1-1-1913

The Hetch Hetchy Valley In The Yosemite National Park, What It Is and The Dangers Threatening Its Destruction.

John Muir

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/jmb

Recommended Citation
https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/jmb/363

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the John Muir Papers at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in John Muir: A Reading Bibliography by Kimes by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.
More Light on the Destructive Hetch Hetchy Scheme

The Yosemite National Park is not only the greatest park in the world, but also one of the most wonderful natural playgrounds in the world. It belongs to the American people, and in world-wide interest ranks with the Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. It embraces the headwaters of two rivers—the Merced and the Tuolumne. The Yosemite Valley is in the Merced basin, the Hetch Hetchy Valley in the Tuolumne basin, and the Tuolumne Meadows are in the Tuolumne basin. Excepting only the Yosemite Valley, the Tuolumne basin in its general features is the most wonderful and the larger half of the park.

The Hetch Hetchy Valley is a wonderfully exact counterpart of the Yosemite. Not only in its cliffs and waterfalls and peaceful river, but in the gardens, groves, meadows and camping grounds of its lovely, park-like floor.

In 1890 Congress, with wise foresight, dedicated to the American people for all time this great health-giving playground. The Yosemite Valley had already been made a park and it was primarily to preserve the Hetch Hetchy Valley and Tuolumne Meadows from destruction that the greater Yosemite National Park was created. This was done ten years before San Francisco began to covet the Hetch Hetchy Valley.

Negligently allowing opportunity after opportunity for making adequate provision for a future water supply to slip away and pass into private hands she finally awoke to the fact that one of the cheapest sources remained as the so-called Hetch Hetchy source on the Tuolumne River in the National Park. This source attracted San Francisco solely because Congress had set it apart for the use and recreation of all the American people and consequently during all these years it had remained free from private claims.

San Francisco is making desperate efforts to get Hetch Hetchy for a reservoir, planning to flood the valley to a depth of two or three hundred feet, burying all its grove and garden camps. The effect of flooding the Hetch Hetchy Valley would be the same as if the Yosemite Valley were turned into a single spot.

This same application by the city for water rights in Hetch Hetchy has been denied several times in the past. Secretary of the Interior Hitchcock refused it in most emphatic terms in 1903, saying:

"Presumably the Yosemite National Park was created, not by law because of the natural objects of scenic importance, located within its boundaries, and the large beauty of its small lakes like Little Yosemite 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 may annually sojourn there during the heated months."

A little later, Secretary of the Navy Metcalf rendered a concurring opinion. In 1909-10 the city applied to Congress, but recognizing that the bill would be defeated it was allowed to die. Secretary of the Interior Garfield granted a qualified permit to use Lake Eleanor first, but Secretary of the Interior H. H. S. of 1911 interior bill in Congress on the Tuolumne River portion of this permit should not be eliminated, and Secretary of the Interior Fisher in 1913 confirmed this order, saying that there was grave danger in creating such a precedent where only the saving of money was involved.

Encouraged by the change in administration at Washington the city is again asking Congress for this priceless wonderland which belongs to all the American people. The city has been persistently working in Washington for months with unlimited financial backing in its campaign to strip the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir Bill through at scandalous speed without allowing time for the people, the owners of the park, to be heard in its defense. After passing the House and being blocked in the Senate it will be brought up for final action on October 1st again. A person with this letter, no matter how little weight he thinks his request may have, should write to his Senators in Congress and to President Woodrow Wilson asking that the wise foresight and labor of years may not be undone, and urge that new administration should not take up the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir Bill and destroy ing and turning to commercial uses the parks dedicated to the people.

Already, emboldened by this assault, there are other interests at work hoping to get a foothold in the vicinity of Yosemite Valley itself. No part of the Yosemite people’s parks will be too grand or too sacred to escape unscathed from hungry hordes of destroyers if this destructive Hetch Hetchy scheme prevails.

SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL PARKS

WESTERN BRANCH

JOHN MUIR, PRESIDENT.

