



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1878-01-21

Letter from Annie K[ennedy] Bidwell to John Muir, 1878 Jan 21.

Annie Kennedy Bidwell

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attach your autograph. ^[33]
Did you know
I accompanied my sister as far as Battle
Mountain on her journey home? Well I
did, and we stoped at Lake Tahoe,
and sailed over these wonderful wa-
ters from nine a. m. until four p. m.,
ever amazed at the varied beauties
thereof. Beautiful jets seemed to
sparkle in the sunlight as the spray
was thrown up by the boat. Even
sapphires of exquisite brilliancy, and
emeralds, & innumerable jets. I sit now
and ~~close~~ my eyes see it all, and look
down into the wondrous beauty of the
water; silver, pearl, blue, green, black,
and purple, and in all their varied
shades. ~~Is~~ there elsewhere such won-
drous water? It passed any concep-
tion of water I had ever had, and is to
me a constant wonder & enjoyment.
I had thought the waters of the big
Spring at Big Meadows must sur-
pass all other waters, so wondrous
clear & beautiful it is; but Lake Tahoe
surpasses it immeasurably. I did

00748

[17]

Rancho Chico
Jan 27th 1878

My Dear Mrs Muir. I had set apart this
evening for you, but, as on similar oc-
casions, have been interrupted by visit-
ors, until now it is almost too late to
more than commence a letter; but com-
mence one I must, having really worried
over my delay in responding to your
very welcome received last month.

General thought it so instruc-
tive and interesting that he enclosed it
to my sister to read; who reports that
she also enjoyed it, and asks me to
say to you that you will receive a
pamphlet, containing engraving of Sir
Joseph Hooker, which will be rather
out of date as she was not able to get
it under six weeks from the time she

ordered it, and it was a ²⁵month old when she saw the copy.
I am to have one also, she tells me. Recently I received a very
kind letter from Sir Joseph, enclosing an excellent photograph
of himself and wife. He said Dr Gray had communicated
news of your sail down the Sacramento river, received from
me, and that he was very anxious to learn how the expedi-
tion terminated, and added "I want to hear from Muir, &
am writing him now." So ere this you doubtless have re-
ceived & answered his letter, but, lest you might not be able
to write immediately, I ventured in my acknowledgments of
his favors to give him a few items regarding your expedi-
tions. I hope you will tell him about our trip from Mt
Shasta, & what you saw at Cinder Cone, and of the twelve
inch high tree of which I have the cone! I told Dr Gray, or
rather asked Mrs Gray to, but I fear they will think me mis-
taken. If you repeat it they will have assurance. I also
told of the grand "Williamsonii" on Lassen. Do tell them all
you can, for Mrs & Dr Gray say they are anxious to hear from
you; & Dr Gray says he feels that he only had a taste where
he wished a good meal & time to digest it.

Mrs Gray recently
sent me views of their camp on Abeyta Pass, taken by Prof.
Hayden. Also a group taken while out here, of herself, Dr Gray
and Sir Joseph. In the Abeyta Pass photographs the entire
party is taken as it was in Colorado, including Prof. Hayden
Dr Lamborn, & others unknown to me, and is sufficiently large
to frame and hang on the wall. Now I want yours. A real
good one of you, too, and I want it very soon, for you see
the collection is not complete until I have it. Also please

[63]
That it was so in other Countries, that in Africa certain white animals were dying out and the black surviving; that the white ate a poisonous weed the odor of which they seemed unable to discover while the black discovered it, avoided it, and lived.

As the Professor was continually claiming our descent ^{with} relationship to animals, I remarked here, that "Then it is different with man, for it is claimed the black is giving way before the white." His answer was that "all circumstances being equally favorable the black would survive the white, that the improved surroundings of the white made them the stronger whereas the black naturally were the stronger." Did you ever hear such arguments? How did the white get their superior surroundings? If Prof. Gunning is really a wise man I want you to tell me so. I could not resist comparing the benefit derived from our intercourse with Dr Gray. No Joseph & yourself, to that derived from our several days with Prof. Gunning. He did not teach us one new

00768 2 [43]
not enjoy the surrounding scenery of Lake Tahoe as I do that of Big Meadows, and thought I could understand your comparison bet the two. Lake Tahoe's scenery ^{was} ~~is~~ sad and oppressive to me, while that of Big Meadows always is so cheerful, harmonious, and exalting. There is a gladness combined with its grandeur which impresses me with a sense of its perfection. I love to sit, and gaze, and drink it in; and each succeeding visit renders it more attractive to me.

