Forestry and The Source
By Marianne Patinelli-Dubay

Mr. PINCHOT: [...] I think that the men who assert that it is better to leave a piece of natural scenery in its natural condition have rather the better of the argument, and I believe if we had nothing else to consider than the delight of a few men and women who would yearly go into Hetch Hetchy Valley, then it should be left in its natural condition. That the considerations on the other side of the question to my mind are simply overwhelming, and so much so that I have never been able to see that there was any reasonable argument against the use of this water supply by the city of San Francisco.

Mr. RAKER: Have you read Mr. John Muir’s criticism of the bill? You know him?

Mr. PINCHOT: Yes, sir; I know him very well. He is an old and a very good friend of mine. I have never been able to agree with him in his attitude toward the Sierras for the reason that my point of view has never appealed to him at all.

—From testimony on the Hetch Hetchy Dam to the House Committee on Public Lands, 1913.

Our cultural and personal origin stories are the authors of our lives. Each of us occupies a world animated by the traditions and beliefs that have been handed down, or that we over time have taken up. Whether by birth or by pilgrimage, our creed guides not just our interior life, but how we think about what we decide to do. Since forestry is in the doing, we are mostly, and correctly, concerned with how decisions land. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider, too, how the profession has been shaped by one ideology that shifted over time, leaving some tension in its wake.

A forester operates according to the established and emerging wisdom of the trade, and this knowledge is improved through insight into how wisdom traditions have both shaped the profession and given rise to its internal disagreements. We talk about this rift in secular language and, by failing to trace this schism back to its source, we remain like Sisyphus, condemned by Zeus to roll a boulder uphill for all eternity. It would be better to own that we are having a re-evaluation of our principles, dedicated to social welfare and reforestation, and that I think that the method of nature could ever analyse it? That rushing stream will not stop to be observed. We can never surprise nature in a corner; never find the end of a thread; never tell where to set the first stone. The bird hastens to lay her egg, the egg hastens to be a bird. The wholeness we admire in the order of the world, is the result of infinite distribution. Its smoothness is the smoothness of the pitch of the cataract. Its permanence is a perpetual illusion. Every natural fact is an emanation, and that from which it emanates is an emanation also, and from every emanation is a new emanation.

—From an oration delivered before the Society of the Adelphi by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Waterville College, Maine, 1841.

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Literature Cited