



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1876-02-28

Letter from Abba G. Woolson to John Muir, 1876 Feb 28.

Abba G. Woolson

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I saw from Glacier Point, and which
I have often seen in fancy since.
But my day is coming; and it is
a comfort to know that Yosemite and
the Sierras "will keep".

I enclose a picture which you may
not recognize as a good likeness of the
toppling individual who came pitching down
behind you, from crag to boulder, on
her return from that immortal glimpse
of the desolate Sierras. It is a
good likeness, nevertheless.

I long, also, to behold Mt. Shasta.
I have a stereoscopic picture of it; but
I shall never attempt such a heroic
ascent of his snow-clad slope as
you appear to have made. I can under-
stand, though, that it would be glorious.

Perhaps strong-minded women do get
into stormy seas, but that has not
been my lot. To live in internal and
external calm, feeling that Nature had
a special care for me, and that I
had a special love for her, has been
the happy existence granted me from
the beginning. If I see a storm

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Concord, N. H.

Feb. 28. 1846.

My dear Mr. Muir,

I was much
surprised and pleased on receiving
a letter from you; for I had supposed
that you were too busy in studying
the grand formations of your beloved
Sierras to have time for thinking of busy
mortals a whole continent's width off,
much more for writing them generous
letters. But it seems I was mistaken;
and that your good memory will not
let you ignore those who have been
permitted to worship, - if only for a few
days, - in your sacred temples, with you
for attendant priest.

The letter reached me yesterday, and
also its accompanying letters printed
at an earlier date. I have read them
all with great interest; for anything

brewing anywhere on the waters, I
steer away, before the leaping waves
become enticing and dangerous; unless I
feel that duty calls me to sail
in and do battle, when I am ready
to stand my chances in the tempest.

But duty seems mostly to dwell in the
still, serene places; so I don't overfind
myself near the breakers in her service.

We, two woodcocks live a very
quiet happy life, caring little for
the opinions about us, though having
many pleasant acquaintances in our
immediate world; but living more really
in the world of books, newspapers,
and the letters of absent and beloved
friends. I go to Boston often; and
breathe mental ozone while there.

I work less in "Reforms" than I
did, - though as "strongminded" and
radical as ever, - because I have
seen that no reforms are so good

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thus dated ²³ and signed is always
welcome to me. Your descriptions are
fresh and graphic; and I am not a
bit surprised that you kept the
Sacramento people still before you
for two hours. I wish I could have
been in that audience.

But no description, however fine,
is as good as the reality. I never
lose my home sickness for the Sierras;
and I am reconciled to no future
that does not promise me weeks and
weeks of sunny weather, with a touch
of storm, on their crystal heights. Why
I do not start at once for that Valley,
and spend the livelong summer there,
dreaming and gazing beside its dreaming
river, I cannot tell; except that nobody
else here understands my remembrance,
or my longing for that far-off splendor,
no one contemplates the possibility of
my pulling up stakes for such a
romantic crusade, and nothing helps me
to it. As the prosaic around me forces

me to seem ²³³ equally so; and I have
not heroism enough to laugh at
barriers of straw, and to start. A
friend wrote me the other day, asking
me what sort of dress she needed for
camping out six months in C.A., near
Mt. Shasta and in the Yosemite. "The
shining robes of the righteous", I was
tempted to reply; but, instead, I
specified what sort of cloth and
leather she should encase her bodily
frame in, saying never a word about
the garb of her mind. Yet she had me;
for it was Mary A. Eastman, who is
invited by Dr. Dix Lewis and wife to
accompany them this Spring on their
enticing jaunt. I count the Lewis'es
as old friends; and had not my
evil fate had, somehow, the upper
hand just then in the management of
my concerns, it would have entered
with the hearts of the Lewis'es to invite
me also. Then should I had seen
that blanch'd granite world again, which

as right formation to start with. ⁶³
Consequently, I am more interested
than ever in the best education for
all, - in bending the twigs, not the
gnarled and crooked old trees.
And I am more content to do as
you do, - leave the Lord to take
care of his own world; only I am
sure he needs me to help him do
it, or he would not have made me,
and given me so strong a desire to
have a hand in these Society-repairs.
In your eternal, unchangeable rock-
world, you can equate humanity, and
forget its sins and dwarfishness; but
it crowds and oppresses you here con-
tinually, and the rocks are not visible
behind it. I long to forget the human
part of the world, and to see more of
the divine; this is why, for one reason,
that I long to sit down for months
between Washington Column & the Healy
some, with Nevada thundering in my ear.
Be good enough to write me when you can.
With kindest remembrances, Truly Yrs.
Abba G. Woolson