

Washington Feb. 5 1857

My very dear Mr. Marsh

I received a few days ago through the kind mediation of our uncle Mary, your good letters of Dec. 12-16, and have read and reread them with increasing interest, each perusal containing revealing some new item previously unnoticed, or correcting some former reading. Jellies and I had a long consultation the other day over our letters, and were fairly boggled at one paragraph about Mary which I read as being a "pious fishwoman", but which we finally concluded to be "precious penwoman", both perhaps afflicting well, the former as being the good wife of an ~~assiduous~~ ichthyologist, the latter as being handy with the quill. Well I won't make fun of your handwriting, even if you have used the same quill without mending, since you have been in Europe, and its nib getting broader and broader each day - for your letters are glorious and worth provoking, and soul inspiring, and greatly refreshing, and it is not for my own ulterior merit that I have been gifted by providence with that wonderfully beautiful celerography, which makes ordinary masters hang themselves for sheer envy.

I wish you were here to talk over the thousand and one things that suggest themselves and which can be so scantily represented on a letter. Every day brings something new. As to our Smithsonian, as Waldeman calls it, we are now in a state of uncertainty. I wrote you that a committee had been appointed to report whether the compromise should be abolished. This has not yet reported, nor have I heard that it has been called together. They will probably give the thing a thorough overhauling, but their decision is uncertain. This committee consists of Pearce, Bach, Totten, Mason, Maury, Choate. Now they can see good in favor of removing the restrictions in favor of the Library Museum, with the plain law before them. I cannot see: perhaps their vision is sharper than mine. The disturbances & anomalies of the