11-1-1908

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Hetch Hetchy Valley Menaced
San Francisco's Selfishness Would Rob State of One of Its Most
Beautiful Spots, Reserved in National Park, the Peer of Yosemite

By
John Muir

THE Hetch-Hetchy Valley, "that wonderful counterpart of Yosemite," as State Geologist Whitney called it, was discovered by Mr. Joseph Screech in 1858, the year before the discovery of Yosemite, when the Digger Indians held possession of it as an acorn orchard. After my first visit, in the autumn of 1872, I have always called it the Tuolumne Yosemite, for it is a wonderfully exact counterpart of the great Yosemite, not only in its crystal river and subterranean pools and waterfalls, but in the gardens, groves and meadows of its flowery parklike floor.

The floor of Yosemite is about 4,900 feet above the sea, the Hetch-Hetchy floor about 3,700; the walls of both are of gray granite, rise abruptly out of the flowery grass and groves, are sculptured in the same style, and in both every rock is a glacial monument.

Standing boldly out from the south wall is a strikingly picturesque rock, called "Kolana" by the Indians, the outermost of a group 233 feet high, corresponding with the Cathedral Rocks of Yosemite, both in relative position and form.

On the opposite side of the valley, facing Kolana there is a counterpart of the El Capitan of Yosemite rising sheer and plain to a height of 1,800 feet, and over its massive bow-downs a stream which makes the most graceful fall I have ever seen. From the edge of the cliff it is perfectly free in the air for a thousand feet, then it breaks up into a ragged sheet of cascades among the boulders of an earthy subterranean talus. It is in all its glory in June, when the snow is melting fast, but fades and vanishes toward the end of summer. The only fall I know with which it may fairly be compared is the Yosemite Bridal Veil; but it excels even that favorite fall in both height and fineness of fairy air beauty.

Lowlanders are apt to suppose that mountain streams in their wild career over cliffs lose control of themselves and tumble in a noisy crash of mist and spray. On the contrary, on no part of their travels are they more harmonious and self-controlled.

Imagine yourself in Hetch-Hetchy on a sunny day in June, standing waist-deep in grass and flowers (as I have oftentimes stood), while the great pines away dreamily with acute-perceptible motion. Looking northward across the valley you see a plain gray granite cliff rising abruptly out of the gardens and groves to a height of 1,800 feet, and in front of it Tufemalala's silvery waterfall burning with liquid sunfire in every flow.

In the first white outburst of the stream at the head of the fall there is abundance of visible energy, but it is speedily hushed and concealed in divine repose; and its tranquil progress to the base of the cliff is like that of dogwood feathers in a still room.
velous distinctness of the various sun-
illuminated fabrics into which the water,
is woven; they sift and float from form
to form, with the same illusion of
gray rock—in so leisurely and uncon-
fused a manner that you can examine
their texture, and patterns and tones of
cascade at the head of the valley on a
grand scale, a place

Near the head of the fall you see
groups of booming-cone-like masses,
the falls themselves, and then the
valley; its roar a dull, thundering,
interlacing among delicate shadows, ever forming
and dissolving, worn out by friction in
their rush through the air. So of
these vanish a few hundred feet
below the summit, changing to the
varied forms of cloudlike drapery.

The upper part of the fall has increased from about twenty
five to a hundred feet. Here, it is com-
posed of yet finer tissues, and is still
winding itself, as it were, and sunlight woven into stuff
that spirits might wear.

So large a fall might well seem
sufficiently grand as in Yosemite. Nature seems
in no wise moderate, for a short distance
to the eastward of Yosemite, and
thundering, you are aware of the
fall, Wapama, so near that you have both of
it in full view from the same
standpoint.

It has no counterpart of the Yosemite
fall, but has a much greater volume of
water, is about 1700 feet in height, and
appears to be nearly vertical though
considerably inclined and split into
huge overhanging basins of foam
on the projecting shelves and knobs of
its jagged gorges.

