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## Letter from John Muir to Merrills and Moores, 1868 Jan 6

John Muir

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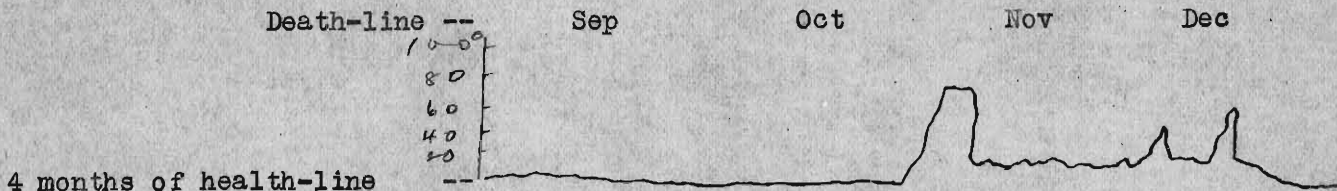
[Original letter returned to Miss M. Merrill].

Cedar Keys, Jan. 6th, '68.

Dear friends [The Merrills and Moores]:

I was so glad to receive your letter. I was lonesome and sick, and all is so strange - the sky, and the plants, and winds, and all the landscape, and the people. I thought a letter had been lost, but in about a month after it was written it reached our Key. "Slow wanderings" which you, Miss Catherine, apply to the motion of my last, may be applied to all southern mails.

I wish you all a happy New Year. I hope that our sixty-eight may be full of bright days for all. I wish I could be with my friends, and the winds and the sky and the frost of my north home a little while. I am glad to hear that you are all so well. I have been sick for two months with repeated attacks of bilious fever, my ups and downs of health may be seen on this line if I may trouble you with it.



I mean to start for Cuba in two days, I am glad of this short opportunity of studying the sea. Matters here flow in a different channel from those of Ind[iana.] All is the reverse of your home account - the peaches do not peach, choirs do not sing, lecturers do not come and none mar their own comfort by mending that of others, nor do merchants seek each others' blood, but lance in harmony for that of their customers. Solomon, you think, would be puzzled with the conduct of your merchants. I think we have much that would require his most profound philosophy. I wish he would return to us and express himself on the topics of our times, edit a review, wouldn't it be delightful.

There are only two seasons here, warm summer and warmer summer, and as the weather goes smoothly over the points of union our storms are not so frequent. Flowers reach from January to January in unbroken ranks. The average temp[erature] of last Dec[ember] was about 65° or 70 in the shade. This Key is 2 1/2 or 3 miles in dia[eter] and 44 ft. above the sea at its highest point. It is surrounded by scores of other islets, many of them beautifully clothed with palmettos, cedars, and live oaks that are trimmed and united by many a flower and shining vine. Others consist of just a bank of shells or sand with a few mangroves and grasses, encompassed with a broad rim of rushes, forming a precious retirement for sea birds. A large feeding ground is regularly laid bare by the tides that is much resorted to by water cranes, blue and snowy white, and a multitude of other waders. It is very interesting to see them gather, flock after flock from the woods and from the reedy islands, confident that their food is waiting, - fed by a sure hand.

I think you would enjoy this climate for a short time. It is perfectly delightful. The sun pours down double measure of the very sweetest rosiest light, in quality like that which fills the balmiest days of your Indiana summer. I know of but one deciduous tree or bush on these islands. All retain their green leaves without any tint of autumn, but plant green here is not so bright and pure as it is at the north, because the sunbeams so glance and sparkle upon the glossy thick evergreens which are so abundant. The whole green of the landscape is thus mixed and whitened. I have repeatedly hastened up to bushes that seemed to be full of white flowers, that were only glowing with light. Another reason is that the grasses are coarser in leaf and stand more apart.

We often go to the house-top to see the sunset. We obtain a wide magnificent view of land and water and surely they could not be more beautifully adjusted. I never in any place have seen sunsets of more perfect, intense loveliness. You would enjoy a sail amid these islets, and as you gazed upon them in their bath of purple and gold, and saw the sky in the calm encircling water you would forget all you had written of snakes and fevers, and the need of reconstruction. I cannot think of fire amid these gardens. Nature as it is will do well enough for any millenium. Not the world, but the people who are in it, need to be burned and reconstructed.

I am now wearied. I am not well at all, but hope to be better when I have more of pleasant walks. I hope I shall reach the flowers and mountains of the tropics. This is a long and mixed sheetful, I will hasten to close. I thank you all for the interest you take in my welfare. My love to all. Rem[ember] me to Mrs. & Mr. Davis. I wish I could reach them with a handful of the wild flowers of these islands.

Once more farewell,  
John Muir