OTHER SOURCES AVAILABLE FOR SAN FRANCISCO.

The Advisory Board of Army Engineers on Feb. 19, 1913, after investigating the water supply situation of San Francisco, arrived at the following conclusion:

"The Board is of the opinion that there are several sources of water supply that could be obtained and used by the city of San Francisco and adjacent communities to supplement the near-by supply which is necessarily develops. From any one of these sources the water is sufficient in quantity and is, or can be made, suitable in quality, while the engineering difficulties are not insurmountable. The determining factor is principally one of cost.

In the face of this report, the truth is that San Francisco can obtain abundance of pure mountain water for present and future needs without invading the Yosemite Park can no longer be questioned.

SAN FRANCISCO CLAIMS AN EMERGENCY.

As an excuse for haste in railroading the Hetch Hetchy bill through Congress at this extra session under the overshadowing tariff and currency bills, it is called "an emergency measure." It is well known that San Francisco needs water, but her own engineers admit that the present supply can be more than doubled by adding nearby sources, and under the circumstances this is the only possible plan of development before the city goes to any of the Sierra streams.

Brigadier-General H. M. Chittenden, U. S. A., who recently made an elaborate investigation of San Francisco’s water supply needs reported as follows:

"So far as quantity is concerned there is no present necessity for a resort to the Sierras, and will not be for an indefinite period to come."

The claim San Francisco’s Representatives are making that portion of the city are without water and that there is a greater famine imminent, is entirely aside from the question, for this situation cannot be relieved in any way by the Hetch Hetchy, even if the city gets it, for it must go elsewhere for water in the meantime. The city officials and the water company have finally come to an agreement and have concluded on construction of a reservoir across the bay, which will add 40,000,000 gallons daily to the present supply, doubling it, and will relieve the situation so that it will be unnecessary to commence any Sierra project for many years to come.

The estimates of Engineer H. H. Wadsworth, who assisted the Army Board, and the conclusions of the Army Board itself indicate that it will be many years before these nearby sources are exhausted and that San Francisco’s present claim of emergency is not consistent with the facts. John R. Freeman, the leading engineer employed by the city, reported that construction of the Hetch Hetchy reservoir could be deferred for several years and that it would be greater economy to utilize nearby sources meanwhile. (See pp. 69, 74, Freeman report, 1912).

HETCH HETCHY SOURCES RECENTLY PROVEN INSUFFICIENT IN QUANTITY AND MORE EXPENSIVE THAN OTHER SOURCES.

Recent government records completely refute San Francisco’s claim that enough water can be conserved in the Hetch Hetchy project to supply the irrigation districts with the amount guaranteed them by the terms of the Raker bill now pending in Congress and also furnish the amount estimated to be necessary for the city. Even state records show that the water stored in this project is less than the amount required to satisfy these two uses, and the water stored in the system would have been drawn on to make up the deficiency. Prior to October 1, 1912, the reservoirs would have been completely drained and no water from the Tuolumne source would have been available for the bay cities during the entire year 1913 and no probability of more water until April, 1914, when the snows melted.

On the other hand, the streams flowing into the Sacramento Valley carry into the bay over and above what can possibly be used for irrigation in that valley. The foregoing statements are contained in an address made by Clement H. Miller, C. E., before the San Francisco Center of the California Civic League and are supported by data from government reports which cannot be refuted. Mr. Miller states that it would be cheaper to take advantage of the opportunity to store water in the San Joaquin Valley of water absolutely essential for irrigation when there is a tremendous surplus and unavoidable annual waste from the Sacramento river and its tributaries. The Tuolumne water can be stored for the irrigationists in footed reservoirs, of which there are high, and which can be economically constructed according to a report of Mr. O’Shaughnessy, the present city engineer of San Francisco, thus avoiding the destruction of the Hetch Hetchy Valley. Those desiring a copy of this paper can obtain it by writing to Clement H. Miller, 920ه East 24th St., Oakland, Cal.
THE HETCH HETCHY VALLEY IN THE YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK: WHAT IT IS AND THE DANGERS THREATENING ITS DESTRUCTION

By JOHN MUIR

A few enterprising politicians up to all sorts of big business, calling themselves "The City of San Francisco," have been plotting and planning for the last ten years to get possession of Hetch Hetchy Valley for a reservoir to supply the city with water and electric power, working very hard, watching the political sky, scheming, log rolling, regarding the invasion of national parks as the development of natural resources for higher purposes, and finally getting hold of all the Secretary's reports on the Interior and in Congress, pleading dire necessity for the colossal grab.