The falls, however, are more unlike—
Yosemite's out-in the open sunshine
descending like thistle-down; Wapama in
a jagged shadowy gossamer motion, and
roaring and thundering, its weight and
energy of an avalanche.

Besides this glorious pair there is,a
broad massive fall on the main river
sharply defined, with a side stream,
forming the Vernal, and
wasting away into the valley. Its position is something like
that of the Vernal in Yosemite, and
its roar as it plunges into a surfing

gorge behind a cataract is

though it is only about twenty feet
high.

There is also a magnificently
falling stream that makes its
course through a forest of
conifers, and then, through
Leaving on bare glacier-polished
granite, covered with crisp crisping spray,
into which the sunbeams pour with

The correspondence between the
Merced and Hermit Rivers[21] (in their trends, sculpture, physical aspects)
seems to have been a general arrangement of the main rock
masses that has excited the wondering
admiration of geologists.

We have seen that the Eel and
Cathedral Rocks occupy the same
relative position in both valleys, so
close as to be difficult of
North Domes. Again that part of the
Yosemite north wall immediately
to the east of the Yosemite fall has two
portions, a crumbling cut of
granite oak about 500 and 1500 feet
above the floor.

Two benches similarly situated
and similarly proportioned, occupy
portion of the Hetch-Hetchy
wall, to the east of Wapama fall, and
no other.

[21] The Eel and Hermit Rivers are the
longest tributaries to the Klamath
River, which is a tributary of the
Sacramento River, which is tributary
the Pacific Ocean.
It appears therefore that Hetch-Hetchy Valley, far from being a planter, is more especially that beautiful and precious piece of land which has been so justly reserved. For all over its green meadows, as far as the eye can reach, may be seen the wildflowers of the Yosemite, where Nature, in her joy and fitful moods, is seen most beautiful and interesting. These wildflowers are as varied as the species of the orchids, which are known to flower with the birds, and the birds with the trees. All the variety of the orchids is here, and the flowers are as beautiful as the birds. All the eyes of the world are upon this valley, where the flowers and the birds are seen most beautiful and interesting. For all over the meadows, as far as the eye can reach, may be seen the wildflowers of the Yosemite, where Nature, in her joy and fitful moods, is seen most beautiful and interesting.
The natural beauty-hunger is displayed in poor folks' window-gardens made up of a few evergreen slips in broken cups as well as in the costly ditty-gardens of the rich...the thousands of spacious city parks and botanical gardens, and in our magnificent national parks—the Yosemite, Sequoia, etc.—Nature's own wonderlands, the administration and joy of the world.

Nevertheless, like everything else worth while, however sacred and precious and well-guarded, they have always been a subject of attack, mostly by despoothing graziers—sheep-drovers and robbers of every degree from Satan to senators, supervisors, lumbermen, cattle-men, farmers, etc., ever trying to make everything saleable, often thinly disguised in killing philanthropy, calling packet-filling plunder.

"Utilization of beneficent natural resources, that man and beast may be fed and the door nation grow great." Thus long ago a lot of enterprising Jayhawkers and merchants made part of the temple into a place of business instead of a place of prayer, changing money, buying and selling cattle and sheep and doves. And still, even till now, the Lord's garden in Eden, and the first forest reservation, including only one tree, was spoiled.

And so to some extent have all our reservations and parks. Ever since the establishment of the Yosemite National Park by act of Congress, October 3, 1890, constant strife has been going on around its borders, and I suppose will go on as part of the universal battle between right and wrong, however its boundaries may be blurred or wild beauty destroyed.

The first application to the government by the San Francisco supervisors for the use of Lake Eleanor and the Hetch-Hetchy Valley was made in 1893, and denied December 22d of that year by the Secretary of the Interior.

