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Letter, May 14, 1925, Katharine Wright to Harry [Henry J. Haskell]

Katharine Wright Haskell

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May 14, 1925.

Dear Harry:

Your letter about the possibility of a Congressional investigation came while we were at the breakfast table. The next to last thing we want is an investigation by politicians. The only worse thing would be no investigation.

But if we do have to have such an investigation of course we must get ready for it. It happens that we both already know both Fess and Willis. Both have been here on occasions when their speeches were very largely taken up with remarks about Will's and Orv's work. Neither one knows much about it of course. Orv spent a day with Senator Willis when he was here looking over the field in connection with keeping the Government Experimental Engineering Field here. Orv was rather astonished by his great interest in finding out all he possibly could and not in a superficial way. The N.C.R. people were piloting him about in their usual mechanical way and Willis wouldn't follow them. He wanted Orv to tell him what he thought and what he knew. The Cash Register people were much peeved because he would keep on the subject of the thing he had come to study. Orv was rather
with his keenness and ability to understand and his evident intention to know what he was doing if he supported our effort to keep the Field here. There is no doubt in my mind that Orv can have the support of both Willis and Fess unless some very shrewd stuff is pulled off against it.

Fitzgerald has been red hot on the subject for some time. He is a keen fellow, with a good mind. He beat us once when we were fighting a school superintendent! He wanted to do something several years ago but Orv wouldn't let him, knowing how dangerous a thing it could be to get the thing mixed up with all kinds of other things.

I wish some pressure could be brought on one of the National Engineering or Scientific Societies to appoint a small committee to see what the situation is. This kind of a thing ought never to go to Congress, unless they put the investigation into the hands of a board of experts, which is too much to hope, I suppose.

Just last night I was talking about what Walcott was apt to be doing and wondering how he would go about it to protect himself. For of course he will do that. We have never underestimated his prestige and power as the head of the Smithsonian and we have never been scornful of his shrewdness and ability. He is considered one of the best politic-
ians in Washington and knows all the influential people in Congress already. He has every
advantage. We know that.

I feel like screaming when you all keep urging Orv to get together what he wants
to say about the state of the art when he and Will took it up work on it and to whom they
were indebted for certain things and what was their original contribution. I have tried
so hard for years to get something done on that. I suppose none of us quite realize what
a tremendous strain Orv has been under these last twenty years. It goes back of that really.
But the severe shock to his whole nervous system in the accident at Fort Myer, the nerve-
racking excitement of the years from 1908 to 1912, when Will died. The further strain of
winning the law suits which Orv had to finish up. No lawyer could handle it at all. When
I used to protest that he shouldn’t do so much on it, that Curtiss didn’t, Orv would say "Yes,
and Curtiss loses all the suits, too, and I can’t afford to do that." The nervous shocks
have reduced Orv’s vitality and energy beyond belief. No one but myself can understand that.

This strain of having the main credit being taken away from him and Will has been more
wearing perhaps than even I have realized. Down deep in his heart he is very bitter and
is disgusted beyond words with the howl that is going up now. No one would take any steps
to do anything to help straighten the outrageous thing but now all seem to feel that he is under further obligations to do some more for a country that has done nothing, through its government, but put obstacles and trouble in his and Will's way.

Of course we must do the best we can now but it is very hard for either of us to fight any more. We are both worn out with these years and years of anxiety and indignation. Indignation is very wearing, you know, and I have always tried to fight it off, both for myself and Orv. Orv has kept pretty still but he has evidently been having his own thoughts, some of which I hardly suspected myself.

I know what you all think, that if he had published more stuff and so on that it would have been different. But Orv is not a writer and it wears him out. His and Will's work is on record. There was no necessity for all this misunderstanding. It is ridiculous that a man should have to stand and howl and howl to call attention to what he has done. Orv can't do it, that's all, and wouldn't, if he could and I respect him for it. I despise the whole superficial spirit in what is called the scientific world! "Scientific fiddle sticks"!

But, of course, I'm going to do all I can to beat that gang down in the Smithsonian. I'm not going to get so indignant I can't fight. Orv is getting a little more rested
but I was alarmed about him several days ago. He has no energy now and can't do what he did in the first week. He certainly was in fine trim then and will be able to do what is necessary. You can't imagine how anxious I am about him and have been for years. Whenever I say anything to our old family doctor about having such ridiculous nerves he always says in his slow moderate way "You must remember, Katherine, that you have had a very exciting life and, as the only woman in the family, you have worried about all the rest of the family as well as about your own worries". It is true that I have been very uneasy about Orv ever since Will's death. Now, I am feeling sorry for ourselves, as you see, and had better get off the subject.

I wonder if Mr. Roberts couldn't stop here on his way to Washington. It may not be convenient of course but if he could it would be a great help to us. If congressional inquiries are prepared for, as you say, (and I do not doubt it) I think we had better take almost any other chance. The New York Times is tremendously interested and I wish it would press hard for an investigation by scientific and engineering people. We are not so afraid of any one who has a reputation for he won't dare to go on record, too far from the facts, we think.

Orv has just told me, over the tele-
phone that he has a letter this morning from a congressman from New York, Griffin or some such name, saying that he has seen the diagram in the N.Y. World, showing the changes and if it is anything like that he does not blame CRV for what he has done.

You are a safety valve for me. You will make allowance for my explosive nature and my foibles and no harm will be done, no matter how silly I am. Oh, and that reminds me of something I don't believe I got in my letter yesterday and I meant to say it. You think you take the same detached, realistic spirit into your personal relations that you pride yourself on, in your relation to impersonal matters. Well, you don't, that's all I've got to say, and I have reason to be glad you don't! I am a beneficiary of your idealistic tendencies when it comes to your friends and I know it and am exceedingly grateful. And that's that!

Did I ever tell you what has been the great surprise of my life, in connection with you? In college I thought you hadn't much feeling! I would have banked, then as now, on your intellectual strength and on your character but I never dreamed you cared much for companionship of any sort. I mean outside of what company you could find for your intellectual interests and of course such company is scarce. I find that I missed it entirely or else you have changed very much.

One says the truth with all As always
my writing is that I am too
conquered! a brother's feminism!

Katharina