This Hetch Hetchy mountain temple so attractive to campers from the lowlands, seeking rest and recreation, as well as to seekers of water and power, is a grand valley like Yosemite, in the northern part of the Yosemite National Park.

After my first visit, in the autumn of 1871, I have always called it the Tuolumne Yosemite, for it is a wonderfully exact counterpart of the great Yosemite, in its rivers, sublune rocks and waterfalls, the stands of meadow, the meadow park-like floor. The floor of Yosemite is about 4,000 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 out from the south wall is a strikingly picturesque rock called "Kolana" by the Indians, the outermost of a group 2,300 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 more than 1,800 feet high, its massive brow flows a stream which makes the most graceful fall I have ever seen. From the edge of the cliff it is free in the air for a thousand feet, then breaks up into a ragged sheet of cascades among the boulders of an earthquake talus. It is in all its glory in June, when the sun sets meltingly slow, and but fades and vanishes toward the end of the 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 both in height and the fineness of its beauty and behavior. Near the head of the group of cascading, column-like masses are seen, their solid white heads separate their tails like coiled silk interlacing among delicate shadows, ever forming and dissolving, worn out by friction in their rush through the air.

Most of these vanish a few hundred feet below the summit, changing to varied colors of grey cloudiness and gray.

So fine a fall might well seem sufficient to glorify any valley; but here in Yosemite Nature seems in no wise moderate, for a short distance to the eastward of Tuoulmula (the Indian name) boms and thunder the great Hetch Hetchy fall, Wapana, so near that you have both of them in full view from the same standpoint. It is the counterpart of the Yosemite Fall, but has a much greater volume of water. No two falls could be more unlike—Tuoulmula out in the open sunshine shining, floating, descending like thistledown; Wapana in a shadowy gorge roaring and thundering, pounding its way with the weight of an avalanche of falling ice. Besides, on the level there is a broad massive fall on the main river a short distance above the head of the valley, and a chain of magnificent cascades on a stream that comes in from the northeast—mostly silvery plumes, like the one between the Vernal and Nevada falls of Yosemite—half-slidling, half-leaping on bare glacier-covered land, and covered with a popular spray into which the sunbeams pour with glorious effect. And besides all these, small streams come over the walls here and there with bird-like song, but they are too unshowy to attract much attention in so grand a place.

The floor of the valley is about three miles and a half miles long and from a fourth to half a mile wide. The lower portion is mostly a level meadow about a mile long with the trees restricted to the sides and the banks of the river, and partially separated from the main upper forested portion by a low bar of glacier-polished granite, across which the river breaks in rapids.

The upper forested part is charmingly diversified with groves of the large picturesque California oak, and the noble yellow pine, which here attains a height of more than two hundred feet, growing well in the small groves on the sides, allowing one to be seen in all its beauty and grandeur. Beneath them the common pteris spreads a sumptuous carpet, tufted here and there with canoanthis and manzanita bushes, azalea and brier-rose, and brightened with the drooping tulip; goldenrod, tall mints, larkspur, geraniums, etc., amid which butterflies, bees, and humming-birds find rich sustenance.

