IN THE YOSEMITE WITH JOHN MUIR: BY CLARA BARRUS

JOHN MUIR, born in Scotland, reared in America, a wanderer in nearly every country on the globe, seventy-four years of age and hale and canny, is doubtless one of the most picturesque figures in our country today. Scot to the backbone, yet America claims him as her own, so earnestly has he studied our trees and mountains, so closely is he identified with the wonders of the great West, so loyally has he labored to preserve our natural beauties when from time to time there have been those of our own countrymen who would have wrested them from us.

It is fitting that the mighty Alaskan glacier he discovered bears his name, and that a noble forest of California redwoods is called The Muir Woods, and it is likewise fitting that a little mountain daisy is his namesake, for with all his enthusiasm for mountain and glacier and noble sequoia, his love for "the bonnie wee blossoms of the wild" is one of his abiding passions.

"To any place that is wild," is the reply Mr. Muir made in eighteen hundred and sixty-eight to a man on the streets of San Francisco of whom he inquired the nearest way out of town.

"But where do you want to go?" the stranger asked. Imagine his surprise on receiving this reply: "To any place that is wild!" But he directed the seeker after the wild to the Oakland ferry, and thence he and another young man made their way on foot through the great flowery central valley of California, walled in on the east by the mighty Sierra range, on through the deep Sierra canyon without knowledge of the topography of the country, and with the snows so deep that the blazed trails were all covered; and after many adventures they reached their goal—the famous Yosemite.

"Any place that is wild" seems always to have been the watchword of this wanderer who started out from Indiana more than forty years ago, journeying alone and afoot to the Gulf of Mexico, then to Florida and Cuba, intending to go to South America. Weakness from Southern fever and failure to get a ship for South America prevented him just then from carrying out his plans, so he took the Panama steamer, arrived in San Francisco, and after one day in that city, set out, as before stated, for the Yosemite. But, as I heard him say this spring, he usually gets to the place he starts for, and doesn’t mind a delay of forty years or more, so long as he can explore other wildernesses by the way. Now in nineteen hundred and twelve he returns from South America and South Africa!

"You see I got there," he said triumphantly on his return.
John Muir of California, Poet, Naturalist, Philosopher, Friend:
From his latest photograph.
A STUDY OF JOHN MUIR IN THE YOSEMITE. THOSE WHO KNOW HIM WELL WILL RECOGNIZE A CHARACTERISTIC POSE OF THIS LOVER OF NATURE.
THE PHILOSOPHER OF THE YOSEMITE

Recently his book on the Yosemite—the result of ten or more years in the Valley in the early seventies—has come from the press. Assuredly Mr. Muir is not to be hurried. Like the enduring rocks, the slow-moving glaciers, and the many-centuried sequoias, he believes in the amplitude of time. How pitifully he speaks of "time-poor" persons who never spare enough of their scanty store to wander leisurely in some of the world's wildernesses!

In reading Mr. Muir’s book on the Yosemite, or, in truth, any of his books, one gets but a partial view of his character. The enthusiastic nature lover, the tireless student, the adventurous explorer—these characteristics stand out on every page, but to know the man one should camp and tramp with him in the Yosemite, as I did in nineteen hundred and nine, in company with Mr. John Burroughs, Mr. Francis Browne and a few others. There we saw the many-sided Muir—the man one sees in his books, and also the teasing, fun-loving Muir, the arbitrary, the devout, the modest, the assertive Muir—an exasperating, lovable, complex personality.

On first meeting him he fell naturally into telling us about himself; of his boyhood in Scotland, and his early years in the "beautiful wilderness of Wisconsin," where his family first settled on coming to America. He spoke of his stern, soldier-like father, a strict disciplinarian and an enthusiast in religion, with much native intelligence and marked inventive ability, but with little schooling; of his gentle and gentler-bred mother, well educated for her time—she could paint, read poetry and was an ardent lover of natural scenery. He told how she tried to second the father's sternness, and to scold the mischievous lads into decorum, but could never really scold however hard she tried.

