

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, April 28, 1891, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Sheeptown — Beinn Bhreagh. April 28th, 1891. My dear little wifie:

Here I am — at 2 o'clock in the morning — “waiting for Gifford.” It has been a good thing my camping out by myself on the mountain.

I can pop in on the shepherds at any moment of the day and night and find out what is going on. The lambs require attention at this time every two hours day and night. Mr. Gifford claimed that Johnny couldn't sit up at night to save his life — so that he was of little use at night for the lambs — In spite of all his efforts to keep awake he would be sound asleep by ten o'clock! I noticed however that in spite of this strange failing, Johnny McKillop was left in charge nearly every evening until after midnight — and that when I looked in upon him near midnight he was faithfully and conscientiously doing his duty — keeping his sleepy eyes wide open as best he could — “waiting for Gifford.” To relieve him.

I found that Gifford was not in bed resting — but was absent in town. This seemed to be the case nearly every evening. No use asking Johnny for an explanation — he is always as close as an oyster on such matters.

I invited myself to tea one evening and about eight o'clock Gifford washes up and brushes his hair and prepares to go out. Why? I ask — Well — they are short of provisions — and he must go into town for some more. But — I say — would it not be better to send Johnny or his brother Angus. No — he couldn't see it — and so he went himself. Carrying with him my injunction to lay in a good supply — to last some time. Midnight before he returns. Next

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night I looked in at the hut about eleven o'clock — 2 Gifford absent — in town — Johnny McKillop in charge.

Yesterday evening I took pity upon Johnny McKillop and invited him down to my tent. I told him to sleep in the inner tent on a spare mattress and I would call him before I went to bed. About ten o'clock at night I slipped up to the hut — Gifford was not there. I hunted the sheep houses and the barn. He had absented himself while on watch. Went up again at eleven o'clock — no Gifford — at twelve o'clock — no Gifford. The lambs were all starving. At half-past twelve I went up again and found he had just come in. He did not know I had been up before — and I did not undeceive him.

The first rain of the season since my appearance here — came this afternoon. Good Mr. McInnis — fearful that the tent might be damp — and that I might catch cold — came up to insist upon my occupying decent quarters tonight — so I agreed to go to the Lodge. In the middle of the night the idea occurred to go up the mountain and see how things were conducted in my absence. Gifford — Johnny — And Angus — had no reason to expect my appearance tonight. They knew I had gone down the mountain to spend the night at the Lodge — and it has been raining hard ever since. I reached the hut about half-past one o'clock A.M. — Gifford absent in town — Johnny McKillop awake faithfully keeping watch over the lambs — but looking fearfully tired. (His brother Angus is only a boy and is never called on for night work).

I sent Johnny to my tent where he will be perfectly quiet and undisturbed — and told him to get a good sleep and not get up till I called him. I have taken the duty of shepherd upon myself tonight — so here I am in the shepherd's hut — at half-past two 3 o'clock in the morning — waiting for Gifford .

Time for my babies to have their bottle — so now I start upon my first night round.

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Good gracious — while I have been writing the fire has gone out. My lambs must starve till I can warm the milk.

Gifford returned half-past three o'clock A.M. — it is now four. Goodnight. Alec.