

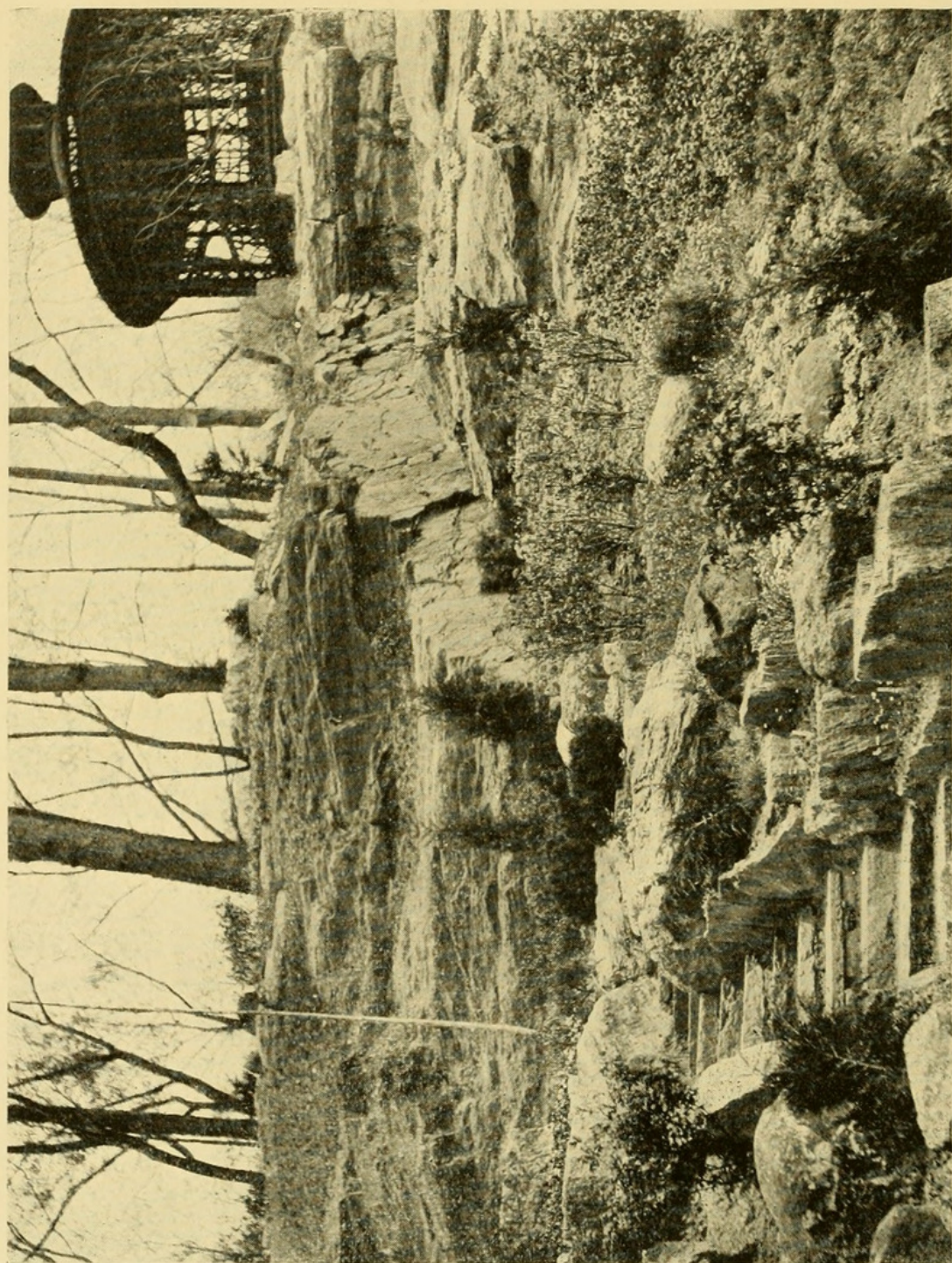
American Rock Gardens

By Richard Rothe



THE introduction of the rock garden has aroused keen interest particularly among nature-loving garden amateurs. That elaborate rock garden building on a large scale will have to be assigned chiefly to professional craftsmen is natural. I am, however, inclined to think that the small rockery as an enjoyable feature of suburban homes with moderate sized grounds will absorb the attention of the owner so that he will want to make it his personal concern. The incomparable vernal display of a host of showy plants, witnessed just after the departure of a long dreary winter, at a time, when our mind and vision is most receptive to floral beauty, exerts its influence. The natural consequence is that a number of enthusiasts become their own rock gardeners. As a striking instance of this we have the celebrated rock