



Light at the End of the Tunnel

1917

Back in Washington on September 17, I was appalled by the stacks of mail, reports, *Congressional Records*, and other paper on my desk. One bright spot was three letters from Mather. This Colorado trip had cut us *off* from each other except for some postcards I had hurriedly scrawled along the way. Happily, his letters showed that he was in fine health and good spirits. His next one, written on September 20, really had great news: "Glad to know you are back on the job again after your strenuous summer.... I may get down to Washington next week for a day or so, stopping on the way in Philadelphia to see Dr. Weisenburg and get his o.k."

Mr. Mather arrived in Washington on September 27. Dr. Weisenburg had given permission for him to stay only until October 1, but he seemed to be in fine health, both mentally and physically. Actually, I didn't get to see too much of him during those three days. I set him up in a pleasant suite at the Shoreham Hotel. His many friends watched over him like mother hens, quietly entertaining him in small groups and avoiding any excitement or worrisome subjects. Grace and I usually accompanied him at dinner time along with other Washington acquaintances.

Mather made only one visit to the Interior Department, just an hour or so to inspect the new offices of the National Park Service. He was as delighted as a child with the location, the decoration of his office, and the brief meeting with his personnel. He did not ask to see Secretary

Lane. I don't think he ever did meet him on this visit, but he did talk to him over the phone. He didn't express any desire to step back as director.

It was just as well, for I guess Mather wasn't quite as well as Grace and I thought. Dr. Weisenburg wrote me on October 8:

As you know I had a long talk with Mr. Mather and had a very good opportunity to see just how much improvement he has made. I do not think that he is well enough as yet to assume charge of the department. He still lacks confidence in himself, has many fears about his health, etc., is quite frequently gloomy and is not capable of sustained mental effort. It would, however, be an excellent thing for him if it could be managed to have him in Washington where first of all he would be away from Mrs. Mather, who herself admits that it is about time for him to get away from her, and secondly it would be of the utmost benefit to him to be able to do some work, for he is capable of some mental effort. Of course it would be all wrong to put any responsibility up to him. If, for example, he could take charge of a department with the understanding that you should do the very important work and that nothing should be done without your approval, the plan could be worked out.

I answered the doctor on October 10:

Ever since I saw him in the West the latter part of August, I have been perfectly sure that the most advisable thing for him to do would be to come down here and undertake the easy ends of the National Park Service work. There is nothing in the world that interests him so much as the park work, and there is nothing that gives him so much pleasure. ... I have worked very hard the past year and have got the administrative work of the National Park Service in such condition that I can handle it without any difficulty, and I can keep Mr. Mather from worrying and fretting over any phases of the work.... He doesn't know much more about the details of the Park Service work now than you do, and I don't propose to let him acquaint himself with them. . . . Secretary Lane is very anxious to have him down here, and he does not care whether he does any work or not. He knows, as all of us do, that Mr. Mather can accomplish more while he is enjoying himself at luncheons and is with his friends on automobile trips or around the club than he could accomplish in his office. It would have done your heart good to have seen him when he was here last week. He enjoyed his new office as much as a little boy does his new red wagon.

Temporarily Mr. Mather didn't choose to get back to Washington and pick up the reins in the Park Service. But I was optimistic that we'd have him back some time soon. Not so. Supervisor Lewis reported to me shortly thereafter that Mather had turned up in Yosemite apparently concerned with the Desmond Company, had a few secretive meetings with people associated with it, and went back to Chicago. I was told nothing and I made no inquiries. Sometimes I felt the less I knew about Mather's dealings with Desmond, the better off the service and I would be.

In the meantime, I only had a few days to finish the annual report of the Park Service and prepare the financial estimates for the upcoming year. Fortunately, I had asked all supervisors and custodians to send me their reports and data at the close of the fiscal year in June. I had many of these with me as I was traveling in the West. With the help of my little portable typewriter, I had been able to write up a rough draft of the annual report. Maps, statistics, and the polishing of the total project were completed back in Washington with the invaluable help of Isabelle Story, Arthur Demaray, and Bob Yard.

With the report out of the way, I tackled the financial situation for the next fiscal year. As I wrote a friend, "I am overwhelmed with the work of writing my annual report and preparing the estimates for the next fiscal year and really ought not to take the time to go home and sleep!" That pretty well summed up our lives. My dearest, long-suffering Grace cooked food that could be held and heated up when I finally got home. We managed some conversation while I ate, and then it was off to bed for me while she cleaned up alone. Some life my precious girl enjoyed, but she never once complained.