Near the walls, especially on the earthquake talus that occur in many places, the pines and California oak give place to the mountain live-oak, which forms the shadiest and most extensive groves. The glossy foliage, densely crowded, makes a beautiful ceiling, with only a few irregular openings for the admission of sunbeams, while the pale-gray trunks and branches, garland and outspread in wide interlacing arches, are most impressively beautiful and picturesque. The sugar-pine, Sublime pine, incense cedar, silver fir, and tamarisk, occur here and there among the oaks and yellow pines, or in cool side canions, or scattered on the rifted wall rocks and benches. The river-bank trees are chiefly birch, poplar, willow, alder, and flowering dogwood.

Hetch Hetchy Valley is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain mansions. As in Yosemite, the sublime rocks of its walls seem to the nature-lover to glow with life, whether leaning back in repose or standing erect in thoughtful attitude, giving wings to stories and dreams and how soft and how gently these marbled rocks are adorned, and how fine and reassuring the company they keep—their brows in the sky; their feet set in grooves and gay gemmed meadows, a thousand flowers leaning confidingly against their adamant boulders, wisps, birds, bees, and butterflies, and their air heavy with the perfume of all things frail and fleeting and types of permanence meeting here and blending, as if into this glorious mountain temple Nature had gathered her choicest treasures, whether great or small, to draw her lovers into close confiding communion with her.

The weather is delightful and invigorating all the year. Snow seldom lies long on the floor, and is never very deep. On the sunny north wall many a sheltered nook may be found embraced by sun-warmed rock-bosses in which flowers bloom every month of the year. Even on the shaded south side of the valley the frost is never severe.

Sad to say, this most precious and sublime feature of the Yosemite National Park, one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace of the people, is in danger of being destroyed for city water and power. This wise and commercial scheme has long been planned, not because water as pure and abundant cannot be obtained outside of the park, but because of the comparative cheapness of the dam and of the basin in which it is sought to divert from the great uses to which it was dedicated by act of Congress in 1890.

Garden- and park-making goes on everywhere with civilization, for everybody needs beauty as well as water and bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength and body and soul. This natural beauty-hunger is displayed in poor form in window-gardens north of a few inches across and four inches deep, as well as in the costly gardens of the rich, spacious city parks and botanical gardens, and in our magnificent National Parks, the Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, etc., Nature's own wonders, the admiration and joy of the world. Nevertheless, like everything else worth while, however sacred and precious and well-guarded, they have always been subject to attack by despotic gain-seekers eagerly trying to make everything dolalrable and available in vote gathering politics. And in pushing their plans the San Francisco dammers are claiming that flooding the valley will enhance its beauty and with fine descension promise to make a road on the cliffs for the accommodation of nature lovers, where they can sit on rocks like frogs on logs and enjoy the charms of the sham dam lake—the grave of the buried Hetch Hetchy.

THE BEAUTIFUL LAKE FALLACY

Landscapes gardens, places of recreation and worship, are never made beautiful by destroying and burying them. The beautiful lake formed in the Hetch Hetchy would be only a half mile above, like man-made lakes and reservoirs others to be seen in the Sierra. For, instead of keeping it at the same level all the year, allowing Nature to make new shores, it would of course be full only a month or two in the spring, when the snow is melting; then it would be gradually drained, exposing the slimy sides of the basin and shallower parts of the bottom, with the gathered drift and waste, death and decay, of the upper basins, caught here instead of being swept on to decent natural burial along the banks of the river or in the sea. Thus the Hetch Hetchy dam-lake would be only a rough imitation of a natural lake for a few of the spring months; an open transparent water.

VIEWS OF J. HORACE McFARLAND, PRESIDENT OF AMERICAN CIVIC ASSOCIATION.

"The value of great scenic possessions is being increasingly recognized all over the world. This value is now known to have a great influence upon the development of that best citizenship, without which a country is poor indeed. It is also admitted to be of vital importance. In every country, every race, every tribe, everywhere, . . . The travel tribute paid to the Yosemite National Park is annually increasing, and as our population increases it must increase in larger proportion; for more and more are men driven for necessary rest and recreation to the few remaining spots presenting undamaged nature's sublimest and sweetest music, that all the various interests appeal to the Yosemite National Park, which in its wisdom Congress set aside many years ago for just the purpose I have been urging, holds a very large value, inuring to all the people of the United States. This value, I insist, should not be interfered with except for a grave public necessity, and for cause fully shown to the satisfaction of the whole country, who own the Yosemite National Park."