garden at a town in Bohemia, the richest Alpine plant treasury in Europe. There the owner, Ernest Count Silva Tarouca, not only was his own designer and builder but frequently even the collector, planter and caretaker of his mountain floral gems.

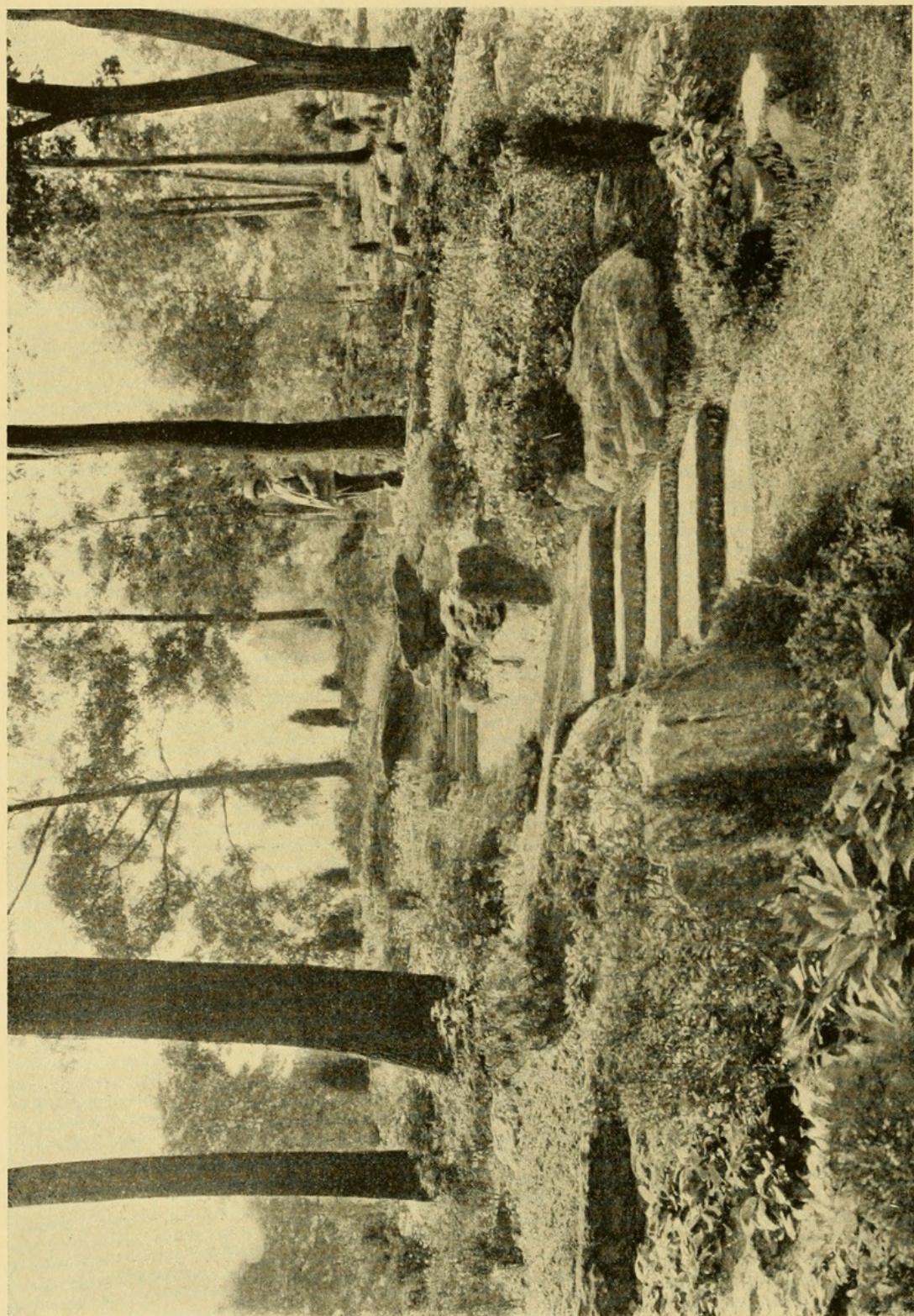
Rock gardening to many of us is still a new proposition, for we have rather vague ideas in regard to its nature and real meaning. Abstract definitions prove more or less misleading; to see clearly we have to ascertain the origin and the subsequent development of our object in view. There is no doubt that the heavy influx of Alpine plant material into the collections of Botanical Gardens during the nineteenth century, with the problems in regard to acclimatisation and adequate display for scientific study, caused the building of the first rockeries. Cultural requirements pertaining to soil condition, retention



