Enter Stephen Tyng Mather
1914-15

I never referred to Stephen Mather as Steve or even Stephen. He was always "Mr. Mather." That summed up the love and respect I had for the man. He altered my life forever and made me a better man for it. There was an old saying: "These fellas remind me of each other—they're so different." That fit Mr. Mather and me. And yet the longer we were together, the more we melded into one team, an indivisible unit. The relationship we formed in 1914 not only deeply enriched my life, but I believe proved of great significance for our beloved country.

It all began in December 1914. By now I was handling most of the work assigned to Adolph Miller's vacated office as well as tasks in Secretary Lane's office on a regular basis, various interbureau problems, and congressional matters. I also was forming plans to leave Washington permanently when the winter was over.

Unknown to me, Lane was investigating a new man to fill Miller's position. It came about in this way. There were always hundreds of letters to Lane with complaints of one sort or another. He was a diligent worker and actually read scores of these and, what's more, paid attention to some. He even answered a few in longhand. One day in the late fall of 1914, a particularly critical but very interesting letter came to his attention. It was written by a Stephen T. Mather of Chicago. It seems he was a native Californian, had become a millionaire with a borax business he had out there, was a member of the Sierra Club, made frequent vacation trips, climbed mountains, and took an active interest in the national parks of

the region—and happened to be a graduate of the University, of California.

Mather's letter was an angry protest against the exploitation of the parks, the conspiracy of private businessmen to steal land on which the giant sequoias grew, and the attitude of the government—the Department of the Interior in particular—in ignoring, actually abandoning, its sacred trust to protect them. The letter was long and contained specifics as to his complaints.

Lane was intrigued by this letter. A short time later he visited Chicago, talked to a friend named John Wigmore, dean of the Law School at Northwestern University, and inquired whether he knew a Stephen Mather. Wigmore did, and he later told of his relationship with Mather:

> Somewhere around 1900, a young friend of mine, an instructor in chemistry in the University of Chicago, used to do the analysis of samples of borax for Stephen Mather's company. Mather was just succeeding in his independent struggle against the so-called borax trust and his industry was headquartered in Chicago. It must have been through this young chemist, Frank Burnett Dains, that I first made the acquaintance of Stephen Mather. Mather being a patriotic Californian had organized in Chicago a California Club, and was President of it, and, as I was born and brought up in California, Mather was always urging me to be faithful in my attendance of the California Club. This accounts for my personal acquaintance with him. In the meantime, another chapter of acquaintance was going on with Franklin Lane. When I left Harvard College in 1883 and went back to San Francisco, a group of young men organized a Municipal Reform League. Frank Lane and myself were two of the active members. The League broke up when the young men were separated by fate in different directions, but Lane and I had kept up our acquaintance and mutual respect and affection. So in 1912 Woodrow Wilson was elected President and Frank Lane, in 1913, after having been Interstate Commerce Commissioner, was selected as Secretary of the Interior, and one day in 1914, when he was passing through Chicago, he had this interview at the Blackstone Hotel. The name of Stephen Mather had been mentioned to him, but I have no recollection how he had learned of the name. But he did *not* know Mather personally. So I arranged a luncheon in order that he and Mather could become acquainted, and he could make up his mind whether Mather was his man to take up the administration of the

National Park System. Mather's company by that time was very prosperous, and Mather was a highly patriotic admirer of the possibilities of California. I suppose that this was the reason why I thought that he would be a good man to take up the question of improving the National Park administration—that we need more good citizens who are able and willing to relinquish the pursuit of the dollar and undertake public service. At any rate, you may take it as certain that this meeting at the Blackstone Hotel was the reason why Frank Lane selected Stephen Mather to be the Director of the National Park System. I do not remember who was the third person at the Blackstone meeting.*

[Signature]

* In fact, I was the third person.