I wrote Mather on October 17: "I got the report in about an hour before midnight on the 15th and now have a little time to take up some of the matters that will be interesting to you." These included arrangements for him to return to Washington to live at the Shoreham.

But he wrote back: "I think I will be here for awhile. I do not see my way clear to come down for sometime yet." Well, I didn't take no for an answer and wrote him on October 24:

Everything is fixed up for you here, including temporary quarters at the Shoreham with Mr. Bradley and tentative plans for your enjoying the morning gymnasium class on the top of the Powhatan with Secretary Vogelsang and a number of other officers high in official life.

However, if you do not care for the class, I have arranged to go into the gymnasium 3 times a week with you at 4:30. I am going to do this because the doctor tells me you need to continue your exercises.

However, Mather still wouldn't give me any date for his return to Washington.

I pored over the estimates for the next fiscal year and finally got them out of my way. With Mather in Chicago, apparently with no immediate plans to come to Washington, I had to focus my attention on policy-making problems, many of which arose from that annual report. There was widespread coverage of it by newspapers in areas adjacent to particular national parks or monuments. Some were hearty in their praise, others nasty and troublesome for us.

Our plans for a Greater Sequoia received the most publicity, which seemed terrific at the time although we later realized it had alerted all kinds of people to block us. Being young and naive, I wrote Jesse Agnew, a firm supporter in Visalia: "We are going to drive the Sequoia Bill pretty hard during the coming session of Congress. Most of the influential Forest Service men are in France and I think we can overpower those who are left here.... We are going to try to put the bill through before the opposition can get thoroughly organized."

We were also ready for a major push to enlarge Yellowstone, to make its boundaries conform more closely to the reality of what nature had delineated in the flow of waters and drift of the animals. It took over thirty years just to save the Jackson Hole, but the borders of original Yellowstone never have been rounded out as we visualized them at this time.

Organization in the Park Service was another thing that required some concentration during this quiet stage. The overriding concern with the war precluded implementation of most of my ideas and plans, but I felt standards must be set up immediately. As far as possible, uniformity must prevail throughout the system. Personnel of high caliber were impossible to recruit while fighting men were needed. However, I had gotten to know most of our top-ranking men. I knew which of them could handle their areas with more or less responsibility.

They, in turn, needed confidence and pride in their work and a uniformity in title. So on November 1, 1917, I ordered the designation of "superintendent" to cover all national park executives. I had never understood the matter of one park, like insignificant Platt, having a

superintendent while another, like Mount Rainier, had a supervisor. The title of "custodian" remained for the national monuments.

Although most employees of the Park Service in Washington were covered by civil service, I held back pushing this for field personnel. Until Mather returned, I was hesitant to freeze some of them into the service. I knew he had likes and dislikes and would want to replace many. Actually, it didn't matter that much as there were so few personnel at this time in any park area. We'd have a lot of problems to solve before we could organize and hire large forces of rangers after the war. Among these would be applicants with little training or education in this naturalist field, lack of job security without civil service, lack of housing.

There was no housing for married men and little for bachelors. The latter usually got lodging in a nearby town, in a ranger station, or worse, in a tent or lean-to in the woods. For the time being, I would let well enough alone. Later, when the time seemed appropriate, I did step in to push through civil service status for our people.

Long hours were spent with various authorities interested in the national parks, listening to their ideas. I took their knowledge and recommendations into account when formulating future plans and then wrote outlines for discussions with Secretary Lane.

Lane was not a man of any great intellectual capacity, hated details, and was impatient with the pros and cons of a given subject. Unless it was political or directly concerned himself, he would form a tipi with his fingers, nod sagely, and say, "Verry interesting. Verry interesting. Why don't you just go ahead. See how it works out and let me know."

So my list of discussions to be held with Lane over future National Park Service plans came down to just one—the standardization of the uniform. Lane was most interested in that. He had to hear how each recommended article of clothing had originated, what the color was to be, who was to be the manufacturer. This really caught his attention, for he had various acquaintances in the clothing business that he suggested I contact. I reminded him that Mather had expressed his desire to settle those details. All I had to do was pass on a uniform—"uniform" meaning everyone in the field Park Service was to wear the same thing, thereby eliminating the wild assortment of boots, shoes, scarves, and hats with which our free-spirited men were now decorating themselves.

