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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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WOMEN'S PART IN NATIONAL PARK DEVELOPMENT

ADDRESS

BY

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WOMEN'S PART IN NATIONAL PARK DEVELOPMENT.

By MRS. JOHN DICKINSON SHERMAN,
Conservation Chairman, General Federation of Women's Clubs.

Mr. Chairman and national park friends, the club women in every State in the Union are working for the development of national parks, and the General Federation, with all the united strength of its 2,500,000 women, is working for better conditions for the men, women, and children all over the United States; and in the national parks we see a great opportunity. Through the conservation department of the General Federation these 2,500,000 women urge that more places of natural scenic beauty be set aside for national park purposes, and we also urge that Congress make an adequate national parks appropriation so that the national park service may do its work and get the national parks, the nation's playgrounds, ready for the full use and enjoyment of the people.

Natural scenery is one of the richest of nature's gifts, and it becomes one of the greatest assets of a nation when we use it in giving rest and hope to the toil-worn men and women of this generation and in the developing of our boys and girls into the good citizens of to-morrow.

In my efforts to spread the gospel of natural scenery for park purposes, I endeavored to arouse each of my 49 State chairmen to an active interest in the scenery of her own State. One of these chairmen had plenty of interest, but she showed a painful lack of appreciation when she said to me: "It is not necessary to do anything for the natural scenery in our State, for the scenery here is altogether too magnificent for the hand of man to change." I never did find out what that chairman thought I wanted to do with the magnificent mountain peaks of one of the splendid Western States. But it is necessary to do something if we are going to save and guard the natural scenic beauty of the land for ourselves, for our children, and for those who are to come after us.

When I was 8 years old I lived on a farm, and early that summer I remember there was to be a festive occasion of some sort in the village church, where I went to Sunday school, and the children of the community were to have a part in the entertainment. I remember that I felt tremendously important because I had the opportunity to march around the Sunday-school room carrying a little American flag. But the great event of the day to the children was the ice

cream that had been promised them. Now, I wish that every one of you, for the moment, would think back to the time when you were 8 years old. You did not have ice cream every day, not if you lived in the country, and don't you remember how eagerly you looked forward to the first dish of the season? Why, you even planned how you would eat it. And how you did hope it would stay hard until the very last mouthful. That is exactly what we children were doing as we sat in the Sunday-school room waiting for the second table. And do you remember, when you were 8, how you felt about waiting for the second table? We were really a very patient little group, but I remember to this day my longing for just one taste of that ice cream as it was carried past me to the grown-up folks. But finally it came our turn. We children all marched up to the table, eager and expectant. And then we were told an awful thing. The ice cream had all been eaten up!

Now, when I see people pulling up wild flowers by the roots, carrying them off by the armful, and killing wild birds for sport and destroying the beauties that nature has given us, just for their own selfish or thoughtless enjoyment, I remember that ice cream, and I am thankful for the national parks.

The General Federation of Women's Clubs is supporting at the present time nine national park projects. I won't take your time to tell about all of these, but in Idaho the club women are particularly energetic. Some years ago they decided that a part of the section of the Sawtooth Mountains ought to be a national park. The men of Idaho did not think much about it one way or the other; so the club women took the initiative and persuaded the State legislature to recommend to Congress that there be a Sawtooth National Park. The State Federation of California has indorsed the project to make the Sequoia National Park sufficiently large to include more of the big trees, and the highest peak in America—Mount Whitney. The club women of Arizona are very eager and very efficient and very earnest, and they have one of the biggest national park projects of them all—the Grand Canyon—and if Congressman Hayden is in the room I would like to have him know, if he does not know it already, that the club women of Arizona have such confidence in him that they firmly believe there that he is going to get the Grand Canyon National Park at this session of Congress.

In a number of States where the scenery is not on a national park scale, the club women are working for State parks. In Florida the club women actually own a State park. They own the park and have the deed to a thousand acres of royal palms about 40 miles south of Miami. This is a delightful and interesting tract of land, of scientific interest as well as beautiful, and the club women have recently dedicated it for park purposes to the people of Florida, but it is owned by the State Federation of Women's Clubs.

