks, besides those created at their own expense by individual states, as New York, Pennsylvania, Colorado, California, and Michigan, in their regions of greatest interest.

### III

This proposal then of a national park in Italy—and of one especially in the Abruzzi Mountains “where,” as Professor Pirotta says, “the beautiful name of our country first appeared; where all is Italian and all proclaims the greatness, the energy, the art of our ancestors; where the highest mountains of the noble Apennine range raise their summits, to descend in lesser peaks and mountain ranges toward one and the other of the two Italian seas”—is but the expression of a great world movement and must be carried out if Italy is not to fall behind other lands in culture and civilization. But now comes the practical question: How can we preserve this territory? How can we institute this park of the Italian people? Let us see what others have done; what, to take a concrete example, was done in our own neighborhood and under similar conditions by the Swiss commission for the protection of natural beauty.

One of its members drew the attention of his colleagues to that portion of the Lower Engadine traversed by the River Inn which includes on the one side the Scarl Valley with its wild lateral branches and on the other the great mass of the Quatorvals, and the commission, led by Sarrasin, took a daring step; it leased, on the 31st of December, 1909, from the Commune of Sornoz for the duration of twenty-five years, the wild valley of Cluozza, for a stretch of 25 kilometers, and so laid the cornerstone of the future national park. Following this, it commenced negotiations with five other communes with the object of enlargement and nine months later, in September, 1910, Sarrasin was able to announce that the work would be complete within the following year. . . . .  
“You may ask me,” he said to the Congress of Graz, “with what courage do we commence such an undertaking, one which



will exact without doubt many and large resources." My answer is: "Not with courage, but with the faith that conquers every obstacle."

To procure the necessary means he instituted a Swiss "League for the Protection of Nature," with dues of one lira a year for each associate. Faith worked its miracle; the associates increased to 9000 in 1910, to 26,000 in 1913, to 35,000 ultimately. The moral influence alone of a league so numerous, including people of every sort and condition, scientific, literary, artistic, and political, could not fail to incline the government favorably toward its project. Speedily the interest of members of the Federal Council was secured for the establishment of a great Swiss reserve in the Grisons, the canton of the Engadine, and when in June, 1912, it was decided to ask of the government a subsidy of 18,200 lire to pay the stipulated rental to the commune of Zernez the cause was already won before the federal council, which hastened to make the project of the national park its own. The legislative chambers did the rest.

Is it then best to follow the same course in Italy? It has already been entered on, but the coming of the European War arrested the propaganda which was a necessary preliminary. Let us recommence it; we are still in time.

Paul Sarrasin has stated that the Swiss league succeeded in raising 35,000 lire a year—or, better, in obtaining 35,000 associates paying each a lira annually; Italy with its far greater population should be able to enroll ten times that number. Numbers apart, however, there are in Italy certain associations that have become most powerful—the Alpine Club, the Touring Club, and others, whose associates pay dues far greater than a single lira, and, without seeking to infuse more active life into the national league for the protection of nature monuments, the Federation Pro Montibus that has now taken the lead with regard to the national park should be able with the aid of these to carry on the noble work and secure the necessary financial means, first from the government, then from the communes, the provinces, the institutions of credit, the chambers of commerce, the art associations, all in a word who have



at heart the welfare of the nation. The sum required is not great, for the plan is to follow for the present the Swiss system of long leases of the communal and provincial domains and private woodlands included within the intended bounds.

Does this seem visionary? But is it visionary to think that a nation of thirty-six million inhabitants can find within itself the resources to accomplish a work of high civilization at the center of its territory?

I have not sought to lay out a mathematically exact scheme but rather to set forth an idea that can be discussed, corrected, dropped perhaps in favor of other and better ideas—more practical, better fitted to the end. The problem of the National Park in the Abruzzi lies before us; in some way it must be solved if we are not to remain alone among the nations in not adopting this new form of conservation—the conservation of natural beauty and of opportunity for scientific study.

Such an undertaking, too, must promote a new development in the Abruzzi country, in that part of it at least which has the good fortune to find itself within the boundaries of its national park. It will become the goal of men of science, of tourists, of nature and landscape lovers; and summer resorts of the first order will spring up in it. Moreover, one of the duties of whoever is called to direct and administer the park will be precisely this, to arouse in all who visit it the eager desire to bring to it the greatest possible number of persons who now go elsewhere to seek green spaces, silence, health-giving air, the restful and consoling view of natural beauty. Thus will cease to be unknown one of the most beautiful regions in Italy, and the strangers who after the war—in greater numbers than before—will come in pilgrimage to enjoy our sun and admire our art will not pass directly, as they do today and have for centuries, from Rome to Naples, but will turn aside toward the center to behold the wonders enclosed in our national park, and pass from it upon their southward way.

Onward then! The undertaking is worthy of an association such as the *Pro Montibus* which includes within itself men of the highest standing in the political and administrative life



of the nation, and whose executive council has given so many proofs of active energy in recent years and is presided over by a man of the highest organizing ability, tenacious and cultivated, the Hon. Miliani, Minister of Agriculture—the man who went in 1907 to see with his own eyes the Yellowstone Park and published an enthusiastic and most instructive description of it in the *Nuova Antologia*, where it may be found in the May 1st issue of 1909.





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