

[Utica, Oneida Co.]

### A Tree on a Church Steeple

For thirty years the people of Central New York who are in the habit of visiting the city of Utica have noticed with much interest a mountain ash, years ago a sprig but now a sturdy tree, growing in a precarious position on the top of a church tower near the junction of Seneca and Columbia streets... Its position is so unique as well as conspicuous that one could hardly fail to notice it.

It is of this sturdy tree that the venerable Daniel Batchelor, of Utica, writes interestingly in the Country Gentleman of last week. The article is given below.

The front wall of the First Universalist Church in this city is constructed of sandstone and Trenton limestone, and was built about forty years ago. At the two angles of the façade there are two Norman turrets 45 feet high, surmounted with the usual notched battlements. Just below these are plain, flat cornices projecting from the main walls about twenty inches, and not over eighteen inches in thickness. On the flat top of one of these ledges, and from a joint in the masonry not more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide, there has been growing, for nearly 30 years, a mountain ash or Scotch "rowan tree" which is now 19 feet high and about 7 or 8 feet across the expansion of its branches of which there are so many and so dense that they make the tree appear bush like. The ash is perfectly healthy, and for several years has borne crops of scarlet berries. As already stated, the joint on the ledge from which the tree grows is not more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide. The bole or main stem, just immediately above the crevice, is five inches in diameter. There is no accumulation of matter on the ledge to form a soil or to retain any moisture.

Of course the tree is not as large as one of the same age would be growing the same length of time in good soil on the ground. But the wonder is how does the plant growing out of that dry mortared chink ever sustain life, especially during the summer fervors, up there as it is on a ledge 40 feet above the street, and not on a crumbling ruin, but on a dry, solid stone cornice, attached to a close jointed dimension stone, well built tower wall? Then, too, the question may be asked of the scientific: "How do the radicles [roots] of that plant find the soluble potash and phosphoric acid so indispensable to its very existence? And from whence does it get the mineral elements which enter into the composition of all aboreal [tree] growth?" Is there not here also evidence that our plant takes in its absolutely necessary nitrogen in the same manner as it does its carbon, i.e. through its foliage and from the air only? For there can be but little, if any, decomposed mortar in the chinks below the plant on that projecting cornice of not more than 18 inches in thickness, into the small interstices between the stones of which the superficial roots of our plant can penetrate. We are taught that in such a dry pabulum devoid of vegetable matter there can be no bacterial nitrification. At an rate on a mere ledge of masonry at that altitude is growing a healthy exotic tree, rich in foliage and fruit, defying zero weather in winter, tropical heat in summer, and never drooping during the most distressing drouths [droughts].

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