

Yosemite for the People.

Wm. E. Smythe, author of "The Conquest of Arid America," thus endorses a proposition to improve the Yosemite Valley. We quote from that popular magazine—"Out West."

The wave of enthusiasm for the building of California which is sweeping over the States has produced a crop of valuable ideas. It is significant that so many of them take the form of suggestions looking to public enterprise. More and more it is seen that we have come to the end of our day of little things and stand upon the threshold of a day of large undertakings. This being so, we are forced to realize that our choice lies between the encouragement of vast private investments and the adoption of a plan of development under public auspices. The appreciation of the fact marks a transition in popular sentiment. We are seriously considering the assertion of public authority and the use of public capital and credit in doing many things essential to the full development of the State—such things, for instance, as the storage of the floods, the replanting of the forests, and the drainage of the Sacramento Basin. After all it is a very short step from the policy of river and harbor improvements to the adoption of similar methods in doing other things of equal, if not of greater importance.

L. M. Holt of Los Angeles, who has furnished a perennial stream of good ideas for the last thirty years, now comes forward with a most interesting suggestion touching the future of Yosemite Valley. He says that this great State property is now a liability, entailing an annual loss of thousands of dollars, whereas it ought to be a productive asset. It requires better hotel accommodations, an electric railroad to take the place of slow and costly stage facilities, and several such mountain roads as that which ascends Mount Lowe in Southern California, so that the tiresome mule ride can be obviated. Mr. Holt thinks the State itself should deal with these matters and he points out the obvious fact that it would be a profitable enterprise in direct returns, immensely more so indirectly, because of the people it would attract to the State, and that in addition to this it would open the park to a great number of Californians who cannot afford to visit it, or at least to remain longer than a brief holiday, under present conditions.

Mr. Holt's suggestion is worthy of general discussion. Two probable objections to its adoption will readily occur to the reader. It will be said that this wonderland will lose something of its picturesqueness when the electric car succeeds the stage-coach and the mountain tramway the mule-ride. Then it will be thought, if not openly said, that it is a pity to make the place too common by rendering it too accessible. The other argument against the proposal will be the old, old objection to all forms of public enterprise—that it involves public debt.

It is possible to sympathize with sentimental regret at the passing of the picturesque, even when nothing is lost except the discomforts of travel. Of course, the natural objects in the Yosemite will be no less wonderful and beautiful because the traveler has been transported by electricity instead of by horse or mule power, nor because he has made the trip in a quarter of the time formerly required, and at one quarter of the present expense. True, the adventure loses some of its novelty, but so has modern transportation throughout the world when compared with the days of the stage-coach, of the canal boat, and of the sailing vessel. Still, no one wishes to return to the old way of doing things. A thousand people travel now where one traveled before. So a thousand people will enjoy the glories of Yosemite where one can do so now. And this will add something to the sum of human happiness. Just here lies the strongest argument in favor of Mr. Holt's plan. The Yosemite is now the resort of the few. It ought to be the playground of the many. Every Californian should know it by contact, and the excursion should be made so cheap that all visitors to the State could afford to go there and imbibe such an enthusiasm as should last them for a lifetime. This grand park is the property of

the public and should be made available for the use of the public. As the matter now stands, the public maintains it at a loss of several thousand dollars a year for the benefit of the comparatively few who can afford the time and expense of the trip.

To those who object to public undertakings because it may involve a public debt, even less may be said. It may be presumed that no one expects California to stand still, and that no one expects the State to be developed as a matter of private benevolence. It follows that capital must be used to make our resources available. Whether that capital be private or public the people must pay the dividend upon it in some form, as they pay dividends on all the railroad and industrial investments. The advantage of public enterprise is that it can be carried on with cheaper money and that the burden is lightened by the elimination of the profits which private investors require. In the case of the Yosemite improvements, the investment would take care of itself from the direct returns of the enterprise, while the whole State would collect commercial dividends from the tourists attracted and social dividends from the advantages enjoyed.

The same wise instinct which led the people to retain the Yosemite as a public property, should now lead them to make it accessible to the largest use on the easiest terms.

Luck means rising at 6 o'clock in the morning and not spending more than half your income; minding your own business and not meddling with other people's; trusting in God and your own resources; the appointment you have failed to keep, and to leave nothing worth doing to chance.

Nations, like men, exert their greatest influence by example, not by force.

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