

May 29, 1870 (Doc. 146)

146. TO ASA GRAY

Smithsonian Inst<sup>on</sup>

May 29<sup>th</sup> 1870—

My Dear Dr:

After having wound up my affairs as far as possible before starting for Europe I have commenced to devote the last hours of Saturday<sup>1</sup> night to a communion with you. The proposition that I should visit Europe was so unexpected, and my labours so multifarious and incessant during the first half of the year that I have been taxed beyond my strength and have had a slight return of the bronchial affection with which I was afflicted last year. I am however encouraged by the physician to hope that the sea voyage and change of air will act beneficially, and as I do not intend to overdo myself by too many engagements I hope to avoid the dangers to which the traveller is exposed. My daughter Mary, who is also an invalid, accompanies me. The manner in which the announcement of my departure has been received in the city of Washington and ↑by↓ the public generally has been very gratifying to myself and my family.<sup>2</sup> The President, the Board of Regents, and the State Department, have without solicitation of mine, furnished me with documents commending me to the special attention of all the Representatives of our Government abroad.<sup>3</sup> The Bremen Line of Steamers offered me a free passage both ways for myself; while the Cunard Line in connection with the New-York Chamber of Commerce have presented me with free tickets for Mary and myself both ways across the Atlantic.

I think the Institution itself has never been regarded in a more favorable light by Congress than at the present; and I indulge the hope that I shall live to see the day when a liberal appropriation will be made for the support of a museum worthy of the Government without encroaching on the Smithsonian fund. The Institution may continue to take charge of the museum or the latter may be placed entirely under other direction. My special object is to keep the Smithsonian fund entirely free from the control of politics, and in order to do this it is necessary that no appropriation should be asked from Congress for the operations of the Institution while it may be asked for, with propriety for taking care of the National Museum. The actual cost of the museum last year, without including our own explorations was \$15000. This does not include the interest on \$140,000 which have been expended on the building since the fire, almost entirely on account of the museum; while we received from Congress for keeping the museum but \$4000. On the one hand with so small an appropriation, and

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without encroaching on the Smithsonian fund a museum worthy of the National Capital<sup>A</sup> cannot be supported; while on the other if we continually petition Congress for an appropriation for the support of the Smithsonian museum ↑we are↓ ~~it~~ continually brings the Institution under the influence of Congress and will finally end in the Institution's being obliged to furnish places ↑for partisans↓ as the reward for political service. The transfer of the Library and the Herbarium have produced good results. The Library of Congress is now the first in the country in regard to the size of its collection and is worthy to be called the National Library;—while the Smithsonian fund has been relieved of the care ↑support↓ of the plants, Botany has been the gainer by the labors of Dr. Parry at the seat of Government.<sup>4</sup> Every transfer of this kind while it does not diminish the usefulness of the collections, increases the power of the Institution to do more for the advancement of knowledge,—to distribute more books and specimens, make more researches and by the returns to enlarge, not only the collections in this city but those in all other parts of the country. Mr Corcoran is just about to open his new gallery of art<sup>5</sup> and this will obviate the necessity of establishing another of a similar character by the Smithsonian Inst<sup>on</sup>. It will be one of my objects abroad to solicit, through the influence of the Institution specimens of sculpture in [---] ↑plaster↓ for the Corcoran Gallery as well as to ~~hand~~ ↑turn↓ over to it on my return all the specimens we have accumulated in this line.<sup>6</sup> The more we give away the richer we are; and if Congress makes the appropriation we have asked for of \$25,000, for finishing the large room in the upper story we shall be able to make a very grand display with what remains.

I have dwelt long upon this subject because I have an idea that you do not fully approve of this part of my policy; and I should regret that after all you have done, with your counsel and your pen, for the Institution, and myself, there should be the slightest shade of difference of opinion between us— I am sure there would be none if we could have a free and full discussion of the subject.

