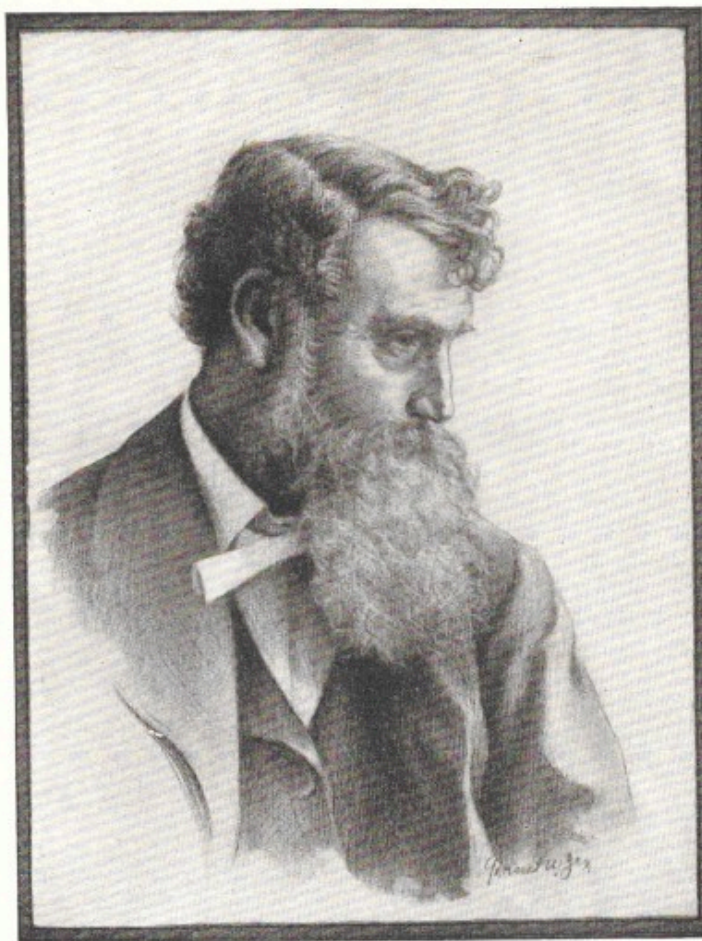


**J**OHN MUIR was a guid Scotch American; but his home was, as he once wrote his address: "John Muir, Earth-planet, Universe." He first opened his eyes upon the earth which was to become to him so fair in Dunbar, Scotland, April 21, 1838. His father emigrated to Wisconsin as a homesteader in 1849 when John was but eleven years old. Here the boy learned the meaning of hard,

grinding, incessant farm work, but also what he has called the "humanity" of animals and the beauty of Nature in the unspoiled woods and fields about his pioneer home. Here, too, he discovered for himself, in the wee sma' hours stolen from sleep in the early dawn, the consolation and delights of the best literature.

At an early age he set forth to find his own place and part in the world and studied for a short period at the University of Wisconsin. He intended at one time to be a physician; at another an inventor, in which line he had made some notable successes, including an automatic bed which threw the sleeper out at the set time, without fear or favor. But, as he said of himself, he was led of the Spirit into the wilderness, and took as his vocation the study and interpretation of Nature. In this pursuit he wandered alone wide and far. His only comrades in one of his long solitary tramps alone through the South in search of unfamiliar flowers and trees and animals were these three books: the New Testament, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Burns' *Poems*. After exploring Florida and Cuba he came at length to the land



JOHN MUIR, 1838-1914  
(After a photograph in "The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography," Vol. IX.)

## JOHN MUIR

by John Wright Buckham

Illustrated by Garnet Jex

as an inspiring memory. He talked of the formation of Yosemite Valley and how he had clambered about the cliffs studying the marks of the glaciers that "stuck their noses together" and plowed out the great valley and of the glory of that vast temple. I caught the glow of his imagination and of his tender affection for "all things both great and small." When I left him he accompanied me to the garden. I asked him, as I was taking leave, about a bird whose odd song I had heard from the bushes along the little stream on the way from the station. Instantly he broke into the most vivacious and life-like imitation of the song, and informed me that it was the yellow-breasted chat. It was not only an imitation but a revelation of that sensitiveness and fellow-feeling for living creatures whose language most of us fail to catch.

He has somewhere translated the carol of a robin heard in a distant mountain meadow of the High Sierra as saying: "Fear not, for only love is here!" Whether he is describing the graceful movements of a water-ouzel, or the eccentricities of a Douglas squirrel, or the silent

of his soul's delight—California. For ten years he lived alone in the Sierra, studying with the utmost care,—taking copious notes the while,—the flora and fauna and geology of this great "range of light" as he loved to call it.

The impression of vitality, enthusiasm and friendliness which I received from a precious conversation of an hour I once had with Muir in his home in Martinez is with me



life of a giant sequoia, or the clumsy shuffling of a brown bear, or the rhythmic dance of an insect in the sunshine, or the response of the forest to the summer shower, there is a Bergsonian intuition in it all which makes our kinship to Nature vivid and real. Doubtless he reads human thought and feeling into Nature; but is not this the way to win her richest meaning?

