

October 18, 1877 (Doc. 292)

of the church until he recanted his errors. Miller's appeals to the New Jersey Synod and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church

were denied. In response, he withdrew from the Presbyterian Church. *DAB*; *New York Times*, May 4 (quotations) and May 5, 1877.

292. TO ALEXANDER AGASSIZ

Smithsonian Instn.  
October 18. 1877.

My Dear Sir:

It is intended in the course of the next year to publish the first volume of the eulogies of the National Academy and I write to remind you that the eulogy of your illustrious ↑Father↓, the principal founder of the Society, remains unwritten.

I do not think that Prof. Guyot will find time and have strength to prepare the article, and therefore I would suggest that it be written under your direction by Mrs. Agassiz, or what would be better still, by yourself. If these suggestions do not meet your approbation, I beg leave to request that you mention the name of some other person who can and who would do the work.<sup>1</sup>

I am much interested in this matter and feel that I have been negligent in my duty, to the Academy, and the memory of its most distinguished member in not having attended to this business more assiduously.

I hope you will attend the meetings of the Academy and give it your support, though I was not very favorably impressed with its importance at the first I now think it an establishment well adapted to the advancement of the best interests of true science in our country, especially since there is such a wide diffusion among us of popular knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

I am especially interested in it with regard to the future of the Smithsonian Inst<sup>on</sup>: In<sup>A</sup> the natural course of events, my connection with it must be short, and having given the best part of my life to the development of the plan of its organization, I most earnestly desire that it may continue, after my departure, to assist in the advancement of the higher civilization of our country. The danger is that it will ultimately fall under political influence.

I have now two papers on my table, one presented through the Secretary of War,<sup>3</sup> and the other from a member of the Senate of the United States claiming the patronage of the Institution on the grounds of scientific merit which consists of illogical speculation; but which might be adopted by the Institution upon ↑under↓ the pressure of the authority by which they are backed.<sup>4</sup>

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I send you by the mail which carries this letter, a copy of the last report of this Inst<sup>on</sup> and beg leave to direct your attention to the remarks at the beginning of my special report.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the time has not yet come to urge the immediate separation of the museum from the Inst<sup>on</sup>; but I think it proper to keep the idea before the Regents and the public.

My theory of the Inst<sup>on</sup> from the first has been that it should be an ideal establishment having nothing of a tangible character to exhibit to the world; the function of which is the promotion, and interchange of new truths; the collection of the materials of science, not to keep, but to diffuse among those who should make the best use of them for the advancement of science.

In the development of this theory I had the confidence, the support, and assistance of your father, and it will give me pleasure to know that I have your sympathy and good feeling.

At the request of yourself and other members of the Academy I have retained the Presidency of it, but I am not unmindful of the weakness of the Bishop of Salamanca, and do not desire to linger too long on the stage.

I remain very truly yours  
Joseph Henry

[Prof.]<sup>B</sup> Alex. Agassiz.  
Cambridge.

P.S. It is proposed to place a sounding buoy opposite your place at Newport. I hope this will not prove as great an annoyance as the fog trumpet.<sup>6</sup>

JH

White Folder (bAg 450.10.1), MCZ Archives, Ernst Mayr Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University.

In a clerk's hand. Draft: October 17, 1877, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives. Copy: Private Letterpress, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives. Reply: November 22, 1877, Agassiz Letterpress Books, Number 6, in same location as this letter.

1. In his reply, Agassiz assured Henry that Arnold Guyot would finish the eulogy by April. By that time, however, the first volume of the *Biographical Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences* had already appeared. Guyot's memoir of Louis Agassiz was published in the second volume (1886).

2. Agassiz responded by complaining about the low standards of the American scientific community and the eagerness of academy members to play up to the press during the meeting in New York in October. He promised to do what he could to keep standards high.

3. George Washington McCrary (1835-1890). *DAB*.

4. Joseph K. Hornish of Keokuk, Iowa, submit-

ted a memoir to the Smithsonian via McCrary, a former congressman and former Smithsonian regent, on the "Equation of Being." Henry and the referee, William B. Taylor, had rejected it in August as containing nothing but valueless speculations. Hornish accepted the initial rejection, but he expressed his determination to continue working on the memoir. A month later, he informed McCrary that he now could prove his assertions and sent Henry a revised version of the memoir. In a file notation on Hornish's cover letter, Henry wrote: "It is not necessary to spend further time on this correspondent" (Hornish to Henry, October 1, 1877).

The fear of possible political interference in the publication program of the Smithsonian was

a continuing one for Henry. Two years earlier, he had complained in the annual report of two persons who had come to Washington in 1875 to appeal the rejection of their memoirs by the Smithsonian. Each had asked his congressman "to aid him in compelling the Institution to acknowledge the merits of his speculations" (*Smithsonian Report for 1875*, p. 38).

William B. Taylor to Henry, August 6, 1877; Joseph K. Hornish to George Washington McCrary, August 27 and September 24, 1877; Hornish to Henry, October 1, 1877: all in RU 26, Smithsonian Archives; Henry to McCrary, draft, August 10, 1877, RU 33, Smithsonian Archives; *Smithsonian Report for 1875*, pp. 37-38.

5. Henry is referring to his report for 1876, in which he discussed his preference for separating the Smithsonian from the National Museum, especially in light of the influx of materials from the centennial exhibition. *Smithsonian Report for 1876*, pp. 11-13.

In his reply, Agassiz assured Henry that he would "have the cordial support of the scientific men of the country" in any effort to separate the two institutions. He went on to provide unsolicited criticism of Spencer Baird. While acknowledging Baird's "capacity of fitness to run

the National Museum," Agassiz claimed that even Baird's friends would not want him as head of the Smithsonian. Agassiz feared Baird would unbalance the Smithsonian's program, overemphasizing natural history.

6. Agassiz lived at Castle Hill, near the entrance to the harbor of Newport, Rhode Island. In 1875, the Light-House Board proposed placing a fog signal there. The landowners in the immediate area protested, however, claiming that the signal "would depreciate the value of their property." Unable to secure a proper site without resorting to legal action, and recognizing that the necessary compensation to the owners would exceed the funds available, the board backed down. On September 26, 1877, the board voted, apparently as a temporary measure, to place an automatic signal buoy off Castle Hill. The board continued to believe that a fog signal was appropriate for the location. George Lincoln Goodale, "Biographical Memoir of Alexander Agassiz, 1835-1910," *Biographical Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences*, 1913, 7:295; *Light-House Board Report for 1875*, pp. 25-26 (quotation on p. 25); 1879, p. 25; *Light-House Board Journal*, September 26 and October 31, 1877.

## 293. TO DAVID STEVENSON<sup>1</sup>

Smithsonian Inst<sup>on</sup>

Washington. Nov 16 1877

My dear Sir:

Your letter of Aug<sup>t</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> was duly received<sup>2</sup> together with your photograph during my absence from the city, both of which were highly esteemed and the latter has been placed among the large collection, which we now possess, of likenesses of the distinguished scientists of the present day.

I am also much obliged to you for the copy of Professor Taits report on lightning conductors<sup>3</sup> which has been placed on file in the office of the Light House Board. He mentions a fact in this which has been verified by us during the last year, viz: the bad conducting quality of the soil covering a rocky substratum.

We have on the coast of Maine a light-house on one island and a fog signal on another one in its neighborhood: Desiring to unite the two by a telegraph line, connection was made with the earth on both islands and