

UNIVERSITY AND HISTORICAL ADDRESSES

DELIVERED DURING A RESIDENCE IN THE
UNITED STATES AS AMBASSADOR
OF GREAT BRITAIN

BY

JAMES BRYCE

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NATIONAL PARKS — THE NEED OF THE FUTURE

ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE EIGHTH ANNUAL CONVENTION
OF THE AMERICAN CIVIC ASSOCIATION, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND,
NOVEMBER 20, 1912, THE HON. WALTER L. FISHER, SECRETARY
OF THE INTERIOR, PRESIDING.

HAVING come here for the first time forty-two years ago, I have known the United States long enough to feel just as much interested in all those questions that relate to your welfare, in city and in country, as if I were one of your own citizens, and I hope you will allow me to speak to you with that freedom which you would allow to one of your citizens. In discussing a subject so far removed from politics or any other controversial field as is that which occupies you this evening, I need not feel those limitations which an official position would otherwise impose.

There is one thing better even than that City Beautiful to which previous speakers have referred, and that is the Country Beautiful. Before there were cities there was a Country. It holds for us greater and more varied beauties than a city can, and it contains more that appeals to our imagination, and is associated with the sweet recollections of childhood.

Let me say something about the need for preserving rural beauty.

I have had in England some experience in dealing with the questions you are discussing, having been for some years chairman of a society for preserving commons and open spaces and public rights of way, and having also served on the committee of another society for securing to the public places of national and historic interest. Thus I was led often to think of what is our duty to the future, and of the benefits which the preservation of places of natural beauty may confer on the community. That is a problem which presents itself, not only in Great Britain, but all over Europe, and now you in America are tending to become what Europe already is. Europe is now a populous, almost overcrowded, continent. You will some day be a populous and ultimately, perhaps, except in those regions which the want of rain condemns to sterility, a crowded continent, and it is well to take thought at once, before the days of overcrowding confront you, how you will deal with the difficulties which have met us in Europe, so that you may learn as much as possible from our experience, and not find too late that the beauty and primitive simplicity of nature have been snatched from you by private individuals.

I need not descant upon that which the love of nature is, or at least ought to be, to each and all of us. Of all those pleasures, the power to enjoy which has been

implanted in us, the love of nature is the very simplest and best. It is the most easily accessible, it is one which can never be perverted, it is one of which (as the old darky said about the watermelon) you cannot have too much. It lasts from youth to age. We cannot enjoy it in the form of strenuous physical exercise with the same fulness in old age, because our powers of walking, swimming, and climbing are not the same, but we have an ampler and richer enjoyment in some other ways, because we have the memories and associations of the past and especially of those in whose company we have in bygone days visited beautiful scenes. And there are also the literary associations with which poetry clothes many a wild or lovely spot. The farther a people recedes from barbarism, the more refined are its tastes, the more gentle its manners, the less sordid its aims, so much the greater is its susceptibility to every form of beauty, so much the more do the charms of nature appeal to it. Delight in them is a test of civilization.

As the love of nature is happily increasing among us, it becomes all the more important to find means for safeguarding nature. Population is also increasing, and thus the number of people who desire to enjoy nature is growing larger both absolutely and in proportion to the whole. But, unfortunately, the opportunities for enjoyment, except as regards easier locomotion, are not increasing. The world is circumscribed, and we feel the narrowness of it more and

more as all its corners are explored and surveyed. The surface of this little earth of ours is indeed sadly limited, and we cannot add to it. When a man finds his house too small, he builds more rooms on to it, but we cannot add to our earth; we did not make it, it was made for us, and we cannot by taking thought increase its dimensions. All that can be done is turn it to the best possible account.

Now, let us remember that the quantity of natural beauty in the world, that is to say, the regions and spots calculated to give enjoyment in the highest form, are limited, and are being constantly encroached upon. This encroachment takes four forms. There is the desire of private persons to appropriate beautiful scenery to themselves by enclosing it in private grounds and debarring the public from access to it. We in England and Scotland have lost some of the most beautiful scenery we possess because it has been taken into private estates. There is the habit of excluding people even from land uncultivated and remote from houses for the sake of "sport." A great deal of the finest scenery in Scotland is now practically unapproachable by the pedestrian or the artist or the naturalist because rich people have appropriated it to their own self-regarding purposes and insist on excluding the public. This is especially the case where the motive for exclusion is what is called sport. Sport is understood to mean killing God's creatures for man's amusement, and for the sake of this amusement—the killing of deer and

birds, an amusement which gives pleasure only to a handful of men—very large areas in Britain (and some few also in other parts of Europe) have been within the last sixty or seventy years closed against all the rest of the nation.