In his report on this case he well says: "Possibly the Yosemite National Park was created upon too low a scale because of the natural objects of varying degrees of singleness of importance, located throughout the United States, inclusive all of its beautiful small lakes, like Eleanor, and its majestic wonders, like Hetch-Hetchy and Yosemite Valley. It is the aggregation of such natural scenic features that makes the Yosemite Park a wonderland which the Congress of the United States sought by law to preserve for all coming time as nearly as practicable in the condition fashioned by the hand of the Creator—a worthy object of national pride and a source of healthful pleasure and rest for the thousands of people who would usually sojourn there during the heated months."

"The most delightful and wonderful campgrounds in the park are the three great valleys—Yosemite, Hetch-Hetchy and Upper Tuolumne; and they are also the most important places of reference to their positions relative to the other great features—the Merced and Tuolumne canyons, and the High Sierra peaks and glaciers, etc., at the head of the rivers.

The main part of the Tuolumne Valley is a beautiful, spacious flowery lawn four or five miles long, surrounded by magnificent snow-covered mountains. It is about 5,000 feet above the sea, and forms the grand central High Sierra camp ground from which excursions are made to the noble mountains, domes, glaciers, etc.; across the range to the Mono Lakes, and throughout the Tuolumne, down to Hetch-Hetchy.
Whereas, the Yosemite National Park was created by an act of Congress, October 3, 1890, in order that the unirvalled aggregation of scenic features of this great natural feature should be preserved in pure wildness for all time for the benefit of the entire nation; and

Whereas, an application has been made to this department by certain local interests to utilize Hetch-Hetchy Valley as a reservoir site for the purposes of obtaining a municipal water-supply for the city of San Francisco, and thus flooding the entire floor of the valley; and

Whereas, Hetch-Hetchy Valley, far superior in beauty as a common meadow, as a minor feature, as a counterpart of Yosemite and a great and wonderful feature of the park, next to Yosemite in beauty, grandeur and importance; and

Whereas, the floor of Hetch-Hetchy, like that of Yosemite, is a beautiful landscape park diversified by magnificently groves, gardens, and lowland meadows in charming combinations specially adapted for pleasure-camping and hiking; and

Whereas, this wonderful valley is the focus of pleasure travel in the large surrounding area of the park, and all the trails from both the south and the north lead into and through this magnificent campground, and though now accessible only by trails, it is visited by a large number of campers and travelers every summer and after a wagon-road has been made into it, and its wonders become better known, it will be visited by countless thousands of admiring travelers from all parts of the world; and

Whereas, if dammed and submersed one hundred and seventy-five feet deep, as proposed, Hetch-Hetchy would be rendered utterly inaccessible for travel, since no road could be built around the borders of the reservoir without tunnelling through solid granite cliffs; and

Whereas, these camping grounds would be destroyed and access to other important places to the north and south of the valley interfered with, and the High Sierra gateway of the sublime Tuolumne Canyon leading up to the grand central campground of the Upper Tuolumne Valley would be completely blocked and closed; and

Whereas, no greater damage could be done to the great National Park, excepting the damming of Yosemite itself; and

Whereas, all of the arguments advanced in favor of making Hetch-Hetchy into a reservoir could be made to apply with equal force to the case of making Yosemite into a reservoir, except that the cost of a dam in the latter case would be greater; and

Whereas, such use would, to a great extent, defeat the purpose and nullify the effect of the law creating the park; and

Whereas, the proponents of the San Francisco water scheme desire the use of Hetch-Hetchy, not because water as pure and abundant cannot be obtained elsewhere, but because, as they themselves admit, the cost would be less; and

Whereas, we do not believe that the vital interests of the nation at large should be sacrificed and so important a part of its National Park be sold for a few dollars for local interests; therefore, be it

Resolved, that we are opposed to the use of Hetch-Hetchy Valley as a reservoir site, and devoutly pray that the application of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to the Honorable Secretary of the Interior may be denied.

(Signed)

JOHN MUIR, President.
WILLIAM E. COLBY, Secretary.
J. N. LE CONTE, Treasurer.
WILLIAM F. BARRIE.
E. T. PARSONS.
Directors of the Sierra Club.