

Dedication of Memorial Grove to Augustine Henry

ON Saturday, 29th September, the Society dedicated a grove to the memory of Dr. Augustine Henry at Avondale Forest School. The Dedication Stone was unveiled by the Minister for Lands in the presence of a large and distinguished gathering of members of our Society, friends and colleagues of Dr. Henry and members of the public. On the platform with our President, Mr. McEvoy and Mrs. Henry (widow of Dr. Henry) were the Minister for Lands, Mr. Tomás Ó Doernig, the Secretary of the Department of Lands, Mr. W. F. Nally, Mr. Justice Martin Maguire, Mr. H. M. FitzPatrick and Dr. T. Walsh (Curator of the Botanic Gardens).

In the opening address Mr. McEvoy said that when the idea of commemorating the late Dr. Henry was first mooted it was agreed that a Memorial Grove was the most fitting tribute from this generation of Irish Foresters to the first great Irish forester. Through the generosity and co-operation of the Department of Lands the Grove had been established at Avondale Forest School and the Minister for Lands had graciously consented to unveil the Dedication Stone. We were also very happy to have with us for the ceremony Mrs. Henry who was her husband's constant companion and collaborator in all his works and travels.

In acknowledging even at this late date our debt to Augustine Henry we were merely following the lead given by China who as far back as 1929 dedicated to Henry a new wing of their famous Botanical Institute at Peking. To him also they dedicated the second Fascicle of the Chinese National Herbarium.

Dr. Henry's interest in trees was aroused in China where he was impressed by the soil erosion and many other evils consequent on deforestation. Characteristically he threw himself wholeheartedly into the study of forestry and rapidly became an acknowledged expert. The fruits of his studies were the seven monumental volumes of "Trees of Great Britain and Ireland." This work, done in collaboration with H. J. Elwes, F.R.S., began in 1903 and ended ten years later in 1913, the year he came to Ireland as Professor of Forestry at the Royal College of Science of Ireland. He read almost everything published which was in any way connected with trees, he corresponded with authorities all over the world, and he carried out prodigious journeys of exploration to study at first-hand all the important tree species in their native habitats. In this way he developed an understanding of and a feeling for trees which has never been surpassed.

In 1907 a Departmental Committee sat on Irish Forestry. Dr. Henry was one of the expert witnesses examined. In his evidence he emphasised that our climate was closer to that of the Pacific coast than to that of continental Europe or even of Norfolk, and he concluded definitely that we should concentrate on planting the fast-growing

Western American conifers, D.F., S.S., etc. He insisted that continental yield-tables were not applicable to Ireland. He also maintained that S.P. was essentially a tree of continental climate and not really adapted to our conditions especially in the west. All these conclusions, unorthodox and even suspect in 1907, have been proved substantially correct by the present generation of Irish foresters and form the basis of current practice.

Forest-tree breeding is a very new science. Here again Dr. Henry was a pioneer. While at Kew he experimented in hybridising poplar, elms, alders, etc. The hybrid vigour of two of the poplars associated with his name, *Populus generosa* and *Populus vernerubens* was such that interest was stimulated in many countries and new horizons were opened for forestry. We cannot do better than quote the recent tribute by the eminent American geneticist, E. J. Schreiner: "Augustine Henry was the first forester to realise the possibilities of creating better forest trees by scientific breeding and he was the first forester to do something about it."

Augustine Henry was a medical doctor, a classical and oriental scholar, a distinguished traveller and botanist, a pioneer in forest genetics and a great forester. It remains to be recorded that he was also a great Irishman. He was always proud of his Irish ancestry which he traced back as far as 1121. In 1913 with the world at his feet he chose to come back to Ireland to establish the Chair of Forestry in the Royal College of Science of Ireland. Thenceforward he spent his talents lavishly in the service of his country and now his magnificent herbarium of 9,000 specimens is housed in the Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin.

Mr. FitzPatrick then spoke and paid tribute to Dr. Henry's work as a botanist and research worker. He stressed the accuracy and clarity of his botanical descriptions which have now become standard. He also spoke of Dr. Henry's thoroughness in his scientific work and of his attention to details. He instanced as an example of the former his travels to all parts of the world to observe, at first hand and in their native habitats, the trees he was studying, and of the latter his motto 'Label the moment you pick' to avoid any possibility of error. He then referred to Dr. Henry's originality as evidenced by his work on hybrids and forest tree breeding, in which work he was a pioneer, and also by his interest in untied species.