The story of Lane and Mather has been recorded in history quite differently. I myself probably cemented it into fact, as I think it was the story circulating around the Interior Department before Mather actually came to work there. The tale went that Lane and Mather were old friends from the University of California and that when Mather complained about the state of the national parks, Lane wrote him: "Dear Steve: If you don't like the way the national parks are run, why don't you come down to Washington and run them yourself?"

In reality, they didn't know each other. Mather had graduated from the University of California with a Bachelor of Letters degree in 1887. Although registered in the class of 1889, Lane never did graduate. Adolph Miller, who knew both men quite well, graduated in Mather's class and affirmed that the two were not personally acquainted until 1914. So let's go back and straighten out the history of Stephen Mather's trail from borax executive to assistant to the secretary of the interior.

The Sierra Club had been organized in 1892 with John Muir as its president. In 1904 Stephen Mather had become a member when his attention had been caught by the twin crises in which that organization was embroiled—the proposal to dam the beautiful Hetch Hetchy Valley of Yosemite and the recession of a huge section of that park, including the Minarets and Devils Postpile, at the insistence of mining and logging interests.

The following year Mather joined the annual mountain outing of the Sierra Club, this one at Mount Rainier in Washington. During this climb, he became good friends with Will Colby, Joseph Le Conte, and others with like interests in the Sierra Club, as well as members of the Mazamas, a similar organization of the Northwest. Through discussions around the campfire at night, the faith, devotion, and philosophy of these associates of John Muir made a deep impression on him.

A few years later, in 1912, Mather made the first of his own mountain trips in the Sierra. Again he met Colby and other Sierra Club members. One of the highlights of Mather's life was the opportunity to have a long talk with the legendary Muir, whose whole life at this time was devoted to fighting the Hetch Hetchy dam. To save this twin of the Yosemite Valley from flooding simply to provide a never-ending source of water for the city of San Francisco was the flame of Muir's passion, which caught fire in Mather. Muir had also interested him in another of his vital concerns—the addition of vast majestic Sierra areas to Sequoia National Park or, better still, the creation of a new park between Yosemite and Sequoia. Mather picked up that banner too.

Also in 1912, Mather came to Washington and attended the congressional hearings on the Hetch Hetchy proposal. Little is known of his involvement, if any, in these hearings. However, he must have made an impression there, because in June 1913 Robert Bradford Marshall, chief geographer of the U.S. Geological Survey, answering a letter from Mather, stated: "Yes, indeed, I well remember, and still appreciate the pleasure of having met you at the memorable Hetch Hetchy Hearing in Washington last Fall, and I feel quite positive that your presence had considerable to do with the powerful decision of the Department in answer to the San Francisco question."

In 1913 Mather was back in California. He learned that his friend from college days, Adolph Miller, was about to leave for Washington to become assistant to Secretary of the Interior Lane and would be in charge of national parks. Mather quickly arranged a meeting and discussed the proposed extension of Sequoia with him. He obtained from Miller the latest maps of the region, sent to him from the Geological Survey by Robert Marshall. Then he contacted Marshall, writing that he had been "out in God's country" and had been involved with Colby, Miller, and others concerning the Sequoia project and offered to help in any way possible.

Marshall picked up on this overture, for he saw an opening to offer his ideas on national parks to Miller. As Marshall wrote to Will Colby:

> I should be glad to know Prof. Miller as intimately as he would allow, but solely for the good of the national park question as a whole, as you know one of my greatest delights is to help the cause in any way possible. Secretary Lane, of course, is busy beyond reason, and it is a human impossibility for any man to grasp all of the details of the propositions that come before the Department of the Interior. He must, therefore, of necessity, rely upon others to advise him before final action, and if I can be of use in any way in that line, either direct to Secretary Lane or through his assistant, Mr. Miller, I shall be more than glad to do so.