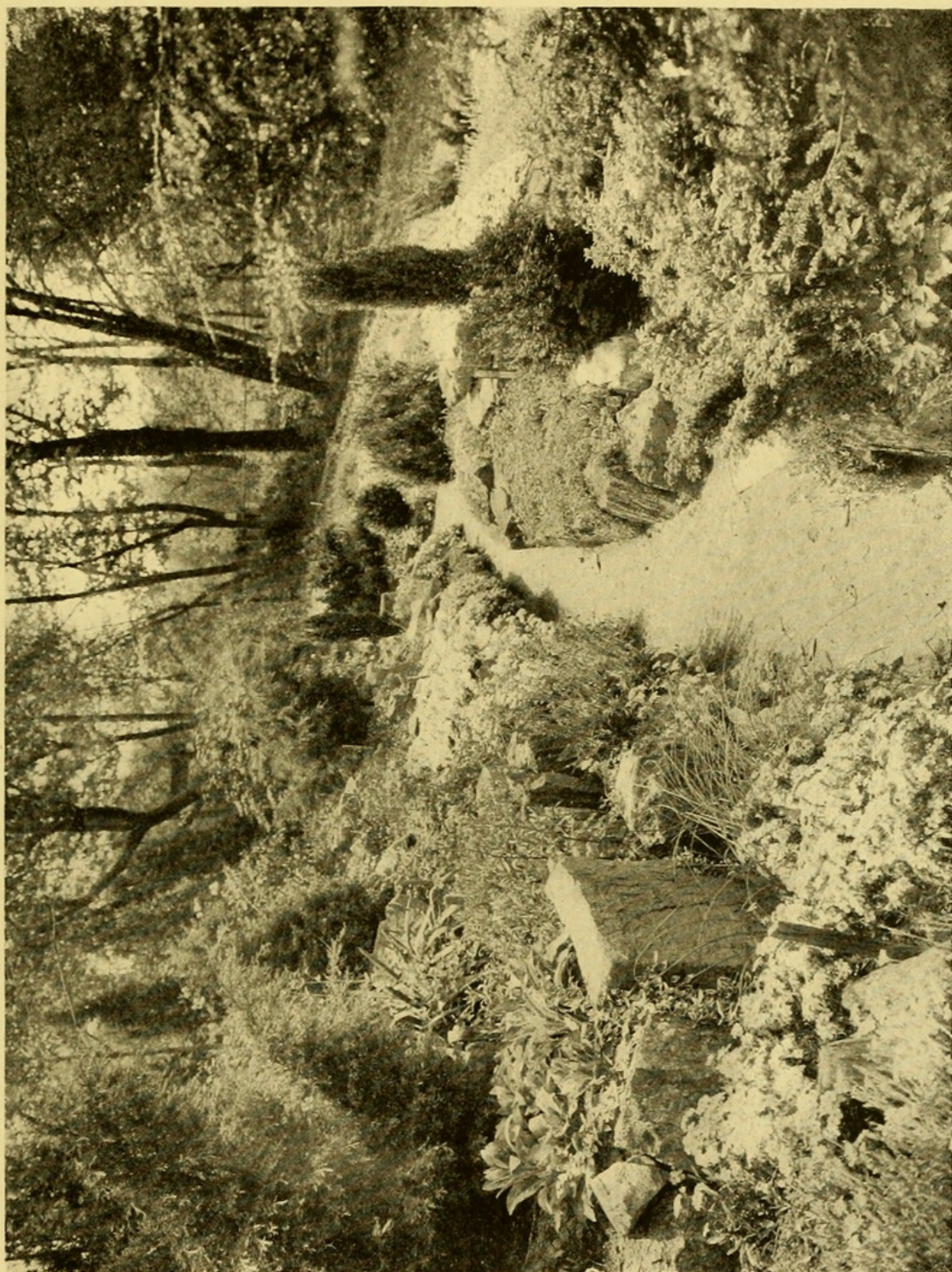
ROCK GARDEN AT LINDENHURST
JOHN WANAMAKER, ESQ.
JENKINTOWN, PA.

