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John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir

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John Muir, America's pioneer conservationist and father of the national park system, was a man of considerable literary talent. As he explored the wilderness of the western part of the United States for decades, he carried notebooks with him, narrating his wanderings, describing what he saw, and recording his scientific researches. This reprint of his journals, edited by Linnie Marsh Wolfe in 1938 and long out of print, offers an intimate picture of Muir and his activities during a long and productive period of his life.

The sixty extant journals and numerous notes in this volume were written from 1867 to 1911. They start seven years after the time covered in *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, Muir's uncompleted autobiography. The earlier journals capture the essence of the Sierra Nevada and Alaska landscapes. The changing appearance of the Sierras from Sequoia north and beyond the Yosemites enthralled Muir, and the first four years of the journals reveal his dominating concern with glacial action. The later notebooks reflect his changes over the years, showing a mellowing of spirit and a deep concern for human rights.

Like all his writings, the journals concentrate on his observations in the wilderness. His devotion to his family, his many warm friendships, and his many-sided public life are hardly mentioned. Very little is said about the quarter-century battle for national parks and forest reserves. The notebooks record, in language fuller and freer than his more formal writings, the depth of his love and transcendental feeling for the wilderness. The rich heritage of his native Scotland and the unconscious music of the poetry of Burns, Milton, and the King James Bible permeate the language of his poetic fancy.

In his later life, Muir attempted to sort out these journals and, at the request of friends, published a few extracts. A year after his death in 1914, his literary executor and biographer, William Frederick Badè, also published episodes from the journals. Linnie Marsh Wolfe set out to salvage the best of his writings still left unpublished in 1938 and has thus added to our understanding of the life and thought of a complex and fascinating American figure.

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