

ALLEGHENY OBSERVATORY.

ALLEGHENY, PENNSYLVANIA.

Nov. 11. 87

Dear Dr Gray.

Thank you for your letter of the 6th and for the assurance that the meeting of the 18th will have your presence. Though I could have wished the Committee had chosen a day, less intimately connected with your own Anniversary.

It is possible that I may be in Boston Monday, but lest I do not see you, I will only say in reference to the thoughts your letter called out, that I have but one thing in my mind about the Smithsonian which seems to rise to the position of a guiding moral principle, and that is, that it is its first duty, as its actual highest privilege, to be independent. Everything is secondary to this; just because this independence enables it to do good in a wider way

than it could from its private means alone.

Absolute independence, and recognised disinterestedness, once secured; it may be able to do more to "increase and diffuse knowledge" by aiding the Government to direct wisely its concerns with pure science and art, than in any other way.

The clearest recognition of such independence and disinterestedness, are conditions requisite to its administration of the Museum or any thing else; with them I think the actual Museum and other interests may be great agencies for good, in the direct line marked out by the organic law of the being of the Institution.

I have said something like this to Dr. Walling but not spoken to any other of the Regents; particularly as any expression of opinion on my part, except as called out by your kindness, would be at present hardly in place. I want to have one more talk with you, if I may, before the Regents meet. and trust I may secure this in Washington.

Very truly Yours
S. P. Langley



Langley, S. P. 1887. "Langley, Samuel P. Nov. 11, 1887." *Asa Gray correspondence*

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