

## Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 20, 1899

1331 Connecticut Ave Washington, May 20th 1899. My dear Alec,

I did not think it was a very kind or gracious thing for you to tell me that to write to me properly was to steal time from your thoughts and experiments. Surely your wife as a right to a few minutes of your time and thoughts once in a while. Rather are you stealing time that properly belongs to me, it strikes me.

But I do not see why it should come to an issue between me and your experiments or thoughts. Rather might it be between me and some of your numerous newspapers. It would not do anybody any harm if you omitted reading all of them every other day, and it would give me a great deal of pleasure, and not interfere with or work. Or you might take a little time from telling your father stories. I am sure he would excuse you. I do want very much to know what you are thinking about and your letter was most interesting, and perfectly intelligible to me, but I did not like the way you began it. That might have been omitted, besides I would like to have been told that the object of your thoughts was sometimes me. A little flattery, like a good dinner never does harm, and may help you to accomplish your purpose! I am very glad that the laboratory experiments are promising as per your telegram received yesterday, and I am very glad that you telegraphed congratulations to Mr McCurdy. He is very much interested in his experiments, and I cannot see what except very bad financial management, is going to prevent his making a great fortune out of it. Everybody who has seen the box lately seems to feel the same. He is improving it constantly. You may think, well, he will waste all his time experimenting, and never push it on the market, but I quite agree that it is not yet ready for exhibition. The practical ability of the thing has been demonstrated peradventure, but the negatives have not yet been quite perfect, not so good as the first ones he took in Baddeck. There were lines

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on them that he wanted to remove before taking the box to investors. He has already made a great improvement.

Since I wrote the last words Mr McCurdy has announced the complete success of his last arrangement. He thinks that he is at last fully entitled to a bottle of champagne, for he has at last developed an absolutely perfect set of pictures. The roll of film s as a whole was not successful, because a bitch occurred owing to the action of a break which was not put on according to his instructions, but the pictures are perfect, no lines or blemishes. He is now ready to show the box to manufacturers and says he would not take less than a million dollars, or a least 3 that amount minus three years interest, for the patent. Of course most of this is nonsense but he certainly has a very valuable and perfect thing. The latest and on improvement was the discarding of the roll of slats on which he has spent so much time and ingenuity. He was very leath to do this, and wanted to try just one more form of cover for the slats, but I very strongly advised him instead to try a roll of hard rubber he had been keeping in reserve some time. He did, and the results were conclusive. Next he tried a roll of soft rubber which has proven still better as the hard rubber was rather too stiff. He thinks a roll of celluloid will be an improvement in ease of use, but this is not to be obtained in Washington. He has sent for one, but this is a mere matter of detail, the soft rubber will do. Of cause the use of this continuos roll lessens the cost of the box very materially. The slat-c ? h ain would have been very expensive, now there is nothing expensive or intricate about it. It is very simple. Mr McCurdy found hard rubber boxes the size he will require for sale at a dollar and a quarter, the roll of celluloid would only cost a few cents, and there is nothing else complicated or needing expensive materials. Then I told you that the Examiner had allowed his counter patent. That can be affixed to existing cameras, and will do away with the necessity of black paper lining the negative film. All the black paper required will be at the ends.

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I wish that I could hear that your flying machine was going to be as immediately successful. That you are on the right track, it seems to me your reasoning proves. Once

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you state the pr ? e position, I dont see how anyone can deny its truth. But of course the thing is to prove it in practice. Mr McCurdy is very much interested, he says however he does not see how you are going to get any propeller to revolve fast enough unless you use explosives. I remember that you tried fire-works some years ago. I wish that you would get a good workman to help Mr Ellis in the laboratory. I think Mr Ferguson is horribly expensive, because he is such a poor workman with no ideas. We are all well here but freezing. It was absurd of you to run away from Washington because of the heat.