I see my friend, Mrs. Matthew T. Scott, in the audience. Now, of course, you all know Mrs. Matthew T. Scott, but perhaps you do not know that it was through her untiring efforts that Fort Massey was made a State park in Illinois.

The club women in every State in the Union are getting acquainted with the natural scenic beauties of their own local communities. They are arranging national park programs for their club meetings because the women are fully awake to the human need for more places for play and recreation. With over a hundred million people in the United States at the present time, and the number steadily increasing, the stress and strain of life grows more exacting every year. We are crowded into close living quarters more than ever before, which makes the needs for outdoor recreation all the greater. In the city of New York children are arrested every day for playing in the streets.

But not only do the people in crowded city districts need parks, but people everywhere need the health and the strength and the inspiration that outdoor nature holds in store for them. Nature is the very best friend a man ever had. Frederick Harrison so well tells us that "We live for the most part in a very iron mask of form. Our daily tasks are so joyless, so compulsory, that we must be free and simple sometimes or we break." Our present world is a world of remarkable civilization, and of very superior virtues, but it is not very natural and not very happy. We need yet some snatches of youth, to be for a season simply healthy, simply happy. We need to draw sometimes great drafts of simplicity and beauty. We need sometimes that poetry should not be drummed into our ears, but flashed into our senses. And man, with all his knowledge and all his pride, needs sometimes to know nothing and to feel nothing but that he is a marvelous atom in a marvelous world.

One of the most successful men of affairs in this country once said that he could do 12 months' work in 10 months, but he could not do that amount of work if he worked steadily for 10 months. This is an excellent statement of the value of an annual vacation. Vacations are now, of course, considered essential in the business world to sustain efficiency, but the full benefit to a vacation depends upon the manner of occupation during that time. It is estimated that the people of the United States now have over three billions leisure hours every week. Now, these are the hours when habits are formed and when character is in the making. So you see how tremendously important is our leisure time. The problem of leisure time is likely to become as important as the problem of earning a living.

I believe that when people are given the opportunity they will eagerly plan to spend their leisure time in outdoor recreation, where nature is at its best, and when the entire vacation custom of the

people is changed from a stultifying period of mere temporary diversion to a time of the great outdoors of nature, where we may gain unnumbered and lasting benefits, then we shall have greater men and greater women.

In the fuller development of national parks we may expect that in the future vacations will be planned with a definite educational purpose in view; that the school year inside of school buildings will be made shorter, and that more time will be spent in an educational way in vacations in the national parks, and that a trip to a national park will be offered as a reward for certain degrees in excellence in the schools instead of the usual school prizes, and that teaching advantages will be provided in the national parks for children and young people, so that they may gain first-hand knowledge under competent guidance of the trees, birds, and wild-animal life and flowers, and of the physiography and geology of the lands. Here in the national parks the children and young people may develop accurate observation, definite thinking and reasoning, mental processes, and here they can also gain that thing which is so essential to human happiness, a wholesome imagination.

The march of settlement was from the East to the West, but it was the West that gave to the people of the United States one of the greatest of all civilizing influences—the national parks; and there is no more important part in our national preparedness than these national parks, where the vision of the people will grow calm and sane and clear.

A country is measured not by population alone, not by wealth, not by power, but by the mental attitude of the people. In such places as national parks you are able to preserve your identity, and there comes to you a sense of kinship and love for all created things.

When we better understand Nature's call, we shall hear her say: "Come and visit me and bring your children; I have beautiful things to show you, and stories to tell that you will never forget. I can show you splendid, silent forests that breathe the message of the centuries, and white, leaping waterfalls, many times higher than Niagara, and a river rushing on between canyon walls a mile high; and I can show you glaciers and moraines that tell the story of the ages. Make parks of the most beautiful of my wild scenic places, so you will always know where to find me at my best. Come and get acquainted with me, and I will give you health and strength and inspiration. Let me train your children to see and hear things as they are. I will make your boys and girls efficient, I will give them high ideals, and fit them to be the fathers and the mothers of future noble men and women."