

# JOHN MUIR IS BACK –

AND MAN! IS HE TICKED OFF!

By Lee Stetson

A play for one performer

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**ACT 1**

(Muir enters in the dark; calling out, as the lights come slowly up.)

Lord Man! (Pause)

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Are you here, then? (He notices the audience.)

Oh. I'm sorry; I'm in search of someone, and felt certain that he was...

Ah, but isn't this a grand gathering of wilderness lovers, eh? Of Yosemite lovers!

Well, I am sorry to disturb you, but I must ask you, have you seen him? Lord Man? Have you? I am certain he is lurking somewhere hereabouts; well, he always feels nearby. Well, I shall find him, for I must. It is urgent that I find him.

Well, I've not only rudely intruded; I've failed to introduce myself. My name is John Muir. I used to live here. In this valley. In these mountains. And I am back. And I'm really ticked off!

Now I know many of you out there no doubt believe I couldn't be ticked off, ticked on, or be ticking in any way at all. For no doubt you've heard that rumor spread about. That I died. And long ago, they say, and of a broken heart, no less, of a shattered spirit, from the loss of the Hetch Hetchy Valley, that other magnificent Yosemite Valley, only a mountain or so away, located in our National Park, and for which I fought so long, so hard to preserve and protect, - and to no avail. And I suppose that there's a good deal of romance attached to the idea of dying of a broken heart. But think on it. If we wilderness lovers died every time we lost a place we loved, our species would have long ago gone down the road of the dodos and the dinosaurs. Indeed that seems to be the very road Lord Man intends that we all go down, eh?

And that of course is why exactly why I'm back. To hunt down Lord Man, who I have reason to believe is lurking among this very gathering, and to strongly urge he choose another road to travel, to become a better beast.

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And of course I'm back. Any lively, ticked off spirit will occasionally haunt its home – well, if the home remains to haunt, eh? And I see I must make haste to do some haunting hereabouts, for the California home that I have known seems on the brink of forever being lost.

For Lord Man has been an astonishingly busy fellow, I see, like some dark and mad magician, who with a snap of his fingers or toss of his cloak is transforming all creation!

Indeed, on this very day, as I was sauntering up here from San Francisco, retracing my very first footsteps to this Valley, I experienced one of the mad magician's most terrifying tricks. For as I sauntered up and over the Pacheco Pass expecting to look down and across the San Joaquin Valley at these glorious mountains – presto! Poof! – all is gone - the entire Sierra Nevada, – my home, my Range of Light, – has vanished - disappeared from sight!

It was there, you see, at the top of the Pacheco Pass, that I had my first view of my glorious Sierra Nevada, and not so long ago as the round world turns. But then, looking down from a height of fifteen hundred feet, there, extending north and south as far as the eye could see, lay a vast flower garden, smooth and level like a lake of gold - the floweriest part of the world I had yet seen. And from the eastern margin of that golden plain arose the white Sierra, my Range of Light, my future and forever home, seen through an atmosphere so clear that three hundred miles or more of the range was comprehended in that single view!

But things have changed, I see. Lord Man, tossing his cloak, disappearing landscapes. And it really ticks me off! The golden plain and the mountain chain gone - vanished to Lord Man's magical industry and his marvelous automobile contraptions!?

Automobiles! I should have seen that coming, I suppose. For I was still sauntering hereabouts when the very first of those automobiles were chugging and puffing its way into this Valley. Dirty, noisy, smelly things. Every animal fled from them. Even the pine trees would have run away if it could.

And it was not long after, at the National Parks Conference of 1912 up here in the Yosemite, the great question, "Shall the automobile be allowed to enter the Yosemite?" was finally settled. And a prodigious lot of gaseous eloquence was spent upon the subject, by auto club delegates from near and far. All signs pointed to automobile victory, and there was little doubt these mechanical blunt-nosed beetles would be allowed to puff their way into all of the parks, mingling their gas-breath with the breath of the pines and the waterfalls. And even then, the damn bandits charged twelve cents a gallon for gasoline! Things have changed, I see. And I expect that ticks you off! But what should really tick you off is that your price at the pump does not include the loss of the glorious view of the Sierra Nevada from Pacheco Pass!

You know, I was blessed to have spent my little while on this good planet in some of God's most glorious landscapes - in Bonnie Scotland as a boy, where I learn to love all things wild and free, in the wondrous wilderness of Wisconsin in my youth, where I was introduced to all the plant people and fellow mortals, all strange inhabitants of my new world, and in my later years, in the lovely rolling hills and orchards in Martinez, here in California, where I was blessed to raise my

family and a bit of fruit – all fine places to be housed in stormy weather, and to write in, and to raise children in - all good, in a food and shelter sort of way. But, you know, none was quite my home. Up here, the Sierra Nevada, here's my home. Where the flowers are born every day and seem to come gushing from the ground like gaily dressed children.

And my first home within this home was only a stone's throw away from here, by the Yosemite Fall. For when I first arrived to stay in this great Valley, I had the good fortune to obtain employment from a Mr. Hutchings, an innkeeper, who asked that I build a sawmill at the base of the Yosemite Fall, and to cut lumber for cottages that he wished to build in the spring. I did so, and built a cabin for myself nearby as well. Ah...that cabin, the handsomest building in the Valley, I thought!

Ha! I know what you're thinking. John Muir with a sawmill in Yosemite? My enemies, as they sought to drown the Hetch Hetchy Valley, made much of that, accusing me of being a "pseudo naturalist, who figured among the squatters in the Yosemite. And there he cut and logged and sawed the trees of that Valley with as willing a hand as any lumberman in the Sierra". All nonsense – I did cut lumber here to be sure, but from trees blown down by storms many years before. I never cut down a single tree in the Yosemite, nor sawed a log cut down by anyone else. Furthermore, I never held, nor tried to hold, any sort of claim in the Valley. Ticks me off!

But in this I see things are very much the same nowadays; those who would defend the wilderness are always accused of wicked deeds by those who would destroy it. Lord Man and his devious tricks...

