

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, June 11, 1899, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. Twin Oaks, June 11th 1899. My dear Alec:

I drove in to Georgetown with Mamma and Elsie this morning, thinking to have a quiet hour at the Bureau, looking over old letters while the rest were in church, but found that Mary had lent her key to Aileen who was gone to church and Mr. Howe's also. So there was nothing for it but to borrow a ticket from Mary and come either here or go home. I decided on this because I foresaw that if Mr. McCurdy were in I should probably talk to him instead of working, while now,—why I am writing you.—

Thanks very much for your two letters posted together. At least they decided two questions to which I wanted answers, whether after hearing all my arguments you still held to Baddeck, and whether I should let things between Elsie and Gilbert drift. I will telegraph you that I will return to Baddeck with you, and the children will follow. I wish you could bring me a list of the things required to put the house in good order. My principal personal regret in going to Baddeck is that the house is so shabby and yet people will come and must be invited inside. Couldn't Mrs. Bell make out a list? I fancy she is a pretty clever woman, and knows a thing or two, but says nothing until she sees her way clear to getting what she wants. I had to go upstairs at your Father's house and saw that they have a fine new bath tub and wash-stand all complete, and that is what I am thinking of as I write. I know that the sofa in your study is a disgrace in its present condition and there are various 2 things that ought to be changed but I cannot remember them now.

I am here for a fortnight. Mamma has a notice of Papa that she wrote for Dartmouth, but which was longer than they wanted. It seems to me that it is just what would do for the obituary notice. I should think it would require about ten minutes to read, perhaps not

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so much. I am getting along slowly with my own work, but am very much interested in it, my admiration for my Father grows. His letters show him to have been a stronger, finer character than I thought. They are always short, and consciously reveal nothing of the writer's character. He never seems to waste time thinking of, or dissecting himself, they simply refer to his work. But what excites my admiration and wonder is his apparently unshakeable hopefulness and patience. There is one series of letters from him every one of which is more hopeful than the last, in regard to his expectation of carrying his Postal Telegraph bill that session. "It will pass the session, next week, this week, when I say the word," he goes on, and then, simply one letter. "Do you remember the story of the little boy in the fandango. Up, up, up I go and down, down I go — well I am like that, and will be for some time longer," and the next letter says, "Congress adjourns and my bill will not be carried this year, we failed to get it up. Now what shall I do. I do not think I ought to give it up as I lose only delay by this postponement, still I will do so if you say so." Not one word of complaint, not one word of self-pity for all the long months of hard fruitless work, the high hopes crushed, not a word either of discouragement. Isn't that fine? He is writing to his wife you see, and he might well be excused for asking for a little sympathy in the disappointment, but he hasn't time or thought apparently for that, it is only "what shall I do next?"

Well you won't want to made through this, and I didn't set out to bother you. Goodbye. I will appear at Northampton if you want me and think I can do any good, but I do grudge time lost to my work as much as you do to yours, although mine isn't as important. Hence I should like to be left here as long as possible. Would you like me to bring up my young lady typewriter? She is also a stenographer and must be a good one though I have not tried her, as she was stenographer and typewriter at a salary of \$100.00 a month to a Congressman. Mr. McCurdy I suppose will be busy about his inventions all summer, and I do not want Frank McKeen in the house, or on the place when the children come . Please let him understand before you go down that his engagement with you terminates when

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you leave for Northampton. Now please do this, please don't put it off but have it distinctly arranged.

Mr. McCurdy has at last got his box to his mind, but unfortunately not his patent, I feel troubled about it. It seems to me so clear that there must be a patentable invention in a device that permits developing to be done from outside a dark room instead of one's having to go inside. All his mechanical devices are allowed without question, and there is admittedly no prior patent in his way, but the examiner cannot see the difference between a dark box and a dark room. He says they are the same in principle. So they are, so is a baby doll house the same in principle as an ordinary house. But the moment you arrange means by which the dolls inside are caused to move about from outside, without putting your hands in and moving them, you have certainly made an invention. Now that is what Mr. McCurdy has done. He has got a small dark room, on principle like a large one, but with all the inside mechanism operated at a distance, outside. He might fairly and justly claim an invention patentable if his box were the size of an ordinary dark room or bigger. The matter is still a subject of correspondence between Examiner and lawyer. All the apparatus claims were allowed long ago, but Mr. McCurdy thinks himself entitled to the process, and it seems to me that he is. I think you would be satisfied that he is doing the proper thing by this invention, whatever you may have thought of the others. The only question is about his counter patent, whether he should sell it now or wait until he is ready to put the box on the market. I think he ought to try and keep the box in his own hands. Eastman would not give him as large a royalty as he could make if he could dispose of part of his patent to an independent company. If he did this then the counter patent would be additional assets.

Well I am sorry I have wasted my time and yours writing what you won't want to read.

Ever yours,