The enjoyment of natural beauty is further threatened by the operations of the lumberman. He is a force we do not have to fear in Britain, because timber no longer exists there in sufficient quantity to be an article of economic value to us, but it is a very serious question here. You have prodigious and magnificent forests; there are perhaps no others in the world comparable for extent and splendor with those you possess. These forests, especially those on the Cascade range and the Sierra Nevada, are now being cut down rapidly and ruthlessly. You cannot blame the men who are cutting and selling the timber; timber is needed, and they want to drive their trade, but the process goes on too fast, and much of the charm of nature is lost, while the interests of the future are forgotten. Superb woods of the huge *Sequoia gigantea*, the so-called Big Trees, were falling under the axe in the southern part of the Sierra Nevada in 1909, and it would take a thousand years to replace these giants. The same thing is happening in the Appalachian ranges in New England and in the Alleghanies southward from Pennsylvania, a country of great sylvan beauty. In many places, after the trees have been cut off, there is left an inextricable tangle of small boughs and twigs,

so that when a dry year comes any spark will start a fire, and the fire rages among the dead boughs, and the land is so scorched that for many long years no great trees will rise to replace those that were destroyed.

Note also that in recent years water power has, since scientific discoveries enabled it to be applied in the form of electricity, become an asset of great commercial value. You fortunately have an enormous supply of water power. No one will deny that a great deal of it, perhaps most of it, may be properly used for industrial purposes, but neither can it be doubted that it has been used in some places to the detriment, and even to the ruin, of scenery. It has been used at Niagara, for instance, to such an extent as to change completely the character of what was once the most beautiful waterfall landscape in the whole world. Those of you who did not see that landscape, as I did, forty-two years ago, with the long line of clear green water plunging over the precipice, the foaming splendour of the rapids above, and the tossing billows of the Whirlpool Gorge below, and so cannot contrast what is seen now with what was seen in those days, cannot know what a wretched shadow of its former self it has become — not so much by the diminution of the flow of the river as by the hideous erections which line the shores and by the smoke from many a chimney that pollutes the air. It is not too late to repair what has been done, and I hope the day will come when the pristine flow of its waters will be restored, and when

the devastating agencies will have been removed. That we will leave for a future generation which will have begun to appreciate scenery more highly than men did thirty years ago, when the ruin of which I speak was just beginning. One may say of the enterprising capitalists who have made fortunes out of this national possession what the Emperor Charles the Fifth said to the ecclesiastics of Cordova who had turned the central part of the great Mosque into a church. "You have destroyed something that was absolutely unique in the world in order to do something which could have been equally well done anywhere else."

Taking all these causes together, you can see how many encroachments there are upon the unique beauty of your country; and I beg you to consider that, although the United States is vast and has mountain and forest regions far more extensive than we can boast in little countries like England or Scotland, even your scenery is not inexhaustible, and, with your great population and the growing desire to enjoy the beauties of nature, you have not any more than you need. Fortunately, you have made a good beginning in the work of conservation. You have led the world in the creation of National Parks. I have seen three or four of these, the Yosemite twice, the Yellowstone twice, and the splendid forest region which you have around that mountain which the people of Seattle now insist on calling Mount Rainier, — no doubt the name originally given by Vancouver, — but which used, when I wan-

dered through its forests and traversed its glaciers, thirty years ago, to be called by the more sonorous Indian name, Tacoma. And there is also that superb reserve on the north side of the Grand Cañon of the Colorado River, as well as Glacier Park in Montana and others of minor extent in other parts of the country. The creation of such National Parks has not only been good for you, but has had the admirable effect of setting other countries to emulate your example. Australia and New Zealand have followed that example. New Zealand, in the district of its hot springs and geysers, has dedicated to the public a scenic area something similar to your Yellowstone Park geyser region, though not on so extensive a scale; the people of New South Wales have set off three beautiful National Parks within forty miles of the capital city of Sydney, taking mountain and forest regions of exquisite beauty and keeping them for a source of delight to the growing population of that city. Thus your example is bearing good fruit. I only wish it had come sooner to us in England and Scotland before we had permitted the control of so much of our own best scenery to pass into private ownership.