Ah, but I was telling you of my cabin, which I thought to be the handsomest building in this Valley. The floor was made of rough slabs, nicely joined and embedded in the ground. In the spring the common pteris ferns pushed up between the joints of the slabs, two of which I trained on threads up the sides and over my window in an ornamental arch, to frame my writing desk. Dainty little tree frogs occasionally climbed the ferns and made their fine music. My bed was suspended from the rafters and lined with cedar plumes. From the Yosemite Creek, I dug a small ditch and brought a stream directly into the cabin. Running alongside the wall, it was not in the way, and had just enough fall to ripple and sing in low, sweet tones, especially at night while lying awake. The only other sounds at night were the ticking of the clock, the flickering of the fire, the love songs of a host of peaceful frogs that sang out in the meadow, and the deep waving roar of the falls like breakers on a rocky coast. Truly a delightful home, a mountaineer's home. And constructed at the cost of only three or four dollars! A cost acceptable even to a Scotsman.

But things have changed, I see. Three or four dollars wouldn't construct the backside of a bird house nowadays. And that's all well and good, but the cost of Lord Man's "constructions" has the songs of the Sierra singing frogs, especially in our High Country, fading fast, and the roar of the Springtime Falls no longer roars as loud nor lasts as long as once it did. Lord Man, the dark magician, at work, tossing his cloak, disappearing landscapes, the fountain snow, the glaciers, - all creation vanishing before our eyes!

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The glaciers! Where have all our glaciers gone?! Have you sauntered into the high country to see what has happened to our glaciers?

You know my first self-imposed task here in the Yosemite was to follow the footprints of those ancient spirits known as glaciers. There were those, you know, who said that those spirits did not exist hereabouts. Well, the reigning geological opinion in my day was put forth by a Professor Whitney, a state geologist - they named that mountain after him. I always thought they should have named Half Dome for him, given his theories. Well, Whitney insisted that the most impressive of the main passages of the Sierra Nevada, like Yosemite Valley, was caused by actual ruptures of the rock. You know, the swallowing up of great masses, or the spitting aside in great cracks. I didn't think much of this so-called cataclysmic theory, and I said so, and wrote so, and for many years the academic community enjoyed sneering at that 'unknown nobody in the woods', a 'mere shepherd', thundered Professor Whitney.

But careful observation, constant brooding, lying above rocks, for years, as the ice did, now that's the way to arrive at the truth that is graven so lavishly upon them.

Nature chose for a tool, not the earthquake and not the lightning to split and rend asunder, but the mighty engine shaping this world was made up of tiny frail snow flowers, falling noiselessly, through endless centuries, and then joining hands, like children on a frolic.

Think on it. An ice sheet, clasping a thousand mountains in its crystal embrace, carving out the mountain waves, scooping up the lake cups for crystal waters, weaving myriads of mazy canyons, and then dancing down the mountains, rivers and lakes breaking into glad existence at their approach, and at last creating fields and orchards and flowers and birds and happy people.

I used to envy Adam, the father of our race, dwelling as he did in contact with the new-made fields and plants of Eden; but I do so no more, because I have discovered that I too have lived in "Creation's dawn". Nature is forever at work building up and pulling down, creating and destroying, keeping everything whirling and flowing, chasing everything out of one beautiful form and into another, an endless song.

So, where Professor Whitney could find none, the "unknown nobody in the woods" discovered no less than sixty-five small, but living glaciers in the Sierra.

But things have changed, I see. Lord Man and with his magical tricks! Half ! Half of those glaciers have disappeared, and those remaining are rapidly shrinking. Now I know glaciers too are of course naturally chased out of one beautiful form and into another, but to the degree that Lord Man is doing the chasing, it really ticks me off!

We need glaciers and icy places for the health of this good planet, and for the health of many of our fellow mortals. Ask the polar bear, placed - just the other day on that abominable list - the Threatened and Endangered Species list, joining more than 1200 of our fellow mortals - 1200 of God's creatures in peril in this country alone, on a list that grows and grows as Lord Man sows.

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And humans too need glaciers, and all sorts of wild places, places to play in and pray in where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike. Even the sick should try the so-called dangerous mountain passes – for every unfortunate they kill, they cure a thousand.

Perhaps the finest example of the happy, healthy, invigorating effect – especially the healthy effect - of the grand outdoors must be my memorable sled-trip on that great glacier in 1890 I took up in Alaska, in Glacier Bay.

I was eager to return to Glacier Bay, which I had discovered some ten years before, for I was eager to explore, measure and to sketch general views of the seven major tributaries and the main upper part of that massive glacier now known as the Muir. The Muir glacier...

That reminds me - one more thing that ticks me off: people have got to stop slapping my name on everything! Now a few years ago, Mr. William Kent of San Francisco did me the very great honor of naming his Redwood forest, his monumental gift to the American people, the Muir Woods. I am proud of that. School children here and there have planted Muir trees in their playgrounds, and long ago, Asa Gray, the botanist, named several plants for me - the most interesting of which was a sturdy frost-enduring daisy that I discovered on the shore of the Arctic Ocean near Icy Cape. A butterfly, a Sierra peak also, and that Alaskan glacier bears my name. More recently my name has been given to the John Muir Trust in Scotland, to preserve wild lands there, and to a County Park in Dunbar as well. But to show that you can do too much of a good thing, not long ago, at my hometown of Martinez, they have named for me a bank. And not far from there, a housing subdivision. And to prove they entirely missed the point of my life, the super highway whizzing alongside my historic home there is now named The John Muir Parkway. Really ticks me off! But where...

Ah, the Muir glacier! And the healthy effect of the grand outdoors! Well, my companions had taken me by canoe across the inlet from our main camp to the head of the glacier, and promised to retrieve me in eleven days - time enough I thought to learn something, and at the same time, I hoped, to get rid of a severe bronchial cough which had troubled me for three months, and which I had of course acquired in the lowlands I intended to camp on the glacier every night, and so, to sleep on the ice, I had constructed a sturdy sled, three feet long, eighteen inches wide, and made as light as possible, though still not weighing less than one hundred pounds, after packing my instruments, sleeping bag, a sack of hardtack, a little tea and sugar, all securely lashed so that nothing would drop off however much it might be jarred while crossing those icy hummocks, or while dangling from crevasses, those great cracks in glacial ice.

And dragging this heavy little sled seven or eight miles a day over so wildly broken a glacier, across innumerable crevasses, some of them brimful with water, over streams, around several lakes and through an endless sea of icy hummocks, well this was somewhat fatiguing. At times I had to carry the sled bodily, strapped across my back, and often too had to cross those narrow, nerve-trying, ice-sliver bridges, balancing astride of them, cautiously shoving the sled ahead of me with tremendous chasms on either side. And the ice was so rough that my shoes,

resoled just before starting out, were about worn out within a week, and my feet wet every night.