John Muir achieved a distinct and notable place as a Nature interpreter. His approach to Nature was quite unlike the Yankee Nature-wisdom of the hermit of Walden, the affluent Nature-philosophy of the sage of Concord, or the observant sagacity of the seer of Slab-sides. As contrasted with these contained and sober Nature seers, Muir is the ardent, passionate devotee, living alone among the heights in the great forests and amid the snows, all for pure love of Nature in her wildest and least pastoral moods. He is, above all others, the Nature mystic,—a Scotch mystic, canny, energetic, wiry, observant, yet a mystic of the mystics, nevertheless. Gazing upon a tree he loses himself, like Brother Lawrence, in its universal prophetic message; looking into a sunset he is rapt away into the eternities; peering into the corolla of a flower he is absorbed in pure and deathless beauty. He is enthralled by Nature. For her he leaves human associations—not because he loves them less but Nature more—and fares forth into the pathless wilderness.

Here is no "fop-o'-fields or sycophant of civilization." He does not care how distant is the nearest grocery, telephone or hospital. He is at home wherever the sun shines or star-beams glitter, storms sing or snowflakes fall. And yet he is no hermit, but one of the most companionable of men, his conversation flowing like a mountain stream and his heart as warm as the camp-fire beside which he loves to sit and talk and listen in the glow of its flame of fellowship. He can even enjoy a dinner with his friends about a table; and yet as he writes: "A crust by a brookside out on the mountains with God is more than all."

He penetrates alone into the remotest fastnesses of the Sierra and is everywhere at home, brother of birds and beasts and insects, lover of the rocks, friend of trees and flowers, studying all with loving diligence and watching the drama of the sky and the changes of the seasons with unwearied delight. He dashes up the mountains, he clings to the sides of cliffs and cañons, hanging unafraid above yawning depths; he stands in the spray of waterfalls, rushes out at night, unterrified, to watch the titanic work of the earthquake. He glories in the storms, fares forth at midnight to see what Nature does in the silent hours, chases sunsets to reach some vantage point before they fade, falls upon his knees to scrutinize

the "embroidery" of mouse tracks, creeps into the crevasses of glaciers, climbs trees to feel them rock in the wind, tunnels under snow-banks, traces rivers to their fountains and trees to their seeds, and flowers to their haunts, and all things to their Original Source.

He is so absorbed that he forgets to eat and banishes sleep that he may watch the stars through the branches of the giant sequoias; he endures withering heat that he may understand the desert and the fiercest cold that he may know the secrets of the snow. He dances at night on the top of Mount Whitney to keep from freezing, and goes for days without food, with "no ill effects." Nature can neither frighten nor freeze nor drown nor burn him. He bears a charmed life. He becomes all things to all forms of Nature if by any means he may win some and bring them within the admiring love of his short-sighted fellow-men. This comradeship with Nature was for him no holiday pastime, nor outburst of the heyday of life, nor selfish amusement, but a lifelong mission. He lived, as he put it, "only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness."

All this appears in his books, and is the secret of their abounding vitality and charm, but it comes out very richly in the admirable biography written by my colleague and friend, and Muir's friend, Dr. Badé, and especially in his letters, with a spontaneity, an intensity and an untrammelled yet artistic freedom which proves that his writings were all as genuine as they are fascinating.

From each Nature interpreter we may take the especial message that Nature, or God through Nature, has given to him. From John Muir it is a message of optimism. He is Nature's Robert Browning—original, buoyant, and invincible—"one who marched breast forward," not only "never doubting clouds would break" but finding clouds, in their way, as beneficent and beautiful as sunshine. Muir died December 24, 1914, but the spread of his influence has but just begun.

"Come on," he calls to us, waving a beckoning hand as he sets out for still loftier heights in the Range of Light, "Look up and down and round about you!" And we follow—"briskly venturing and roaming," in this exhilarating companionship, "washing off sins and cobweb cares of the devil's spinning in all-day storms on mountains; sauntering in rosy pinewoods or in gentian meadows, brushing through chaparral, bending down and parting sweet, flowery sprays; tracing rivers to their sources, getting in touch with the nerves of Mother Earth; jumping from rock to rock, feeling the life of them, learning the songs of them, panting in whole-souled exercise, and rejoicing in deep, long-drawn breaths of pure wildness."

*Among other good things, Christmas will bring Nature Magazine to many. It is an ideal gift that lasts the year around. The December issue will be a sample of that year-round pleasure. Besides a cover that is beautiful and worthy of framing and twelve attractive paintings in color by Mr. Horsfall, there will be a beautiful frontispiece in colors. Tom Gill contributes a "different" Christmas tree story; Hugh Stevens Bell an article on Carlsbad, the Magnificent; Frank DuFresne a fine dog story, to mention only a few of the features. In January the Association's Expedition story begins.*