One of the things your Association has to care for is not only the provision of more parks, but also the methods to be followed for keeping the existing parks in the best condition. I heard the other day that a question has been raised as to whether automobiles should be admitted in the Yosemite Valley. May a word be

permitted on that subject? If Adam had known what harm the serpent was going to work, he would have tried to prevent him from finding lodgment in Eden; and if you stop to realize what the result of the automobile will be in that wonderful, that incomparable valley, you will keep it out. The one drawback to enjoyment of the Yosemite Valley in the summer and autumn is the dust. The granite rock becomes in the roads fine sand; even under existing conditions the feet of the horses and the wheels of the vehicles raise a great deal of it, enough to interfere with enjoyment as one drives or walks; but the conditions would become grievously worse with the swift automobile. And, further, the automobile would destroy what may be called the sentimental charm of the landscape. It is not merely that dust clouds would fill the air and coat the foliage, but the whole feeling of the spontaneity and freshness of primitive nature would be marred by this modern invention, with its din and whir and odious smell. Remember, moreover, that one cannot really enjoy fine scenery when travelling at a rate of fifteen to twenty or twenty-five miles an hour. If you want to enjoy the beauty of such landscapes as the Yosemite presents, you must see them slowly. Fine scenery is seen best of all in walking, when one can stop at any moment and enjoy any special point of view, but it is also agreeably seen in riding or driving, because in moving at a pace of five or six miles an hour you are not going too fast to take in the minor beauties of

the landscape. But travelling faster than that — and my experience is that chauffeurs so delight in speed that it is hard to get them to slacken even when you bid them — you cannot enjoy the beauty. It was often my duty in the British Parliament to oppose bills conferring powers to build railways through some of the beautiful lake and valley scenery, — scenery on a much smaller scale than that of this Continent, but quite as beautiful, which we possess in Britain. The advocates of the bills urged that passengers could look out at the landscape from the windows of the railroad car. But we pointed out that it is impossible to get the full enjoyment of a romantic landscape from a railway window, especially where the beauties are delicate and the scale small. It is different where scenery is on a vast scale, so that the railway is insignificant in comparison, and the objects, rocks or mountains or rivers, are huge. There one may get some pleasure from the big views even as seen from a train, though they are far better seen in walking or driving, but you cannot enjoy the small beauties either of form or of colour. The focus is always changing, and it is impossible to give that kind of enjoyment which a painter, or any devotee of nature, seeks if you are hurrying past at a swift automobile pace. Whoever loves fine scenery has a sort of feeling that he is wasting it when he passes through it on a train instead of on foot or driving in an open vehicle.

It will of course be said that the automobile might

be allowed to come up to the principal hotels and go no farther. If it is allowed to go so far as that, it will soon be allowed to go wherever else there is a road to bear it. Do not let the serpent enter Eden at all. Our friends who possess automobiles are numerous, wealthy, and powerful, but as all the rest of the North American Continent is open to them they are not gravely injured when one valley, besides parts of Mount Desert Island, is reserved for those who walk or ride. It is no intolerable hardship to be required to forgo in one spot a convenience which none of us had twenty years ago and which the great majority of our fellow-creatures cannot afford to pay for now. At present the railway comes to an end some twelve miles away from the entrance of the Yosemite Park, and the drive up to it behind horses gives far more pleasure than a journey by rail or motor car possibly could. There are plenty of roads elsewhere for the lovers of speed and noise, without intruding on these few places where the wood nymphs and the water nymphs ought to be allowed to remain in untroubled seclusion, and their true worshippers to have the landscape to themselves.

Let me pay a tribute to the taste and judgment with which, as it seemed to me when I visited the valley in 1909, the park and the hotels in the Yosemite were being managed. There were no offensive signs, no advertisements of medicines, no other external disfigurements to excite horror, and the inns were all

of moderate size, plain but sufficiently comfortable and not more than two stories high. I earnestly hope that the administration will always be continued on these lines, with this same regard for landscape beauty.

