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1865-09-13

## Letter from John Muir to Jeanne C. Carr, 1865 Sep 13

John Muir

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possibly '66

Trout-mills near Meaford, Sept-<sup>13<sup>th</sup></sup>  
[1865]

" " Mrs Can

Your precious letter with its burden of cheer and good wishes has come to our hollow, and has done for me that work of sympathy and encouragement which I know you kindly wished it to do, it came at a time when much needed, for I am subject to lousomness at times, accept then my heartfelt gratitude - would that I could make a better return.

E#

I am gaily over the loss of Prof Sterlings letter, for I waited and worried for it a long time, I have been keeping up an irregular course of study since leaving Madison, but with no great success. I do not believe that study, especially of the Natural Sciences, is incompatible with ordinary attention to business, still I seem to be able to do but one thing at a time. Since undertaking a month or two ago to invent new machinery for our mill, my mind seems to be busy itself in the work that I am fit for but little else, and then a lifetime is so little a time that we die ere we get ready to live. I would like to go to college, but then I have to say to myself "You will die ere you can do any thing else" - I should like to invent useful machinery, but it comes. "You do not wish to spend your lifetime among machines and you will die ere you can do anything else", I should like to study medicine that I might do my parts in lessening human misery; but again it comes, "You will die ere you are ready or able to do so, how intensely I desire to be a Humboldt

but - again the chilling answer is reiterated -  
 but - could we but - live a Million of years,  
 then how delightful to spend in perfect content-  
 ment - so many thousand years in quiet study in college,  
 do many amidst the joyful din of machines,  
 do many among human pain, do many thousands  
 in the sweet study of Nature among the dingles and  
 and dells of Scotland, and all the other less  
 important parts - of our world: Then perhaps  
 might we, with - at least a show of reason, "buff  
 off this mortal coil and look back upon our  
 star with something of satisfaction; I should be  
 ashamed if shame might be in the other world,  
 if any of the powers, virtues, essences etc should  
 ask me for common knowledge concerning our world  
 which I could not bestow - But - away with this  
aged structure and we are back to our hand-  
 ful of twenty years half gone, all of course for  
 the best did we but know all of the Creator's  
 plan concerning us, in our higher state of  
 existence, we shall have time & intellect for  
 Study - Eternity - with - perhaps the whole unlimited  
 creation of God as our field should satisfy us,  
 and make us patient - & trustful, while we pray  
 with - the Psalmist - "Teach us to number our days  
 that we may apply our hearts - unto wisdom"

I was struck with - your remarks  
 about - our real home as being a thing of stillness  
 and peace - how little does the outer & noisy  
 world in general know of that "real home" & real  
 inner life, happy indeed they who have a friend  
 to whom they can unmask the workings of their  
 real life, give of sympathy & forbearance.  
 I sent - for the book which you recom-  
 mend; I have just - been reading a short sketch of the

Life of the Mother of Lamartine -

You say about ~~the~~ these are beautiful things  
and about ~~the~~ <sup>was</sup> gathering in the Drumhine

What you say respecting the littleness of the  
number who are called to "the pure & deep communion  
of the beautiful All-loving Nature", is particularly  
true of the hardworking, harddrinking, stolid Canadians,  
in vain is the glorious chest of God in nature spread  
out for them - so many acres chopped is their motto,  
so they grub away amid the stroke of magnificent  
forest-trees black as demons & material as the soil they  
moose upon - I often think of the doctor's lecture  
upon the condition of the different races of men as  
controlled by physical agencies - Canada though abounding  
in the elements of wealth - is too difficult to subdue to  
permit the first few generations to arrive at any great intellec-  
tual development - In my long rambles last summer  
I did not find a single person who knew anything of botany  
and but a few who knew the meaning of the word; and wherever  
lay the charm that could conduct a man who might as  
well be gathering mammoth, so many miles through these  
fastnesses to suffer hunger and exhaustion was with them  
never to be discovered, do not these answer well to the  
person described by the poet in these lines.

"A primrose by the river's brim,

A yellow primrose was to him,

And nothing more"

I thank Dr Carr for his kind remembrance of me, but still  
more for the good patience he had with so inept a scholar,  
we remember in a peculiar way those who first give us  
the story of Redeeming Love from the great-book of revelation, and  
I shall not forget the doctor who first laid before me the great-  
book of nature, and though I have taken so little from his  
hand he has at least shown me where those mines of priceless  
knowledge lie and how to reach them -

London, P.O. 10/10/1880

Please remember me to my friends, and now hoping to receive a letter from you at least semi-occasionally I remain yours with gratitude John Muir

O how frequently, Mrs Carr, when lonely & tired, have I wished that like some hungry worm, I could creep into that delightful kernel of your house - your library, with its portraits of scientific men, such as bountiful as store of their treasures amid the bloom and verdure of your little kingdom of plants, luxuriant & happy as though holding their leaves to the open sky of the most flower-bearing zone in the world -

That "sweet-day" did as you wished reach our hollow, and another is with-us now, the sky has the haze of Autumn and excepting <sup>the</sup> aspen not a tree has motion - upon our enclosing wall of verdure new tints appear - the gorgeous dyes of Autumn are too plainly seen, and the forest seems to have found out - that again its leaf must fade, our stream too has a less cheerful sound and as it bears its foam-bells pensively away from the shallow rapids in the rocks seems to feel that summer is past -