Kindly read carefully, act promptly, and hand this pamphlet to a friend in order that it may keep working.
3. HETCH HETCHY VALLEY.

"It is a veritable Yosemite Valley on a small scale. The Hetch Hetchy Falls, near the lower end of the valley are fully equal in beauty and grandeur to many of the falls in Yosemite Valley. The rugged granite walls, crowned with domes, towers, spires and battle-ments, seem to rise almost perpendicularly upon all sides to a height of 2500 feet above this beautiful emerald meadow, which, seen from the trail approaching it from the east, is a sight never to be forgotten."—91st An. Rep. U. S. Geological Survey, Part IV, page 460.

"... below me—hundreds of feet below—lay the valley, a broad meadow, green as emerald, skirted at the edge with forests and locked in precipitous granite cliffs, mountain high, between which white waterfalls stood erect and slim like dryads. Through this meadow a shining river wandered lazily—we could not see from so far how swift it was—turning back upon its course, tangling itself into Ss and Ms as if it were both to leave so beautiful a place. It looked like pictures I have seen of the Vale of Cashmere, like that river and its meanderings have been the inspiration of a nation's art, whose pattern you may unravel in your Persian rugs and shawls. This was our Vale of Cashmere; ours forever, wisely dedicated to the peo-ple by our Government, preserved forever from despoiling hands within the sacred boundaries of a National Park, and therefore inde-structible, inviolable."—From description by Harriet Moore at hearing before Senate Committee on Public Lands on S. R. 123, Feb. 10, 1909.

2. THE TUOLUMNE MEADOWS.

On the headwaters of the Tuolumne River which runs down and drains into the proposed Hetch Hetchy reservoir, are situated the famous Tuolumne Meadows. Their importance as camp grounds and their scenic beauty have been described as follows:

Professor Joseph Le Conte, the late eminent geologist, writes that "Tuolumne Meadow is a beautiful grassy plain of great extent, thickly enamelled with flowers, and surrounded with the most magnificant scenery."

Referring to this same region, the United States engineers report as follows: "The scenery is particularly grand, and there are found here a number of mineral springs which are equal to any of the famed springs of the country. Through this section of the park, wood, water, and grass abound, making it a paradise for campers."—Senate Document No. 165, 60th Congress, 1st Session, page 81.

4. THE GRAND CANYON OF THE TUOLUMNE.

Herbert W. Gleason, the well-known traveler and lecturer of Boston, who passed through it recently writes as follows: "The Grand Cañon of the Tuolumne River deserves to rank, in its sublime impressiveness, stupendous majesty, and rugged beauty, with anything that this country affords. Through the length of the Cañon for 80 miles flows the Tuolumne River in a constant succession of magnificent waterfalls and cascades, some of which, though not as lofty, are more uniquely beautiful than the famous falls of the Yosemite Valley.

These features of the Yosemite National Park have been described to emphasize the fact that, excepting the Yosemite Valley, the Tuolumne watershed portion of the park is by far the finer and more attractive half.

EFFECT OF FLOODING THE HETCH HETCHY VALLEY.

G. Frederick Schwarz, a forest landscape expert, says: "The many aspects similar to the Yosemite Valley, which it lies nearest, surpasses even that splendid valley in the grouping of its trees, its magnificent single specimens, its fine oak benches, meadows, and richly decorated walls."

The Board of Army Engineers who reported on this project said: "It is admitted that the Yosemite Valley is as a whole more wonderful than the Hetch Hetchy Valley, but the floor of the latter is more diversified in its trees and flowers, and of at equal beauty. Flooding the valley would destroy this floor and the falls of the Tuolumne at the head of the valley."

THE IMPORTANT RELATION WHICH HETCH HETCHY VALLEY BEARS TO THE PARK AS A WHOLE.