The same day Marshall wrote to Mather, advising him that Hetch Hereby would eventually go to San Francisco, but that the ones who had fought for Hetch Hetchy should now use their influence to work on a new concept for the Sierras. It would be a park that contained "what might be called three Yosemites—the Tehipite, Kings River Canyon, and Kern River Canyon." He closed his letter by writing: "I am grateful for your remarks to Mr. Miller regarding my knowledge of parks in general, and I shall be very glad indeed to give him any information I possess on the subject, and hope that he may have the time in the near future, to pump me dry."

Mather jumped on Marshall's suggestion about working for a Sequoia extension or creation of a new park. From then on, he kept in close touch with Marshall, receiving new maps of the Sierra from him, arranging for possible publication of his articles on the parks, and finally setting a date at the Prairie Club of Chicago for him to lecture on the national parks.

In August 1913 Marshall, in Washington, wrote Mather about the California situation, saying that "Muir and the Sierra Club are doing all they can for the cause at long distance, but it needs some real live man on the ground here to handle the matter personally. I wish it were possible for you to shoulder the task."

Was this the first seed to be planted in Mather's brain?

In March 1914 Mather proposed a "Tahoe to Mt. Whitney" trip. Marshall enthusiastically agreed to join the party if official duties didn't get in the way, but he would at least provide information, maps, and suggestions on other people to accompany Mather. Deeply affected by the

back country of the Sierra Nevada and intense discussions with his companions, Mather came out of that trip not only a devotee of the area and concerned about its future but also an emerging supporter of the concept of a national park service.

And so it would have been perfectly logical to assume that Mather talked these matters over with his friend Miller—and possibly Marshall—and then wrote the letter described in history. No one I knew had ever actually seen the legendary letters to and from Lane, but the factual background fits the picture.

Now back to events after the luncheon meeting of Lane and Mather at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. Lane was obviously impressed by Mather's personality, energy, and knowledge. But he had another reason for considering him to fill Miller's position. Lane was ever alert to get men of the Miller-Mather type, for he himself had never had an adequate income. He had always been dependent on his small salary, and these men were in a position to do things with and for him that he couldn't do himself.

One day Miller called to alert me that Lane was considering a man to fill his former job, and this fellow was coming to Washington to discuss the possibility. He didn't give me a name, but I soon learned it was Mather when, a few days after this conversation, I was summoned to Lane's office to meet him.

Mather and Lane had been closeted for some time, having a long discussion in the secretary's spacious office. Lane had outlined the work Miller had been brought to Washington to do and what had been accomplished, in particular about the federally owned parks. He stressed the fact that they were orphans. They were split among three departments—War, Agriculture, and Interior. They were anybody's business and therefore nobody's business. The time was ripe for some person who really cared to wade into the problem, get them united in a strong, separate bureau, and get Americans acquainted with their own scenic and historic sites instead of spending their time and money in foreign countries. Lane made it clear that Mather's job would mainly be to lobby Congress for a national parks bureau. Lane pointed out that he was hog-tied on that score for he was a "marked man" because of leading the fight for Hetch Hetchy.

Mather had seemed to be extremely interested as long as the conversation stayed on parks. Then Lane added divisions that Mather would be responsible for overseeing—the hospital for the insane, territorial problems, the Bureau of Education, and others. Mather blanched and protested

that he just couldn't work with all the government red tape, policy differences, and situations he knew nothing about.

Lane hurriedly assured Mather that he wouldn't be concerned with much of anything- except parks, that he'd be practically a free agent. "Just get out in the country, size up the park problems, and do a broad public relations job, so that you can convince the Congress of establishing an independent park service bureau. Besides that, this is a real opportunity for you to do a great public service." Not knowing the man, he probably didn't realize the final bit of persuasion was the type of thing that got through to Mather.

But Mather still had lingering doubts. "This is all so new to me. I have never been under restrictions or a lot of regulations and I'm just not temperamentally fitted for this type of work in Washington. I'll probably get into trouble before the job is an hour old."