If allowed to talk on uninterruptedly, Mr. Muir regales his hearers with a monologue of exceptional range and raciness, but, intrude a question, or venture an opinion, and the smoothly-flowing stream of talk is impeded; and if it happen when a choice bit of description is in progress, the chances are you will never hear that to completion, though you may hear something exceedingly diverting instead. Confess ignorance and seek enlightenment from him, and you will more than likely be met with bantering ridicule; yet he will on occasion volunteer the most minute and painstaking information. I recall how, as we neared the Yosemite, Mr. Muir took great pains to teach me about the different trees in the Sierra, indicating their diagnostic points and the distribution of the various belts—object-lessons in tree-lore one was exceptionally fortunate to have from such a teacher. But when Mr. Burroughs raised some
questions about the geology of the Yosemite over which he was puzzling, and earnestly asked Mr. Muir for a solution, the Yosemite student replied:

"Aw, Johnny, ye may tak' all your geology and tie it in a bundle and cast it into the sea, and it wouldn'a' mak' a ripple," and that is all the satisfaction one could get out of him.

ARBITRARY in conversation, Mr. Muir's is the attitude of the fencer, ever delighted to give a thrust; caring little for the point of view of another, he catches at conversational straws, is sure which way the wind blows in the speaker's mind, and enlarges on this when, perhaps, the opinions he is ridiculing are as foreign to the speaker as to the Scot himself. One wonders how much of this disputatiousness is racial and how much individual, how much due to his belief that you are what he charges you with being, and how much to his perverse inclination to tease. But his hectoring is always from a fun-loving motive; his nature is essentially kindly. I once heard him say: "There is one thing I hate with a perfect hatred—cruelty for anything or anybody."

Mr. Muir has been in nearly every land under the sun; his descriptions are vivid; his anecdotes inimitable. Occasionally he uses the broad dialect of the Scot.

Though so full of wit and humor, a pathetic look often comes in his face as he speaks of lonely mountain and glacier explorations, although he had so much delight in them. At such times one thinks of him as the "Beloved Wanderer;" again, as the other side comes uppermost, and one sees his opinionatedness, sees him tripping up his companions, meeting their opinions with gibe and hectoring remark, one is moved to dub him the "Beloved Egotist:" although a description of this side alone would give a biased impression of his character.

How keen is our mountaineer's susceptibility to beauty—the beauty of wild and remote places, the grandeur of storms, the ecstasy of pine trees, the roar and splash of rain, the wild leaps of waterfalls! Concerning some of these sights he said that not only his soul but also his whole body drank in the beauty, and he prayed for a bigger body, for more bulk, that his delight might be the greater. Absorbing it in his pores, he sighed for more pores for absorption, more blood vessels to carry the joyous blood, more nerves to be thrilled, for life more and abundant—so intoxicated was he with the wonders of the mountain fastnesses.

After being alone on the heights for a season, on coming down among men, he was preternaturally keen to impressions; he could
THE PHILOSOPHER OF THE YOSEMITE

see deeper and clearer into the hearts and motives of people, and was often pained by the revelations experienced. The sensitiveness wore off as he mingled more with men.

The look that comes in Mr. Muir’s mobile face as he tells of miles and miles of beauty traversed, and his reverent reference to certain excursions as “glorious seasons of forest grace,” make one aware of his unspeakable experiences, for with all his engaging loquacity he is shy about disclosing his deeper feelings. He told us how through the long summer nights he used to lie under the stars upon a bed of pine needles at the edge of a daisy and gentian meadow; again how he gloried in being “magnificently snow-bound in the Lord’s Mountain-House”—those regions in the high Sierra. Sometimes hungry and often cold, yet he was drunk with the beauty of it all. Some of his descriptions have a religious exaltation; he is always hearing the still, small voice in nature; never tires of trying to make others aware of “God’s wild blessings,” speaks of snow and rock crystals as “God’s darlings,” experiences a “baptism of light” on icy Shasta, and regards the “divine alpenglow” as one of the most impressive of the terrestrial manifestations of God.

Such glimpses of him made one feel that practical man, inventor, geologist, botanist, explorer that he is, beyond and above all these he is the mystic. His studies in the Sierra, earnestly as they were pursued, were only secondary—his rapt admiration of the dawn and the alpenglow, of majestic trees that wave and pray, of rejoicing waters, and the sacred, history-bearing rocks, of night and the stars on lonely mountain tops, reveal the soul of the mystic.

