

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, May 21, 1895, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B.

Tuesday, May 21, 1895. My darling May:

Another day gone — a busy day. It is well I came here — at least for my sheep records! Poor John McKillop — as faithful a follow as can be — is unreliable when it comes to a record.

I always succeed in spotting errors — in records that he has worked over as faithfully as can be — and what worries me is the feeling that there may be other errors — indeed probably are others — that I have no means of discovering.

Nearly all the lambs are in now — and I hope tomorrow to have each ewe identify its own lamb for my special delectation. I shall examine the number-names of the sheep with my own eyes — and in this way verify Johnnie's records.

A few lambs are dead — and of course in these cases the records must stand as Johnnie noted them — but the living lambs will all be identified by me personally! I shall ask them to find their mothers — and when I am satisfied of the mutual recognition — I shall examine the tag on the sheep's ear. In this way I may be able to spot errors — if errors there are. For example I may find that the ewe noted by Johnnie as 344 may be 244 or vice-versa. This is the sort of error he is likely to make. Then male lambs may be noted as female and etc., etc.

You remember the black six-nippled ewe we made such a fuss over in the autumn. Three times (I think) John visited the “North Shore” — St. Anne's in search of the sheep for 2 which I had offered a fancy price. And three times he returned without her. She was as

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wild as a deer and sped to the mountains — and I was fearful that she would not be found in time for our purpose. At last she was caught and brought to me — and as luck would have it — we were in time.

I have been very anxious about the lamb or lambs we expect to obtain from her — for their mother is a six-nippled ewe — and their father (four-nippled) is a son of a six-nippled ewe. Will the lamb or lambs be six-nippled — and specially — will she present us with a six-nippled male. She had triplets last year. Will she have twins or triplets this year?

Well — last Friday — just about the time we expected her to lamb — she escaped into the woods on Beinn Bhreagh among the foxes and wild-cats — which will make short work of her six-nippled lambs (?) if they get a chance. John is about worn out searching for her. I found this morning that she was still missing — and so posted up a public notice offering a reward of two dollars for her recovery with her lambs. Result the young men of the neighbourhood have been exploring every nook and corner of Beinn Bhreagh — and this evening just before dusk — Duncan Buchanan found her standing guard over a sleeping lamb — a black lamb — a regular monster — a beauty — so he reports. Whether or not others were born we cannot tell.

Duncan found her — but alas he could not catch her. She whistled to her lamb — and in a moment they were both off like wild creatures — as they are. They are in the woods on the south side of the mountain — the Bras d' Or side — the most dangerous place for the lamb. I have made up my mind to save that lamb if we can possibly do it. Tomorrow morning at daybreak all the men on the place — under the leadership of Mr. McInnis — are to join in a hunt. They have no hope of catching the mother — but they may run down the lamb — if she is alive tomorrow.

They are to form line at the boundary fence between our property and the adjoining one — and drive the sheep this way.

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If twins or triplets were born — the others are probably dead — as Duncan saw only one lamb with her. The large size of the lamb may indicate a single birth — and perhaps a male. If a male he is the most important lamb on the place because he combines the blood of two six-nippled sheep — with the best four-nippled blood on Beinn Bhreagh.

I only hope he may turn out to be a six-nippled ram — and I think he will. There's a prediction for you. I will let you know whether my prophecy is fulfilled or not — as soon as I know myself. We must have that lamb even if we have to shoot the mother to get him! I append here the ancestry of this lamb — so far as known to me. On the father's side he has four generations of four-nippled rams.

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Mr. Ellis expects to have his new whirligig ready for trial tomorrow. I shall get Mr. McCurdy to take my place in the laboratory — merely superintending matters myself. If I find that Mr. Ellis and he can carry out the experiments satisfactorily by themselves — I shall leave here as soon as the sheep records are complete and the arrangements of the flock for this year are all settled. This should not take many days — and then I will go in search of my own dear lambs on the other side of the Atlantic — and their run-away mother — but I won't shoot the mother!

Your loving husband, Alec. Mrs. A. Graham Bell, Paris, France.