For the most part, they accepted a design by Mark Daniels, which was pretty much a combination of the Forest Service style and color with bits of the army here and there. For years, Mather and I could never totally

quash the ingenuity of our various officials when it came to their uniforms. Especially Colonel John White, later superintendent of Sequoia. I'll bet Mather fired him ten times for his rakish hats and swishing baton. (Of course, he was hired back every time.)

In general, plans were made for the 1918 tourist season or for after the war. The uncertainty of the war as well as the almost total lack of money put much on hold. However, I plodded along, putting my plans on paper for uniformity in building and landscaping, campground rules, acceptance of gifts to the government of land, pay scales, wildlife problems, expansion of the system (especially Sequoia and Yellowstone), information centers for the parks, and programs for rangers to enlighten and aid the tourists. I kept a file in my desk and when an idea struck would pull it out and jot it down.

And then there was Enos Mills once more. Lordy, how I used to pray he would just get off my back for a few months. He had misinterpreted a few lines in the annual report about parks in the Denver area. What about the Mount Evans region? Why had I spent so much time in California instead of Colorado? And on and on. I spent more energy on explanations than I should have, but his influence was enormous, and he was a dangerous fellow to cross.

A few weeks later he seemed to have forgotten the original gripe and now took off after me about Bob Yard: "I find that a number of National Park enthusiasts throughout the country do not trust him. For very good reasons I have not for more than a year. If it ever comes to a show-down I shall say so to officials higher up and also denounce him before the public."

It took a few letters to discover that Mills regarded Yard as a secret agent for the despised Forest Service and believed that he was using his official position "to screen the insidious work of the Forest Service." It took more letters and a lot of soft soap to quiet him on this subject—temporarily.

Although Mills was bad news in my life, I had good news too. Absolutely joyful news arrived with the resignation of our old enemy, Congressman John Joseph Fitzgerald, as of December 31, 1917.

Ever since returning from the West, I had been attacking the problem Fitzgerald had created concerning troops in Yellowstone. My main argument centered on the war: that soldiers were badly needed in Europe to fight the Germans, not loll around a national park. On September 25 I persuaded Secretary Lane to write Secretary of War Newton D. Baker

about the troops. I even sketched out a rough draft for him, so there'd be no mistake about our purpose.

Lane's letter stated: "The employment of troops in the protection of national parks, as you have again and again emphasized, is from every military point of view undesirable.... I propose to submit an estimate for an appropriation that will make possible the early withdrawal of the troops now stationed in the Yellowstone and the reorganization of the civilian ranger force. This estimate will be included in the budget of the National Park Service for the next fiscal year."

When Lane reached the next section of my outline, he looked up quizzically and asked, "Alright, don't you think we've gone far enough for this time?"

"Well, Mr. Secretary," I replied, "What have we got to lose? The generals over at the War Department have bigger things to think about. They may just accidentally overlook this demand." And so the memo continued: "Another question of policy that I believe we should submit to Congress through the medium of the estimates this year—should not the National Park Service, rather than the Engineer Corps of the Army, be charged hereafter with the construction and maintenance of roads in Yellowstone and Crater Lake National Parks? The Service has control of work of this character in all other national parks." As I wrote Mather the same day, "We are 'out for blood' this time."

My enthusiasm got ahead of events. Another letter to Mather on October 17 reported: "The Engineer Corps of the War Department double-crossed us on the Yellowstone and Crater Lake estimates. They did not give Secretary Baker a chance to look at Secretary Lane's letter until the day the estimates were to go in, and then it was too late for us to do anything with them. I hope I may never run across another body of men that I dislike as much as the Engineer Corps of the Army. They are the most determined and self-centered lot of men that draw salaries from the Government."

The end of Fitzgerald's reign of terror at the House Appropriations Committee and the elevation of Swager Sherley of Kentucky to his position brought about the removal of troops from Yellowstone and provided funds for the reorganization of the ranger force there. The last of the cavalry departed at the end of the 1917-18 fiscal year, and on June 10, 1918, Congress turned Yellowstone National Park over to the exclusive jurisdiction of the National Park Service, thus removing the Army Engineers from that park as well as from Crater Lake. It was the end of

sharing administration of national parks with other sectors of the federal government. "I guess you could call it the 'separation of powers,'" I wrote Mather.

Without warning, Mr. Mather suddenly appeared in Washington on November 5 and stated that he would resume his normal activities as director of the National Park Service. On the surface, we all deferred to him and gave the impression to the public that he was completely back to normal, but we carefully screened his mail, his phone calls, and everyone who wished to see him. I also made sure Weisenburg's instructions were carried out to the letter: "Let him come to the office and play director but you keep all problems away from him and you do all the work." In view of that, Lane, with Mather's consent, kept me in the position of acting director.

