Edward Taylor Parsons.

John Muir
Edward Taylor Parsons, mountaineer and faithful defender of national forests and parks, was born March 15, 1861, near Rochester, New York, the eldest of a family of five. His boyhood was spent on his father's farm; in his earliest years helping to look after the bees, chickens, and lambs, and at the age of fourteen ploughing, mowing and harvesting. This simple, healthful employment from daylight to dark through all sorts of weather, though rather hard and exacting in the busiest seasons, was not, however, without a few fine compensating holidays spent in fishing and rowing on Black Creek, nutting in the glorious Indian Summer, and in winter skating and sleighing with merry companions, thus forming a bright background for the great club camp-fires in the mountain and forest wildernesses of the west side of the continent that he was soon to know and love so well.

His parents were poor and the farm was poor, and of course he had to work hard. He was fond of reading, but both time and books were scarce and the wide world of libraries opened later to him than to most boys. Excepting what he learned at a little district school during a few odd months in winter, he had no instruction until at the age of eighteen years he entered the Rochester Academy, going home to help in the farm work during the summer vacations. Three years later he entered Rochester University and worked his way through four lean and hungry years with money earned in harvesting, reporting on an evening newspaper, copying in a lawyer's office, and was graduated with the class of 1886.
Continuing his studies, he was called back to Rochester University two years later to receive the degree of master of arts. He intended to study law, but family circumstances called for immediate financial assistance, and a few months after graduation he gained a place in a business house which he held with increasing usefulness and honor until his last illness.

With Chicago as his headquarters, he now began to make long business journeys into the western country, through Dakota, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Hawaii, Washington and Oregon, spending the summer vacations in mountaineering.

He first became interested in mountaineering clubs in Oregon, where, in 1896, he joined the Mazama Club of Portland in one of their early outings to Crater Lake and Mt. Pitt. Thenceforward every summer vacation, when he was free from business cares, he spent on the outings of mountaineering clubs. With the Mazamas in 1897 he climbed Mt. Rainier; in 1899 visited the Lake Chelan region, and with a small private party of Mazamas made his first ascent of Mt. Shasta, and in 1900 was a member of their outing to Mt. Jefferson. Later, with the Sierra Club, he climbed Mt. Hood, and made second ascents of both Rainier and Shasta. With the Sierra Club, too, he climbed Mts. Dana, Lyell, Ritter, Brewer, Williamson, Whitney, and many others, besides three times making the difficult descent of Tuolumne Cañon. On his last outing, in 1913, he climbed Mts. Seattle and Olympus with the Mountaineer Club of Washington.

During a visit to Yosemite Valley in May, 1900, he first heard of the Sierra Club, and on his return to San Francisco he was elected a member. The directors of the club were at this time trying to plan regular annual outings against considerable opposition. The practical knowledge which Mr. Parsons had gained on the Mazama outings opened a clear way through all opposition, and from that year the club has held successful summer outings with ever-increasing numbers and influence.

Mr. Parsons' active interest in the work of the club began from his earliest connection with it. For thirteen years he was a member of the outing committee, for nine years a director, recently chairman of the Le Conte Memorial Lodge Committee, and long an untiring worker on the club Bulletin.

In the work of other mountaineering clubs he also took an active interest; was a charter member of the Mountaineers' Club, organized in 1907, and only a few months before his death was elected Western vice-president of the American Alpine Club of Philadelphia.

In 1907 he married Marion Randall, as able and enthusiastic a mountaineer as himself, whom he first met on the Sierra Club Outing of 1903, and three years later, in 1910, established his first home high up on the Berkeley hills overlooking the Golden Gate, some thirty-one eventful years after he left the home farm.

Like most mountaineers, Mr. Parsons was fond of wild scenery. He carried a heavy camera on all his trips, however difficult, up to the tops of the highest mountains and down the roughest canons, making numberless photographs, many of which, reproduced in various publications, have done good service in the promotion of mountaineering and particularly in the cause of the preservation of our national forests and parks.

On first acquaintance he seemed at times to be rather dictatorial in carrying out the rules and regulations of the outing committees of which he was a member; but these impressions quickly vanished when one saw him patiently at work in camp or on the trail, stretching and cobbhng shoes, reinforcing thin soles, sharing his blanket with some unfortunate whose duffle bag had gone astray.

In helpful work he was never sparing of time or strength, spending almost every spare moment of his last years in whole-souled self-sacrificing devotion to the best interests of the club in every way. For his unflagging devotion to the lost cause of Hetch Hetchy he paid a heavy price in strength and health as well as in time and money. After a very short illness he passed away on May 22, 1914. He will be sadly missed and his memory will long be cherished by all the mountaineers of the West as one of the most faithful of the faithful.