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John Muir

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THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 20, 1876.

SUMMERING IN THE SIERRA.

John Muir Shakes the Dust of the Town from his Feet and Flees to the Mountains.

The Calaveras Grove—Some Facts About the Sequoia System.

[SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BULLETIN.]

BIG TREE GROVE, July 13, 1876.

Ho, weary town worker, come to the woods and rest! I wish it were possible to compel all to come; not that I am just at this moment seized with a fit of Quixotic philanthropy, for with Thoreau, I am convinced that the profession of doing good is full. It is hard, however, to see so many of the best of one's fellow-beings diseased with duties when Nature's rest-cure is so specific and available. Californians are not lazy; on the contrary, we work too much and rest too little, hoping all the while in a vague way to escape the deplorable results. There is something inexpressibly mean in arithmetical arguments. They have the advantage, however, of being clear-edged and universally appreciable. I will therefore venture to offer the following:

THE UTILITY OF REST.

Rest pays even in a pecuniary way, for one will do more and better work in a lifetime by taking a good summer Sabbath every year: and those Sabbath months, in the total length of one's life, will rather be added, with good compound interest, at the end.

This appears so plain to people who halt long enough to think at all, and is so generally granted, that it seems idle to dwell upon it; yet, nevertheless, nature's rest law is practically ignored, and nervous toil has become a chronic and contagious disease. We are fond of laws, and elect men to make them by the thousand; then why not enact laws of rest, compelling, at least, one annual exodus to the woods. Compulsory education may be good; compulsory recreation may be better. "The groves were God's first temples,"—pity they are not also the last. In the midst of this Centennial freedom, with all its glad exultation, how many are slaves, duty bound, business bound, in ways wholly unnatural and unpardonable.

Means of escape from the restless atmospheres of cities seem perfect—navigable seas and rivers and smooth iron roads with well-appointed transportation companies eager to serve. Yet, after all, how really hard it is to escape the habitual bondage of one's own elected or inherited work. You cannot leave your business? Yes, but you *will* leave it. There stand the jolly undertaker and the prayer-saying priest, and the pall-bearers, black cloth and countenance; and they will give you a ride—take you on at least one excursion, and take you too soon. A ride into the green woods is better for most people, whether taken on the cars or lumbering stage, however finely the hearse may be decorated with crosses and feather-dusters. In less than a day and a quarter from San Francisco you may be in the bosom of the Calaveras forests, out of the hard commercial heart of the town into the balmy woods—from nervous noise to the still, small voices of nature; from invisible iron-bound waterworks to the crystal mountain fountains.

HOW TO GET TO THE CALAVERAS GROVE—A BEAUTIFUL SPOT.

I left the city at 4 P. M., skimmed across the pictures of the coast range to Stockton, where I rested as well as a mountaineer may in so flat and sedimentary a city. Next morning we crossed many a mile of granger bread-fields to Milton, where we arrived between 9 and 10 o'clock in the forenoon. Here we took the stage and at once began to ascend the Sierra foothills, winding easily along ravines, through cattle ranges and deserted gold-fields to the little sun-burned village called Murphy's Camp; thence up through the piny woods to the famous Big Tree grove, where we arrived just as the last of the evening sun-gold was fading from the giant trees. To the free mountaineer all the woods are accessible alike from the firs that girdle icy Shasta to the giant forests of the Tule; but the feeble or timebound must follow ways and means, and I know of none better than those of Calaveras. The Big Tree Hotel is located on the edge of a flowery glade in the very heart of the woods, forming a fine centre for the student, and delicious resting place for the

weary. Here one no longer finds himself on the world, but *in* it, pervaded with the subtle essences of the woods. Every leaf and flower gives out fragrance like a fountain, spicing all the air. Sauntering in the woods, every sight and sound is invigorating; the crisp peppery crackle of the dry needles underfoot, the careless chatter of the squirrels overhead, and the flowers, pines, grand Sequoia Kings, all inspired with immortal sunshine.

THE GROVE.

The flowery leafiness of this grove is one of its most charming characteristics. Lilies, violets, and trientalis, cover the ground along the glen; and carpets of the blooming chamæbatia are outspread where the light falls free, forming a beautiful ground of color for the brown sequoia trunks. The underbrush in the shadiest portion of the grove is chiefly rubus, dogwood, hazel, maple, buckthorn, and yew—rising above one another and motting the air to a height of fifteen or twenty feet with their various leaves and flowers. Two of the largest sequoias have been killed, one of these, called oddly enough, "The Mother of the Forest," when all sequoia are both father and mother, was flayed alive, the bark having been removed in sections, and set up in the London Exposition. The other was cut down because some one wanted to dance on the stump, and the noble monarch now lies a mass of ruins overrun with rubbish and weeds, while a paltry fungus-like pavilion has been erected on the stump with the surface planed smooth for a dancing floor. Most of the larger trees have been slightly disfigured with black glaring names carved on marble tablets and counter-sunk in the brown bark, producing a shabby, tombstone appearance; while the names themselves are a grotesque mixture of Misters and Misses, Professors, Generals and Bishops; batchelors, old maids, graces, etc. But with these exceptions the grove has been well preserved, that is, let alone, the flowers and underbrush in particular retaining their fine, pure wildness unimpaired.

COMPARISON OF GROVES.

This grove is remarkable as being the northernmost of the species yet discovered. The southern boundary is on the head of Deer creek, a distance from here of nearly 200 miles. I might also observe in this connection that the Calaveras Grove, like those of the Tuolumne and Merced, are less ancient in general aspect than the grand forests farther south—as if the species had first established itself on the southern extremity of the range.

The "South Calaveras Grove," which by the way is I think within the bonds of Tuolumne county, lies about six miles from here on a tributary of the Stanislaus, and next to the Fresno Grove is the largest of the isolated congregation of Sequoia in the entire belt. It occupies about a square mile of area in a sheltered glen and has the advantage of wildness nearly pure. The trail from here conducts over a series of ridges and valleys superbly forested, and commanding glorious landscapes in which one would delight to rove and revel forever.

The trees in both these groves are perhaps a little taller than those growing farther south, some specimens surpassing 300 feet in height, but none that I measured exceed 85 feet in circumference four feet from the ground. Of course these little sequoia patches, hemmed in by the pines, cannot compare in grand impressiveness with the majestic forests that fill the basins of the Kaweah and Tule, but those are inaccessible to the ordinary tourist, and these northern groups, with their carriages and hotels, will doubtless be favorite spots for many years to come.

BEAUTY FOR ASHES.

Most of the main ridges of the Northern Sierra are capped with lava, and it is exceedingly interesting to learn how these remnants of ancient fire-floods are crumbled into garden and forest soils. I found frail, lovely flowers growing down over the ashy lips of the Mono craters, Ennanus and the splendid Yellow Mentzelia blooming confidently on the very hearths and firesides of nature, thus literally giving "beauty for ashes;" and I found the sombre lava tables of the Feather river fairly covered with a stratum of the golden bloom of violets and radiant compositæ, explaining those stupendous fiery manifestations of what is called destructive energy, as expressions of nature's eternal love, however terrible they may at first appear. Here I find the doctrine of love still more grandly expressed; for not only the flowers, but the giant sequoias are growing upon ancient lava, forming the noblest illustration of the giving of beauty for ashes I have ever yet beheld.

JOHN MUIR.