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Letter from John Muir to [Annie Kennedy] Bidwell, 1878 Feb 1.

John Muir

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My Dear Mrs. Bidwell

My dear Miss Bidwell

I was delighted with your fine long sparkling letter of June 21, which reached me soon after posting a short note to you.

Your account of your scientific discussions with Gunning is very amusing & I could not help being pleased to know that he had caught a Bruth-Oring Tartan, the only kind of which such so-called scientists are afraid.

You ask my opinion of this gentleman. I know
very little about him not with I be likely to know
much more, because I fear he belongs to a class
of "Profs" who are animated less by love of truth
than by a vulgar appetite for notoriety & money.
The word "humbug" is very telling in descriptions of
such characters, though I am loathe to apply so
perfectly damning a term to anyone not well known
to me. Still I have seen reports of some of his lectures,
& have looked through a book that he wrote some
years ago so that I can hardly be mistaken in his
size & genus. On the contrary my friends Prof. Horton
of San Jose & John Swett who have met him & heard
his lectures were pleased with him, although the latter
confessed that in a portion of one of his lectures he
had tried to humbug the people.
He met another friend of mine lately on the Sacramento
boat, & sent me word that there was no one in
California he was so anxious to meet as myself.

Probably this statement is not very strictly true. At any rate I am not at all
eager to see him. When I was at San Jose last summer I met his wife, who
was teaching drawing in the Normal school. My friend Prof Allen the principal
asked my opinion of Prof Sumner much in the same spirit as you have done, &
in a lecture that Allen prevailed on me to give before the teachers, Mr Sumner
was present, & I could not help looking her way & sneezing against scientific
humbug.

The questions you ask concerning evolution are far too extensive to be touched in a mere
letter. The subject is very interesting to every intelligent person in the world. Gray has
written a remarkably lucid & charming pamphlet on the subject that you must
ask him for. It is entitled, "A free examination of Darwin on the Origin of Species".
It was first published in the form of articles in the Atlantic Monthly.

I wish too that you would read some of Darwin's writings, if for no other purpose
than to learn how poor & good a man he is. His noble character has suffered from silly ignorant
& unbelieving men who say much about Darwinism without really knowing anything about
it. A more devoted & indefatigable seeker after truth than Darwin never lived. Both
Gray & Hooker are warm personal friends of his. If you do not care, or have not time
to examine his heavy plodding scientific works, at least read his "Journey of a Naturalist
round the world," published by Harper. The death plant on the pitchfork camp at the
foot of Luzon, or rather on the side of the mountain is *Bryanthus*. I have no photograph to send you but
will procure one. I can well understand your enthusiasm over the Lake water. I had a
glorious week there after your visit. Have not yet heard from Hooker. Remember me to the

General Hildreth in care of
Prof Allen
John Murray