of moisture, difference in exposure, and above all, the necessity for natural effect of these low-growing creeping and rambling mountain denizens, called for the rugged rock-receptacle of the distant hillside and plateau, from whence they were taken. The botanical gardens of Europe and especially the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew are famed for their large and beautiful collections of alpine. Mountaineering and the life in mountain resorts, during the last twenty-five years, brought about a more intimate acquaintance with the beauty of the flora within the different regions of high altitude. This has perhaps done more in popularizing the rock garden, particularly among nature lovers, than all the previous writings and publications on the subject. There is no doubt that Great Britain has been the leader in Europe. Exceptionally favorable climatic conditions, a high standard of training and subsequent efficiency of her professional men, and an innate love for plants and flowers as a distinct attribute of her cultured classes, are the underlying reasons for this state of affairs. The rock gardeners of continental Europe more strictly adhere to alpine plant material than those of the British Islands do. The conception *alpine* in this case however does not mean exclusively natives of the Alps, but in its present application it embraces suitable subjects for rockeries from the floras of mountainous regions all over the world.

The study of the origin and brief history of the rock garden enables us to see plainly that the principal purpose of the stone construction is to serve as a receptacle for the display of the enchanting beauty of plant material which inhabits mostly mountainous districts. When deciding on a location, we may be told that a rock garden can only be appropriately placed and introduced on large estates where the natural ground formation adapts itself so well that we can make it appear part of the landscape. From another section we hear that for rock garden building we ought to have a natural ravine with a little brook running through it. And finally we may learn from one who knows it all, that without an old abandoned quarry hole, to build in, we should leave rock gardening alone. These suggested