The children got up a picnic to Gre a t Falls yesterday. M and Madame de Wollant (Mrs Tisdell) were chaperones, and the party consisted of Messrs Totten, Grosvenor, Bradley, Deucher Misses Bell , T e i sdel , Colton , Mertvago. They took dinner out at Cabin John Hotel, and got home at eleven. We see quite a good deal of Gilbert, and Elsie evidently likes him very much. You cannot wash your hands of him at least for the present, for if Elsie decides that she wants him, you will have to look out for him. The Grosvenor twins have evedently made a good record for themselves among those who are watching , for the very next day after your letter offering the assistant editorship was received , another letter came 5 offering eit h er one of them a position in a large school in Philadelphia with a very good salary. It was a position that many men have striven for through years, and it came to either of these young men without effort on their part. Which seems to be saying a good deal for their ability. Marian has brushed her hair up from her forehead this morning, and I am s ?? ur prised to find how much handsomer she looks. She really has a fine forehead, and showing it her nose does not look so big. I had such a nice letter from Mrs Boutelier of Sable Island the ot h er day. I had no idea that she could write so well. The paper the other day said that the Canadian Gover n ment intended to wait the result of experiments with wireless telegraphy before going on with its proposed cable to Sable Island. What do you think of that? I wish that yoo would write Marian. I am very sorry to take yoo away from your experiments, still if you will I should like you to take your family aboard this year. I feel as if it is a critical one in the whole lives of the children for whose existence and happiness you are responsible. I cannot bear to have Elsie decide

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on Gilbert without seeing other other men, and he is so ? m uch superior to any others that she has met that she will , and soon , if she is not given the chance, and what chance would she have in Baddeck. Frank and George McKean!. I cannot hink of anything more to say, and it ii time foe me to 6 drive out to Twin Oaks. Mamma says that Mr Stein has been out to see her and wants us to pay up. Later. I have been alone with Elsie and Gilbert all the evening, and I dont know what to think. They are evidently extremely good friends, very fond of each other, but it seems to me more the good commerarderie of congenial friends than the sentiment and shyness of lovers. Elsie says to me before him isnt he a dear, isnt he cunning isnt he a baby? He doesnt like this and tells her so, but I dont think he retaliates in kind. He admires her and wants to be with her, but there is nothing loverlike in his attitude, he doesnt pay h i e r compliments. She took his hand in hers, and asked me questions about its size &, she leaned her elbow on his knee when she bent over to speak to me, but he did not make the slightest sign of being affected by this. He withdrew his hand at the proper time, he went away at the proper time withiut any appearance of regret, in short was perfectly calm, and untouched as if Elsie was but a very dear and confidential friend. Yet he always wants to be with her and nobody else, and she is happy with him. But yet she isnot at all sure she wants him, she says he is so young, much younger than herself. Gilbert brought up the title page of the June Geographic with his name on it. He said he thought it was the most aristocratic and handsomest name there "though perhaps it does not stand for so much". He does not want for a certain kind of self-confidence He told me 7 something of himself tonight that I did not know before. Afterwards he said that he did not know what I would think of him for speaking of it, that it was not his habit to speak of himself. He said that he had taken the prize in St Louis, MISSOURI for the best declamation essay. So far as I understand tha matter, they have ranked his essay in excellance with essays of Daniel Webster, and several other distinguished Americans whose names I forget, ending with Chauncey Depew. I dont really remember what Gilbert said except that the prize was given him, and that his name was associated with that of all those men. The more I see of the boy, the more I am impressed with the idea that he will be a successful man. I like the way he talks. In answer to my enquiries he said

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that he would like very much to enter Congress, but immediately afterwards he told Elsie that he wasnt going to think or talk of being anything else but the assistant editor of the Geographic. He was going to be that this summer, and that was enough, he wouldnt bother about what tomorrow would bring. He is wholly absorbed in making the success of the paper, and if this is charecteristic of him it seems to me it must ensure his success in life. In regard to Elsie it seems to me that ordinary rules will not apply to anything that she does. She is so astonishingly frank and open that you cannot expect the reserve that other girls would show. But is it possible for a young man in love to be so perfectly self-possessed when his lady-love is around and near him? I am sure you werent. Yet he knows that she understands that he is in love with aer, and he is too honorable a t man to let her suppose that if he did not think that himself. An ? d he knows that I know all that has passed between them, and have seen his letters, and that I know taat he has seen mine to her. I do think the whole thing is the funiest. Well , Good-night I have sat up late to write all this. Will you read it all? I know your abhorrence of long letters, but I forgot it until just now. Will not bother you again in this way. I find however tha t I like type-writing. It does not tire my hand the way t h at holding a pen does, and I fancy that you prefer it to my penmanship. You have no old-fashioned preferences for something your wifes's hand has touched, and which b a ears the mark of her individuality!

Much love to you and all Mabel