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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

STEPHEN T. MATHER, DIRECTOR

THE PUBLIC AND THE NATIONAL PARKS

ADDRESS :: By HUSTON THOMPSON, JR.

Assistant Attorney General

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THE PUBLIC AND THE NATIONAL PARKS.

By HUSTON THOMPSON, Jr., Assistant Attorney General.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I took a trip with Secretary Mather last summer to Yellowstone Park, in company with several others, and had such a marvelous time that I have been thinking about another trip ever since. A few days ago, when he called me up over the telephone and asked if I would not make a few remarks at this gathering, I demurred, not feeling that I was up to the propositions; and then he said on the 'phone in a most significant way, "Well, you know we are going to take another trip next summer." And I said, "Oh, very well; I will make the remarks." So you know the price he is paying and the fee I am getting, and the Lord only knows how hard you are going to suffer.

I think this is a most fascinating question which we have to discuss. That part of the symposium assigned to me, "The public and our national parks," is unusually appealing. The parks suggest a panorama of peaks, canyons, fleckless skies, illimitable spaces, and lofty altitudes so inspirational that the call to say something becomes irresistible. Some of our good friends in their fullness of local pride may ask, But why go to the national parks for your inspiration? That question might be put with some weight to a Burroughs or a Whitman, but, sad to relate, few of us have their vision. In fact, most of us have but three active senses, and while in modern vernacular we are a six-cylindereed machine, we are running on three. The old Persian poet described not only the people of his time but our own when he said: "We are no other than a moving row of magic shadow shapes that come and go." We travel in a moving show whose destination is the great cities of our land. They draw us into their maws, just as the mud geyser of the Yellowstone draws any particle near its lips down into its dragon's mouth with a roar, vomits it up and sucks it back again. So we are caught in the throats of the great cities as they inhale and exhale our man-made civilization. Their noises dull our ears to the still small voice of nature, while man's handiwork blinds our eyes till it is only the shock of great altitudes or the vistas of nature in their most colossal and primeval state that can attune our ears and brush the scales from our eyes.

Some may say, Why not go to the shores of the sea for your inspiration? Our answer is that the seas do not inspire. Since the

birth of man and down to the present hour the poets have sung about the sea in the minor key until its unanswered question has become a tragedy or a travesty, according as one may feel. The ancients thought the sea contained a monster called Leviathan, who, after a great contest with the Supreme Being, was plunged beneath the waves and kept there only through the power of God. The Hebrew poet describes the sea as "sprung from the womb of chaos." From his day to that of our own Longfellow the sea has been synonymous with sadness. Longfellow, who knew its moods by personal contact and study, in this "Evangeline," speaks of it as the "mournful and mystic Atlantic," and as giving forth disconsolate replies. There must be a psychological reason for such an effect on men's spirits. This probably lies in the fact that when man looks out to sea he continues to look out and out and finally down, while inspirations from time immemorial have come from looking upward. It is this action of looking upward that seems to fill the human soul with joy so that we shout or sing, and it is for this reason that the mountains or great altitudes inspire rather than depress. The greatest declaration of the human or divine soul was delivered from the top of a mountain. Why did not Jesus utter his Sermon on the Mount down by the Sea of Galilee? The answer is that even He saw more clearly on the mountain top. Goethe led Faust through the valleys of life, where he wandered amidst the din and confusion of humanity, and it was not until he stood on the hillside that he heard the voices in song of those for whom it had been made possible to live in pleasant toil.

Zebulon Pike in his diary says that when he and his small band of followers fighting the Indians and struggling along the banks of the Arkansas on the 15th day of November, 1806, first saw Pikes Peak and Cheyenne Mountains they shouted for joy. It is these very mountains that the people are now asking to be included in a national park. When Maj. Long and his party of scientists traversed the South Platte and first beheld Longs Peak and what is now Rocky Mountain National Park, despite their weariness they shouted for joy. Isaiah described the mountains and hills as singing. Job said they bring forth food. David spoke of the mountains as the "pillars of Heaven" and said: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help." Finally, the "sweet singer of Israel" declared that the mountains bring peace to the people.

There is a deep significance in this. Has it ever occurred to you how infrequently the races of the mountains have been the aggressors in war and have rarely sought the territory of others; yet how when attacked they fought with invincible heroism? We have but to suggest that wonderful little Republic of Switzerland as an evidence

of this fact. If the mountains have a peaceful effect on the people then at this time in particular it is worth while studying them and finding the reason. I think the answer is, to some extent, embraced in an article in a late number of the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled, "The still small voice," by John Burroughs. He says in substance that the noise of the falling tree is the thing that attracts our attention, but that the real significant thing is the silent force in nature that has been slowly bringing about the condition that caused the tree to fall; that in our mountains it is not the noises of the moment, such as the thunder of the storm or the roar of the tornado, but the silent forces eroding the peaks or the imperceptible action of the great glaciers that are the really great forces. The writer fears that in our present great world catastrophe and in our political life we may hear and see only the external patent things, the momentary clamor of the passing event or the voice of the political demagogue; whereas we must catch the sound of the still small voice if we would hold our spiritual and political equilibrium.

Just as Burroughs is impelled to borrow his similes on this subject from the mountains, so are those that live in them, in a more unconscious degree, impressed with the clearer judgment of man's relations in life. And if even from the days of the ancient Israelite to "live and let live" in peace be the story they tell to those dwelling or sojourning among them and we can absorb this lesson, then will we store up our national strength, and it will be used only against the invader and will not be dissipated in aggression. Looking at our parks and their mountains in this light we shall see that they mean something more to our nation than mere playgrounds. We shall have a desire to visit them and become saturated with their atmosphere. Then shall they be to us what they ought to be—stabilizers of our national life—and with our national life leavened by this desire for peace rather than for aggression not only in respect to territory, but in our commercial life, we shall as a nation have no fear of what our position may be in the international world.

But what of the effect of the mountains and parks on the individual? They will open the eyes of youth to the truth. Turgenev in one of his books describes a youth looking out on a great vista, his soul moved with an intense longing. The writer adds that the youth will find his answer when he looks at this scene through the eyes of his mate. This is the wholesome lesson that our mountains will teach our youth. What a restorative they will be to the man of 50 who has been pyramiding success upon success and is suddenly bowled over by his first great failure. This is, undoubtedly, the most momentous period in man's life. We are told that 95 per cent of our kind, instead of rising above the failure of this time lose their grip and go down. The man in this frame of mind will be lifted above his

futile aims for fame or gain and there will come a new vision of the verities of life that will bring peace to his soul. **Finally, what a glorious call to old age.** To those who fear the crossing of the Great Divide there is here an object lesson in the beauties of the other side, so enchanting as to drive away all its fears.

It is along this line of thought that I have tried to fashion the following lines to our national parks:

I sigh for your peaks, your canyons and trees,
Where the rain, the sun, the mist, and the breeze
Slowly fashion God's dreams with infinite grace,
Forever unconscious of man's fevered pace.

Your vistas are not like those by the sea,
Where questions unanswered roll back from the lee;
No sphinx's riddle you leave in the soul,
But joyously point each heart to its goal.

You unveil to youth in his questioning state
The answer which lies in the soul of his mate;
While trembling fifty, once swollen with fame,
Beholding your verities recovers his aim.

You call old age from life's vale to the peak,
Where, standing above the mists of the weak
And immersed in the beauty of yonder side,
He welcomes the crossing of life's great divide.

O lift up your heads, ye everlasting hills,
And sing of the hope that restores broken wills;
Let our people pause and in receptive moods
Catch this spirit of God that over you broods.

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