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Letter from John Muir to [Jeanne C.] Carr, [1874 Sep].

John Muir

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[Sept, 1874]

Yosemite Valley

Dear Mrs Carr. Here again are
 pinetrees & the wind & living rock &
 water. I met two of my buses on
 one of the pebble ripples of the river where
 I used to be with them. Most of the
 meadow gardens are disenchanting &
 dead. Yet I found a few mint-spikes
 & asters & brave sunful golden rods &
 a patch of the tiny mimulus ^{that has} two spots
 on ^{each} lip. The fragrance & the color
 & the form, & the whole spiritual expression
 of golden rods are hopeful & strength-
 giving beyond any other flowers that I know.
 A single spike is sufficient to heal unbelief
 & melancholy.

On leaving Oakland I was so excited over
 my escape that of course I forgot & left
 all the accounts I was to collect, no wonder
 & no matter. I'm beneath that grand old
 pine that I have heard so often in storms
 both in the night & day. It sings grandly.

now, every needle ear thrilled & shining
 & responding tenderly to the azure wind

When I left I was in a dreamy ex-
 =hausted daze. Yet from mere habit or
 instinct I tried to observe & study. From
 the car window I watched the gradual
 transitions from muddy water, spongy
 tule, marsh & level fields as we chafed
 up the San Jose valley, & marked as
 best I could the forms of the stream
 canons as they opened to the plain, &
 the outlines of the undulating hillocks
 & headlands between. Interest increased
 at every mile until it seemed un-
 bearable to be thrust so flyingly
 onward even towards the blessed
 Sierras. I will study them yet, free from
 time & wheels. When we turned suddenly
 & dashed into the narrow mouth of the Liver-
 =more Pass I was looking out of the right side
 of the car. The window was closed on account
 of the cinders & smoke from the locomotive.
 All at once my eyes clasped a big hard

rock not a hundred yds away every
 line of which is as strictly & autopoetically
 glacial as any of the most alphabetic of
 the high & young Sierra. That one sure
 glacial word thrilled & overjoyed me
 more than you will ever believe.
 Town smokes & shadows had not dimmed
 my vision for I had passed this glacial
 rock twice before without reading its
 meaning.

As we proceeded the general glacial-
 =ness of the range became more & more
 apparent until we reached Pleasanton
 where once there was a grand Sher-
 de glaze. Here the red sun went
 down in a cloudless glow & I leaned
 back happy & weary & possessed with
 a life full of noble problems.

At Lathrop we suppered & changed
 cars. The last of the daylight had long
 faded & I sauntered away from the
 din while the baggage was being transferred.
 The young moon hung like a sickle

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above the shorn wheatfields, Ursa
major pictured the northern sky
the milkyway curved sublimely through
the broad east stars like some grand
celestial moraine with planets for
boulders, & the whole night shone
resplendant adorned with that
calm imperishable beauty it has
worn unchanged from the beginning

I slept at Turlock & next-morning
faced the Sierra & ran out through
the sand above the freedom I
felt was exhilarating & the burning
heat & thirst & faintness could not
make it less. Before I had walked
ten miles I was wearied & foot sore
but it was real earnest work &
I liked it. Any kind of simple natural
distraction is preferable to the numb dumb
apathetic deaths of a town

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Before I was out of sight of Turlock I found a handful of the glorious *hemizonia virgata*. & a few of the patient steadfast *Eriogonum* that I learned to love around the slopes of Twenty Hill Hollow. While I stood with these old dear friends we were joined by a lark. & in a few seconds more Harry Edwards came flapping by with spotted wings. Just think of the completeness of that reunion. Twenty Hill Hollow *Hemizonia*, *Eriogonum*, Lark, Butterfly & I, & lavish outflows of genuine Twenty Hill Hollow ~~sunshine~~ sun gold. I threw down my coat & one shirt in the sand forgetting ~~deposition~~ & heedless that the sun was becoming hotter every minute I was wild once more & let my watch warm & paint as it pleased. Heavy wagon loads of wheat had been hauled along the road & the wheels had sunk deep & left a smooth beveled furrows in the sand. Upon the smooth slopes of these sand furrows I soon observed a most beautiful & varied embroidery evidently ~~the~~ tracks of some

kind. At first I thought of mice but soon saw they were too light & delicate for mice. Then a tiny lizard darted into the stubble ahead of me & I carefully examined the track he made, but it was entirely unlike the fine print-embroidery I was studying. However I knew that he might make very different tracks if walking leisurely. Therefore I determined to catch one & experiment. I found out in Florida that lizards however swift are short winded so I gave chase & soon captured a tiny gray fellow & carried him to a smooth sand bed where he could embroider without getting away into grass tufts or holes. He was so wearied that he couldn't skim & was compelled to walk & I was excited with delight in seeing an exquisitely beautiful strip of embroidery about $\frac{5}{8}$ of an inch wide drawn out in flowing curves behind him as from a loom. The riddle was solved. I knew that mountain boulders moved in music so also do lizards & their written music printed by their feet moved so swiftly as to be invisible

