

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, November 23, 1896, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. 1331 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D.C. Nov. 23, 1896. My darling Alec:

I have just suggested to Elsie at 11:30 P.M. that it would be nice to give a “bud” lunch party on the 3rd — she has agreed, made out her list and now has rushed to the discussion of what she shall wear and how she shall seat her guests! This is counting her chickens before even her eggs are laid.

I want to thank you so much for your kind letter received today. It is so nice to get a little petting and sympathy from you Alec dear. And nobody can help as well as you, once you throw yourself into a thing. The only thing about the library is that I don't think it would be worth what it cost if we got it at the expense of Mr. and Mrs. Kennan's friendship and goodwill. I thoroughly believe that you are right, that we Americans should take a back seat and simply stir the people up to work for themselves. Help them all we can with money and sympathy but let them have all the work and all the care and also all the credit. I am quite certain that the townspeople cannot have been properly encouraged to interest themselves in the library by the treatment I have myself received at the time of the Poster exhibition. Although it was my idea, my wishes were not consulted in any way nor was I asked if I had any especial desire about the disposition of the money raised. I asked and I wrote asking for a meeting of the Com ee . to discuss the best way of arousing interest 2 viz. the meeting, but was simply told it was not necessary. Miss McCurdy said she would like to go among the people and get them interested but “she did not like to interfere”. And I felt the same way, since the whole management of the affair was taken away from me I “did not like to interfere”. The consequence was that only the presence of summer visitors kept the affair from being a complete failure and the people were scolded afterwards for

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their indifference, which I think unfair. The only trouble is that Mr. Kennan founded the library and is its president and has worked hard for it, so I would rather let it go than make trouble with him about it. The village would suffer certainly because any trouble between us would divide it. The Club has done a very great work in forming a common meeting ground where ladies, separated by the political differences of their husbands from all other intercourse, have been able to meet each other with a common interest. We cannot let the library be the means of undoing all this good. I hoped to get Mr. Kennan to consent to the reading room and Miss McCurdy told me that she thought with the help of my fifty dollars she could interest the people to raise enough to carry it on. Mr. Kennan claims that she agrees with him in thinking it impracticable, but she has not said so to me and the tone of her letter implied nothing of the kind at least.

About the Club. If it is true that members of the Club suggested the subjects for the programme I am very glad indeed that I did not leave mine and I feel much more hopeful for the future success of the Club than ever I did. I did not believe this before I thought Mrs. Kennan did the whole thing. I knew she did not know of my program 3 because I purposely did not tell her and I did want to polish it up before I sent it to Maude. But Maude knew and all the old Board knew and I did think they would remember that I hadn't gone so far away that a letter wouldn't reach me and I did want to be asked for it. Enough people knew I had worked hard on it, if they wanted it they could take the trouble to ask me. I think the others would if left to themselves. Well it's all right.

My tooth is finally gone and I have enough else to think of here but my heart's still in the Highlands.

President Jordan of the Leland Stanford Junior University and Postmaster General Wilson were at Papa's to dinner yesterday. I wore my new velvet dress yesterday and felt gorgeous, but neither it or anything else made any impression upon Mr. Jordan's immovable countenance. I never saw any more set and expressionless and his round gold spectacles help the effect. He said he had written ten volumes of typewritten notes

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on the fur seal. That the Behring Sea Arbitration was badly managed and would reflect no credit upon its managers. The English were mean but the Americans were stupid. Justice Harlow and the rest did the best probably that could be done with the case after it came into their hands, but it was spoilt beforehand. He would accept Brown Gordon position and I am glad he would be such a contrast. He is over six feet and big in proportion but so lifeless. Mr. Wilson has a very sweet, gentle yet strong face, refined and gentlemanly, as full of expression as the others isn't and is small too. He said Bryan was on the Ways and Means with him four years and during all that time no one ever thought of going to him for advice and assistance. He has a beautiful voice which he never strains and a very ambitious wife. Mr. Langley was there, just returned from a driving trip through Virginia with Maj. Powell. He rides his bicycle and hopes for many such rides with you when you come down. He looks 20% better than when you were here. Miss Tarbell came and McGee and Walcott. Papa told Mr. McGee he hoped he would remember that we were all plain people and his beautiful new long Indian words were beyond our comprehension. Elsie gives a "bud" luncheon on Dec. 3rd — Thursday. When may I expect you? She goes to Morris Plains for Thanksgiving this morning. Day and Gipse, Helen and Grace and all the Marsh boys and girls will be there.

Ever your May.