



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1904-07-17

Letter from John Muir to Mabel Colf, [et al.], 1904 Jul 17.

John Muir

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Martinez, July 17, 1904.

Dear scholars four.

Mabel Colby,

Lilian Sexton, Marie Watson &
Harmon O. Parsons, I was far away
in Australia beneath the Southern
Cross when your kind good
letters to me were written; &
when I got home & read them
none of the big pile on my
desk pleased me more.
It was very kind of you to write
these letters, & I thank you &
your teacher & others for the
honors you report, especially the
dedication of your Arbor Day
Redwood.

The Redwood grows taller
than any other tree in the world.
One that I measured was 340
feet high, & some may be 50 or
60 feet higher, while the tallest
Australian Eucalyptus as far as ^{known}
does not exceed 300 feet in height.

Though many of the stories about them are much taller.

The fine new schoolhouse you so well describe - set on a hill, in sight of the mountains, nearer the sea than any other in the city brings to mind the two I attended when a boy in Scotland. They were one-room buildings, & both stood much nearer the sea than yours, one of them so near that at high tide the waves seemed to be playing tag on our playground ^{stone} wall, running up the sandy shore & perhaps just touching the base of the wall & hurrying back. But sometimes in wild storms the tops of the waves came surging over the wall into the playground, while the finer spray flying on the roaring gale drenched & washed the schoolhouse itself. These great gray roaring booming storms were glorious sights, but we were taught to pity the poor sailors, for many good ships were wrecked & driven ashore by them.

From the high ³side of our playground we saw the ships sailing past & amused ourselves guessing whence they came, whither bound, & what they carried etc.

In Scotland children are sent to school at a very early age. I was so young my first days of school life are beyond recall. We had to study hard & were thrashed hard. Our teachers said that thrashing & irritating the skin excited the memory, & I suppose it did for by the time we were ten or eleven years old we had committed whole books to memory - English, French, & Latin grammars, the New Testament etc. & besides had learned like Indian boys to endure pain with fortitude & take our sorest memory-lessons in silence without flinching or making faces. But in spite of a that & a that we were wildly happy & healthy, enjoyed the scenery of the sea & the Lammermoor Hills, had many fine merry games, & on Saturdays often ran 20 or 30 miles without stopping or getting out of breath.

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I wish I could tell you stories of my long trip, but a big book would not hold half of them - the parks & gardens & picture galleries of Europe, - the towns & fields, forests & rivers of Russia - the beautiful shores of the Black Sea, - the great mountains & glaciers & forests of the Caucasus, - the broad billowy densely forested ridges & spurs of the Ural Mountains, - the vast fertile plains & rivers of Siberia, - the charming hills & dales forested mountains & broad rich plains of beautiful Manchuria - picturesque Japan, - the mountainous island-dotted coast of China. The snowy Himalaya - loftiest of earth's mountains, with their glacial great rivers & Deodar forest, - wonderful old Egypt with its life-giving river, green fields & lawny deserts & innumerable sublime monuments of cold Langsyne of humanity - Balmey palmy Ceylon - The wonders & beauties of Australia & New Zealand - the strangest people, the strangest animals, the strangest plants. The Philippine Islands too & etc. Thus I fear you will find hard reading but what can a body do with such a job at the end of a letter? Anyhow I am

Sincerely your friend John Muir.