Lane replied: "I'll give you a young fellow who knows the ropes and who'll handle the legal and other hurdles you'll run into. He's the man to keep you out of trouble, someone who knows the department, can handle the routine administrative work, and—wonder of wonders—a fellow graduate of the University of California whom Miller brought with him last year."

It was at this point that Lane sent for me.

From the moment I walked into the room and met Stephen Mather, I was struck by his appearance and personality, and, oddly enough, I have always said that I instantly felt a strong kinship with him. He was old enough to be my father, a bit taller than my six feet, with prematurely white hair, piercing blue eyes, and a smile that radiated friendliness, gentleness, and kindness.

Lane told Mather and me to go sit down over at the north end of the room beside an open hearth where a fire was burning brightly. "Talk it over," he said. "Let Albright explain the work already done, the problems ahead, and the situation for the future. He's been on this thing for some time, knows the roadblocks."

Mather and I settled down together on the brown leather couch. He immediately threw the ball to me by asking about my background in California. Where had I come from? When had I been at Berkeley? Why had I come to Washington with Miller, and what did I intend to do with my life in the future? He riveted his attention on my answers, interrupting frequently to pose new questions, jabbing his finger to make a point, rest-

lessly moving head, body, and hands as he talked. His was a lightning fast brain with an electric nervous energy to go with it.

When he seemed satisfied that he had learned enough about me (for the time being), he switched to interrogation about the position he had been asked to fill. He listened to my summary of St. Elizabeth's Hospital and other fringe matters with which he would be dealing. Then impatiently he cut me off and said he wanted to hear about the *real subject* at hand, the national parks. What was the situation with them? What had Miller and I done so far? What was the outlook for the bill to create a park service that was before the Congress? These and a dozen more rapid-fire questions were hurled at me.

I replied slowly, carefully, and as completely as I could. My main emphasis was on the fact that no one person was exclusively concerned with the national parks and monuments. Acker was grossly overworked as it was. Miller had been involved in too many extra activities. I tried to paint a clear picture of why he could make a real difference. My detailed resume of the progress of legislation through Congress, impressions of individual members, and thoughts on future action seemed to interest and impress him. His deep blue eyes bored into me as he became very quiet and thoughtful, questioning me on every point.

Then he abruptly switched topics by telling me why he thought he didn't want to take the position offered, repeating the reasons he had just presented to Lane. Naturally, I didn't give him any arguments, but he had so interested and excited me with his personality and energy that I found I was trying to make it easier for him to accept the job.

This conversation went on for several hours with no interruption. At last Mather put it to me that if I stayed with him, he'd go along for a year. I protested that I had been about to leave Washington, that I was engaged to a California girl, that I had to make some money to get married, and that I had a legal career waiting for me in San Francisco with Will Colby or with some other firm. As Mather knew Colby quite well, he understood and nodded agreement with my reasoning. But the longer we talked, the more our minds were in harmony. Mather's doubts gradually melted into enthusiasm, and his enthusiasm whetted my interest.

Finally, as it was getting late and Lane was obviously getting anxious to quit for the day, Mather and I rose to leave. Putting his arm around my shoulders as though we were old and fast friends, he said, "Albright, you and I would do well together. Keep your mind open. Let's think about it

for a while. This isn't the time for promises, but if you'll stay with me for a year, I'll consider coming down to Washington to run the parks for a year. Think it over. We'll get together after the holidays." And, turning to Lane, he added, "I don't want to make any decisions today. I want to go home and think about all this. I have a family. I have a thriving business to consider. But if we agree on the action to be taken, it's a real possibility that I'll take a shot at running the parks for one year. And I really mean, *just one year."*

After the Christmas holidays, in early January 1915, Mather returned to Washington. He told Lane that he would accept the offer, but with conditions. He would do everything possible to accomplish the goal of a national park bureau, *but* he would only stay one year. He also stated that he wanted Albright as his assistant "to keep me out of jail."