Still, in this serene wilderness - with the intense silvery whiteness of the day, the icy freshness of the sweet north wind, the sounds of the streams and rills falling into the chasms and shafts, the fall of snow in the solid darkness of night, - in this serene wilderness, I say, no matter how weary, one can gain a heart-bath in perfect peace.

Oh, one day would be dismal and damp, but the next glorious, all pure sunshine. And I often climbed the surrounding mountains often, to sketch, to plan a way, and take bearing, etc., in case of storms. Once, to shorten the return journey to my camp, I was tempted to glissade down what appeared to be a snow-filled ravine, which was very steep. All went well until I reached a bluish spot which proved to be ice, on which I lost control of myself and shot down, rolling into a gravel talus at the foot - and happily, all without a scratch. Just then I was startled by a loud fierce, diabolical scream, as if an enemy, having seen me fall, was exulting in my death. Then suddenly, swooping from the sky, two ravens alighted on a jag of rock within a few feet of me, evidently hoping that I had been maimed and that they were going to have a feast. But as they stared at me, studying my condition, impatiently waiting for bone-picking time, I saw what they were up to, and shouted, "Not yet, you black imps, not yet. I'm not carrion yet. I was only sliding for fun. Shame on you not to know better!" - and they did seem ashamed. What wonderful eyes they must have! Nothing that moves in all that icy wilderness escapes those brave birds.

Much was beginning to escape me, however, for I had now had been sketching every day for a week or so, and my eyes were now much inflamed, and I could scarcely see. All the lines I made appeared double, and I awoke one morning nearly blind. The light was intolerable, and I lay all day on my back with a snow poultice bound over my eyes. Every object I tried to look at seemed doubled, even the distant mountain ranges, the upper an exact copy of the lower. This is the first time in Alaska that I had too much sunshine. Not all was dismal, for twice I was visited by a hummingbird, attracted by the red lining of my sleeping bag. Fortunately, about four o'clock in the afternoon, some thin, kindly clouds cast a grateful shade over the glowing landscape, and pulling my cap well down, I gladly took advantage of them to cross a few miles of glacier that lay between me and the shore of the inlet, enabling me to get nearer the main camp, where I could be more easily found should I be unable to travel.

I kept wet bandages on my eyes that night as long as I could, and felt better in the morning, and so decided to pull the sled still further down the glacier, and to be closer still to my companions.

Near the front of the glacier the ice was perfectly free, apparently, of anything like danger, and in walking almost carelessly, I was suddenly swallowed up into a water-filled crevasse. This crevasse like many others was being used as the channel of a stream, and at some narrow point the small cubical masses of ice into which the glacier surface disintegrates were jammed and extended back farther and farther back, forming a sort of slush that completely covered the water. Into this, after crossing thousands of really dangerous crevasses, I suddenly sank, for

never before had I encountered a danger so completely concealed. Down I plunged over head and ears, but of course bobbed up again, and after a hard struggle succeeded in dragging myself out over the farther side. I quickly pulled my sled over to the shelter of a cliff, stripped off my soggy clothing, threw it in a wet heap and leapt into my sleeping-bag to shiver away the night as best I could. Next morning dressing in a dreary rain - after wringing out my sloppy underclothing, - well, it was far from pleasant. Still, that very night, I was back at the main camp, my eyes were better, and I felt no bad effect from my icy bath. And every last trace of my three month's bronchial cough was gone. No lowland microbe could have survived such a trip.

So, are you weary? Are you ill? Then go air yourself out on an ice-prairie, or up on our breezy mountain tops. Outdoors is the natural place for man - and the farther from his cities the better.

You know as a young man, I often thought I'd like to explore the cities, if like a lot of wild hills and valleys, they could be cleared of inhabitants. But inhabitants or no, I always found the streets so barren, bee-less, muddy, and mean-looking. Now God never made an ugly landscape, eh? All that the sun shines on is beautiful, as long as it is wild. And it's strange that so many really good people waste their short lives in mean surroundings.

And when they do attempt to escape, these city dwellers, - these would-be travelers - , transform themselves into a creature known hereabouts as a tourist, and becomes satisfied with the view they get from their car windows, and hotels and dust and chatter. And whenever an excursion off into the woods is proposed, all sorts of fears and imaginary dangers are conjured up. Out there, eh? Bugs. Aye, bugs. And impassable rivers. Jungles of brush. Colds, fevers. Snakes, bears, Indians. Starvation. Well, that's true - the average tourist can die of starvation in a single afternoon.

Many are starved more than they know – starved of beauty, starved of health. Tell me what you will of the benefits of city civilization, of the sweet security of the streets - all as part of that high destiny of man that we hear so much of. I know ... I know that our bodies were made to thrive in pure air, and in scenes in which pure air is found. All those deathly exhalations and poisons that sit and brood over the broad and cities and towns – every man and beast with stinging eyes and gasping lung... doesn't that tick you off?

Now, where was I?... ah! glaciers. Glaciers then, and glaciers now – I see that not only our Yosemite glaciers but the great Muir glacier, and so many others worldwide, are shrinking drastically, all no doubt on some endangered landscape list. Lord Man, tossing his cloak worldwide.

But enough of glaciers...

Ha! I remember my good friend, John Burroughs, introducing me to a crowd of scientists while on that Harriman expedition to Alaska. "In John Muir," he said, " we have an authority on glaciers, and a thorough one, so thorough that he will not allow the rest of us to have an

opinion on the subject!" A bit of truth in that. So enough of glaciers, and should you need to know more on the subject, well, I've written it all down here somewhere.

And as writing was always the most difficult work I ever did, I'd be grateful to know that someone, somewhere, was reading the stuff. Though writing... well, it did have this advantage, I suppose, of extending my play on this good planet, for a man in his books made be said to wander the world long after he is in his grave. And it is a pleasure to think that someone, somewhere, may be sauntering through the Sierra this very moment with a bit of Old John Muir's spirit in his pocket - as I once sauntered about with Robbie Burns, and Shakespeare, and Thoreau and Emerson.

Emerson! Ralph Waldo Emerson! Now he I walked with in the flesh. Here, in the Yosemite Valley.