Now, a word about additional parks. Although you have set a wholesome example in creating those I have mentioned and some others, there are still other places where National Parks are wanted. There is a splendid region in the Alleghanies, a region of beautiful forests, where the tulip trees lift their tall, smooth shafts and graceful heads one hundred and fifty feet or more into the air, a mountain land on the borders of North Carolina and East Tennessee, with romantic river valleys and hills clothed with luxuriant woods, primitive forests standing as they stood before the white man drove the Indians away, high lawns filled with flowers and traversed by sparkling brooks, containing everything to delight the heart of the lover of nature. It would be a fine thing to have a tract of three or four hundred thousand acres set apart here for the benefit of the people of the South and Middle Atlantic States, for whom it is a far cry to the Rockies. Then you ought to have one or two additional parks in Colorado and Montana also. As regards the Northeast Atlantic States, what seems to be most wanted is to preserve the forests of the White and Green Mountains. Perhaps it is not necessary to set apart in that country a National Park in the same sense as that which might be thought

requisite in the Alleghanies, because the mountains are so high and rocky, and so little ground is suitable for cultivation on the steeper slopes, that it is not likely they will be inclosed, and probably hardly necessary that a public authority should step in to save them. But in some parts of the White Mountains, for instance, it would be an excellent thing to create large forest reserves, where the trees should be under protection of the National or State Government, being cut by them as required, and the forests replanted as they are cut. Recent legislation has already made a beginning with this good work. The sale of the timber would more than cover the costs of management and the interest on the purchase money. In this way you would keep a place where the beauty of the woodlands would remain for all generations, and where they would be so cared for that the present danger of forest fires would be averted.

There is one question that comes very near to you in Baltimore, and also to us in Washington, on which I would like to speak a word. You know there is a great deal of charming forest country between Baltimore and Washington. A good deal of it is forest of the second growth, some few small bits of it are of the first growth; but even that of the second contains a great number of beautiful, fine-grown trees. The land is of no considerable value, and I believe it could now be purchased at a low price. I have heard it suggested that thirty-six dollars an acre would be an aver-

age price for the land, on which a great quantity of timber remains. Having frequently taken walking excursions from Washington into the country from ten to fifteen or twenty miles around the city, I have been struck with the beauty and profusion of the wild flowers. The flora of that region, being a sort of blend of the flora of the North Atlantic States with some of the plants and flowers which belong to the South Atlantic region, is of great interest to the scientific botanist. Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington are all swiftly growing cities. What could be done better for the inhabitants of these three cities than to secure for their enjoyment a large part of this forest land and set it apart, forever free from private purposes or use of agriculture, and keep it as a forest reserve, to be managed scientifically, so that it should pay for the expense of working it by the timber which could be cut and sold on well-planned scientific lines, and should afford a place where people could go and wander about at their own sweet will, just as the old settlers did when they first came here? Here the automobile would do no harm on the main roads, because there would be plenty of byways and forest footpaths. If the automobilist wants to be whirled along the roads, let him have his way, but keep wide sylvan spaces where those who seek quiet and the sense of communing with nature can go out in the early morning from the city and spend a whole day enjoying one spot after another where nature has provided her

simple joys, mingled shade and sunlight falling on the long vistas of the forest, the ripple and the murmur of a streamlet, the rustling of the leaves, and the birds singing among the branches. These gifts can here be offered to the man condemned to spend most of his life in cities, and when nature has provided them in such bountiful measure ought not the opportunity to be taken to secure them?

Shall we who make these plans be accused of treating this subject in a sentimental way? Well, I confess these arguments are not addressed to those who think that man lives by bread alone, or who recognize no values except those measured by dollars and cents. It is because the members of this Association are not of that mind that such considerations are submitted. A century hence there will be in North America, if things go on as they are going on now, far more people, far more lovers of nature, and also fewer places in which nature can be enjoyed.

Now let me try to give some logical quality to these rambling reflections by submitting a few propositions in order.

The world seems likely to last a long, long time, and we ought to make provision for the future.

The population of the world is increasing rapidly, and most rapidly in North America.

The taste for natural beauty is also increasing, and, as we hope, will continue to increase.

The places of scenic beauty do not increase, but, on

the contrary, are in danger of being reduced in number and diminished in quantity. This is due chiefly to the accumulation of wealth. Forests are cut down, water power is appropriated, rich men buy up tracts of land and frequently seek to exclude the public from them. Accordingly, no better service can be rendered to the masses of the people than to preserve for their delight wide spaces of fine scenery.

We must carefully guard what we have got, and must extend the policy which you have wisely adopted in creating your existing National Parks, by acquiring and preserving further areas for the perpetual enjoyment of the people.

Let us think of the future. We are trustees for the future. We are not here for ourselves alone. All these gifts were not given to us to be used by one generation, or with the thought of one generation only before our minds. We are the heirs of those who have gone before, and charged with the duty we owe to those who come after, and there is no duty which seems more clearly incumbent on us than that of handing on to them undiminished opportunities and facilities for the enjoyment of some of the best gifts that the Creator has bestowed upon his children.