

PARKS FOR THE PEOPLE: CALIFORNIA'S WISDOM IN CONVERTING HER ANCIENT FORESTS INTO MODERN PLAYGROUNDS



It is because we have suddenly awakened to the fact that we have sacrificed and wasted so much of our own earth's lovely vestments that we are as a nation all at once holding out such eager hands for whatever natural beauty there is still remaining to us? Are we seeking to establish parks that we may forget our ruined hillsides? Are our mountain streams more precious to us because we have defiled and laid waste our beautiful wide wooded rivers? Do we at last lay arresting hands on the lumbermen of the North and Northwest because we have in the past permitted them to desecrate our hills, injure our climate and make arid and old our wide fragrant pastureland?

A mighty cry is going up from one end to the other of our shorn land to save the few oases of beauty left for the outdoor life of present and future generations. Slowly we have grown to know that rooms can never take the place of forests or railway traffic of our rivers. From every city and town we hear a murmur of voices: "Take us from our house prisons; we are growing pallid and irritable from the pressure of walls. We want our old world grown once more fair and fragrant and melodious. We want to walk in the sunlight and sleep in the fresh winds. We are tired of the work of man's hands and we yearn once more for God's large kindnesses."

Out of this freshened spirit, this renewal of simplicity surely is being born the impulse that would save what little is left to us of our wooded hills, our full-running rivers, Nature's own largess, for the good of the people. Through the whole length and breadth of the country we ask but a few playgrounds and few joy spots for the young and old. It is good for our nation that we are refusing longer to be satisfied with the little man-made patches of ground which we have called our city parks. The call today is to save for us some remnant of our mountains, our forests, our knee-deep clover pastures. In practically every city in the Union we are asking that the virgin woods should be spared to freshen the souls of our children. We want playgrounds for them that are moss-and flower-covered, and where the air is still and green. We want them to see deep amber brooks with the trout flying up through the spray of the falls, and the paths silent for the approach of deer. We want them to know the perfume of the pine and the elusive sweetness of the wild grape. We refuse to consider it enough that they should rest on park benches and look upon burly park policemen instead of birds and flowers, that they should be dragged through crowded driveways and that they should

see only on the great green lawns of Nature newspapers and discarded cracker boxes. What child has a true heritage from Nature who has not been given the vision of the great, wild, green beautiful world, with all its mysteries, lessons and comfortings?

Perhaps to the early settlers with so vast an untouched world all about them it would have seemed niggardly and overcareful to arrange to preserve stretches of land for the parks of future generations. But it was this past time lavishness and heedlessness that has cost us so terrible a price in the destruction of our country. For there are vast areas today where the desolation and the destruction are utter and final, where it is hard to realize that the utmost care and economy can never reconstruct green and beautiful spots for our people.

We can still remember, many of us, the methods of the early American home-builder and garden-maker, who set about to surround his house with a smooth tract of country, felling all the trees, filling up the ponds and brooks, leveling the ground, going over it with a harrow to make flat clean places in which to plant neat flower-beds and narrow rows of trees. We smile over this now, but this tendency was at one time so nation-wide that the destruction of beautiful slopes of lands, of ponds, of little streams, of low hillsides was incalculable. Of course, this is a different matter from the spoliation of our great mountains and hills and valleys for commercial purposes, but the difficulties of reconstruction are no less overwhelming.

And now that we have realized how cruel to us has been the mere heedlessness of our forefathers, do we not owe it to ourselves to practice the ways of wisdom for posterity? Shall we not let the generations near to us feel all the generous grace of wild woodland and field beauty? Shall we not decide that whatever untouched stretches of land, whatever forests, whatever streams, whatever fair valleys still remain in this devastated country we will make every effort to hold sacred for the sake of the permanent beauty of our nation, for the health and happiness of posterity?

HERE in the West we still have many thousands of acres of unspoiled, virgin woodland, and the desire to save it is growing more general all along the Pacific Coast. Perhaps the best example which we can give of the preservation of a wild garden of rare beauty and charm for the people is the purchase of hundreds of acres of the woodland in the Arroyo Seco, which threads the western edge of Pasadena. Few cities in the East or in the West are blessed with a more beautiful environment than this particular country, which Nature and the elements have carved and molded and planted for years past unnumbered.

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Pasadena has already succeeded in acquiring ownership, options and promises of options on six hundred and twenty acres of Arroyo Seco lands, and expects to possess before fall the balance of Arroyo acreage lying within the city limits, making a total of nine hundred and twenty-nine acres. The interest in this park project is widespread in southern California. As the Arroyo Seco extends from the Sierra Madre Mountains north of Pasadena to Los Angeles at the south, passing South Pasadena en route, both Los Angeles and South Pasadena are cooperating with Pasadena and are buying up Arroyo lands in their districts for park purposes. The county is also interested in improving outlying lands in its district, and is heartily helping in the furthering of plans. The funds for purchase and improvement are being met by a tax levy. One management will be appointed control, and the expense of improvements apportioned according to the area of each district. When negotiations are completed the people will own a parkway fourteen miles long.

The contract has just been let for a magnificent bridge to span the Arroyo at Pasadena, connecting the town with a new boulevard to the west. This bridge will be fourteen hundred and sixty feet long, with eleven spans or arches ranging in width from sixty to two hundred and twenty-three feet, and in the highest place will be two hundred and twenty feet above the bed of the Arroyo. It will be constructed of monolithic concrete and will cost one hundred and ninety thousand dollars, and will be a great asset to the park.