I was working then as a sawmill operator over by the Yosemite Creek, when one day I overheard the hotel people whispering, "Emerson is here!" My heart throbbed as if an angel direct from Heaven had alighted on my Sierran rocks. Well, I had read all of his essays and thought that of all people he would be the best to interpret the sayings and doings of these noble mountains and trees. But so great was my awe and reverence for the man, I did not dare to go to him or speak to him. I just hovered on the outside of the crowd of people that were pressing up to be introduced to him, but then I heard that in three or four days he was going away, and in sheer desperation I sat down and I wrote him a note, and I said, "El Capitan and the Half Dome demand that you stay longer!"

Well, next day, he inquired for the writer, and was directed to the saw mill, to which he came on horseback, attended by his Boston friends. Bostonians!

But, oh, Emerson! The most serene, majestic, Sequoia-like soul I ever met. He was as sincere as the trees, as sincere as the sun.

I had then a small box-like home attached beneath the gable of the mill, overhanging the stream. People called in my hang-nest, because it seemed unsupported. A hole in the roof commanded a view of the glorious Half Dome, and a skylight on the other side of the roof commanded a full view of the upper Yosemite Fall. But it was not easy of access, being reached only by a series of sloping planks, like a hen ladder. Fortunately only the people I disliked were afraid to enter it, and Emerson bravely climbed up and I showed him my collection of plants and my studies of the glaciers, all of which seemed to interest him greatly.

I was then in my early thirties, and he was close to seventy, but forgetting his age, plans, duties, and ties to his Boston friends, I immediately proposed an immeasurable camping trip in back of the mountains. He seemed anxious to go, but he considerably mentioned his party. I said, "Never mind all these plans and parties and all lowland duties - the mountains are calling! Run away!" But alas, he was too close to the sundown of his life, and his Boston party, full of indoor philosophy, failed to appreciate my wild plan, and kept Mr. Emerson to the hotels and the trails.

Still, he did come, again and again, to my hang-nest, while his party hung about the hotel, and when he was leaving the Valley, he invited me to accompany him to the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees. Well, I said, "I'll go, Mr. Emerson, if you promised to camp out with me in the grove. I'll build a glorious camp-fire, and the great brown boles of the Sequoia will be lighted up. You yourself are a Sequoia," I said, "you must stop and get acquainted with your big brethren. At this he became as enthusiastic as a boy, and sweet perennial smile became still deeper and sweeter, and he said, "Yes, we will! Camp out, camp out!" and I felt sure that we would have at least one good wild memorable night around a Sequoia campfire.

Well, then, the next day, early in the afternoon, when we reached Clark's Station, - Wawona - I was surprised to see this party dismount. And when I went up to ask if we not going up into the grove to camp, one of these Boston fellows turns to me and says "Oh, no. Oh, no, no - it would never do to camp out in the night air, Mr. Muir. Mr. Emerson might take cold, you know, and that would be a dreadful thing."

"Only in homes and hotels are colds caught!" I said, "Nobody was ever known to take cold camping in these woods - there's not a single cough or sneeze in all of the Sierra!" And I pictured the climate-changing fire that I would make, and how the trees would stand about us transfigured in the purple light, while the stars looked down between the great domes, and ended by urging them to "Come on, and make an immortal Emerson night of it!" But their strange dread of pure night air was not to be overcome; they could not shake the house habit, with its comfort of carpet dust and other unknowable reeks.

The following afternoon, Emerson and his sadly civilized party mounted and rode westward. But when Emerson reached the top of the ridge, and after all the rest of the party were over and out of sight, he turned his horse, took off his hat and waved me a last good-bye, then down all mountains and into the sunset.

Ah, I felt lonely when he left, so sure had I been that of all people Emerson would be the first to sing and praise these mountains. That night I did build a great fire in the grove, but as usual had it to myself. And though lonesome for the first time in these woods, I quickly took heart again. For the trees had not gone to Boston, nor the birds, and as I sat by my fire Emerson was with me again in the spirit, though I never saw him again in the flesh. I wish I had met him in some other season, not so late in the winter of his life. Though for his Boston party, I suppose all seasons were winter - which may be miserable in Boston, but can be enjoyed hereabouts as well as any other, eh? Bostonians – they really tick me off!

Now it's a minor tick-off, not to be compared to the loss of glaciers, the loss of the view of the Sierra from Pacheco Pass, , the loss of so many of our fellow mortals since I spent my little while on this good planet, the loss of the Hetch Hetchy Valley...

You know, of all the things that tick me off, the one thing that most often keeps me spinning up and out of my grave, is the continuing battle for the Hetch Hetchy Valley. How could they take the Hetch Hetchy?

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You know the Hetch Hetchy Valley, eh? or if you don't you should take a saunter over to it as you leave the Sierra. It's another beautiful Yosemite type valley, only a mountain or two away in that direction, part of our National Park, drowned hundreds of feet deep, to pipe Sierra water to San Francisco. Now San Francisco needs water, yes, but that water could have been, still can be, stored elsewhere, downstream! The Hetch Hetchy Valley, looks just like this glorious Valley outside these doors, a rare national treasure, carved by the same glorious glacial forces, lying at the same height above sea level, with the same plant people, the same fellow mortals, the same waterfalls - all to be lost forever to our people's future? Lord Man, the dark magician, tossing his cloak, disappearing landscapes. We need to drain the thing, bring back the plant people, and stock it with grizzly bears. The bears will keep Lord Man – and perhaps the Bostonians, away.

Bears. Poor fellow mortals. They are much misunderstood beasts.

I should confess I misunderstood them when I first came to the Sierra. I shall never forget my first interview with a Yosemite bear; we were surprised and embarrassed, the both of us, but I confess that the bear's behavior was better than mine. When I first reached the High Sierra, I was eager to meet all of the mountain animals, and many of them came to me as if to introduce themselves and to make my acquaintance, but the bears stayed out of my way. And a mountaineer, a hunter from whom I sought information about bears, well, he told me that all bears were very shy, and that I might travel those mountains for years without meeting one, for they always ran away from bad Brother Man, never showing fight unless wounded, or in defense of their young.

But one morning, in June, just as the sunbeams were streaming through the trees, I set off for a day's sketching up on the North Dome, for the North Dome commands a general view of the Valley, and I was eager then to sketch every rock and tree and waterfall. Well, we had not gone more than a half a mile from camp, when Carlo, ahead of me on the trail, suddenly stopped, snuff the air, peered cautiously ahead, dropped his bushy tail, drooped his ears, and began to step softly, like a mountain cat, stopping every few yards to look into my face, and saying plainly enough, "Bear ahead!"

