Letter, February 27, 1925, Katharine Wright to Harry [Henry J. Haskell]

Katharine Wright Haskell

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Dear Harry:

I got home only last night. In Oberlin there was no chance to write. For one thing I was tired all the time and for another, there was no place where I could be alone.

Louis and I drove into Cleveland one afternoon and I gathered from the things he said that he really hates to leave Oberlin and his work and would be glad to stay if everything concerned could be patched up. So without telling him what I was doing I made an appointment to see President King. First of all I saw the Prof. He told me all about the trouble with Professor Martin. I had not taken that in though Louis says he told me something about it two years ago when it was arranged that the Ancient Art should go into the Fine Arts Department. That discouraged me more than anything else for it gave some excuse to President King for favoring Ward at Louis' expense. But I went to see President King.

At first he was very nervous and not inclined to do anything but say that no one was taking away anything from Louis and that they wanted him to stay and keep...
the work he was doing. But I insisted on going into the real difficulty. I asked him if it was anything unreasonable or unusual for Louis to want the Ancient Art in the Classical Department. He said it was not but that they had decided two years ago, when the question of Professor Ward's leaving had come up. Then I asked him if he knew then that he was deciding between keeping Mr. Ward or Louis. He said he didn't. I asked if he didn't suspect that that was the real point that was being decided. He said no, that there were two ways of handling the Ancient Art and that it had been their judgment that it should go in with the Fine Arts. It could obviously be handled in only one way of the two. He went on to explain that the three people who knew most about it were heard on the subject: Mr. Ward, Professor Martin and Louis. The first two thought it had better go into the Fine Arts and Louis had thought it ought to go into the Classical Department. The Committee had decided with the former and, on their decision, Professor Ward had decided to stay. It would not be fair to Ward now to ask him to give that up. He didn't see that anything could be done. What did I suggest?

Well, I said, if it was not under-
a decision was made two years ago which made it impossible for a man like Louis Lord to stay in Oberlin that I thought something ought to be done about it. It was too outrageous a situation to allow to exist. Then I told the President that I thought he had never understood Louis Lord and I told of how he had calmed me down several years ago when I was so discouraged with the way things were going in Oberlin and how he had always begged me not to allow what happened to him to turn me against the College. I told him that as a matter of fact Louis was loyal to him, perhaps more so than some who talked a good deal more about it to his face. I told him that since I had been on the Board Louis had not talked to me at all about what was going on, that he had leaned over backwards, fairly, in his scruples on that point. I had known nothing about his resignation until he had sent it in. I said I had been disturbed for many years about the type of men we were getting in and, of late years, about the number of good men we were losing. I told him that you thought and Orv thought that something ought to be done to try to keep Louis in Oberlin and that it seemed my job to do what I could in the matter. I think I made some impression in what I said about Louis' attitude toward him and his attitude toward me
since I had been on the Board of Trustees.
I think he thought we had been having our
heads together to cook up criticisms and so
on. He said that E.A. Miller had told him
the same thing about Louis' genuine loyalty.

I said a lot more, of course, about
Louis' strength and character and ambition,
and asked him if he couldn't understand his
desire to have a real job to undertake, such
as this new Classical Department would offer.
I told Louis afterward that it rather hurt
my conscience to make him out such an angel
and I hoped to Goodness he would act like one
now—that it would come back on me if he didn't!

Finally President King walked over
to the window and looked out for a while.
Then he said that Mrs. King felt "just exactly
as you do about it", and added, "and I do too,
for that matter".

(Some one has been fooling with this type­
writer since I have been gone and I can't
do a thing with it. Or I suppose.)