~~covers~~ ^{covers} the hot sands with beauty wherever they go. But my sand embroidery lesson was by no means done. I speedily discovered a yet more delicate pattern on the sands woven into that of the lizards. I examined the strange combination of bars & dots - no fireweed lizard had printed that music I watched narrowly down on my knees following the strange & beautiful pattern along the wheel furrows & over into the stubble. Occasionally the pattern would suddenly end in a shallow pit half an inch across & an eighth of an inch deep. I was fairly puzzled, picked up my bundle & trudged discontentedly away but my eyes were hungrily awake & I watched all the ground. At length a gray grasshopper rattled & flew up & the truth flashed upon me that he was the complementary embroiderer of the lizard. Then followed long careful observation. but I never could see the grasshopper until he jumped, & after he

alighted he invariably stood watching me with his legs set ready for another jump in case of danger. Nevertheless I soon made sure that he was my man for I found that in jumping he made the shallow pits I had observed at the termination of the pattern I was studying. But no matter how patiently I waited he would not walk while I was sufficiently near to observe they are so nearly the color of the sand I therefore caught one & lifted his wing covers & cut off about half of each wing with my pen knife, & carried him to a favorable place on the sand. At first he did nothing but jump & make dimples but soon became wary & walked in common rhythm with all his six legs. My interest you may guess while I watched the embroidery - the written name laid down in a beautiful ribbon-like strip behind the

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I glowed with wild joy as if I had found a new glacier - copied specimens of the precious fabrics into my note book & strode away with my own feet sinking with a dull crunch crunch crunch in the hot gray sand glad to believe that the dark & cloudy vicissitudes of the Oakland period had not dimmed my vision in the least. Surely Mother Nature pitied the poor boy & showed him pictures. Happen what would ~~my~~ fever throb or sunstroke my joy for that day was complete. Yet I was to receive still more, a train of curving tracks with a line in the middle next fixed my attention & almost before I had time to make a guess concerning their author, a small hawk came shooting down vertically out of the sky a few steps ahead of me & picked up something in his talons, after rising thirty or forty feet over head, he dropped it by the road side as if to show me what it was. I ran forward

& found a little lumpy field mouse
 & at once suspected him of being
 an embroiderer number three. After
 an exciting chase through stubble
 & weed thickets I wearied & captured
 him without being bitten. I turned him
 free to make his mark in a favorable
 sand bed. He also embroidered better
 than he knew & at once claimed the
 authorship of the new track work.
 I soon learned to distinguish the pretty
 sparrow tracks from those of the Magpie
 & Lark with their three delicate trenches
 & the straight scratch behind made by the
 backcurving claw dragged loosely
 like the spur of a Mexican vaquero.
 The cushioned elastic feet of the hare
 frequently were seen mixed with the
 pattering scratchy prints of the squirrel.
 I was now wholly trackful I fancied
 I could see the air whirling in dimples
 from sparrow & Lark wings. Earthquake
 howlders descending in a song of curses
 snow flakes gliding softly to the
 gutter.

in perfect affinity & made me strong
 Towards evening after passing through
 miles of blooming hemizunia I reached
 Hopetown on the edge of the oak fringe
 of the Merced. Here all were yellow &
 I was beset with malarious fever.
 I rested one day spending the time in
 examining the remarkably flat water-
 eroded valley of the Merced & the geological
 sections which it offers. In going across
 to the river I had a suggestive time breaking
 my way through tangles of blackberry
 thrier rose & willow. I admire delicate
 plants that are well prickled & therefore
 took my scratched face & hands patiently
 I bathed in the sacred stream. Seeming to
 catch all its mountain tones while it softly
 mumbled & rippled over the shallows of
 brown pebbles. The whole river ~~black~~
 to its icy sources seemed to rise in
 clear vision with its countless cas-
 cades & falls & blooming meadows &
 gardens its pine groves too & the winds
 that play there, all appeared & sounded.