I walked cautiously in the indicated direction, until we approached a small flowery meadow that I was familiar with, and there I crept to the base of a tree on its margin, bearing in mind what I had been told about the shyness of bears and fearing that he might catch sight of me and run away.

Peering out from around this tree, I saw, not thirty yards away, a big burly cinnamon bear, half erect, his paws resting on the trunk of a tree that had fallen into the meadow, his hips almost hidden in grass and flowers. And he was listening attentively, and trying to catch the scent, as if somehow aware of our approach. He made a fine picture, standing there, and alert, in that sunny garden, surrounded by the most beautiful fir trees in the world.

I studied him at leisure, noting the sharp muzzle thrust inquiringly forward, the stiff ears almost hidden in hair, the long shaggy hair on his massive chest, and the slow, heavy way in which he

moved his head. After studying him at length, I decided that I wanted to see that bear run, so that I might study his gait in motion, and so I foolishly, waving my hat and shouting, made a wild rush on the bear, expecting him to make haste to run away. But I quickly found, to my very profound dismay, he himself had no such expectations. He simply thrust his head a little more forward and looked at me sharply, as if to say, "You want to fight? I'm ready!" I began to fear that upon me would fall the work of running.

But I was afraid to run, fearing that he might pursue me, and so I could simply stand my ground, putting on as bold a look as I could, with him not a dozen yards away, and trusting that the influence of the human eye was as great as it is said to be. And under these strained circumstances, our interview seemed to last a long time. But finally the bear, seeing how still I was, removed his huge paws from the log, gave me a piercing look as if warning me not to follow him, and sauntered off through the meadow and into the forest, stopping every few yards to look back, to make sure that I would not take advantage of him in a rear attack. I greatly enjoyed the vanishing view as he sauntered off into the lilies and the columbines.

Ah! Bears! Sierra bears! They are everywhere there at home. And everything - everything! - except granite - is food. Truly every tree serves to feed him, every bush and herb, with leaves and flowers, fruit and bark, and all the animals he can catch - badgers, gophers, ground squirrels, lizards, snakes. And among the many reasons to admire and respect bears, is that they are extremely fond of mutton.

And eating everything, they themselves are never eaten. Except by man. And man of course is their only enemy to be feared. I shall never forget that hunter, that mountaineer I asked for information about bears, and his dreadful enthusiasm on the subject. "Bears! Bear meat is the best meat in these mountains; their skins make the best beds, and their grease the best butter. Biscuits shortened with bear grease goes about as far as beans - a man can walk all day on a couple of them biscuit!"

I'm sure the bear would be grateful to know just how useful he is to Brother Man. Indeed, the grizzly bear, here in California, is all used up. I've not seen a grizzly bear now in those mountains for many, many years. Gone to biscuits, I suppose. Used up.

It is use, you see. Use is the holy war cry of the temple destroyers. Endless use of our fellow mortals and of the plant people. Have you noticed? Lord Man is always painfully astonished whenever they find anything, in all God's universe, living or dead, that they cannot eat - or render into something they call useful to themselves - for work or play, clothing, ornament, or for mere cruel sportish amusement. And all of our other fellow mortals, who have no such obvious benefit to Lord Man, well, they have no right or reason to exist, and so they too perish, for their un-usefulness. As if our ways were God's ways!

And of course, Lord Man believes that to be the case, for Lord Man has a very precise and dogmatic insight of the nature.

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Their God is regarded as a civilized, law-abiding gentleman in favor a republican form of government; believes in the literature and language of England; is a warm supporter of Sunday schools, missionary societies, and the constitution, and is as purely a manufactured puppet as any heathen idol!

And is it any wonder then that, with this understanding of their God's nature, that they would have in addition a precise and dogmatic insight into the *intention* of the Creator, which was - and is - to make the world - and everything in it - especially for man.

So under this pleasant plan, Lord Man snatches the passenger pigeon from the sky as merely a morsel of meat for us. For us. Snatched by the many millions until the pigeon no longer exists on the planet. The buffalo is chased toward extinction for his tasty tongue alone. But for us, that tongue, for us. The ostrich we pluck for his feather. And the walrus - and the elephant - for their tusks alone, but for us, for us, those tusks. Bears for biscuits! Whales, well, during my little while on this good planet, were useful as storehouses of oil to light our dark ways, until the discovery of the Pennsylvania oil field, which occurred just when I was first sauntering to the Sierra, not so long ago as the round world turns, and now the more we light our way, the dimmer the planet becomes - and we can longer see the Sierra Nevada from Pacheco Pass! Though it didn't help the whale of course, for Lord Man has found a higher use for them. As a gourmet meal for some, and for others, useful research, in which the killing of whales must go on and on, so that Lord Man might better understand why their numbers are declining.

But now if we should ask these profound expositors of God's intentions, how about those man-eating animals? -- lions, tigers, alligators -- which smack their lips over raw man? Or about those myriads of noxious insects that destroy his labor and drink his blood? Perhaps man was intended for food and drink for all these? Oh, no! Not at all! These are irresolvable difficulties connected with Eden's apple and the Devil. Why does water drown its lord? Why do so many minerals poison him? Why are so many plants and fishes deadly enemies? Why is the lord of creation subjected to the same laws of life as his subjects?

Now, it never seems to occur to Lord Man that Nature's object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each and every one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one. Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit -- the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it is incomplete too without the smallest microscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge.

From the dust of the earth the Creator has made Homo Sapiens, true. But from that same material he has made every other creature, however obnoxious, insignificant, or useful to us. They are earth-born companions and our fellow mortals.

Bears are made of the same dust as we; they breathe the same winds; drink the same waters. A bear's day is warmed by the same sun, over domed by the same blue sky, and his life burns

and ebbs with heart-pulsing very much the same as ours, for they are our earth-born companions, and our fellow mortals.

How blind Lord Man is to the rights of all the rest of creation, eh! It is a mean, blinding, loveless doctrine that teaches that animals were made only for man, to be petted, spoiled, enslaved, slaughtered, or mounted on a wall. And how civilized people can reap jolly pleasure from the blood and agony and death of these fine animals, with their humanlike groans... Lord Man! Ticks me off!