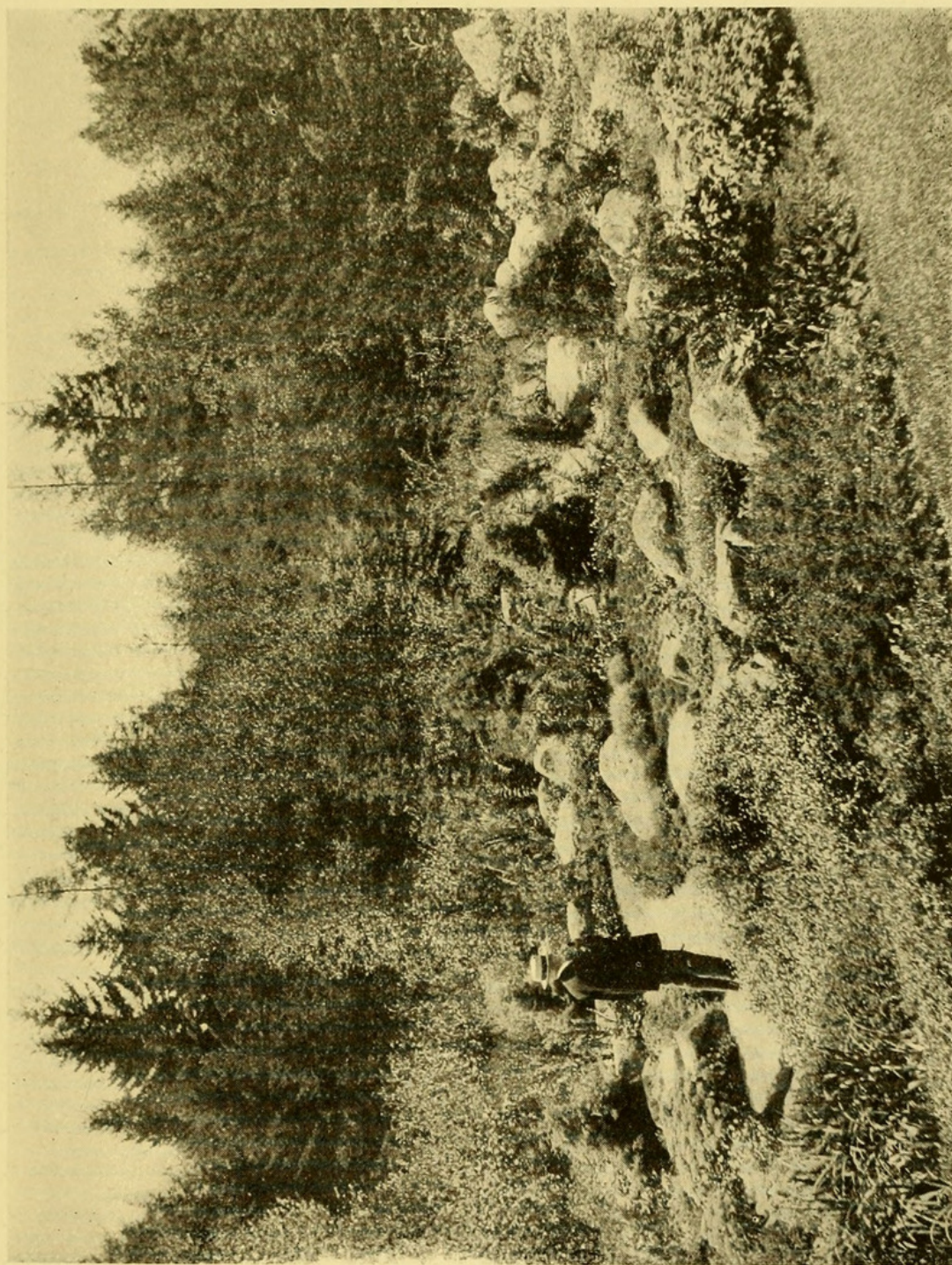
SHADED PATH IN
ROCK GARDEN AT
LINDENHURST



AUTHOR'S ROCK GARDEN
GLENSIDE, PA.

locations one must readily admit are the most ideal for work; the only serious trouble is that they are extremely rare. If the American rock garden is to depend solely on ideal natural ground formation we are not going to make any noticeable headway with it. During the last two years a friend, who, as a lover of nature and the beautiful, contemplated building and enjoying a rock garden. Having a clear idea of the work he gradually succeeded in transforming a very unsightly slope back of his house into a rock garden radiant in brilliancy from April until July, and throughout the rest of the season by no means lacking in interest. This rockery, while in no way part of any landscape scheme, simply represented the object of beautifying a comparatively small suburban lot, just as a strikingly beautiful oil canvass may figure as the dominant ornament in the library or sitting room of an art enthusiast.