So Lane summoned me once more. Mather told me directly what his conditions were, and, although I had agonized over the thought of remaining much longer in the Interior Department, now I didn't hesitate a minute. "Yes, Mr. Mather, if you want me to help you for a year, I'll do it." There: I'd said it. I really hadn't asked for time to consider the proposal or even ask Grace. That was the power of the man.

I would be less than honest if I didn't add that Mather made my acceptance a lot happier by promising me an extra one thousand dollars a year to augment my government salary of sixteen hundred. This would be paid out of his own pocket. However, at the time I agreed to remain in Washington, I was unaware of this offer. It was made after I read him a letter from Grace in which she approved of my staying on in Washington, but gently reminded me that she would like to be a part of my life there. This extra pay from a private source was perfectly legal at the time. Within six months he raised his payment to me to two hundred dollars a month. Incidentally Mather himself only received a salary of $2,750 per year. Fortunately, he was already a millionaire, so he didn't care.

Mather moved to Washington immediately and took his oath of office on January 21, 1915. As he was not bringing his wife and daughter to Washington, I located a nice suite of rooms for him at the Powhatan Hotel at Eighteenth and Pennsylvania. This was close to the office and also to the place where I was living. It was very convenient because we were both workaholics. He frequently had me come along to dinner with him and then spend the evening in his suite working on departmental problems.

After he assumed his position as assistant to the secretary, Lane showed him around the office he was to occupy—one adjoining his own with a

separate room for myself in between. I had taken the liberty of inviting several high officials of the department to attend the ceremony. When everyone had left except Lane, Mather, and me, Lane shook hands and left us. A moment after he had shut the door, his big, round, smiling face reappeared, and he said, "Hey, Steve, I forgot to ask your politics." Before Mather could answer, the door closed once more. Lane did not ask his politics, then or ever, although he surely knew that Mather was a Bull Moose Roosevelt Progressive. After lunch in the department dining hall, Mather and I toured the building, stopping in to visit with various people on the way. When Mather had seen enough of his new surroundings, we walked six blocks to the U.S. Geological Survey offices so that I could introduce him to George Otis Smith, the director, one of my mentors, and a great friend of national parks.

The next day of Stephen Mather's education was when I took him to the Capitol. The first office we visited was that of Representative John E. Raker, the co-sponsor of the bill to create a national park service. The two men hit it off as though they had known each other for years. They had many mutual friends and experiences in the Sierra Nevada. Most interesting of all, their ideas for this future park bureau were almost identical. Raker grew more cordial as they talked and was obviously excited that the Interior Department now had a man who had the authority to act decisively on behalf of the national park legislation he had introduced. Raker rushed to a closet in his room and brought back a stack of copies of his bill for us to pass around to people who might help us. On the spot we made plans for strategy at the hearings before the Public Lands Committee. Raker then hurried us down the hall to an office to meet another member of that committee and, after getting his approval, swept us along to meet more strategic congressmen. As I saw time and again through the years with Mather, his personality and enthusiastic energy carried everything before him as he charmed one important person after another.

The late afternoon forced us to call a halt to this frenetic activity. We settled on a visit to the Library of Congress, where Mather obtained a Congressional Directory to bone up on the members of the Senate and House committees we would face in our hearings.

When I got into bed that night, I finally had a chance to think. I came to the conclusion that Stephen Mather and I would make quite a combination. He was an experienced public relations man, created instant rapport with strangers, had a personality that radiated poise, friendliness, and charm, could talk easily with anyone he met, confidently instilling

perfect strangers with his enthusiasm. It was hard for me to dig up reasons for my being a help to Mather except that I was knowledgeable about Washington, the Interior Department, and the Congress, was quite good at detail and administrative work, which he obviously hated, could help with legal problems, and, above all, was loyal and conscientious. And, at twenty-four years old, I was as healthy as an ox, able to work half the night as well as Sundays and holidays for him. Most of all, I so admired him that I found I was imitating him right from the beginning.