

*Prof. Thomson  
got this and sent it to me.  
J.F.M.*

RADIO BROADCAST

February 20, 1937

J.F. Macdonald

(Professor of English,  
(University College, U. of T.)

"I see a great land waiting for its own people to come and take possession of it", wrote Edward Carpenter in Towards Democracy. This is the appropriate text which Miss M.B. Williams uses for her admirable little book, GUARDIANS OF THE WILD. In less space than a hundred and fifty pages Miss Williams tells the story of the beginnings and the development of our Canadian National Parks. It is a story Canadians will be proud to read in this account written by one who has herself had much to do with it from that day in 1911, when, a few months before the Liberal Government went out of office, they passed the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act by which the existing reserves were created National Parks and were given a separate Branch to administer them. In the twenty-five years since then Miss Williams has seen the transformation wrought under the wise guidance of her chief, Mr. J.B.Harkin.

After a chapter entitled Beginnings, in which the steps leading up to the Parks Act of 1911 are detailed, Miss Williams proceeds to describe The Parks in the Mountains - Banff, Jasper, and Waterton Lakes. Glacier National Park of the United States is immediately to the south of this last. A few years ago, in commemoration of a century of peace between two good neighbors, the United States and Canada constituted these two reserves into an International Peace Park. It is a fitting region for a park of peace since it is not only a very beautiful part of the mountains but, according to Indian legend, a happy land where evil spirits do not come. Banff and Jasper, which straddle the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia, are much better known in Eastern Canada, I suppose because each is sponsored by one of our two great railways. The CP.R. runs through Banff and the C.N.R. through Jasper 150 miles to the north.

Miss Williams uses her brief space well in the hopeless effort to describe the glories of this great mountain region which extends 1200 miles to the north in a belt 440 miles wide. Even an eagle, which the traveller is sure to see in summer poised high



above the valley where his train runs, even an eagle, with his telescopic eyes, can take in little of this tumbled masses of mountains. I haven't the faintest idea how many eagles there are in the mountains, but if each pair had 100 square miles all to themselves for hunting, there would be room for more than 5000 pairs. Out of this vast area the Dominion Government has set aside these two parks and is now building a motor road to run from the heart of one to the heart of the other, 150 miles of road from north to south high up on the mountain sides. When it is finished there will be few motor trips in the world to rival it for scenic beauty.

I am not going to quote Miss Williams and I am not going to begin raving myself about the marvellous beauty of these two parks. For I had the great good fortune to spend some days in each of them two years ago. Lake Louise with its reflection of the glacier, the lovelier Emerald Lake, the thrilling ride over the Yoho Trail--it all comes back too vividly for description. And the shimmering light on Lac Beauvert at breakfast in the Lodge at Jasper Park. I have never seen anything like the play of colours on its placid surfaces in which is mirrored the lovely peak of Mt. Edith Cavell. The broad valley of the Athabaska at Jasper gives a sense of spaciousness and grandeur that is very restful as one gazes on the friendly peaks that sweep in a great circle around the level valley where Jasper Lodge and its numerous cottages rise beside the lake as if they were part of nature itself. But I am not going to try to tell you about the heritage we have in these parks. Read what Miss Williams has to say and then multiply her praise many times and you will approach the unbelievable truth.

The part of her book that will hold the interest of most readers is probably the chapter entitled Sanctuary. This tells how the game began to come back as soon as shooting and trapping were made illegal in the parks. How did the animals know that they would be safe within these boundaries. There is plenty of evidence that in some strange ways news of an area of safety spread through the mountains. Goats and mountain sheep moved south from their haunts twenty miles to the north of Jasper and have stayed in the broad park area ever since and greatly increased in number. And they seem now to know



that the old warfare between men and beasts is over. They are still shy but seemingly not afraid. The clownish bears are far from shy. Indeed they have almost risen to the level of human racketeers. At any rate they sometimes hold up visitors in their quest of food and are not pleased if nothing is at hand to suit their taste. The moose are plentiful and the graceful caribou, that were almost extinct, are not uncommon.

The story of Canada's buffalo herd, now grown to several thousand in their great park at Wainwright, is told effectively by Miss Williams. She points out, as so many have done before her, the mad slaughter of the great herds that once roamed the plains, literally in hundreds of thousands, some say in millions. The white man in his greed for profit made no attempt at conservation. Let the future look after itself. The Indian, with his communal life, was far wiser. He knew that the future of his people was bound up with these great herds of buffalo who supplied him with food and clothes and tents. He killed only for need and over the body of his victim breathed the ancestral prayer, "Forgive me, my brother, if I take your life to save my own."

As I said, this chapter on Sanctuary and the one on Bringing back the Buffalo, will be read with the greatest interest. And surely, too, with the most satisfaction. The Commissioner for our National Parks and all his staff--most of all the rangers in the parks themselves, must have a deep sense of work well done when they see the animals living in peace and increasing in numbers in these great areas where they are safe from their most dangerous enemy - man. The story of the coming of the animals will match anything in Kipling's Jungle Tales. How did that herd of moose which had its feeding-grounds near the head waters of the Saskatchewan learn of Jasper Park? It must have learned in some way, for it climbed a high range of mountains and came down to live in the safety of that park. And a few years later a herd of the almost extinct Douglas caribou climbed the Great Divide and moved into the park. Here is a book for supplementary reading in our schools. It has all the glamour of romance and it is true. Moreover there are not many books so likely to breed a wholesome pride in our country.



After all, a country is more than a place in which to get rich quick. Miss Williams brings home this truth to the reader. She makes one realize how these great areas are really People's Parks where we can go for holidays that send us back refreshed in body and soul with a lasting memory of lovely places. Those of you who have not had a chance to visit any of these areas cannot do better than read this admirable little book with its dozen or more fine illustrations. It is the most persuasive argument to See Canada First that I have yet read. When you finish it, you understand why Miss Williams began with that fine vision of Edward Carpenter's "I see a great land waiting for its own people to come and take possession of it. I hope the people will be worthy of their land.

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These two books (Susannah, a Little Girl with the Mounties, Muriel Denison) are the best kind of propaganda for a sane and healthy patriotism. For if Guardians of the Wild tells us about the beauty of our land, Susannah shows that the land has guardians that are worthy of it. I am very grateful to both these women for their books, etc.....

**JB Harkin to MB Williams, Feb 1937**

**Transcription / Additional Information**

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