"In traversing the northern portion of the Park, owing to the mountainous and rocky nature of the country, suitable camping spots and forage grounds, especially for parties of a considerable size, are few and far between. It is owing to this circumstance that all the trails in the northern portion of the Park center in the Hetch Hetchy. With Hetch Hetchy flooded, the valley as headquarters for travelers would forever lose, and there would be absolutely nothing to take its place."

If a Municipal water-works is permitted to erect its plant in the Hetch Hetchy Valley, it means that the Yosemite Park will become the back-yard of a great municipal utility instead of a recreation ground for all the people of the country.—Editorial in N. Y. "Outlook," January 30, 1909.
CIRCULAR NUMBER SEVEN

THE PRESS of the whole country has heartily responded to the call for aid in this fight. If the good work is continued and all public spirited citizens urge their congressmen and the president to prevent this destructive measure from becoming a law the battle to save the people's parks will surely be won.

Every American citizen who believes that our National Parks are worth while and also urges to write or wire without delay to his Senator in Congress (see list on this page) and request them to put a stop to this commercial destruction which threatens our whole National Park system. Write also to the same effect to President Woodrow Wilson, White House, Washington, D. C.

VIEWS OF JAMES BRYCE.

The Rt. Hon. James Bryce, until recently British Ambassador to the United States, has for years keenly interested in the preservation of Hetch Hetchy Valley on his American Civic Association, on “National Parks—The Need of the Future,” he said:

“The world seems likely to last a long, long time, and we ought to make provision for the future. The population of the world goes on constantly increasing and nowhere increasing so fast as in North America. A taste for natural beauty is increasing; and, as we hope, will go on increasing.

“The places of scenic beauty do not increase, but, on the contrary, are in danger of being reduced in number and diminished in quantity, and the danger is always increasing with the accumulation of wealth, owing to the desire of private persons to appropriate those places. There is no better advice we can render to the masses of the people than to set about and preserve for them wide spaces of fine scenery for their delight.

“From these propositions I draw the conclusion that it is necessary to save what we have got, and to extend the policy which you have wisely adopted, by acquiring and preserving still further areas for the perpetual enjoyment of the people.”

HOW TO HELP TO PRESERVE THE HETCH HETCHY VALLEY AND THE YOSEMITE PARK.

1. Write at once to President Woodrow Wilson, White House, Washington, D. C. Do it now. Ask him to oppose this Hetch Hetchy Bill.

2. Write also to the Senators from your State and get as many more as you can, addressing each at “Senate Chamber, Washington, D. C.” requesting them to oppose this Hetch Hetchy Bill.

3. Get as many of your friends as possible to write. Remember every letter and every protest counts.

4. Interest your newspapers and get them to publish editorials and news items and send copies to your Senators and Representatives.

5. Send the names and addresses of anyone who will be interested in receiving this circular to “Society for the Preservation of National Parks, 402 Mills Building, San Francisco, Cal.”

6. It is particularly important that Senators from your State bear the importance of opposing any bill granting the Hetch Hetchy Valley to San Francisco. See them personally if possible, wire them, write to them and send resolutions to them.

HON.

Sample Letter.

Sen. Chamber, Washington, D. C.

Six:—Our national parks are already too few in number. We are vitally interested in preserving intact those now existing. We earnestly protest against the destruction of any of the wonderful scenery of the Yosemite National Park and urge you to oppose any bill which will permit San Francisco to use Hetch Hetchy as a municipal water tank. Strengthen our park laws immediately, giving them to be overridden.

Very truly,

(Write letters similar to the foregoing in your own language and in accordance with your own ideas).

CIRCULAR NUMBER SEVEN

EDITORS are requested to write brief editorials and news items informing the public and calling on them to write to their Congressmen and Senators and the President.

Funds are needed to carry on this fight. Those who would like to render pecuniary assistance may send their contributions to Mrs. R. V. Colby, Treasurer of The Society for the Preservation of National Parks, 402 Mills Building, San Francisco, Cal.