The design and building of the stone-work of a rock garden pre-supposes a keen eye for the elements of beauty in rocks and natural rock formation. In this faculty the Japanese, in their gardens, display remarkable mastery. The American rock garden, if it is to be anything true to name, however, brings the imperative necessity of first of all taking our lessons from Nature. It also leads to the study of the character of our native mountain flora as an essential part for the work of effective arrangement of plantations. The author of this article during his seven years connection with the Mount Desert Nurseries at Bar Harbor, Maine, had an opportunity to study Mount Desert Island, well known as one of the most interesting and instructive of Nature's own rock gardens in this country. The Adirondack, Blue and Allegheny mountains with their thickets of native laurels and *Rhododendron* growth are rich in suggestive details for prospective rock garden builders. But let us not forget that the granite, cliff-bound shore lines, the formation of the ledgy mountain plateau and the picturesque rock-strewn ravine are object lessons valuable chiefly for character study of the beauty of our native landscape. Only subtlety of vision in regard to general characteristics of the formation and vegetation of our mountain regions



ROCK GARDEN OF
JOHN S. MELCHER, ESQ.
NORTHEAST HARBOR, ME.

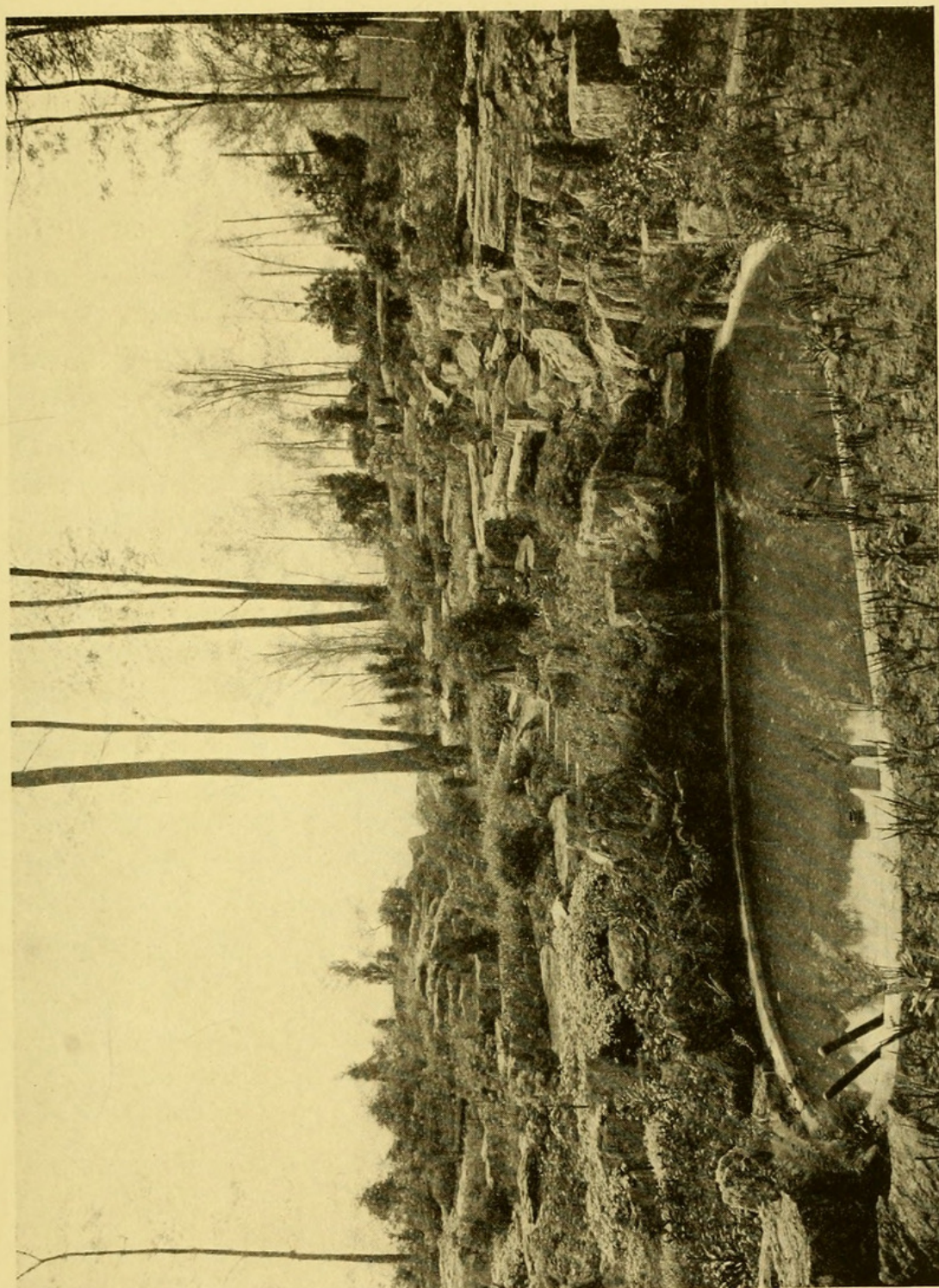
will qualify us to do satisfactory work in American rock garden building.