Well, I feel a need for some Yosemite wildness, perhaps saunter about what lovely glaciers might remain there, and cool off some of the ticking. You too might want to freshen up your spirits just a bit. Now I'll be back, and shortly, - for Lord Man is surely lurking somewhere hereabouts, and perhaps we'll discuss a few more things that really ticks me off.

**END ACT ONE**

## **ACT TWO**

All right, then, I'm back. You know, it's difficult, as I saunter about my home in these glorious mountains to stay ticked off. But I've managed. Well, even from the highest peaks, I cannot see Pacheco Pass, the Yosemite glaciers are shrinking still, the Hetch Hetchy Valley, I see, remains 400 feet under water, and Lord Man continues to evade me. And have you noticed? So many of your fellow travelers out there are *hiking* through the Valley like soldiers on campaign.

Hiking! Hiking is a vile word, don't you think? I don't like the word or the thing! One should saunter through the Sierra, but no, they go 'hiking' through the woods. Well, down the easy trail to the nearest lake. Well, you know they'll go where they can find their own reflection.

Do you know the origin of that word 'saunter'? It's a beautiful word. As you know, away back in the Middle Ages people used to go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and when people in the villages through which they passed asked where they were going, they would reply, "A la sainte terre" – "To the Holy Land". And so they became known as the sainte-terre-ers or saunterers. Well, these mountains are our Holy Land, and we should saunter through them reverently, not 'hike' through them, as if at war with the mountains. In that respect, much like Lord Man, eh?

Lord Man. He continues to evade me, but I meet his minions, now and then, of course, in many places and in many guises. The first time I vividly recall was in the mountains of Tennessee. I was sauntering about on my 1000 walk through the South just after the Civil War, and I came upon a fellow leaning on a fence, looking across the wasted hills of Tennessee, who said to me, "I believe in Providence. Our fathers came into these valleys, got the richest of them, and skimmed off the cream of the soil. The worn-out ground won't yield no roasin' ears now. But the Lord foresaw this state of affairs, and prepared something else for us. And what is it? Why,

He meant us to bust open these copper mines and gold mines, so that we may have money to buy the corn that we cannot raise." A profound observation, extracted from the Gospel of Lord Man.

Why is it that, Lord Man, in pursuit of bread, so often lays to waste the very land it grows upon? Now it is a serious matter, this bread, which perishes, and could it have been dispensed with during my little while on this good planet, I doubt if civilization would have ever seen me again.

Ha! When I first arrived here in California, after too brief a visit to this Valley, I found employment as a shepherd in the San Joaquin Valley, and it was there, that for the first time in my life, I found that I had to make as well as earn my daily bread. And I shall never forget my first attempt. I filled this big, cylindrical pot full of dough, and applied hot coals, trusting that the result might be bread. But innocent of yeast, this sticky compost remained as passive beneath the fire as an Indian martyr. And upon prying it out of the pot the next morning I found it to be black, perfectly solid, and upon trying to cut out a section of it with a butcher knife, it broke with a glassy fracture. I began to hope that, like Goodyear, I had discovered a new article of manufacture. My teeth were good, though, so I could gnaw on a chunk of it like a squirrel on a nut, and then a neighboring shepherd made me wise to sourdough ferment, and thereafter my bread was better.

Oh, the shepherd's sordid life, here in early California, I tell you! Well, to earn the right to make this dubious bread, I had eighteen hundred sheep to chase after, all day long, alone, over hill and dale. My day began with a blur of these woolly bundles gushing and squeezing out of the gate of the corral and scattering, like water from a broken flume, over a dozen hills and gullies, until each had about an acre of ground to themselves, except for four or five hundred, who would run, convulsively, at a gallop, with very short stops to feed - as if determined to leave the flock for dreamed-of new pastures, but too hungry to fully carry out their plans. Fortunately, for the pursuing shepherd, they were like some people that we know - having acquired their freedom, they did not know what to do with it, and toward sundown they always seemed glad to get back into their corral and their old familiar bondage.

Silly animals! Well, a sheep can scarcely be called an animal. An entire flock is required to make one foolish individual.

For example, whenever a danger, real or imaginary, would rattle their silly nerves, the entire flock would run up from the hills and the gullies, racing for the very center of the flock, as if every mutton eating animal in the world was at their heels, and in a few seconds, the entire eighteen hundred would be squeezed and felted into a solid circular cake of mutton and wool. And they would behave like this, for example, upon perceiving, in the distance, a large cloud.

Now after my stories of the sheep, you might think it would be a long time indeed before I would again enjoy the poetry of a shepherd's life. But working in the San Joaquin Valley as summer approached, I was longing for the cool mountains, whose treasures I had tasted briefly the previous summer. Happily, a Mr. Delaney, a sheep owner for whom I'd worked for a few

weeks, came to me and offered to engage me to go with him and his flock, and a shabby shepherd named Billy, to the headwaters of the Merced and the Tuolumne rivers, the very region in those mountains I had most in mind to visit. And the main thing, he said, was simply to keep an eye on this shabby shepherd Billy, and that otherwise I would be free to study rocks, scenery, or trees as much as I liked. And so I concluded to go, though fearing, when I saw those silly sheep, awkwardly bouncing one by one out of the home corral to be counted, that few of the two thousand and fifty of the silly things would ever return from the high mountains.

And as difficult as it was watching the silly sheep, it was even more difficult to keep an eye on that shabby shepherd, Billy. Have I told you about Billy? Now there was a queer character.

In following the sheep, Billy carried a heavy six-shooter on one hip, and on the other, his luncheon, mutton, of course. Now the ancient cloth, in which this meat, fresh from the frying pan, was tied, served as a filter, through which the clear fat and gravy juices would drip down his right hip and leg, gathering in clustering stalactites. This formation, however, was soon broken up and scattered evenly throughout his scanty apparel, by sitting down, rolling over, crossing his legs while resting on logs, etc., making his shirt and trousers water-tight and shiny.

The trousers, in particular, had become so adhesive from the mixed fat and resin, that pine needles, thin flakes of bark, hair, mica scales, minute grains of quartz, moth and butterfly wings, the legs and antennae of innumerable insects, and even whole insects, like the small beetles and mosquitoes, flower petals, - indeed bits and pieces of all of the animals, minerals and plants of the region adhered to them, and were safely embedded, so that, though far from being a naturalist, he collected fragmentary specimens of everything, and was richer than he knew.