How this apostle of beauty scorns the fleshly apathy of the ordinary tourist who walks or rides emotionless through the sublimity of the Yosemite! He told many a tale of the indifference and callousness of the soulless ones whom he conducted through the Valley in the years when he acted as guide to parties. But to offset these, there were memorable hours with Asa Gray, Sir Joseph Hooker, Le Conte and other scientists, and there was Emerson’s all too brief sojourn there when he sauntered under the big trees with Mr. Muir, “as serene as a sequoia, his head in the empyrean.”

It was particularly gratifying to Mr. Muir to show Mr. Burroughs the glories of the Yosemite and make him admit that he had nothing like it in Esopus Valley, or in the Catskills. He had conducted Colonel Roosevelt to his mountains a few years before, and not many weeks after we were there, President Taft saw the Yosemite and the Big Trees under the guidance of Mr. Muir, yet neither the earlier nor later experiences effaced from his recollection
the wondrous spectacle as he viewed it for the first time when he
and his young companion tramped in there all the way from San
Francisco. After crossing innumerable boulder-choked canyons,
scrambling through chapparal, and wallowing through snow, they
at last stood upon the heights and looked down to the floor of the
Valley which lay nearly a mile below them, and across to the oppo-
site wall of the chasm, half a mile distant:

"Great God! have we got to cross that gulch, too?" ejaculated his
intrepid companion whom Mr. Muir had led at such a lively pace
all the way thither.

Thereafter for many years Mr. Muir wintered and summered in
Yosemite, tracing the waterfalls to their sources, examining each
basin, observing the fauna and flora, making sketches of the rocks,
tracing the courses of the ancient glaciers, and discovering the
glaciers that still lingered there.

He showed us the site of his old saw-mill, told us how he built
it and kept it in repair, and how he used to sit and sketch until he
saw the great logs nearing the end, when he would stop and start
another log on its way, and resume sketching. He spoke of his
inventive ability which showed itself in boyhood, and told us of
several ingenious devices which he has patented, which have yielded
him tangible financial returns. With engaging frankness he said he
was so smart he could not help making money whenever he ceased
his wanderings for a spell.

He used to make Sunday raids on the heights above the Yosemite,
starting out at daybreak and tracing Pohono or some other wild
waterfall to its source, walking all night among the moon shadows,
and descending the perilous cliffs in the darkness, reaching his cabin
at daybreak to begin work at the mill.

"Ah! how many glorious Sundays were mine!" he mused. And
here he roamed, loving the wilderness, glorying in storms, in the roar
of waterfalls, even in the thunder of earthquakes and the relentless
speed of avalanches. He told of one wild ride on an avalanche: He
had been climbing all day hoping to reach a certain summit in time
to see the sunset, but stepping inadvertently on the trampled snow,
he started an avalanche, and in the twinkling of an eye was swished
down to the foot of the canyon, the avalanche lurching and plunging,
the snow particles flying in a blinding mist around him. The next
instant he picked himself up unharmed, gloriously exhilarated by
the astounding experience.

When his cabin would rock and creak during an earthquake, this
imperturbable student would sit unmoved making his notes, register-
ing the desire that some day he could go to South America and study
earthquakes. In those days he was so engrossed with his studies that he read the glacial tracings in his dreams, followed the lines of cleavage, and struggled all night with the things that puzzled his waking hours.

He told us how he drifted about the Valley and on the heights above, and said that it was only by resting on the rocks as the ice had done that he was able to absorb and arrive at the truths about them. And when the great geologic truths about the formation of the Valley burst upon him, and he found the proofs piling up as a result of his unwearyied research, he was fairly beside himself with admiration of the Power that had achieved such stupendous results. Pushed on by his thirst for more and more knowledge, he became so oblivious to his health and safety that his friends feared for his life; but he laughed at their fears, and only asked that they find him some concentrated food so he could carry a year’s provisions and thus pursue his studies in those almost inaccessible heights, without the interruption of coming down the mountains to get bread. Still as a young man he was much more dependable upon friendship than one might gather, and during those years of lonely wandering in the high Sierra he came down from the snow-line to the bread-line quite as often for the nourishment he found in friendly letters as to replenish his bread sack and tea can.

“When I was in college,” he said, “I nearly starved; I lived on fifty cents a week, and used to count the crackers and jealously watch the candles, but I didn’t mind after I got in here—no bell that rang meant me; I was free to go and come, and here were things that were bread and meat to me—things to fatten my soul, and all free as the air. Ah! but I’ve had a blessed time in here. But I did wish the ravens would come and feed me, so I could keep at my studies.”