In the cool of the evening I caught
 Browny & cantered across to the Indumae
 the whole way being fragrant & golden
 with hemizunia. A breeze swept
 in from your golden gate regions
 over the passes & across the plains
 fanning the hot ground & drooping
 plants. Refreshing every beast & bird
 & weary plodding man.

It was dark ere I reached my old friend
 Delaney but was instantly recognized
 by my voice & welcomed in the old good
 civilized way not to be misunderstood.

All ~~the~~ region adjacent to the
 Indumae River where it sweeps out
 into the plain after its long eventful
 journey in the mountains is exceedingly
 picturesque. Round terraced hills brown
 & yellow with grasses & composites
 & adorned with open groves of darkly
 foliaged live oak ~~these hills~~ ^{are} grouped
 in a most open tranquil manner & laid
 upon a smooth level base ^{purple} of plain
 While the river banks is lined with: rock

several miles¹³ above & conducted by
ditches & pipes & made to play upon
these deposits - for the gold they contain

Thus the Involuntariness of today is compelled
to unravel & lay bare its own ancient
history wh^{ch} is a thousandfold more
important than the handfuls of gold
sand its chances to contain

I mean to return to these magnificent
records in a week or two & turn the
gold disease of the La Grangers to account
in learning the grand old story of the
Sierra flood period. If these hundred
laborious hydraulicers were under my
employ they could not do me better
service & all along the Sierra flank
thousands of strong arms are working
for me incited by the small golden bait
Who shall say that I am not rich?

Up through the purple foothills to
Coulterville where I met many hearty
shaggy mountaineers glad to see me
strange to say the Oberland studies have been
read & discussed in the most unlikely places

Some numbers have found their way
through the Bloody Canon pass to
Monro

In the evening Black & I rode together
up into the sugar pine forests & on to
his old ranch in the moonlight.
The grand forest like pines held their
arms above us in blessing. The wind
sang songs of welcome. The cool glaciers
& the running crystal fountains were in it.
I was no longer ~~on~~ but in the mountains
home again & my pulses were filled again.
On & on in white moonlight. Spangles on
the streams. Shadows in rock hollows
& briery ravines. Tree architecture on
the sky more divine than ever. Stars in
~~among~~ their spires. Leafy mosaic
on meadow & bank. I never had the Sierra
it seemed so inexhaustible. Mile on mile
onward in the forest through groves
old & young. Pine tunnels overarching
& brushing both cheeks at once. The
chirping of crickets - ~~the~~ only deepened
the stillness. About 8 o'clock a strange

mass of tones came surging & wailing
through the pines. "That's the death song"
said Black as he reined up his horse to
listen. Some Indian is dead. Soon two
glaring ^{watch} fires shone red through the forest
marking the place of their congregation.
The fire glare & the wild wailing came with
indescribable unpreparedness through the
still dark woods. I listened eagerly as the
weird curses of war swelled & cadenced
now rising steep like glacial precipices
now enveloping low in polished slopes
falling boulders & rushing streams & wind
tones caught from rock & ~~tree~~ ^{tree} were
in it. As we at length rode away &
the heaviest notes were lost in distance
I wondered that so much of mountain nature
should well out from such a source.
Miles away we met Indian groups slipping
through the shadows on their way
to join the death wail.
Farther on a harsh grunting & growling
seemed to come from the opposite bank of
a hazely brook along which we rode. What?

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Hush! That's a bear ejaculated
black in a gruff bearish undertone
Yes said some rough old bruiser
is sauntering this fine night seeking
some wayside sheep lost from
migrating flocks Of course all
night sounds otherwise unaccountable
are accredited to bears. On ascending
a sloping hillside less than a mile
from the first we heard another
grunting bear but whether or no
daylight would transform our bears
to pigs may well be counted into the
story =

Pack Bower came & along a narrow
winding trail in deep shadow. So
dark had to throw the reins on Browne's
neck & trust to his skill for I could
not see the ground & the hillside was

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step. A fine bright tributary of the
Merced came far beneath us as we
climbed higher higher through the
hazels & dogwoods that pruned the
rough black boles of Spruces & pines
We were now nearing the old camping
ground of the Pilot Peak region
where I learned to know the large
nodding lilies (*L. pardalium*) so abundant
- ant along these streams. & the groups
of alder shaded cataraacts - is characteristic
of the North Merced Fork
Moonlight whitened all the long fluted
slopes of the opposite bank. But we
rode in continuous shadow
The rush & gurgle & prolonged ~~the~~
a-a-a-a-h of the stream coming
up lifting into the wind was very
solemnly impressive. It was here
that you first seemed to join me
I reached up as Browne carried me
underneath a big Douglas spruce
& plucked one of its long plummy sprays
Wh' brought you from the Oakland dead