Professor Baird, who at one time, was opposed to these views now professes to be in entire agreement with them. If the museum were to be wholly separated from the Inst<sup>on</sup> I would use, all the influence I ↑may↓ have, to procure the appointment of Prof. Baird as Director or if a separate appropriation were made for the care of the museum I would give the whole in charge to Professor Baird. This I cannot do while the funds of the Smithsonian are devoted to the museum. You may recollect that we started with the plan of separate departments ↑and↓ with different heads; but this produced the Jewett imbroglio and was abolished by the Regents.<sup>7</sup> The whole was then put under the immediate charge of the Secretary with

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such assistants as he might choose to employ; and a special act was passed forbidding any letters to be written on business connected with the Inst<sup>on</sup> unless under the special direction of the Secretary.<sup>8</sup> After the Jewett [?events] I stated to Professor Baird, that if he would render me all the assistance I might require of him, in carrying out my views of the policy of the Inst<sup>on</sup> I would grant him every facility which the Inst<sup>on</sup> could afford to prosecute any branch of Natural History he might desire to cultivate, but that I could not without being derelict to the duties devolved upon me and regardless of the experience of the past, give him any share of the management of the Institution. To this he fully and unconditionally agreed. The course which I have adopted has given and gives me an amount of labor not surpassed by any one in any public position in the country. Baird is now I think thoroughly imbued with my views and I trust with the most important fact of all in the management of a public trust that the policy pursued must involve an entire abnegation of all personal considerations as to the interest of the agent.<sup>9</sup>

I regret that I shall not have the opportunity of seeing you before I sail, to talk over the past and speculate on the future. I have a regard for you which from long and friendly intercourse has grown into something stronger than ordinary friendship and it is with feelings of dissatisfaction that I have learned you have changed your physical appearance by cultivating a beard. This which may possibly improve your appearance ↑in the eyes of some↓ cannot have the same effect in mine. It will forever ↑or↓ as long as it is worn change to me a face which from long association has become a source of pleasure for me to look upon. I doubt not that Dr Torrey shares this feeling with me though I have not spoken with him on the subject. Indeed the question may be asked whether a man over the age of 45 has a moral right to so change his appearance that his friends cannot recognize him. He surely ought to have the full consent of his wife. What says Mrs Gray to the metamorphosis?

We all regret that Mrs Gray did not give us the long spring visit we all looked for. The weather has been delightful, and I am sure she would have enjoyed herself and added much to our pleasure.

I commenced this letter with the intention of giving you an account of the feeling of the Commissioner of Agriculture<sup>10</sup> as to the Report on Forest Trees. This has varied with the prospects of the Government appropriation. At the first of the session this was very poor and a spirit of retrenchment prevailed to an immense extent; but this has given way to a more liberal feeling and while the Commissioner concluded a few weeks ago to give up all attempts in the way of doing anything for the report this year he now thinks something may be done at this Congress to secure an

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appropriation for commencing the work. I wish therefore you would enter in upon a correspondence with him in regard to the work and give him as definite an estimate as you can furnish as to the time of completion and the annual cost of the Report.

With kind regards to Mrs Gray  
I remain as ever truly your friend  
Joseph Henry

Dr A Gray  
Cambridge Mass.  
P.S. A letter addressed to the care of  
William Wesley, 81 Fleet Street, London  
will reach me  
J.H.

Historic Letters, Archives, Gray Herbarium Library, Harvard University.

In a clerk's hand, except for the signature. Reply: June 30, 1870, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives.

1. May 28.
2. The May 21 issue of the *Washington Star* announced Henry's trip, wishing him a pleasant voyage and restoration of health. The newspaper added, "His services in the cause of science are recognized throughout the civilized world, and will insure him a warm welcome wherever he goes; but the benefits he has conferred from time to time upon our community, and the uniform courtesy and kindness of his disposition which have won him many friends, will cause his absence from this city to be much regretted."
3. In a letter signed by Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase, chancellor of the Smithsonian, and by Senator Lyman Trumbull and Representative Luke P. Poland, the Board of Regents commended Henry "to the hospitality of the learned savans of Europe" (May 24, 1870, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives). Secretary of State Hamilton Fish wrote a letter of introduction for Henry to United States diplomatic and consular agents (May 26, 1870, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives). A similar letter from President Grant has not been found.
4. Charles Christopher Parry (*Henry Papers*, 8:35n), who was appointed botanist to the Department of Agriculture in 1869. He was selected to arrange the plant collection that had been transferred to the department from the Smithsonian. *DAB*; Elliott, *Dictionary*; *Smithsonian Report for 1869*, pp. 27-28.
5. On May 24, President Grant approved a Senate bill to incorporate the Corcoran Gallery of Art. W. W. Corcoran had tried to establish the gallery a decade earlier and had enlisted Henry's help in acquiring European works of

art. But his plans were derailed by the war; due to Corcoran's southern sympathies, the government seized the building being erected to house his gallery. It was not returned to him until 1869. The gallery would not open to the public until January 1874. *Congressional Globe*, 41st Congress, 2d Session, May 24, 1870, p. 3747; *Henry Papers*, 10:144-145; [Davira Spiro Taragin], *Corcoran* (Washington, 1976), pp. 19-20, 47; Holly Tank, "Dedicated to Art: William Corcoran and the Founding of his Gallery," *Washington History*, 2005 17:36-38.