The natural scenic beauty of the park, the charm and luxuriance and variety of its growth, with its flavor of woodsy wildness and freedom make it one which will appeal intimately to the people. Pasadena already has plans for laying out and improving her portion of this nature garden. It is to be a natural garden in every sense of the word. It is not to be molested or desecrated by tawdry architecture, cement walks, marble statuary or anything set or artificial; the projected improvements are to consist merely of grubbing out some underbrush and of outlining, grading and granite-topping a driveway over which every sort of vehicle can travel, and making paths through the woodland fragrance and loveliness. The city will also plant trees, shrubs and flowers indigenous to the hills, mountains, fields and deserts of southern California, segregating the varieties so that they can be studied logically and easily. Quaint log cabins will be placed here and there and banked with ferns, rustic seats will be scattered about and drinking fountains designed after old-time wells with oak moss-covered buckets are to be provided. Rough stone fireplaces where picnic parties may brew coffee or fry bacon and eggs in true camp fashion may be another innovation of this unusual public park.

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In a setting of civilization and modern city improvements which creep to its very edges and look over, the Arroyo Seco's woodland freshness and solitude are all the more remarkable. Linked to the Sierra Madre Mountains at the north of Pasadena, it winds and curves southward until it merges into the gaunt open-jawed Los Angeles River. It is deep-gashed in the earth, with a home-strown mesa on the east, and hills walling it on the west. A boulevard is being cut along the hillside and in some places curves the crests. The Arroyo ranges in width from twenty-five feet to a quarter of a mile, a silver stream-bed winding delicately through the green. In winter and spring, the seasons of rain in the Southwest, and the time when the snow is melting and flowing down from the mountain tops, the stream widens into a broad rushing torrent that tugs at boulders and tree trunks on the banks. In the upper end of the Arroyo the stream-bed holds water the year round, and trout are found in the deeper quiet places; but on the lower levels summer finds the path of the stream empty, huge boulders and small stones gleaming white and clean from their winter flood polishing. In winter, spring and early summer there are luxuriant beds of wild ferns of many varieties hiding in shadow of trees and crags, or delicate maidenhair and fluffy mosses cling to precipitous rock walls, and the wild-flower beds are radiant with Nature's loveliest offerings of color, perfume and flower textures. Trees and shrubs are close growing and of wide variety: the sycamore, maple, live-oak, canyon oak, scrub oak, golden cup oak, holly leaf cherry, ash, willow, poplar, big cone spruce, greasewood, bay, alder, mountain mahogany, elder, Spanish bayonet, manzanita, artemisia and many others.

When the Arroyo becomes a park it will make a wonderful playground for the people, both grown-up and children. The children can build stone houses and sand houses. They can study the methods and manners of the birds and other small interesting wood folk. They will have opportunity to learn the secrets of the everyday lives of wild creatures, to become friends and comrades in a way that will curb the youthful instinct to tease and kill, and cultivate instead the desire to protect. They can romp and frolic in the wide spaces, for there will be few restrictions in the form of signs. Little feet may be muddy or dusty, and laughing faces smudged; they can shout as much as they like, and there will be no one to protest, for there is ample space for noise, or for quiet. Indeed, the influences of such environment will be too far-reaching to catalogue.

In the later seventies and early eighties when Pasadena was in the embryo stage, the portion of the Arroyo Seco nearest the town possessed no value or interest to the people, except for the fire-

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wood and kindling it furnished. It was subdivided into woodlots which were sold to Mexicans and others for from three dollars to ten dollars each, and cord-wood and brush were harvested therefrom. At that time the country was big and open, only one or two hundred families living in the valley, and when they wished to picnic they drove to the mountain canyons five or more miles distant, or to a narrow gorge with grass-grown, oak-shaded ledges known as Devil's Gate, three miles north of the town. This is one of the most interesting and rugged scenes in the Arroyo Seco. Pasadena obtains her water supply from this locality, water that is of the purity of the mountain air, clear as crystal from seepage through granite. The width of the Arroyo at this point, where precipitous rock walls crowd close, is scarcely twenty-five feet, and conditions are perfect for making a huge storage reservoir or lake on which boating can be enjoyed.

The tendency toward out-of-door life, the love of light and air and growing things is developing in the West. On Sundays, when people are freed from work, they rush away to the open, until our roads are filled with automobiles, motor cycles and all sorts of conveyances. Nearby beach, mountain resorts and city parks are thronged with picnic parties and rest parties, all getting strength and inspiration from the good medicines to be found in Nature's laboratory. While the city parks with their smooth lawns, landscape gardens, perfect walks and drives are a delight to the people, the Arroyo Seco Park will surpass them all, because it will be wild and free, untrammelled by the conventional laws, just Nature with all her kindness, simplicity, quiet and restfulness. In one of thousands of secluded bowers of greenery a family can hide for a long happy day, alone and undisturbed. If they have no home garden, they can find one here, for all the park acres, the trees, the flowers, the hills, the stream, the sky, the sunlight will belong to them. Townspeople and visiting strangers can enjoy equal privileges and possession, while artists, botanists and biologists will all find the Arroyo Seco Park a rich field for study, research, inspiration and rest.

