

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 28, 1904, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B. Monday, November 28, 1904. Mrs. A. G. Bell, Twin Oaks, Woodley Lane, Washington, D. C. Dear Mabel:

I had intended to write to you yesterday about laboratory experiments — but I became interested in my letter to Daisy and had not time. If I had only omitted the postscript I might have had time. If John McDermid had only given me time to read over the postscript carefully it might have found its way into my waste-paper basket — but he didn't, and I had to scribble to finish it. It expressed perhaps rather too strongly my feeling of disgust at the tendency of McClure's Magazine to go into a sort of detective business on a large scale. It expressed truly my feeling in the matter — but then it is not always wise to give expression to such feelings. Indeed, as a general rule, silence is better than expression, where the subject matter is disagreeable.

There are times, however, when perhaps good vigorous expressions may be of use. Charles and his wife have just returned from a trip to Sydney where they have been submitted to most humiliating treatment on account of their color . I enclose copy of Sydney Daily Post of this morning containing a letter from Charles upon the subject. Lina McCurdy wept over it — and kind-hearted Mrs. Bell joined in. I stormed — inwardly — but said nothing — and have been considering what to do. I had a talk with Mr. Davidson this evening. I told him I knew him to be a man with a pretty good-sized temper — that occasionally broke loose at the wrong times — but here was an occasion when he could let himself out . Here was the right time. There would be a meeting of men here on Wednesday evening. Wouldn't he think over the insult to Charles and his wife and let himself out on Wednesday. Could he not engineer a resolution or address to Charles from

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the men expressing their appreciation of Charles and his wife — and their indignation at the treatment they had received in Sydney. Then I think of forwarding the resolution or address to the Halifax papers with a short note from myself. The address from the men might also be signed by people in Baddeck. Don't know yet what to do — but will do something at the Wednesday meeting — and then something publicly naming the hotels that refused him admittance and quoting “the insulting remarks” which Charles did not incorporate in his published letter.

Good idea — get my father to draw up a resolution for signature. This will give him something to think about — and he will do it well.

The committee appointed by the men who met in Mr. McInnis' office, Mr. McInnis, Mr. Davidson and Mr. McIver, prepared an address of sympathy to Charles Thomson, which was handed to Mrs. Thompson for her husband.

It had been signed by all the men on Beinn Breagh and by many people in Baddeck; and Mr. Davidson reported on behalf of the Committee that so many people in Baddeck wanted to sign it — that it would be sent over to Baddeck in the morning for additional signatures. The whole town wanted to sign it. Charles Thompson wrote a very nice note in reply thanking the citizens of Baddeck and etc.

A great deal of eloquence was let off here this evening, and it was unanimously decided that this was an outrage — not only on Charles and his wife — but an outrage on Cape Breton Island, on Nova Scotia — on Canada — and that some decided action should be taken to bring the matter to public attention — so as to compel the issue — Shall there be a color line of this sort in Canada.

A committee of five was appointed with power to add to their numbers to investigate whole matter and arouse the public.

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Committee: Arthur W. McCurdy, Chairman, Dr. Macdonald, Mr. Davidson, Mr. McNeil, and — either Mr. McInnis or Mr. McIver constituted the fifth member.

Mr. McInnis on behalf of this committee will go to Sydney — ostensibly to see his son — but also to examine the hotel registers and diagrams and find out whether or not the hotels were full on the evening of last Thursday. Charles was allowed to register at the Sydney. McInnis will find out whether any persons registered after him and were given rooms. The cab drivers will be interviewed, and the facts as detailed by Charles will be fully enquired into. A report to the Committee will be made by Mr. McInnis, at the house of Dr. Macdonald on Monday — and then the Committee will go to work. So much feeling has been aroused — and all are so unanimous that I have no doubt that the people here represent public sentiment generally. Therefore I anticipate a stirring time — and the matter may even become a National issue.

Mr. McCurdy is headed in the right direction. From the earliest slave holding days Canada has been the friend of the colored man. If a slave once set foot in Canada he was free — and was received as a human being — entitled to protection and recognition. Will Canada permit the color line to be drawn in Sydney without protest. Should not be surprised to find the whole of Canada aroused by this little incident.

I have a note from Mr. Alvin Pope from St. Louis informing me that I have been awarded a gold medal for my tetrahedral kite — the highest award given for this class of exhibit.

We leave Friday morning, so I will follow very closely upon the heels of this letter.

Your loving husband, Alec. Mrs. A. G. Bell, Twin Oaks, Woodley Lane, Washington, D. C.

P. S. We had Mrs. Thompson before the Committee this evening so as to get the names of the hotels and etc., and the exact words used in turning them out.

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At the Queen's Hotel, Charles sent the driver in to find out whether they had any rooms. He returned, told them that it was all right — they had rooms — so Charles and his 5 wife got out of the carriage and went in. When Charles went to the desk to register — the man there exclaimed — “Oh — we can't take you in — get out — it's against orders.” And turned his back upon them. Charles made no reply and left. Charles has acted — throughout — as a gentleman — and even his published letter of protest — written under the greatest provocation — merely recites facts. I have never seen a better instance of self-control. He did not even mention the matter to me — or to any one here. He left it to be found out from his published letter. He handed me a copy of the paper himself as soon as it came out — and I started matters here. I think the people here — with Arthur McCurdy at their head — are so fully aroused that it is unnecessary for me to do anything further here. This is a Canadian affair — and citizens of the United States are not called upon to interfere.

I can help materially, however, in making this matter a national issue in Canada — by being interviewed in the United States. The Canadians are sensitive to American opinion — and something stirring upon this subject in some prominent American newspaper — implicating Canada — would be likely to be copied — both by the American and Canadian papers. I'll stir up Arthur McCurdy's Committee from the American end of the line — and I trust that the ultimate result may be — that such an outrage cannot happen again in the Dominion of Canada.

AGB. Think I better write to the American Consul in Sydney upon the subject. AGB.