6. During his visit to Europe, Henry would meet with Angelo Secchi, director of the observatory of the Collegio Romano, and discuss renewing negotiations over obtaining moulds of famous statues in the Vatican. Plaster casts could then be made from the moulds to supply the Corcoran Gallery and other galleries in America with accurate models of ancient art. Secchi had previously worked out an agreement with the Vatican in 1860, before the war disrupted Corcoran's plans for the gallery. Henry to W. T. Walters, July 31, 1873, Private Letterpress, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives; Henry to Secchi, ca. 1873, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives; *Henry Papers*, 10:144n.

Among the details to be settled were the expense of moulds, their durability for making multiple casts, and the method of shipment to America. In 1873, after Henry became a trustee of the Corcoran Gallery, he wrote a letter on this topic to a fellow trustee, W. T. Walters, who was then in Europe and was entrusted with making decisions about purchasing European art. Henry to Walters, July 31, 1873; Trustees' Min-

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utes, May 26 and June 23, 1873, Archives, Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Regarding works of art in the Smithsonian, Corcoran would later decide that, with some exceptions, they were not "within the scope of his design" (Rhees, *Journals*, p. 391). The works that were transferred to the gallery shortly after it opened are listed in the *Smithsonian Report for 1874* (p. 65).

7. Henry's dispute with Charles C. Jewett is discussed in the introduction to volume 9 of the

*Henry Papers*; see page xviii for the regents' decision regarding separate departments.

8. A resolution giving the secretary authority over all correspondence was adopted on February 24, 1855. Rhees, *Journals*, p. 120.

9. Gray replied that he approved all of Henry's policies, except for one. He hoped the Smithsonian would remain curator of the national museum, "to be so as a favor to Congress and as the best trustee."

10. Horace Capron.

## 147. TO HARRIET HENRY

London, June 25, 1870

Dearest

... I have been exceedingly busy since our arrival in London. ...<sup>1</sup> Mary has given you an account of our reception in London and the many kindnesses which have been extended to us.<sup>2</sup> I was immediately elected, for during my stay in London, an honorary member of the Athenaeum Club<sup>3</sup> and find the establishment a great convenience. It has a large library, eating room, and all conveniences in the way of washing, &c. It is one of the customs of London before eating or doing anything to wash your hands and this is necessary on account of the smokey atmosphere which renders the houses as black as if they had been painted with a thin wash of lamp black. ... I find many changes in London although I am well known and my card immediately gives me admission and kind reception. I find but few of my old acquaintances: 33 years has changed almost entirely the whole generation.<sup>4</sup>

I have been called upon in a number of cases to make speeches and have in every case succeeded to my own satisfaction, which is as well as I could desire, as I am somewhat fastidious.

Mary Henry Copy, Family Correspondence, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives.

1. Henry and his daughter Mary arrived in London on June 11 (Doc. 150), along with a traveling companion, a Miss Clymer. By the date of this letter, Henry had attended meetings of the Anthropological Society, the Geological Society, the Linnean Society, the Royal Society, and the Statistical Society. Henry to Baird, June 25, 1870, Baird Papers, Smithsonian Archives.

2. Mary related that her father was pleased with his reception by London scientific societies. She stated that on June 14 Henry "was made so much of that he was obliged to make a

speech" at the Anthropological Society, where he gave an account of the origin and growth of the Smithsonian. Mary Henry to Harriet Henry, June 15, 1870, Family Correspondence, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives; B. R. H. MacKenzie to Henry, June 15, 1870, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives; *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, 1870-1871, 8:clxxxiv; J. F. Collingwood to Henry, June 22, 1870, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives.

3. On June 14, Henry was invited to join the Athenaeum Club for one month. Mary described