

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 17, 1896, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh Hall, Tuesday, Nov. 17, 1896. You poor little girl:

You seem to be in great trouble all round — what with money matters — Ladies Club — Library — headache — and toothache — everything must seem to be going the wrong way.

I am inclined to think that your physical condition reacts upon your mental — and that you will feel brighter and better — after Dr. Evans has completed his work.

I am sorry you did not send me a copy of Mr. Kennan's letter relating to the Library — to which you replied. Your reply is not perfectly intelligible without it. I have asked Mr. Blanchard for information concerning the correspondence — for I believe your position is correct — but of course I cannot do anything while I am ignorant of what has passed.

The whole Library matter — has been mismanaged — or rather not managed at all. It is the duty of all interested to look into the matter.

I believe that I was appointed — (Against my will) — a Trustee or something in connection with the Library. I have always been ready to help in the matter — but so far — I have not been invited to any meetings — and know nothing about Library matters. I shall certainly look into it — and will see Blanchard about the matter.

I am inclined to think that the trouble has been — that little or no attempt has been made to consult others — and that some of the principal people in town feel hurt about it. Mr. Gwillum, I know, feels an interest in the Library, but feels that he and Mr. McDougall have

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been slighted. The Ministers he says — should be on the board of management — or have something to do with it. I have no doubt there is something in this.

Ministers and School teachers could, if they were interested in the Library, influence large numbers of people.

A Library that is not accessible out of business hours — is of as little value as gold hoarded in a vault — and withdrawn from circulation. There must be a reading—room where works of reference can be consulted — open at such times when people are free — open in the after noon or evening. The most important books in any Library worthy of the name — cannot be loaned. They cannot be removed from the custody of the Librarian or Custodian. Take encyclopedias for example — you could not safely allow any one to remove a volume of the set. A reading—room is imperative. A Librarian is imperative — and equally necessary — is some provision for providing new books and works of reference. The town people must be stirred up — and their sympathy and active assistance exhibited.

We cannot afford to have the town people feel that they are out out. I think that both you and I should try to stir the people up upon the subject — and take back seats so far as management is concerned ourselves. We want to help the people to help themselves.

Why not write a paper for the Ladies' Club upon the 3 subject of the Library. Put your ideas in shape.

Text: How to improve the Free Public Library of Baddeck and make it more useful to the people at large.

This brings me to the Club. It is certainly very annoying that the programme over which you worked so hard has — by some mischance — been overlooked; and that Miss McCurdy should have been absent when the programme was prepared. Still there is another and very encouraging side to the matter. It is very encouraging to know that the members of the club — are quite capable of preparing a good programme without the aid

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of Miss McCurdy or yourself. This is a most hopeful sign of life — and health — and vigor. You have always desired — and looked forward to the day — when the Club you founded — could go on alone without your help.

In various ways the Club has demonstrated its vitality and vigor — and this last act shows that there are brains in the Club — that can plan and act — quite independently of you and Miss McCurdy. I understand that the programme prepared is a good one — and quite satisfactory, and that the only regrettable matter is the apparent lack of courtesy to you. This, of course, is only apparent and not real — for you know how much you have won the love and esteem of every one connected with it. “Some one has blundered” — that is all. When you see the new programme — your wisest course I think — is to praise it — if it really meets with your approval. You could even prefer it to your own — and compliment the authors. Of course I have not seen it — so I can't say much about it. I think, however, — as a matter of policy if nothing more — it would be wise to sink all personal feeling — and take the ground that you are pleased to know that the Club is perfectly able to stand upon its own feet — without your aid — while at the same time your interest is so great — that you want to aid it all you can. Goodnight my dear — don't worry yourself all the time. Think the best of everyone and believe simply that an unintentional error has been committed.

Your own, Alec. P. S. Are you sure you left a copy of your Club programme here? My recollection is that you were at work upon it — even up to the very moment of leaving here — and intended completing it at the Grand Narrows or on the train. Are you sure you sent it to anyone here? Mr. McCurdy knows nothing about it — and Mrs. Kennan said that they had to make up a programme — without your suggestions because they didn't get them. Neither Mr. McCurdy nor I have spoken to Mrs. Kennan or to anyone else about your feeling in the matter. AGB.