He also stopped at Virginia City and after studying the science of mining as exhibited above ground, descended into the Ophir mine nineteen hundred feet!

I confess to being very loth to descend into the blackness & depth, but the persuasions of the party conquered, and the result was that I saw more than I had ever expected to, of mining. It was a most interesting and instructive experience, and while thankful for having enjoyed the benefit, con-

251

ness to a joy experienced in again breathing the free air of heaven, and beholding the light of the sun. We went through the Ophir & Consolidated Virginia, and I presume you know what we saw as well as I could tell you; There were seven of us, Prof. Gunning being of the party. And here I want to ask you your opinion of that gentleman. I promise not to betray confidence, for I am really anxious to know something about him. He had letters to General and myself, and expects to visit Chico ere returning east. Is merry and amusing, but I do not believe a word he says, scientifically, and I will tell you why. First, because he confessed to having deceived persons rather than confess his ignorance. Second - because he always evaded, or deliberately improvised answers which I knew incorrect - when cornered.

An instance - He insisted that "the whole scientific world without exception, admits that man is evolved out of a lower animal." I replied that Dr Gray does not, for he had so told me. (Prof Gunning at first declared Dr Gray does, but when I added "he told me he does not", then Prof. Gunning replied "Well Gray does not, but he is the only one".) To prove his theory he would constantly twist every thing twistable into harmony with his theory. A passing drove of hogs was turned to the same account, but seemingly unintentionally. "I notice that in California ~~and~~ Nevada the white hogs are giving way to the black, the black are evolved from the white: (you can see it in these hogs, they have mostly become black." I replied "yes, but in the cause you are mistaken: The Chester white is too delicate a hog for this country's mode of treatment, requiring great care; while the Essex & Berkshire, both black hogs naturally, would thrive under the harding system and grow fat on grass, & can bear exposure to the weather, hence are the only hogs which our people can afford to keep." This annoyed Prof. Gunning and he replied

But I must say good night, pray-
ing that you may be kept in safe-
ty and happiness, and remain

Very Sincerely Your friend
Annie K. Bidwell

Mr John Muir.

00763

thing. He assured us that the Bible is a fraud, yet quoted it to prove Adam & Eve were "people all covered with hair like animals," which he assured us the original of the term "naked" signified.

At Lake Tahoe, when viewing the fish culture establishment he announced that in the trout we could see development illustrated. That often a trout is hatched with two heads. I assured him I could not see such in the water before us, and his answer was that the two headed die. I replied that to me the argument was against his theory in as much as the monsters fail to survive. He also said all botanists, Dr Gray included, teach that plants change from one to another "You do not mean that a lily becomes a rose, or a similar change occurs" I replied. He answered "yes I do, & Dr Gray will tell you so too."

I have seen a statement by Dr Carruthers the keeper of the botanical department of the British Museum "to the

effect that he has carefully ^{studied} this question but fails to find any facts to prove it, but rather the contrary. And I have an extract ~~from~~ his address before the geological Association on this subject, delivered last year. Also a statement by Prof. Davidson regarding another point on which Prof. Gunning said all scientists agree; evolution in animal life. In this article Prof. Davidson says that after 15 years of careful study, at Prof. Darwin's request, of the Brachiopoda, he has been unable to "produce a single actual fact in support of the theory." Please tell me who is nearest right & in what you think Prof. G. right or wrong.

Will you please tell me the name of the plant on which we spread our blankets, under those grand *Abies Williamsonii*, on Lassen? Also the plant which you pronounced one of your favorites, and for which you named our camp? I have forgotten both, and wish to know them.

We congratulate you on the grand success of your recent explorations, and are truly thankful you were preserved through every danger, and arrived safely among the haunts of man. Against this last clause you may rebel, but we are none the less glad that it is true. I trust your life may long be spared to gather these stores of knowledge whereby the world is made wiser and better, and from which you derive such pure joy.

We shall always be so glad to hear from you when you feel like writing, and shall hope ere long to have our promised visit. Just now the rain is copiously visiting us, and soon the flowers will show their pretty faces and we do hope you will be here to enjoy their beauty with us.