

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, March 5, 1896, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Auditorium Hotel, Chicago. March 5th, 1896. Mrs. A. G. Bell, 1331 Conn. Ave., Washington, D. C.

Thank you my darling for all the kind and loving words you have sent to me. I have been too miserable for the past two days to reply — but now that the clouds have lifted and the sun has come out again — I write you — if only a few lines — to show you that your husband is still alive — and thinking of you. The cold I caught in Cincinnati — aggravated by much speaking in Jacksonville — and by early morning hours — rendered me perfectly miserable by the time I reached here. I spoke before the Parents Association on Monday night — but have not done anything since. In my hoarse, stuffy and headachy condition, I felt it would be perfectly suicidal to attempt to carry out Mr. Spencer's programme — so cancelled all my engagements and determined to remain quietly here until I felt able to travel safely in this cold and damp climate.

I now feel well again — and propose visiting schools here tomorrow (Friday) — On Saturday I hope to have members of the School Board lunch here — and on Sunday propose to go to Milwaukee and complete arrangements for my Wisconsin tour with Mr. Spencer so as to interrupt as little as possible my regular habits of life!! Upon this depends my being bright and well.

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Mr. McCurdy has been just as good as he can be — actually submitting to be interviewed in my place! (vide Chicago Journal)

By the by — I want to tell you something confidentially — I mean it — therefore — perhaps — I better not tell you at all!

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If you promise not to tell you may read on — but if you don't — then I trust you not to read any more of this letter!

Stop here till you've made up your mind. You won't tell? — honor bright? “honest and truth?” as the children used to say. Then — turn over.

You know that a deaf-mute newspaper called “The National Exponent” was started here a year or two ago — specially to oppose the advance of the Oral Method. “Single Methods must go” was their motto.

Well the proprietor of this paper, a Mr. Regensburg (a deaf man) sent one of his staff, Mr. Ring (a hearing man) to me with a strange proposition. Mr. Ring, I understand, is the Manager, or Printer, Or Publisher of the Journal — the hearing member of the concern.

The proposition was that I should quietly subsidize the Journal — nobody need know anything about it — they would never tell — and then the Journal would experience a change of heart and advocate the Oral Method! — 3 or anything under the sun that I might desire! In expatiating on the value of the Journal, Mr. Ring told me that it paid its expenses with no profits — had a circulation of 2700 including 700 parents of deaf children.

If I could see my way to subsidizing their paper I might have absolute control of it. Might write the Editorials myself — or dictate what they should be — and nothing should appear in it that I did not fully approve.

Of course I told Mr. Ring that I could not consider it for a moment. In fact I told him that the proposition looked like a trap — and said he might be quite sure that if I subsidized any Journal it would be done openly and not in a secret manner.

He assured me that it was not a trap but a bona fide business proposition, and if I desired to have it announced in the paper of course they would be glad to do that.

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I told him I could not do it, but asked him what amount of subsidy he had in mind — and called Mr. McCurdy into the room to be a witness of the conversation.

He said that the Journal could be run for about sixty dollars a month leaving me to infer that that was their proposition — but that they were open to a lower sum.

Mr. Ring seemed very much disappointed that I would not consider the matter.

I have half a mind — when I return from Chicago — to lead them on to make me a proposition in writing — and then give them a piece of my mind concerning the morality of the matter! Won't you please write me what you think about it. The only thing is — it might not be quite honorable in me to lead them to make me a proposition I have no intention of accepting. What do you say my little wife?

Better leave dishonorable men severely alone. One cannot touch pitch without himself being defiled.

Your loving husband, Alec. P. S. Elsie wrote me a nice birthday letter. How is my little [???][???][???][???][???][???] (Daidums) A.G.B. Mrs. A. G. Bell, 1331 Conn. Ave., Washington, D. C.