It was often amusing to hear him recount hairbreadth escapes and in the same breath disclaim recklessness. We wondered to what lengths a reckless person would have gone; but there seem to have been certain rules he observed, such as never taking a step forward when scaling cliffs, unless he was sure that from that point he would be able to take a step backward; and never to gaze about him, no matter how glorious the view, until he had made sure his footing was secure.

On the long dusty stage ride from El Portal into the Yosemite, Mr. Muir diverted us much by his bantering talk with a sprightly elderly woman on the seat with him. She did not know who he was, or that on other seats of the coach were other men of
note also, although later in the forenoon on hearing more of Mr. Muir's talk she got an inkling and asked, "Who are you, anyhow, that you know so much about all these things?" He forebore enlightening her, but burst a bomb at her feet by asking her if she knew the works of John Burroughs, then telling her that that was the man sitting two seats ahead of her. She nearly jumped out of the wagon. Later she learned who Mr. Muir was himself, and still later, in coming upon Mr. Browne, she naively asked, "Won't you tell me if you are not somebody—somebody in particular, I mean." But I'm afraid the able editor of The Dial disclaimed being anybody but "plain Mr. Browne of Chicago."

"What is that lavender flower up there?" innocently asked this vivacious little woman of nobody in particular, soon after the coach had started.

"That, madam," said Mr. Muir, "is the coeanthus integerrimus."

"Mercy! but hasn't it any other name?"

"Yes, coeanthus integerrimus, buckthorn, deer-brush, California lilac, bearberry—take your pick," said the Scot.

"But you give me so many—I can't tell any of them," she complained.

"But, madam, I gave you first the one it is known by the world over, and you would have none of it."

On seeing a huge boulder, which had been cleft from the face of the rock above, lying in the roadway so that the road had to be turned aside for it, the loquacious lady exclaimed, "My! but why didn't it go further?" Then the Scot rallied her thus:

"So you are not satisfied, madam, with the place the Lord gave it? He made quite a job of it as it is." Then he drew her into an argument as to whether the Lord had planned and placed every boulder in the spots where they lie, telling her that as a good Presbyterian she was going back on her religion unless she believed this, and exasperating her by declaring that it was presumptuous in us to criticise His work, laughing in his sleeve at her earnestness all the time. Later when we came to a mammoth boulder which had gone clean down into the roaring Merced, Mr. Muir queried, "Did that go far enough to suit you, madam?"

That Mr. Muir thoroughly enjoys witnessing one's discomfiture when the distress is only comical was seen when he told us of a well-known lecturer's trip into the Valley many years ago with a body of scientific men. The lecturer having crammed on Whitney's geology, had started out with the intention of worsting Mr. Muir in his arguments in favor of the tremendous importance of glaciers in the formation of the Valley. Though talking glibly at first, he
THE PHILOSOPHER OF THE YOSEMITE

was soon at a disadvantage, having no well-grounded knowledge of these things; while Mr. Muir was able to prove to the audience that what he affirmed was first-hand knowledge. After the discussion, the lecturer trotted up to Mr. Muir as they were about to start for a walk up one of the trails where he was to show some of the convincing evidences of glaciation, and asked, "If there were glaciers here, Mr. Muir, where are the moraines?"

"You better ask, 'Where could the moraines have rested in the Valley,'" retorted the Scot. Then he explained that if the lecturer had known a moraine when he saw it, he would have recognized a large lateral moraine, covered with trees and underbrush, at the beginning of the Valley. Presently, they came to a place where the old glaciers had made it very slippery. The stout defender of the Ice-gods warned the guest: "Look out here, Doctor, it is pretty dangerous, you better take my hand." But saying airily that he was all right, Mr. A. went his way. The next instant out went his feet and down he fell on the slippery rocks, striking on the ice-polished granite with a force that made him pale long afterward. He sprawled about, and finally tottered to his feet, his clothes dripping. For the rest of the way he was willing to take Mr. Muir's hand.

"Now are you ready to accept the glacial theory?" mercilessly asked the stout defender of it.

"Yes, I capitulate to the Huge Miller of the Sierras," humbly answered the dripping disputant.

"I thought you would," added Mr. Muir. "God works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform—He almost has to kill some people to get the truth into them." Then he chuckled as he recalled how comical the stout little man had looked when on returning to the hotel he had walked about in someone's trousers much too short for him, while his own were being made presentable again.