You propose Mrs Carr an exchange of thoughts for which I thank you very sincerely, this will be a means of pleasure and improvement - which I could not have hoped ever to have been possessed of but - then here is difficulty, I feel that I am altogether incapable of properly conducting a correspondence with one so much above me - We are indeed, as you say, students in the same life school, but in very different classes, I am but an alpha novice in those sciences which you have studied & loved so long, if however you are willing in this to adopt the plan that our Saviour endeavored to beat into the stony Israelites, viz to "give hoping for nothing again" all will be well, and as long as your letters resemble this one before me, which you have just written, in genus, order, class, province, or Kingdom, be assured that by way of reply you shall at least receive an honest "Thank you"

Tell Alice that Mr Muir thanks him for his pretty flowers and would like to see him, also that I have a story for him which I shall tell some other time -

[Original letter in mounted <sup>set</sup> of letters to Mrs. Carr, marked #3]

Trouts Mills, near Meaford, [e.w.] [Canada],  
Sept. 13th [1865].

Dear Mrs. Carr:

Your precious letter with its burden of cheer and good wishes has come to our hollow, and has done for me that work of sympathy and encouragement which I know you kindly wished it to do. It came at a time when much needed, for I am subject to lonesomeness at times. Accept, then, my heartfelt gratitude — would that I could make a better return.

I am sorry over the loss of Prof. Sterling's letter, for I waited and wearied for it a long time. I have been keeping up an irregular course of study since leaving Madison, but with no great success. I do not believe that study, especially of the Natural Sciences, is incompatible with ordinary attention to business; still, I seem to be able to do but one thing at a time. Since undertaking, a month or two ago, to invent new machinery for our mill, my mind seems to so bury itself in the work that I am fit for but little else; and then a lifetime is so little a time that we die ere we get ready to live.

I would like to go to college, but then I have to say to myself, "You will die ere you can do anything else." I should like to invent useful machinery, but it comes, "You do not wish to spend your lifetime among machines and you will die ere you can do anything else." I should like to study medicine that I might do my part in lessening human misery, but again it comes, "You will die ere you are ready or able to do so." How intensely I desire to be a Humboldt! but again the chilling answer is reiterated, ~~but~~ <sup>but</sup> could we but live a million of years, then how delightful to spend in perfect contentment so many thousand years in quiet study in college, so many amid the grateful din of machines, so many among human pain, so many thousands in the sweet study of Nature among the dingles and dells of Scotland, and all the other less important parts of our world! Then perhaps ~~might we~~, with at least a show of reason, "shuffle off this mortal coil" and look back upon our star with something of satisfaction. I should be ashamed if shame might be in the other world, if any of the powers, virtues, essences, etc. should ask me for common knowledge concerning our world which I could not bestow. But away with this aged structure and we are back to our handful of hasty years half gone, all of course for the best did we but know all of the Greater's plan concerning us. In our higher state of existence we shall have time and intellect for study. Eternity, with perhaps the whole unlimited creation of God as our field, should satisfy us, and make us patient and trustful, while we pray with the Psalmist, "Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

I was struck with your remarks about our real home as being a thing of stillness and peace. How little does the outer and noisy world in general know of that "real home" and real inner life! Happy indeed they who have a friend to whom they can unmask the workings of their real life, sure of sympathy and forbearance!

I sent for the book which you recommend. I have just been reading a short sketch of the life of the Mother of Lamartine. These are beautiful things you say about the humble life of our Saviour and about the trees gathering in the sunshine.

What you say respecting the littleness of the number who are called to "the pure and deep communion of the beautiful, all-loving Nature," is particularly true of the hard-working, hard-drinking, stolid Canadians. In vain is the glorious chart of God in Nature spread out for them. So many acres chopped is their motto, so they grub away amid the smoke of magnificent forest trees, black as demons and material as the soil they move upon. I often think of the Doctor's lecture upon the condition of the different races of men as controlled by physical agencies. Canada, though abounding in the elements of wealth, is too difficult to subdue to permit the first few generations to arrive at any great intellectual development. In my long rambles last summer I did not find a single person who knew anything of botany and but a few who knew the meaning of the word; and wherein lay the charm that could conduct a man, who might as well be gathering mammon, so

[Letter of John Muir to Mrs. Carr, dated Sept. 13, 1865, continued]

many miles through these fastnesses to suffer hunger and exhaustion, was with them never to be discovered. Do not these answer well to the person described by the poet in these lines:

"A primrose by the river's brim,  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
And nothing more."

I thank Dr. Carr for his kind remembrance of me, but still more for the good patience he had with so inapt a scholar.)

We remember in a peculiar way those who first give us the story of Redeeming Love from the great book of revelation, and I shall not forget the Doctor, who first laid before me the great book of Nature, and though I have taken so little from his hand, he has at least shown me where those mines of priceless knowledge lie and how to reach them.)

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Tell Allie that Mr. Muir thanks him for his pretty flowers and would like to see him, also that I have a story for him which I shall tell some other time. Please remember me to my friends, and now, hoping to receive a letter from you at least semi-occasionally, I remain,

Yours with gratitude,

JOHN MUIR

Address Meaford P.O., County Grey, Canada West.

[This letter is answered by Mrs. Carr's letter of Sept. 24, (1865)].