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The National Parks and Forest Reservations

John Muir

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ONE fine calm day last summer, when Professor Sergeant, General Abbot, and myself were going through the California redwoods, admiring their wonderful beauty and grandeur and silence, we came suddenly upon a scene of disorder. At the foot of a shallow dell, where a little stream crosses the way, we discovered three Indians, a white man, and a horse, all in wild motion—especially the horse. He was a good-looking animal, well bred apparently, but laboring under furious excitement—snorting, growing foam upon his lips, straining and braying the air, then dropping on his knees as if reeling to stand of his head, plunging back and forth in blind fury, butting his master like a goat, butting the bank on one side of the road and the gnarled base of one of the giant trees on the other, as if trying to break his neck, his eyes staring wildly, while he steamed and quivered and threw off splashes of froth from his widely distended nostrils. The Indians scrambled into the bushes out of danger, and the bewildered white man, holding on to the halter and dodging about to avoid being kicked, piled Edward in all his current of despair. We all knew something about ourselves and gave no assistance. Everybody was puzzled. What could be the matter with the animal? He seemed to be torn and tossed by devils. At length, when we were at our wit's end, a yellow-jacket was found in his ear. Then the excitement seemed excessively reasonable, and of course, after the maddening insect was got rid of, the storm subsided as quickly as it rose.

And last February, when the wild storm of protest cauglit by the West against the grand new forest reservations proclaimed by President Cleveland, I thought of that poor horse, and said, "These men must have yellow-jackets in their ears." Gold stings worse than the wasps of the woods, and gives rise to far more unreasonable and unexplainable behavior. "All our precious mountains," they screamed, "with their stores of timber and grass, silver and gold, fertile valleys and streams—all the natural resources of our great growing States are set aside from use, smothered up in mere pleasure-gounds for wild beasts and a set of sick, rich, dawdling sentimentals. For this purpose being made, kicked and every current of industry damned. Will our people stand this? No-o-o!" Which in plain English means, "Let us steal and destroy in peace."

Judging by the number and violence of these protests, one would be led to believe that 'most everybody was against the reservation system, none heartily for it. But in truth it is far otherwise. Probably more than ninety per cent. of the people in the States in which the new reservations lie are in favor of them, or at least of some form of them. The matter is a war of nerves. For our travels last summer we talked with all sorts of settlers—miners, prospectors, merchants, etc.—and I cannot recall a single instance in which objection was made to a rational government forest policy by any one not interested in plunder.

Now, unfortunately, many of the best men in the country have been drawn over to the opposition through cunningly devised fables.

Much is said on questions of this kind about "the greatest good for the greatest number," but the greatest number is too often found to be number one. It is never the greatest number in the common meaning of the term that make the greatest noise and stir on questions mixed with money. One man with a thousand-dollar yellow-jacket in his ear will make more bewildering noise and do more effective kicking and fighting on certain public measures than a million working-men minding their own business, and whose cash interests are not visibly involved. But as soon as light comes, the awakened million creates a public opinion that overcomes wrong, however cunningly veiled. When the opposition first appeared in the newspapers many of gods call. The reason and system are drawn: the government commission has made the mistake of recommending too many large reserves at once, and this
slipping into the
sources, forests
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This main object of this proposed legislation
ages of the fires now devouring the
and surely
reckless money-crazed persons with yellow - jackets in
A strip of the grandest woods in the world, ranging
the broad, rough, complicated Rocky
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In Congress
was made in 1897, the
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and enrolling in the various states, under which
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June 5, 1897.

Amined would require a book of many volumes. I have only space enough left here to say that all we saw last summer, added to what we had seen in these woods on excursions made in many other summers, only showed more fully that not only should all the reserves established be maintained, but that every remaining acre of unentered forest-bearing land in all the country, not more valuable for agriculture than for tree-growing, should be reserved, protected, and administered by the Federal government for the public good forever.