in a moment You are more spruce than pine though I never definitely knew it till now Miles & miles of tree scripture along the sky, a bible that will one day be read The beauty of its letters & sentences have burned me like fire through all these Sierra seasons Yet I cannot interpret their hidden thoughts. They are terrestrial expressions of ~~sun~~ pure & water & snow Heavens! listen to the wind song. I'm still writing beneath that grand old pine in Black's yard & that other companion scarcely less noble back of which I sheltered during the earthquake is just a few yards beyond The shadows of their boles lie like charred logs on the gray sand while half the yard is embroidered with their branches & leaves. There goes a wood pecker with an acorn to drive into its thick bark for winter & well it may gather its stores for I can myself detect winter in the wind

Few nights of my mountain life have been more eventful than that of my ride in the woods from Coulterville when I made my reunion with the woods & pines. It was eleven o'clock when we reached Black's ranch I was weary & soon died in sleep How cool & vital & recreative was the hale young mountain air. On higher higher up into the holy of holies of the woods pure white, lustrous clouds overshadowed the massive congregations of silver fir & pine. We entered & a thousand living arms were raised in solemn blessing. An infinity of mountain life How complete is the absorption of one's life into the spirit of mountain woods No one can love or hate an enemy here, for no one can conceive of such a creature as an enemy. Nor can one have any distinctive love of friends The dearest & best of you all seemed of no special account mere trifles

Hazel green water famous among
mountaineers distilled from the
pores of an ancient moraine - spiced
stoned in a maze of fragrant roots -
winter or summer warm or cool it

Shadows over shadows keep its fountains
ever cool Moss & felted leaves guard
frost in spring & autumn frosts - while
a wooly robe of snow protects from
the intense cold of winter Bears
deer birds & ~~men~~ ^{Indians} love the water
& nuts of Hazel green alike - while
the pine squirrel reigns supreme & haunts
its incomparable groves like a spirit

Here a grand old glacier swept over
from the Tuolumne ice fountains
into basin of the Merced leaving
the Hazel green moraine for the
food of her coming trees & fountains
of her predestined waters -

Along the Merced divide to the ancient
glacial lake bowl of Cranes Flat
was ever fir or pine more perfect
What groves! What combinations of green
& silver gray & glowing white of glinting
sunbeams. Where is leaf or limb wanting
& is this the upshot of the so-called Mountain
glooms & mountain storms If so is
Sierra forestry aught beside an outflow
of Divine Love. These round bottomed
grooves sweeping across the divide
& down where sides our horses
canter with accelerated speed are
the pathways of ancient ice currents
& it is just where these crushing
glaciers have borne down most
heavily that the greatest loneliness
of grove & forest appears -

A deep canon filled with blue air
now comes in view on the right. That
is the valley of the Merced & the highest
rocks ^{scattered throughout the trees} belong to the Yosemite Valley.
More miles of glorious forest then
out into free light & down down down

into the groves & meadows of Yosemite
The new wagon road has opened out
some very striking views both up & down
the valley. How simple all the problems
are that I have been working last winter
Yet how hopeless seems the work of
opening other eyes, by mere words
No one will ever know the grandeur of this
Sierra Sculpture in its entirety without the
same study on the spot

Some of the rocks seems to call me
now nor any of the distant mountains
Surely this Merced & Tuolumne Chapter
of my life is done.

I have been out on the river bank with
your letters. How good & wise they seem
to be. You wrote better than you know
All together they form a precious volume
whose sentences are more intimately connected
with my mountain work than any one will
ever be able to appreciate. An angel came
as I sat reading alighting in the water
with a delicate & graceful glint on his bosom
How pure is the morning light on the great

gray walls & how marvellous the subdued
lights of the moon. The nights are
wholly enchanting.
I will not try tell the valley. Yet I feel
that I am a stranger here
I have been gathering you a handful
of leaves I show them to dear Keith
& give some to Mrs McChesney
They are probably the last of Yosemite
that I will ever give you

I have not seen Mrs H & hope I shall
not. I will go out in a day or so
Farewell. I seem to be more really leaving
you here than there

Keep these long pages for they are
a kind of memorandum of my walk
after the strange Oakland pack. & I may
want to copy some of them when I have
leisure.

Remember me to my friends.
I trust you are not now so sorely overladen
Good night. Keep the Golden Rod &
the Yarrow. They are Auld Lang Syne
Ever warmly Yours John Muir