After breakfast and a workout at the gymnasium, Mather would come into his office about eleven o'clock, read his mail (which I had already screened for any problems or disturbing news), and dictate letters to his secretary. Then he would call me in for maybe an hour of discussion, go to lunch with friends, usually at the Cosmos Club, and seldom return to Interior. A favorite pastime was to rummage in the scrapbooks the Albrights had made for him.

I'm not entirely sure what he did most of the afternoons. Various people filled me in that, after a leisurely lunch with him, they might then accompany him to the zoo or the Smithsonian, drive in the country, or stroll along the Potomac. In any case, I was satisfied that he was contented and not involved in anything that might upset his health. I was also careful in letters I wrote to people interested in the Park Service to add that Mr. Mather was back and had enjoyed "a complete recovery." Although I wasn't all that confident, physically he looked healthier every day and appeared to be mentally bright and cheerful.

However, just as suddenly as he had arrived in Washington, he departed. He simply called me in one morning and told me that he was returning to Chicago—"two weeks here, two weeks in Chicago." No reason, nothing the matter. Only three weeks after his arrival, he pulled out.

That same day I had written Dr. Weisenburg: "He has grown stronger and healthier and is taking a great interest in his work, although he gets the blues once in a while." I added that Mather had been immersed in Desmond Company affairs, and "it is hard to keep him from worrying about them."

Actually, he had gotten so upset over Desmond's affairs, not knowing details, that I finally broke down one day and gave him all the information I had. I feared that his fretting over Desmond's mess would be more detrimental than just plain letting him have the facts. Happily, he worked over the financial sheets, dictated a few letters to Dohrmann, and appeared to be the better for satisfying his curiosity. I took the precaution, though, of letting Weisenburg know what I had done in case Mather's reaction turned out to be adverse.

I was at a loss to know why Mather had gone back to Chicago. I never did get the answer. Mrs. Mather wrote me to say she was worried about her husband's health, his cough. And all I learned from Dr. Weisenburg was that Mather was doing just fine, but he cautioned me not to discuss his former illness. "He knows nothing of his old lung trouble." Lung trouble? I never did know what all that meant and never asked. I was simply too relieved that there was no problem with his mental and nervous condition.

The year 1917 was drawing to a close. I can't say I was sorry to put it behind me. It had been a brutal time in some respects: Stephen Mather's prolonged illness and gradual recovery, organizing the Park Service, fighting for appropriations, setting up policies, fighting the commercial interests' attempts to use our parks, traveling thousands of miles but learning an encyclopedia about the National Park Service, its individual unit problems, reclamation, wild animals, and on and on. I felt I had matured, had tried to pattern myself in the image of my chief, Mr. Mather, and had been rewarded by a credible performance for him and the National Park Service.

Probably the worst thing about 1917 was that my work had kept me away from my lovely Grace entirely too much. Looking back, I realize that I saw very little of her until near the end of the year. She never complained. She always understood my compulsive need to fulfill what I regarded as my duty.

Not until December, when Mather had gone back to Chicago and government work slowed to a crawl, did Grace and I finally spend time together. And did we have fun! We had snowball fights in Rock Creek Park. We went to the zoo several times. We had a lovely weekend in Annapolis. We even wrote an article for the *Northwestern Motorist Magazine* together. I contributed the facts, and, as she was a much better writer, she put it all together. It was really exciting when we saw it in print early in

1918. Although it included pictures of Mather and me, the editors deleted Grace's name as co-author. Such was the lot of women in 1918.

Over the holidays we spent many evenings catching up with friends, the Yards, the Marshalls, and the Gidneys. We went out alone to the theater, to dinner and dancing. On New Year's Eve we remembered Mather's dinner a year ago. We decided to splurge some carefully saved cash and go to the same hotel and celebrate.

And what did we have to celebrate? The main thing was that we had managed to survive this past year. We had overcome the strain of separation, the concern for Mather's health, and for me the stress of organizing the new Park Service and making the solitary crucial decisions affecting its future. Balancing all this was the fact that we had grown stronger through the experiences. Grace summed it up: "We're young. We're healthy. We have a love that just grows deeper as it gets tested by fire."

We were always confident about our future. Especially now, with Mr. Mather apparently recovered and eager to take over once more, we felt we would soon be free of Washington. So on New Year's Eve, had we had been drinkers, we would have had a toast in champagne to that.

Little did we know that 1918 would be nearly as much of a trial as 1917.