These precious trousers were never taken off, and nobody knew how old they were - though one might guess by their concentric structure and thickness. For instead of growing thin, they grew thick, and in their stratification they came to have a rich biological and geological significance. I think he was chiefly fond of them for they enabled him to cross a stream without getting wet. And he seemed as fearful of water as his silly sheep.

Now there! There is a mystery! Why sheep are so dreadfully afraid of water - well, I don't know, but they do fear it, as soon as they are born, and perhaps before. I once saw a young lamb down in the San Joaquin Valley, not two hours old, not having gone yet a hundred yards on his life journey - I watched him approach a shallow stream - shallow? - perhaps two feet wide and an inch deep. It fearfully approached the dreaded water, cried piteously for its mother, and refused to venture. It's patient mother came to it again and again to encourage it, but long without avail. Finally, gathering up it's trembling legs for this mighty effort, and holding up its head, as if it knew all about drowning and was anxious to keep its nose above the water, it took a tremendous leap, and landed in the middle of the inch-deep stream. It seemed astonished to find that instead of sinking over head and ears, only its toes were wet, and after gazing at the fearful water for a few more moments, it finally sprang out safe and dry on the other side. Sheep brain must surely be poor stuff, eh?

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Well, with Delaney's sheep, in driving them into the high mountains, we came at last, weeks into the drive, to the Yosemite Creek, a mile or so above the lip of the Valley where it makes its tremendous leap half a mile down to the Valley floor. Now Delaney assured us that if only one of these two thousand fifty sheep could be made to cross over the creek, all the rest would be sure to follow. But that one could not be found. Finally Delaney seized a young lamb, waded across the stream, tied it to a bush on the farther side, where it cried piteously for its mother. Well, mother, though greatly concerned, simply called it back.

This play on maternal affection having failed, Delaney began to cut down the slender trees that grew along the bank, with which to build a small coral, just large enough to contain the entire flock when well pressed together. And as the stream would form one side of the coral, he thought they could easily be forced into the water. Well, the enclosure complete, the silly animals driven in, and then rammed hard up against the brink of the ford. I have seen fish driven out of the water with less ado than was made trying to drive these animal in to it. The best efforts of Billy, Carlo, Delaney and myself were of no avail. Finally Delaney wedged himself through this now compacted mass, and at the brink, seized a few of these unfortunate animals, and by main strength threw them into the stream. But instead of crossing over, they simply swam about the bank, trying desperately to get back into the flock. We were now pretty well baffled. Pan with his pipes could do no better, we thought.

But then Delaney struck upon the last but most likely scheme to try: starvation. Simply keep them in the coral, let them grow hungry until they came to their senses, if they had any. This plan was put into effect for only a few minutes, when one adventurer in the foremost rank suddenly plunged into the water and then bravely swam to the farther shore. And now, as if suddenly the stream had become the only desirable part of the planet, two thousand and fifty plunged into the water, trampling one another underneath, while we desperately tried to hold them back.

I can still see Delaney in the midst of this gurgling, gasping, drowning mass, shoving sheep left and right, as if each were a piece of timber, and then the stream, too, served to drift them out a bit, and in a few minutes, they were all over and baaing and feeding as if nothing out of the ordinary had ever happen to them in their lives.

That none were drowned seemed wonderful. I fully expected that hundreds would meet the romantic fate of being swept into the Yosemite Valley over the highest waterfall in the world. And it was not long after that I began to relish that notion.

Well, you know, it was not long after that we reached our destination, the Tuolumne Meadows, the Lord's grandest gardens. And oh, the damage that those sheep did there - not only my sheep, of course, but more than one hundred thousand sheep driven into those meadows every year before it became a park. And they would eat every blade of grass, every shrub, bush and flower, not sparing even the young conifers. And then they would rake and dibble at the loose mountain soil for the spring floods to wash away, and at last leaving the ground barren. I tell you, the coming of a glacial period or a lava flow could scarcely wipe out the flowers and shrubs as effectively as those "hoofed locusts."

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Ah, well, you know, our civilized sheep at least have the excuse that centuries ago Lord Man went into their mountain strongholds, seized them, carried them home, bred the hair out of their wool, the bones out of their bodies, subjected them to the usual processes of husbandry, and finished by boiling them in a pot - process that completes all sheep improvements as far as Lord Man is concerned.

And compare, eh? Compare these silly creatures with the wild mountain sheep I met in that same first summer up in the Sierra. They, all magnificently horned, moving strongly and deliberately up the face of a cliff so steep I could not follow unless barefooted, and perhaps not then. And like the true mountaineers that they are, they never seem to hurry, make no noise, move in admirable order, and each has an independent will. And fearless of water, whether a small stream or a raging river.

And Nature's sheep, they are so clean and elegant, and ours are so dirty and awkward. But then, Nature's sheep are guarded by the Great Shepherd of us all, and ours are guarded by Billy Trousers and the like. A little pure wildness is the great present want of both men and sheep. Indeed, you know, in my later studies of wild sheep, I was delighted and astonished to discover that the quality of wool in wild sheep is infinitely better than the quality in any of our domestics. Not the quantity of course, for they are not bred for any purpose but their own, and they need their hairy coats for their winter storms. But so much better is the quality, that I once seriously suggested to the wool growers association here in California, that I go into the Yosemite region and capture several hundred of those sheep, to breed with, and improve the wool, and perhaps the brains, of our domestics. And though that might have been a good idea those many years ago, well, like the grizzly bear, at the end my little while on this good planet, I had not seen a wild sheep in those mountains for many, many years. I suppose that Lord Man found a higher use for them - to adorn the walls of their saloons and parlors with their magnificent horns.

Trophy hunters – there's Lord Man at work! Not content with domestic sheep being useful for meat and wool, the Bighorn becomes useful for sport and for bragging rights on the size of his horns! The Bighorn... ah, the Bighorn...

You know, I've had a sudden - and uncomfortable - recollection. And I believe I know now where Lord Man lurks.