I hoped at the end of that inter­
view that he would do something. He asked
me to talk it over with Louis and see if if
he wanted to talk with him (King). Louis
didn't want to do that. He thought I could
tell the President what he thought about it.
First, he could not get out of his agreement
with Powers unless the College could persuade
Powers to release him. Second, he could not stay unless the Ancient Art was given to the Classical Department. Of course, there was nothing else for him to do. I felt that Prof. Martin was our real trouble so I wanted to see him and see if he really thought what President King had said. So I tried to see him before I went back to President King but he had a class when I called him and would not be free until four o'clock. I called the President's office and found that if I did not see him before four o'clock I could not get in until four the next day. The next day was the Day of Prayer for Colleges and it was much more important to pray than to take care of such a matter as losing one of the best members of his Faculty. So I decided to see him without waiting to see Martin but I suspected from the lukewarmness to see me that the mood would not be favorable. Sure enough, he was very different from the day before. There was no disposition to do anything but stand on the assurance given Ward two years ago. I asked if he would not talk to Ward though I agreed that if Ward stood pat, King could not honorably go back on his promise. But, I said, it was doing a great injustice and there was a great mistake made two years ago to make a decision and give a promise
which was sure, sooner or later, to drive Louis Lord from Oberlin. When he said, in defense of their position, that Professor Ward would have left if they hadn't given him the Ancient Art for his department I said that, for my part, I thought we could much better lose Ward than Louis. I did not see anything else to do but I made up my mind to see Professor Martin. It looked to me as if he had been a good responsible, though of course we all know that his opinion wouldn't have been taken so seriously if it had not fitted right in with what King wanted. So I left the President, merely saying that I thought it was a very serious thing if there was no place in Oberlin for a man of Louis Lord's ability, especially considering his years of fine work in Oberlin, and that nothing was being done to keep him.

It was a day of grief for poor Prexy for I found Mrs. Millikan waiting to talk to him as I left. She and Mrs. Mastick had disturbed his Sunday morning peace by going out to his house to protest about the kind of dancing that was going on the night of the home-coming! More about that later. Louis predicts there won't be much joy at Oberlin at the thought of "home-comings" if they have another time like this.

I finally saw Professor Martin. I
told him I had been completely flabbergasted by having President King quote him in defense of what they had done. I asked him if he really thought that Louis couldn't handle the Ancient Art. He says he never said Louis couldn't teach it; he said that Louis did not have his own first-hand appreciation of art.

I asked him if he thought Ward was better able to teach it or handle it. He said, in substance, no, but Louis would be impossible to get along with if he had some work over in the Museum. Then it came out that he has a great deal of resentment over the events which I am sure Mr. Stetson has told you about. He said Louis was "ruthless", "mean" and gave instances to illustrate. He said he knew Ward couldn't get along with him at all, that Louis would be running the whole Museum and so on. He also said, on the other hand, that Louis was a wonderful teacher and had made a very unusual department with his Latin; that he would teach Greek as well or better but he did not know near as much about ancient art as he himself did. I could see that what was irritating him was the thought that Louis should assume, for a second, that he could fill Martin's place. I asked him if he thought we were likely to get a better man if Ward brought some one in but he just stuck to it that Louis would be hard to get
along with and that Ward couldn't be expected to put up with it.

I had had no idea, and Mr. Stetson said he hadn't, that Martin felt as he did about Louis. It would break Louis' heart if he knew it, I think, so I did not report any of it to them. After we got through with that and I saw we could get no help from him I told him that I could never understand, if I lived to be a hundred and fifty years old, how he could take such a position toward Louis Lord. I reminded him of how Louis fought for him, though he undoubtedly thought Professor Martin had some faults. I said that I couldn't see why he felt that he was in duty bound to take such a position when he admitted that Louis would be such a loss to the College. He had said that there were only two men, in his opinion, who would more of a loss to Oberlin. One was Bosworth and the other Wager. Please don't pass this on to any one in Oberlin. I told Mr. Stetson part of it but I did not mention the names. I tried awfully hard not to "gossip" or "tattle" back and forth. But Professor Martin just stuck to his position and said he was sorry I felt about it as I did. I told him it was his part in it that made me feel the worst. I could understand the rest but I never could understand him.
I want to tell you about the situation in the Alumni Association. The Administration is controlling it now. Bohn named the new Secretary who has been a Y.M.C.A. Secretary and not even a success at that. It was all decided before even the EX. Comm. of the Association had a chance at it. There is a general stir-up about that. There is a very great deal of criticism about the new Hospital which is another case of an autocrat making a mess of things. But I want to get this letter off immediately and will tell you more about the other things another time. I shall write to Clayte Fauver and Dana Durand and Joel Hayden, all of whom are on the Appointments Committee of the Trustees. We won't save Louis but this thing won't happen again so easily.

President King read me the letters from Cole and Alexander, written in reply to King's telling of Louis' resignation. Among other things, Cole said that "his "batting average was lowered by this outcome. "I did not think that Lord would go". All of which shows that at least Cole knew of the danger of his going. Of course King did too unless he is a worse judge of human nature than even I think him to be!

As always,

Katherine

Glad you won your battle figured.