

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 8, 1895, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. La Bourgogne, May 8th 1895. My darling Alec:

I don't know but what it would be as entertaining to write you as to do anything else. At all events I will try.

It's either pouring with rain or splashing with salt water on deck, so that is not a very desirable place of residence today although both my big girls are up there. They have found two very nice friends, a pair of middle-aged jolly old boys, that are very good to my girls, trotting them up and down on deck and telling them stories of their children at home. One is a Dr. Cheney, and the other a Mr. Trowbridge from Boston. Dr. Cheney's face looks perplexingly familiar. I am sure I have seen and known him before and the children say the same thing, but he gives no hint of having known us previously so I am inclined to think Mrs. Mauro must be right in saying that his is one of those good-natured faces of a very usual type that you see so often that you think you have met them before. I think this the more likely that Mrs. Mauro says she had the same idea, that she had seen him previously. He has a son who is Professor at Yale. Mr. Trowbridge is a big stout, red-faced man with red mustache and red hair, what he has of it, and a cousin who is engaged to be married to a Roman Prince. He said he didn't like it so I said we had one who had been married twenty-five or thirty years, and wasn't divorced yet. This he admitted was a consolation. He and his friend the doctor are in the highest spirits the whole time like two school boys off on a holiday, as indeed they say they are.

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The children have another acquaintance not so safe and unexceptionable, a Bohemian looking man like the pictures of the Paris artists in Trilby with a shock of curly black hair.

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He says he is Mexican Consul to France and Algiers. He told Elsie he feared I did not like him, and I certainly don't care to have either child see too much of him and I don't think they will now as they both admit being afraid of him, although neither know why.

Mrs. Mauro says that she has been asked where Mrs. Bell is, "the two girls are there, and a young lady with them, but where is Mrs. Bell?" The stewardess calls me Mademoiselle, and altogether people seem rather to question my right to be the mother of "those tall girls."

I am very much pleased with Elsie, she is talking French bravely for all she is worth, and really seems to have a far greater command of language than I dared expect. Her next neighbor at dinner is a French priest, Father Sataile, whose English is even more limited than her French, so she talks to him in French, and he is very good in helping her out with French words or telling her how she should have expressed herself. Yesterday she attempted to tell him your story of the duel between the thin Frenchman and fat Irishman, and if he didn't quite catch the point he at least pretended to.

We haven't seen the Captain yet, they say he has been sick ever since we started, and spends all his time in his room or on the bridge.

Our company is a motley lot of foreigners with a small sprinkling of well-bred Americans, not enough to leaven the lot. Some are opera singers of, I think, Maurice Gran's company, a lot of 3 Spaniards, Mexicans and Italians and French. Mrs. Mauro has been asked if those tall girls were not Spaniards. This by a Frenchman. I am afraid they are rather conspicuous, they say there are two Spaniards who stand at the door and stare at them, or follow them around on deck. I think I shall be glad when the journey is over.

Mrs. Mauro and her sister Miss Rockwood are most kind, I don't know what Elsie would do without Miss Rockwood and Dr. Cheney to march up and down with. Mrs. Mauro says that some one told her that some throat medicine she had been using for many years for sore throat would lighten her hair, which formerly very light had turned dark after her first child's

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birth, so just for fun she tried. At first she saw no change, but when she came home in the evening to her horror she found her hair bright golden red! She declared she had never known before what shame was. She tried every means to get the color off in vain. Now it is growing and the new hair is dark, but the old hair still golden red.

May 10th. 1. I would like to understand what you expect me to do about my money in the letter of credit. Two thousand five hundred dollars ought I think to be all we need for living, travelling and purchasing expenses, but if I have to take off a good five hundred for return fares we will be cut pretty short. I would like to buy my and the children's fall and winter clothes in Paris, it would be a saving of money, time and trouble if I can. I think six hundred dollars would cover all my expenses in that line, leaving \$1900 for living and travelling expenses. That if we don't travel certainly ought to be plenty. I think we ought not to pay more than \$4.00 a day for living expenses, that for four months would be \$984.00 4 for the four of us. I will try to be as economical as I can, but I think I ought to be able to buy my clothes here as it will save me certainly two hundred dollars later on. Please let me know as I want to partition my money up so that it shall last. 2. Do you remember Mrs. Mauro's singing, and would you advise me to trust her judgement in the choice of a singing teacher for Elsie? At all events she knows something about music and I know nothing at all. 3. Would you object to Daisy's taking singing lessons also? She wants to but I will await your decision, if not too long deferred. 4th. Would you be willing to have me leave the children in their families and stay in the same house with Mrs. Mauro? I am not at all sure that I shall want to, but ask in case I might.

Please get Mr. McCurdy to send me my Mexican notes, and guide-books so I may write a paper for the club if I feel inclined.

The children are more or less excited over their "villain" who at this present moment sits opposite me, blowing on his name written across his photographs. I hope he doesn't intend to present Elsie with one. He is an Italian concert player who plays the mandolin most beautifully, and followed Elsie around all the first day out. He has now reached the

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point of conversation, but I hope the point won't penetrate very far, and think there is little danger as his English is of the scantiest. I think I should have hesitated more than I did about coming without you if I had any idea my children would attract as much attention as they think they have. However they will not be in the way of seeing many people in their families. Dr. Cheney and Mr. Trowbridge I think are very nice friends for the children to have although I think they should make some effort to speak to me. They are from New Haven, not Boston, and know Cousin Evelyn. There are some rather disreputable people on board, and the children hear more gossip than I like, but we are near the end of our journey now. The vessel is rolling a good deal in a slow, steady fashion, which disagrees with a good many passengers, but we are all well.

May 12th. We ought to reach Havre tonight at seven, and start for Paris tomorrow morning at half past seven. It will remind me pleasantly of our good old times in Mexico, but come rather hard after our late habits of raising anywhere from nine until twelve! The children have been very good and done all I asked of them, and Elsie has looked very handsomely and talked right and left in broken French, Italian and English with an ease and composure of manner that amazes me. After all I don't think she will be a wallflower. Daisy is more quiet but she is a dear, thoughtful child, and seems to have more heart than I perhaps gave her credit for. In our long conversations in the morning while Elsie is dressing I have learned much of my children's memory of their childhood which has interested and sometimes touched me very much. I did not realize I think that I was so much to Daisy as a little child, she said one most dreadful recollection was when she had told a fib and I had not spoken to her all the rest of the day.

Goodbye, our journey is nearly over and I could be almost sorry it has been quiet and restful and the Captain is believed to be a myth, so our table has been very quiet, only ourselves, the priest and two quiet American ladies.

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Now dear I love you very very much and want you dreadfully, do write to me often, and tell me you love me.

Yours ever,