Many years ago, I was sauntering through the Modoc lava beds, up in northern California, and I chanced upon four hunters, eagerly bent on hunting the wild sheep, to get their magnificent horns with which to adorn their walls. I joined them, not for the pleasure of killing sheep, but because I thought I might learn something of their habits and their homes. . The hunters came back to camp night after night, weary and sheep-less, and I was glad to see the sheep had so wild and safe a home. Then, one morning, while crossing the lava beds, one sharp eyed hunter spotted some, a flock of fifty, three hundred yards distant, standing proud, gazing at us. An old ram set off toward the safety of a nearby mountain, all the others following in single file, racing on by us at right angles - a thrilling scene. The hunters drew up, took deliberate aim, fired. One of the rams fell, a noble old fellow, broad and ponderous as a buffalo, probably weighing three

hundred and fifty pounds. The brave sheep were now bounding wildly over the plain in a direct line for their castle mountain; yet a second fell, a ewe this time. Then the first, the ram, suddenly arose, and after staggering a few rods, while the hunters were reloading, ran firm and erect again. And I remember he halted, clearly outlined against the sky, broad and massive, huge horns thrown back over his shoulders - a tempting target - and then vanished, going down back of a cliff. We raced up to the ewe, all that was left of the fifty. She was breathing still, but helpless, and with so gentle an eye ... poor woman sheep! One of the hunters drew a big knife and coolly shed her blood, which formed a crimson pool in a hollow of the gray lava.

But this is what I must tell you: just a moment before, unarmed as I was, I would have worried that poor ewe like a wolf. And in the excitement and savage exhilaration while chasing that wounded ram, I, who have never killed any mountain life, - again, I felt like a wolf in pursuit of the flying flock.

The truth is, - as much as I should like to deny it - only a few generations separate us from our grandfathers who were savage as wolves. This is the secret of our love of the hunt. Savageness is natural; it is civilization that is strained and unnatural. I expect we little know just how much wildness there is in us. How much of Lord Man there is in us. In us - well, perhaps in you - but most certainly, I see, in me.

And it is this, I suppose, that ticks me off the most.

For at last I know where Lord Man, the great magician, lurks, know why he always seems nearby, and know too his greatest trick of all! Not that he can obliterate a landscape at his whim, or extinguish our plant people or our fellow mortals forever from this good earth, or reduce a mighty glacier to a puddle, but his greatest trick of all is that, with a snap of his finger, a toss of his cloak, he conceals himself, becomes invisible, within.

**For he dwells within. And I caught a glimpse of him in action there on the Modoc Lava beds. Not the action of Lord Man full blown perhaps, driven by greed and arrogance. The action of a minor minion, I could say, but a minion nonetheless, tossing my cloak, concealing myself, making thoughts and deeds invisible.**

And so, suddenly I see that, while I did not cut down a single tree here in this Valley, I did build a saw mill just over there, certainly some contribution to the work of Lord Man.

And though I learned to loathe the domestic sheep, I did drive some 2,050 of the things into those glorious meadows, yet another offering to Lord Man's magic. And so on and on, I suppose.

For he dwells within. Not occupying so large a space as some perhaps, but a presence nonetheless.

**But. In our strained and unnatural civilization, we've managed to reduce** and nearly rid ourselves of many-another dreadful presence in our lives - cannibalism, slavery, infanticide -

and other hateful habits. Surely we can reduce the astonishing abuse we are heaping on this good planet; surely we can become a better beast. We can use our little time to better purpose. We can do this.

Now of course, except for my occasional haunting hereabouts, my little while on this good planet was spent a while ago, as the round world turns. But your time, good wilderness lovers, good Yosemite lovers, your time remains, and can be spent, must be spent, to even better purpose.

For I know you must see Lord Man more clearly than I have ever done, for his works are everywhere today; it is plain enough that in this grand creation, Earth, no single patch of soil, no drop of water, no breath of air, is safe now from Lord Man's dark magic.

So, join me! And get ticked off! You needn't be ticked off at what ticks me off, here in my Yosemite home. Oh, I think you should be ticked off at the loss of our fellow mortals, the loss of our plant people, the loss of air, soil and water, the loss of the Hetch Hetchy, the fact that you cannot see the Sierra Nevada from the Pacheco Pass. You can leave the Bostonians to me. But if none of these things ticks you off, when you're once again at your precious home, look around your neighborhood; you'll find a host of things that will really tick you off. Then join your hands with all your **ticked-off friends and neighbors, and even minor minions**, and use your little while to purpose.

And when you tire, as tire you will, of being ticked off, saunter on back to these glorious mountains, get their good tidings. Because you already know that wherever you happen to find yourself here, in the Sierra, it always seems, at that moment, to be, of all places, the best, a fine place to forget weariness and wrongs and bad business, and being ticked off.

Go, take a Sierra saunter.

Go, because everyone needs to be kind, at least to themselves. Go because everyone needs beauty, as well as bread. Go quietly; go alone, no harm will befall you. Go often. Go all your life. As age comes on, one source of enjoyment after another is closed, but nature's sources will never fail you. And go, ultimately, because in the going lies the answer to Lord Man and his minions who would destroy our Sierra through greed and arrogance and ignorance. For if enough of us go and play among the spirits of the wilderness, - jumping from rock to rock, tracing the rivers and the streams to sources, sauntering through the pinewoods and the meadows, getting in touch with the nerves of the Mother, Earth, - if enough of us do this we need not despair. For what we so learn to love we shall not allow to be destroyed. And we can retain our faith. Oh, our faith in the loving process of creation to be sure, but our faith too in humanity. As a workman. Our faith that the time is coming - must come - when every article of manufacture, every dwelling, every part of human activity, will be as purely a work of loving creation as are these mountains, and trees and bonnie loving flowers.

Well, the mountains are calling me home, and I must go. I do thank you for your time here this evening, and if should you ever need to conjure up the spirit of Old John Muir again, well, you

might find it from time to time in artificial caves such as this. And you'll find that spirit, too, in good hearts all around you. So seek them out. Nature is not so poor as to possess only one of anything. And you'll find that spirit, too, wherever you find wildness, and especially in these spirited mountains, here in Yosemite. So engage it, engage it well, and somewhere down the trail, I'll become heart-hungry to see old friends again, and I expect I'll meet your spirit hereabouts.

And if you have used your little while to purpose, perhaps we'll saunter over to the Pacheco Pass, and look back through an atmosphere so crystal clear we see three hundred miles and more of our glorious Sierra Nevada in one comprehensive view. And I'll turn to you to say "Things have changed, I see. Glad you got ticked off!"

**END OF SCRIPT**