

**LETTERS TO A FRIEND,
WRITTEN TO MRS. EZRA
S. CARR, 1866-1879**

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Letters to a friend, written to Mrs. Ezra S. Carr, 1866-1879 by John Muir

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JOHN MUIR

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Written to Mrs. Ezra S. Carr

1866—1879

By

John Muir



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Prefatory Note

WHEN John Muir was a student in the University of Wisconsin he was a frequent caller at the house of Dr. Ezra S. Carr. The kindness shown him there, and especially the sympathy which Mrs. Carr, as a botanist and a lover of nature, felt in the young man's interests and aims, led to the formation of a lasting friendship. He regarded Mrs. Carr, indeed, as his "spiritual mother," and his letters to her in later years are the outpourings of a sensitive spirit to one who he felt thoroughly understood and sympathized with him. These letters are therefore peculiarly revealing of their writer's personality. Most of them were written from the Yosemite Valley, and they give a good notion of the life Muir led there, sheep-herding, guiding, and tending a sawmill at intervals to earn his daily bread, but devoting his real self to an ardent scientific study of glacial geology and a joyous and reverent communion with Nature.

LETTERS TO A FRIEND

"The Hollow," January 21, 1866.

YOUR last, written in the delicious quiet of a Sabbath in the country, has been received and read a good many times. I was interested with the description you draw of your sermon. You speak of such services like one who appreciated and relished them. But although the page of Nature is so replete with divine truth, it is silent concerning the fall of man and the wonders of Redeeming Love. Might she not have been made to speak as clearly and eloquently of these things as she now does of the character and attributes of God? It may be a bad symptom, but I will confess that I take more intense delight from reading the power and *goodness* of God from "the things which are made" than from the Bible. The two books, however, harmonize beautifully, and contain enough of divine truth for the study of all eternity. It is so

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much easier for us to employ our faculties upon these beautiful tangible forms than to exercise a simple, humble living faith such as you so well describe as enabling us to reach out joyfully into the future to *expect* what is promised as a thing of to-morrow.

I wish, Mrs. Carr, that I could see your mosses and ferns and lichens. I am sure that you must be happier than anybody else. You have so much less of winter than others; your parlor garden is verdant and in bloom all the year.

I took your hint and procured ten or twelve species of moss all in fruit, also a club-moss, a fern, and some liverworts and lichens. I have also a box of thyme. I would go a long way to see your herbarium, more especially your ferns and mosses. These two are by far the most interesting of all the natural orders to me. The shaded hills and glens of Canada are richly ornamented with these lovely plants. *Aspidium spinulosum* is common everywhere, so also is *A. marginale*. *A. aculeatum*, *A. Lonchitis*, and

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A. acrostichoides are also abundant in many places. I found specimens of most of the other aspidiums, but those I have mentioned are more common. *Cystopteris bulbifera* grows in every arbor-vitæ shade in company with the beautiful and fragrant *Linnæa borealis*. *Botrychium lunarioides* is a common fern in many parts of Canada. *Osmunda regalis* is far less common here than in Wisconsin. I found it in only two localities. Six *Claytoniana* only in one place near the Niagara Falls. The delicate *Adiantum* trembles upon every hillside. *Struthiopteris Germanica* grows to a great height in open places in arbor-vitæ and black ash swamps. *Camptosorus rhizophyllus* and *Scolopendrium officinarum* I found in but one place, amid the wet limestone rocks of Owen Sound. There are many species of sedge common here which I do not remember having seen in Wisconsin. *Calypso borealis* is a lovely plant found in a few places in dark hemlock woods. But this is an endless thing; I may as well stop here.

I have been very busy of late making prac-