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A NATURALIST OF INTERNATIONAL RENOWN

AN INTERVIEW WITH Prof. JOHN MUIR

James Russel Lowell has commented on the sad state of the man who ne'er had seen Nature unfold itself, and his words gain a fresh significance to one who listens as did a HERALD representative while John Muir, geologist, explorer, naturalist of international renown, gave of his apparently unlimited knowledge of the subjects which have been the basis of his life work.

Professor Muir

John Muir is the son of Daniel and Anne (Gilyre) M. Muir, and was born in Dunbar, Scotland on April 21st, 1838. He attended school in Scotland, but, in 1849, his father emigrated to the state of Wisconsin and found his home in a sparcely settled district where there was no one living within a radius of ten miles. In such isolation the boy grew to know Nature and depend upon its companionship. He entered the University of Wisconsin, but left before graduating. The deep commercial interest which his adopted state had in the lumber trade led to his becoming concerned in the forests of Wisconsin, not alone for the value of their products, but as an agent for the conservation of their natural resources, and that is the great gospel which he has been preaching ever since—forest preservation and the establishment of national parks such as Yellowstone and Yosemite, where Nature in some at least of "its varied forms" might be left untouched by the hand of man for future generations to study. And in speaking of this phase of his life work, he told with simplicity how Senator Kent, of California a stranger to him had bought some forest land within ninety minutes by train from San Francisco and offered it to the United States Government as a national park, suggesting that it be given the name of "Muir's Woods". This prompted a query from President Roosevelt as to why "Kent's Woods" would not do, to which Senator Kent replied that he did not care to stencil his benefactions with his name, that he had five husky boys, and if they could not keep the name alive, nothing else would, to which came the characteristic Rooseveltian reply "Neither do I care to stencil my benefactions, I have three husky boys and I depend on them to do the same with my name."

"And how about Muir Glacier, Mr. Muir?" — "Oh, I discovered that in 1879," was the reply, and the scribe wondered how it felt to reach that altitude of scientific accomplishment and reputation where the discovery of a glacier could be regarded as a common-place event. Muir Glacier, in Alaska, is two and a half miles wide at its mouth, where it discharges into the sound, two hundred feet in height above water, and eight hundred feet in depth below the surface. It is twenty-five miles in width at the widest part.

"And how about your books?" was the next query. — "Oh, I have only written six on the glaciers of Alaska and other topics. I am not going to write books to any extent until I give up my present occupation."

"And what may that be?" — "Tramp," came the answer with grim Scotch gravity "I am seventy-four and am still good at it."

"Have you any particular object in coming to South America?" the HERALD representative asked. — "I am studying the trees of South America, but am here particularly to visit Chili, and locate, if possible, the place of origin of the tree known as *Araucaria Imbricata* after the American tribe of Indians who are native in that country. It is currently called the "monkey puzzle" because its prickly needles render ascent impossible to the monkey. I leave for Chili this week, return to Buenos Aires shortly, and take passage for South Africa."

"And what do you think of Buenos Aires?" — "The lack of time and sunshine has precluded my seeing much of the city, but I have visited the Zoological Gardens and Palermo. I found the animals in good condition and the gardens well laid out for future development. The park, by its tree life, shows the fertility of soil in this country. The begum tree grows better in Palermo than in some parts of Australia, of which it is a native."

The Professor then went on to talk of the topics he loved, of the subjects he had made particularly his own, of trees and plants of all descriptions, their varied characteristics and how they flourished in different countries of the world; of the devastation caused by forest fires, of the insight of Robert Burns into nature, and so on—all with a simplicity and a lack of egotism which was delightfully refreshing to a newspaper correspondent whose daily routine brings him into contact with many personalities but with few who, with so much right, have so little inclination to claim attention.