But many a man thinks Mr. Muir goes too far in attributing so much of the formation and sculpturing of the Yosemite to glaciers, though unquestionably they have done their part. Mr. Burroughs had many a tilt with him on this score, and said of his claims: "Muir rides his ice-hobby till the tongue of the poor beast hangs out, and he is ready to lie down and give up the ghost. Ice is by no means the only agency at work here." This much to the scorn of Mr. Muir; but the two men were one in their admiration of the beauties and wonders of the Valley.

Mr. Muir shows a marked indifference to creature comforts, especially to food. After long tramps, when the rest of the party would almost devour luncheon, he would sit and play with a piece
of dry bread, and keep up a steady stream of talk. Place a sandwich close to his hand, or shell an egg for him, and a courteous "thank you" is forthcoming, but more often than not a mere nibble is all the attention he pays to your efforts, and the talk flows on. Not that one wants it to stop, but one feels guilty at being so entertained at the expense of the entertainer. He declares that bread is about the only food that he needs, and insists that through some temperamental quality he can get out of bread more than any chemical analysis can show—if his spirit is pitched in the right key. "Eat bread in the mountains," he said, "and with love and adoration in your soul you can get a nourishment that food experts have no conception of."

He is equally careless as to rest and sleep if there is something he wants to see, or some one at hand to talk to. One night in the Yosemite after a most fatiguing day, when most of us were ready to sleep on going to our rooms, the indefatigable Scot, finding himself rooming with the editor of The Dial, who is a veritable repository of Golden Poems and who knows his Burns as well as does Mr. Muir himself, could not resist the temptation to quote and quote, matching Mr. Browne's favorites with favorites of his own. The walls of the room were thin so that this debauch of poetry was enjoyed by the occupants of adjoining rooms as well, until out of prudence and the fear that the lack of sleep would unfit us all for the long day's tramp on the morrow, we arrested the Burns' devotees in their quotations by a warning knock on the partition and the entreaty:

"O, try and sleep, ye waukrif rogues,

Now, bairnies, cuddle doon!"

The introduction of another poet in place of their beloved Bobby had the desired effect, and the wakeful "bairnies cuddled doon."

The Scot has a way when he wishes to call your attention to anything in nature, of taking you by the shoulder, arresting your attention for an instant as he indicates the object, then as abruptly giving you a little push from him, as much as to say, "Go! it rests with you whether you are worthy to behold it." In like manner he put his hand on my shoulder and pointing to Half Dome said: "There! take a look at my darling—it is nearly five thousand feet from this valley floor, and nearly nine thousand from the level of the sea—look at its sublime tranquillity, its repose, the solemn, god-like calm that rests on that rock!" And then the push away as he walks on silently contemplating the majestic rock which of all
THE PHILOSOPHER OF THE YOSEMITE

others in the Valley seems nearest his heart. It seems a bit uncanny for a man to give up so large a place in his heart to a rock, a glacier, or a tree, however sublime it may be, but his devotion is not to be questioned.

One day on our return to the hotel after a tramp up one of the canyons, the sprightly seat-mate of Mr. Muir, above referred to, told him that she and her friend had been to Mirror Lake. "We might know you would go where there is a mirror," he taunted, but a moment later he said contritely, "I am ashamed of myself for attempting to jest in here."

Many of his associations with the Valley are naturally of a serious and solemn nature—the months of loneliness and hardship, the narrow escapes from accident and death, the years of consecration to his work, the wild and terrible beauty he has often witnessed, the overflowing peace he has experienced in traversing glacier meadows, the ecstasy on remote mountain heights—almost mountains of transfiguration to him—these have combined to make of the place almost holy ground.

Perhaps the most idyllic of our Yosemite days was when we tramped to the Nevada and Vernal Falls, a distance of fourteen miles, returning to Camp Ahwahnee at night weary almost to exhaustion, but strangely uplifted by the beauty and sublimity in which we had moved. Our brown tents stood hospitably open and out in the great open space in front we sat around a huge campfire under the noble spruces and firs, the Merced flowing softly on our right, the mighty Yosemite Falls thundering away in the distance; the moon rising over Sentinel Rock on our left, lending a touch of ineffable beauty to the scene. Nor was the charm of melancholy missing, for on the morrow we were to leave the Happy Valley.