

# JOHN MUIR: AN APPRECIATION<sup>1</sup>

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

OUR greatest nature lover and nature writer, the man who has done most in securing for the American people the incalculable benefit of appreciation of wild nature in his own land, is John Burroughs. Second only to John Burroughs, and in some respects ahead even of John Burroughs, was John Muir. Ordinarily, the man who loves the woods and the mountains, the trees, the flowers, and the wild things, has in him some indefinable quality of charm which appeals even to those sons of civilization who care for little outside of paved streets and brick walls. John Muir was a fine illustration of this rule. He was by birth a Scotchman—a tall and spare man, with the poise and ease natural to him who has lived much alone under conditions of

<sup>1</sup>Elsewhere in this issue will be found an editorial estimate of John Muir; a portrait appears in the picture section.—THE EDITORS.

labor and hazard. His was a dauntless soul, and also one brimming over with friendliness and kindness.

He was emphatically a good citizen. Not only are his books delightful, not only is he the author to whom all men turn when they think of the Sierras and northern glaciers, and the giant trees of the California slope, but he was also—what few nature lovers are—a man able to influence contemporary thought and action on the subjects to which he had devoted his life. He was a great factor in influencing the thought of California and the thought of the entire country so as to secure the preservation of those great natural phenomena—wonderful canyons, giant trees, slopes of flower-spangled hillsides—which make California a veritable Garden of the Lord.

It was my good fortune to know John

Muir. He had written me, even before I met him personally, expressing his regret that when Emerson came to see the Yosemite, his (Emerson's) friends would not allow him to accept John Muir's invitation to spend two or three days camping with him, so as to see the giant grandeur of the place under surroundings more congenial than those of a hotel piazza or a seat on a coach. I had answered him that if ever I got in his neighborhood I should claim from him the treatment that he had wished to accord Emerson. Later, when as President I visited the Yosemite, John Muir fulfilled the promise he had at that time made to me. He met me with a couple of pack-mules, as well as with riding mules for himself and myself, and a first-class packer and cook, and I spent a delightful three days and two nights with him.

The first night we camped in a grove of giant sequoias. It was clear weather, and we lay in the open, the enormous cinnamon-colored trunks rising about us like the columns of a vaster and more beautiful cathedral than was ever conceived by any human architect. One incident surprised me not a little. Some thrushes—I think they were Western hermit-thrushes—were singing beautifully in the solemn evening stillness. I asked some question concerning them of John Muir, and to my surprise found that he had not been listening to them and knew nothing about them. Once or twice I had been off with John Burroughs, and had found that, although he was so much older than I was, his ear and his eye were infinitely better as regards the sights and sounds of wild life, or at least of the smaller wild life, and I was accustomed unhesitatingly to refer to him regarding any bird note that puzzled me. But John Muir, I found, was not interested in the small things of nature unless they were unusually conspicuous. Mountains, cliffs, trees, appealed to him tremendously, but birds did not unless they possessed some very peculiar and interesting as well as conspicuous traits, as in the case of the water ouzel. In the same way, he knew nothing of the wood mice; but the more conspicuous beasts, such as bear and deer, for example, he could tell much about.

All next day we traveled through the forest. Then a snow-storm came on, and at night we camped on the edge of the Yosemite, under the branches of a magnificent silver fir, and very warm and comfortable we were, and a very good dinner we had before we rolled up in our tarpaulins and blankets for the night.

The following day we went down into the Yosemite and through the valley, camping in the bottom among the timber.

There was a delightful innocence and good will about the man, and an utter inability to imagine that any one could either take or give offense. Of this I had an amusing illustration just before we parted. We were saying good-by, when his expression suddenly changed, and he remarked that he had totally forgotten something. He was intending to go to the Old World with a great tree lover and tree expert from the Eastern States who possessed a somewhat crotchety temper. He informed me that his friend had written him, asking him to get from me personal letters to the Russian Czar and the Chinese Emperor; and when I explained to him that I could not give personal letters to foreign potentates, he said: "Oh, well, read the letter yourself, and that will explain just what I want." Accordingly he thrust the letter on me. It contained not only the request which he had mentioned, but also a delicious preface, which, with the request, ran somewhat as follows:

"I hear Roosevelt is coming out to see you. He takes a sloppy, unintelligent interest in forests, although he is altogether too much under the influence of that creature Pinchot, and you had better get from him letters to the Czar of Russia and the Emperor of China, so that we may have better opportunity to examine the forests and trees of the Old World."

Of course I laughed heartily as I read the letter, and said: "John, do you remember exactly the words in which this letter was couched?" Whereupon a look of startled surprise came over his face, and he said: "Good gracious! there was something unpleasant about you in it; wasn't there? I had forgotten. Give me the letter back."

So I gave him back the letter, telling him that I appreciated it far more than if it had not contained the phrases he had forgotten, and that while I could not give him and his companion letters to the two rulers in question, I would give him letters to our Ambassadors, which would bring about the same result.

John Muir talked even better than he wrote. His greatest influence was always upon those who were brought into personal contact with him. But he wrote well, and while his books have not the peculiar charm that a very, very few other writers on similar subjects have had, they will nevertheless last long. Our generation owes much to John Muir.