Mr. FitzPatrick, who was first a student and later a friend of Dr. Henry then spoke of the man himself, of his charming and endearing personality, his great understanding and tolerance, his modesty, in fact all the traits which made Dr. Henry the lovable person he was. He conjured up for us by a series of anecdotes a vivid picture of Dr. Henry. We saw him in his voluminous cloak, his papers clasped under his arm struggling to raise his hat to the charwoman on the steps of the College of Science. Or again when a Chinese attempted to dispose of his unwanted son (by drowning) we saw Dr. Henry, instead of disputing

the custom which allowed of this practice, calmly challenge his right to do so in front of his (Dr. Henry's) house and thereby disturb the peace and serenity of his view. When the native stopped to consider this new angle the son took advantage of his distraction to escape and Dr. Henry returned to his house chuckling at the success of his ruse. Yet again we saw the dignified Professor when engaged in a dispute on phrenology, while travelling by bus, endeavouring to prove his point by surreptitious measurements of the skulls of his fellow passengers, with a calipers which should properly be used for the measurement of trees. In short we saw Dr. Henry as those who were privileged to know him saw him and loved him.

The Minister for Lands then unveiled the suitably inscribed Dedication Stone. Having first paid a tribute to Dr. Henry, Mr. O Deirg said, "I am sure the work he (Augustine Henry) did in research, spreading the knowledge of scientific methods in forestry, will encourage our young men in the forestry service and all others who are interested, to encourage an informed public opinion as to the possibilities of extensive tree planting in this country as a means of building up a great natural resource."

In her reply, which was read by Dr. Walsh, Mrs. Henry said, "This would be a very happy day for Dr. Henry, surrounded by so much affection and remembrance—a remembrance so beautifully expressed, and completely after his own heart.

"Dr. Henry's special interest in trees took shape towards the end of his stay in China. He was for fifteen years in the Chinese Customs Service, stationed in remote places, sometimes where white men had not been before. To give himself interest and occupation he started collecting plants, sending them back to Kew for identification and preservation. He introduced into Europe five hundred new species, and twenty-five new genera. The number of specimens received at Kew amounted to 158,000.

"Before he left China his observation had been particularly awakened by the beauty of the trees. On his return to Europe, he went as a student to the French Forestry School at Nancy, and took a two years' forestry course. Coming back to England he settled at Kew to be near his collections. At that point, he and his friend, Mr. H. J. Elwes, F.R.S., decided to 'write a book on trees'—which, during the ten years of intensive research, developed into 'The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland' in seven volumes. For the study of the trees themselves, Dr. Henry was only content if he could see them in their own homes; and for twenty years after our marriage we continued travels all over Europe—poplars in Scandinavia; larch in Poland, Silesia, and the Engadin; spruce in the Serbian mountains; elm over Northern Italy, Southern France, and Spain.

"In 1907 Dr. Henry had taken up a post, newly established as Reader in Forestry at Cambridge University, where he remained for

six years. Shortly before that, in 1904, the Department of Agriculture had started forestry in Ireland, and Mr. A. C. Forbes took up his residence at Avondale. In 1913 Dr. Henry accepted an invitation to come over to Ireland as Professor of Forestry, saying at the time that he would like to do some work for his own country. This was just before 1914, and, for a while, it was impossible to go abroad for collecting, but as soon as movement was re-established, he travelled again; and continued till within 18 months of his death.

"The dried collection of tree specimens he assembled during those years while at Cambridge and here, now belongs to this country—known as the 'Augustine Henry Forestry Herbarium'. It is at Glasnevin Botanic Gardens. Through the years 1931-39 I classified it, and Dr. Walsh has catalogued it.

"While in China Dr. Henry made many friends; he spoke Chinese fluently, and his study of their classics endeared him to them greatly. They did not forget him. There is in Peking the Fan Memorial Institute of Botany and Biology. In 1929, almost thirty years after he had left China, they dedicated a new wing of the building 'To Augustine Henry, through whose assiduous botanical exploration of Central and South Western China, the knowledge of our flora has been greatly extended.'

"Now it is another 21 years since his work here was finished, and you have all kept his memory green—now and into the future, in this beautiful memorial grove, with its dedicatory tablet. This honour that you have shown him, would have pleased him more than all the others, for it is within his own country, and from his own people."