



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1873-01-09

Letter from John Muir to [J. B.] Mc Chesney, 1873 Jan 9.

John Muir

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When taken into the stomach
 so would silver & gold - so
 would sunshine. but I have
 lined with & loved with Kalmia
 many a day & slept with my
 cheek upon her bonnie purple
 flowers & glossy leaves & I
 know that she is only love,
 directly spoken from the lips
 of God, & I know something
 about "the blasted trunk, & the
 barren rock, the moaning of the
 bleak winds, the solemn solitudes
 of moors & seas, the roar of the
 black, perilous merciless whirlpools
 of the mountain streams" & they have
 a language for me. but declare
 nothing of wrath or of hell, only
 love plain as was ever spoken.
 All that he says about near
 approach to mtn beauty & familiarity
 with nature in general is very com-
 pletely false. This my friend is the
 true infidelity - a disbelief in the con-
 stancy & sufficiency & everlastingness
 of God's Love as written in Nature
 & in the mountains. ^{we should see beauty every moment as we have breath}
 from the same fountain
 when I read such heresy as Ruskin's mtn
 & mtn evil & mtn death. & the unwholesome-
 ness of mtn beauty as everyday bread. I wish

I was a preacher. Over cordially yrs John Mann

The very hope & longings of Ruskin are clear cut & regular in form as bricks & could be made & order by a machine

Yosemite Valley
 January 9th 1873

Dear Mr Cheever
 I have just finished a ramble through the handsome Ruskin you gave me, Ruskin is great but not a great man, only a great ready-to-hand bud of a man, He is fettered & bounded though his chain is long, His tether seems at times to break all together & he roams over all this world & what he takes to be the next, but after all, one never can feel that he is free - his widest world, his highest sky is enclosed by a hard definite shell, making us think of a mouse beneath a huge bell glass so huge that it sees & feels its bounds
 There are writers of far lesser intellectual growth who nevertheless

give promise of indefinite development - 'it doth not appear what they shall be', but Ruskin leaves us nothing to hope in the direction of after development. All of his attainments & all of his hopes are bounded by surfaces definite as those of a crystal.

He is suggestive & instructive & in every way well worthy of perusal. He makes one think. His errors & absurdities are so clearly expressed they do good rather than harm.

His beauties are numberless. Page after page is studded with flowers like a glacial meadow.

I have never experienced his mtn gloom wh doubtless is a hogle humbug - nor have I seen any of that "fierce convulsive energy" said to manifest itself in mtn tops. But the worst thing I find in his book is his lack of faith in

The scriptures of Nature. He says we must not dwell in contact with Nature's beauty else we will become blind to it just as if God had not ^{into composed of strips of evil & good work} made beauty an ocean in wh we ^{& good & of Saldy} will dwell forever. Evil he says ^{Resist every mtn fangel he eats a mtn devil.} always exists with good & ugliness with beauty in order to act as foils the one for the other. —

Here I want to say so much that I cannot say anything. Only he is an infidel to Nature & knows nothing about her. Kalmia one of the very dearest of my Mountain flowers. A Companion of Bryanthus & Cassiope, one of the purest words of love that God has ever uttered. On Mountain meadow he calls, a type of deceit - because when he eats it - it poisons him - unfit for his belly, a good English reason. Kalmia kills men & sheep.