Looking at the pictures depicting the bare rock construction for the rock garden at "Lindenhurst" near Jenkintown, Pa. the reader can see what may be accomplished with large sized rough-quarried stones. For building on or near level ground the large field-boulder effect, in my opinion, seems the most appropriate and the simplest to arrange. Here the illustration of the small rockery of John S. Melcher, Esq. in Northeast Harbor, Maine is an admirable interpretation of the idea. For the construction of my own rock garden at Glenside, Pa., I used mostly yellow flint stones taken out of a nearby creek. Yellow flint rocks I recommend especially for rock garden operations on open rolling lawn expanses and in connection with brook, pool, and pond effects.

No other garden form and design leaves the latitude for originality in conception as the rock garden does. Regardless of size and situation, there are always interesting and for the lover of nature alluring problems to solve. Practical experience, no doubt is a valuable asset, nevertheless, for dodging mediocrity the faculty of conceiving the beautiful side of a thing and a loving interest in the work seem to me the leading factors.

In rock garden building it is an advantage if we can complete the construction work during the autumn months and have everything prepared for early spring planting. In regard to exposure of a rock garden we want all the light we can get. Throughout the Middle Atlantic States, however, the slope facing east and southeast is preferable, while the south—and particularly the southwesterly incline, on account of the hot afternoon sun, is trying for some rock garden inmates.

The preparation of soil, the description and enumeration of the plant material together with the arrangement of plantations for floral color effects is a subject by itself, which, I believe, is better treated in a separate article. But at this writing I cannot omit pointing out the importance of a proper back-ground for a rockery. In selecting the trees and shrubs



ROCK GARDEN AT
LINDENHURST
JENKINTOWN, PA.

for back-ground and flanking we aim to accentuate the natural character of a rockery. Native evergreens, birches, dogwoods, hawthorns, shrubbery, and in partially shady situations rhododendrons and *Kalmia latifolia* give a very satisfactory combination. For the purpose of enriching the early brightness of the whole we may add some Forsythias and magnolias. The point is however to avoid the conventional effect of the flowering shrub border of everyday planting.

The near future will bring our leading garden architects and landscape gardeners face to face with the task of establishing an artistic standard for the American rock garden. Our native mountain flora is exceptionally rich in valuable plant material. Our leading hardy plant firms, anticipating the trend of the times, carry well selected assortments of rock garden subjects on their lists. Some of the more delicate and capricious alpinists, of course, we shall be obliged to exclude, but the majority of foreign species offered for rock gardens is well adapted to our climate. There is no reason why the artistic beauty of our rockeries should not be fully up to that of the best creations abroad. There is a strong contingent of nature loving, active enthusiasts among us endowed with some ingenuity and these should be encouraged to try rock gardening as among the most interesting and enjoyable of outdoor occupations.



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