

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 20, 1904, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B. Sunday, November 20, 1904. (Letter No. 2) Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell, Twin Oaks, Woodley Lane, Washington, D. C. Dear Mabel:

I can't sleep — so here I am again — on Letter No. 2.

My last letter has been all about myself and my father — and I have made no mention of your loving letters which have been such a comfort to me. Daisy too has sent me two nice letters. Bert also has not forgotten me — and even dear lazy Elsie — has written too — a nice letter — telling me just what I want to know about Bert and his work — and Melville and Gertrude too. She has also included graphical kisses from the little ones.

I had intended writing to all today — but I have had a sociable time instead. Give my love to all — and to your mother too. We don't correspond very much — but, I am sure she knows that I love her in my silent way — yes as such as my own dear mother when she was alive.

I have taken up my pen again to answer your letters and telegrams as well as I can and let you know a little of the things at Beinn Bhreagh — you would like to hear about.

First: I received the Registered Letter with the deposit receipt for three thousand dollars. Mr. Mitchell will take it over to Mr. Wright in the morning and arrange for its 2 deposit to your credit in the Halifax Bank — with interest due.

The kodak stock — and the deposit receipt for four thousand dollars — repose safely in your hiding place. I can bring them down or send them to you as you desire.

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I received your letter about Mr. Borglum at the time you thought and immediately sent him a cheque in payment of his bill — adding on \$200 — as a testimony of appreciation for what he had done for Daisy — the whole amounting to \$786. The letter was mailed at the time you anticipated. Your telegram about the matter evidently crossed mine to you — both telegrams probably delayed by the storm in New England — which interrupted communications. I hope the cheque will relieve his condition. Have had no acknowledgement of receipt yet.

And now it is “up to you” to say what shall be done in reply to the proposition from the Macraes enclosed herewith. They make a business proposition for a loan — to be submitted to Charlie by you — for they think we can do nothing without consulting him — “will do nothing” would be more true. I must say that the matter does not appeal to me as a business proposition — and we cannot afford to make the loan out of mere sentiment. Still I feel sorry for them — and wish we could help them in some way. Whatever you feel like doing — do without the expectation of ever seeing your money again. I have the greatest sympathy for Flo Macrae — but not much confidence in the ability of her husband — and know nothing about the father of Mr. Macrae.

If you feel like making a personal present to Flo of any amount you can afford to throw away — on account of friendly feeling and sentiment — this — no doubt — would help them — for it would leave their property untouched — so that they would still have the means of borrowing in a business way from business people.

There is something about this whole matter that I do not understand. The secrecy of it — and the evident desire that nothing should be known about it in Baddeck. George Macrae would not even send his letter — but brought it himself — so that Mr. Mitchell knows nothing about it. I feel suspicious about the whole thing — and wonder whether Mr. Macrae (the father) — as Postmaster — has encountered any of Emslee's difficulties. I advise against the proposal — but would like to show our good will — by making Flo, privately, a present of a few hundred dollars — which she can repay at some future time

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should she be able to do so. We don't want to get tangled up with their property and their store and etc., thrown into our hands. If your heart feels moved to do anything for Flo — do it generously and privately. An instinctive feeling within me tells me — but why I don't know — that Macrae's father is the one that is in trouble — and that they privately want to help him. Cast your bread upon the waters my little girl — with a generous hand — but keep out of the business arrangement proposed. Consult Charlie and see what he says. Act at once — one way or the other — and do not keep them longer in suspense.

Shall I give Flo Macrae five hundred dollars in your name — as all you can afford in the matter — and decline to take any security excepting her personal word that she will repay it at some future time should she be able to do so. You cannot telegraph reply without letting Baddeck people know something about the matter — and they evidently desire — for some reason unknown to me — that nothing should be known. I'll tell you what to do.

If you wish me to give Flo five hundred dollars from you telegraph “Melville is quite well” and if you wish me to tell them that you cannot do anything for them at all — telegraph “Gertrude is quite well.” Surely telegraph operators could draw no materials for gossip from such telegrams as these — but I would know how to — act — so as to end their suspense.

There has been a fatal epidemic among cats on Beinn Bhreagh — all — both wild and domestic — have disappeared. Mr. Davidson's cat and her five kittens have all died — and his heart is broken over it. John McKillop's little girl brought a cat from Baddeck and it has died. Two of the cats that run wild on the place have been found dead on the road — and we see no cats now — in the woods — or near here. A wild black cat has lived for some time in or near the laboratory. The other day I saw her sitting lazily in the grass near the photographic blackboard and she did not move as I walked by. I therefore approached her closely when she rose and went away so slowly and haltingly as to show that something was wrong.

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About an hour afterwards, while working in the Annex 5 I heard the most extraordinary caterwaulings apparently outside. The noise was so loud and so strange that Mr. Ferguson and I thought that Mr. Mitchell was up to some of his tricks — making a rather poor imitation of cat's mewing. It was too loud to be natural. Mr. Ferguson and I flew outside to catch him at it — but he was nowhere in sight. I hoy-hoyed for him — and he replied from a great distance — showing that he was not the author of the disturbance. He shouted to us that he had not been mewing or making any noise at all. Remembering then the strange actions of the poor black cat we searched the cellar under the Annex for her, and found her in a coil of rope which she had evidently used as a nest — evidently in great pain. She lay quietly while we examined her closely and did not try to run away.

All that afternoon — at intervals — she gave utterance to blood-curdling mews — Just before I left the laboratory for the evening — I went down to have a last look at her — determined either to put her in a ware box near the laboratory stove — or put her out of her misery. She was lying quietly in her coil of rope — and I put my hand upon her and found her dead. All the cats on Beinn Bhreagh have disappeared — and I am afraid they are all dead. I cannot imagine the cause. People here say that cats are often poisoned by eating the heads of field mice — but I never heard of such a thing before and don't take much stock in the story. Submit the matter to Dr. Nerriam and see what he says.

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I have been going over the accounts of Beinn Bhreagh Estate — and am very much dissatisfied with the condition of affairs. \$12,883.45 have been expended on the place this year. \$4769.40 for permanent improvements; and \$8114.05 for running expenses.

The total amount deposited in bank this year was \$15,529.37 and all that remains now is \$2645.92.

The total receipts from all sorts — tickets and etc., (not including the “working capital” of \$9000) was \$6529.37 and the total running expenses (not including permanent

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improvements, wire fences, implements and etc.) amounted to \$8114.05. The running expenses thus exceeded the receipts by \$1584.68

Nothing has paid its expenses excepting the Nursery Department —and even in this case the excess of receipts over expenditures is apparent and not real — resulting (1) from the fact that the labor employed by the Nursery is largely charged to outside work (Pleasure Department) — thus (apparently) reducing the cost of the Nursery; and (2) that we have allowed the Nursery to charge a commission of 10% on outside work which commission (apparently) increases the profits of the Nursery Department.

But on the whole — to us — this commission represents an expenditure and not a receipt. We have simply paid for supplies and work for Pleasure Department — 10% more than they 7 cost. Will send you analysis of results when Mr. McCurdy's Report on the financial condition of Beinn Bhreagh is completed.

Can't write any more — Good night or rather good morning. John McDermid will soon be here for the mail.

Your loving husband, Alec.