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[Excerpts from Letters.]

John Muir

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JOHN MUIR—PILGRIM SOUL

BY CHARLOTTE KELLOGG

This is a personal record of the great naturalist and scientist who spent the long years of his life saving for America the heart of her continent—her mountains and forests. Mrs. Kellogg knew him when she was a little girl in California. Her picture of him is a vivid tribute. His figure looms indeed against the skyline as one of the great men of America.

Standing against the skyline, on the crest of his beloved Sierra, John Muir is the most conspicuous figure in the mountain world of America. Though his body has passed from the mountain tops, his spirit will long remain there. His was a fascinating personality. Almost all of us have read pages in the romantic chapters of his life-story that run like the tale of one of the poet-prophets of long ago. How vivid is our picture of the tall, gaunt mountaineer with flowing beard, broad forehead and kindly blue eye, spending most of his seventy-six years in the open, exploring, interpreting and fighting up to within a few days of his death to save the beauties of our national parks for our children's children. By his personal method of year-counting, his own life was immeasurable. "Longest is the life," he said, "that contains the largest amount of time-effacing enjoyment—of work that is a steady delight."

Even as a little boy, on the stormy east Scotland coast—he was born in Dunbar in April, 1838—he found much "time-effacing enjoyment."

As I write, I am turning over a few of his unpublished letters on my desk and in each I read some tender reference of us. In one, written when he was seventy-five, he says: "Tell darling Jean the kiss she sent came airy fast to me over the hills, for kisses have wings one, written when he was seventy-six years old, to try his luck on the far American forest plains. They settled in Wisconsin, whither the mother and four other children followed, once the home site was assured. Then came the tree-felling and clearing years—mixed magic and bitter endurance; the hunger for books and the need to give expression to a rare inventive gift, which led the thin, undersized lad to slip down the cold attic stairs of the little wooden plains house shortly after midnight to read in the kitchen or to work on locks and wheels in the cellar. All sorts of things grew under his eager fingers—latches, water-wheels and thermometers, and a marvelous clock that took the week as its week and month and started fires and lighted lamps! More and more he thirsted for an education and believed he might succeed in a machine-shop. And kindly, pioneer neighbors encouraged him to take his clock to the State Fair, where he finally arrived, carrying his treasure in a sack. It proved an immediate sensation, and the young inventor's hopes were high."

Then arrived March, 1867, heavily underscored in his life calendar! He had long been looking from the wild northern forests to the warm gardens of the South and dreamed of following them to South America. In March, 1867, a piece of metal cut into one of his eyes—and threatened blindness. "By common belief in those days the loss of even one eye was an unsurmountable handicap in such a profession as mechanics. So through the dark-room hours he waited and thought, to conclude in the end, even if his eyesight were spared, life was too precious to be squandered on belts and saws; that while he was, "pottering in a wagon factory, God was making a world."

He determined to use what sight might be left him in a study of the process. So after his release from the dark room with one eye unimpaired he felt the time had come to start on his great southern adventure. He wrote quickly home to his family and friends for their "Godspeed" and by September, 1867, was off on his now famous one thousand-mile walk to the Gulf. The diary of that journey is inscribed, "John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe," and nothing he ever set down better suggested his cosmic consciousness.

In Florida illness called a halt; Cuba he reached; but South America had for the time to be given up. And finally he said good-by to spectacular tropical gardens and took his crooked way to California, reaching San Francisco in April, 1868. From that time the Golden Western State was to be as much his home as any particular place could be to one to whom the whole universe was home. He sought out the Sierras and the grand Yosemite Valley almost at once, and till the day of his death theirs were his most loved haunts and the preservation of their beauties his chief concern. He acted as guide in the valley to such friends as Emerson and Roosevelt.

As he journeyed he studied all the earth-forms—flowers, rocks, trees, birds—it is hard to tell which attracted him most—unceasingly, crammed note-books with his observations, and, happily, took time to make exquisite pencil drawings of many objects and scenes. His descriptions may be as awe-inspiring as those of storms of the high mountains or auroras of Alaska, or they may be as deliciously humorous as his lines about silly sheep, or gay as his account of that queer, and jolly fellow the grasshopper, or tender as his lingering over lily-bells or birds—they are for all moods and seasons. Of the smaller wild animals, the Douglas squirrel remained perhaps his favorite, and all who have read his child or children's book "Sticken"—know how he felt about a dog.

What has the world followed him in such joysome companies? Why did his dream of a Sierra Mountain Club to which not a favored few, but all the people who wished to, might belong, so splendidly come true? Why have he and his beloved Muir trails and lodges as well as Muir peaks and glaciers scattered throughout all our mountain lands? It was certainly not merely because of what he knew, but largely because of the precious personality, the rare human qualities of this teacher-friend. Perhaps if we look at him for a moment from some single more intimate human angle we may better see why he was always the greatly loved leader.

I like, for instance, to remember his inconsistencies. Now even the superficial setting down of a few facts in his life has shown that no one was more magnificently consistent, fundamentally, than John Muir. In the inner fastnesses of his spirit he rested secure and tranquil in his unalterable faith in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator of the universe. His belief in the brotherhood of rock and lizard and lily-bell and star and man, his absorbing and inclusive love for the whole created, related cosmos was the stanch activating principle of his years, which progressed with superb logic to their close.

But against this rock-rubbed background of conviction and purpose was thrown delightfully a rare amount of contradiction and whimsy. He was a rabid naturalist, with flowing gray beard and kindly blue eye, whose glacier-stride along any street was instantly arresting—the simple, great man—was guilty of many endearing incongruities. He himself was lonely and lost in man-made places.
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Conclusion from page 2

[The text continues with the story of John Muir's life and his contributions to conservation and environmental awareness.]

[The text concludes with a sense of respect and admiration for John Muir's pilgrim soul, emphasizing his dedication to the natural world and his legacy of environmental stewardship.]