

BEATRIX FARRAND
THE VALLEY CLUB OF MONTECITO
P. O. BOX 1140
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

February 28, 1947
hand 7

Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss
1537 28th Street
Washington, D. C.

My very dear Mildred:

Your encyclopedic letter of February 21 and 22 arrived hand in hand with Mr. Patterson's full report (posted also on the 22nd) of his visit to Dumbarton of February 3rd to 6th.

The two together propound so many problems that I find myself overwhelmed, and because of this sense of bewilderment and lack of strength, a long latent decision seems wise to make at once. It is perfectly clear that while physically better, there is no likelihood of ever really being strong again, and that is to be expected as in a few months the 75th milestone will have been passed. And as you have repeatedly told me, there have long been heavy overdrafts. So it will be kinder to Dumbarton and wiser for the rest of us to face the fact that after a happy association with its loveliness, I must give up the idea of advising and counselling and probably further visits.

Making this decision is a good deal like tearing off an arm or a leg or cutting out one's heart, but the change has got to come some day and Dumbarton develop on lines I might not be able to approve or follow. There is no chance that Dumbarton can be as intimately and personally lovely as it was when you and Robert lived there. Quite naturally Mr. Thacher's instinct leads him away from gardening and into the Library and collections, and Bryce has not the artistic background and technique which would make him a good adviser. Mr. Patterson will counsel wisely and sensibly and has feeling and training and is growing more and more to understand and love the place.

Naturally I'll slowly work on with the record notes, and hope to finish them gradually, but even they "drain" me and a visit would be still harder.

Now as to one or two of your problems - I know the herbaceous border and its hedges is wrong. The dimensions of border and walks are too nearly alike. Eventually walls will be needed, but in the meantime shrubs should be added and the hedges on the slope taken out and the herbaceous material reduced in its width and bulk. If the walk could be narrowed a little so much the better. Max always said I could not reason, but instinctively I know that this pronouncement is right from my personal point of view as a designer.

As to the north vista - again it seems pretty sure to me that walls are the right solution, but they should be higher and also the north end bulkier, and all should be well covered with evergreen creepers that will fuzz out softly. Personally it seems to me that the wooden palings would be better to replace with stone.

As to the replacement of the Orangery by a Library and building a new Garden establishment on 32nd Street: my old mind cannot accept doing away with the lovely little building, which is so right, as the start of the garden picture. Age has made me mentally inelastic in such matters and this is one of the reasons I feel my usefulness to Dumbarton is largely past.

Isn't it curious that you should speak of the Cathedral. Probably more than fifty years ago Bishop Satterlee spoke to me about placing it and the site was deliberately chosen by me. The ravine on its south side was meant to give a great high crypt or further basements and to have nothing between the cathedral and the road, so that it would soar up from its ravine as Laon towers over the countryside. The schools are badly placed and architecture bad and I've never seen the Pilgrim steps but they sound pretty dreadful and out of scale. Attack it my dear, and I wish we could do it together.

Elizabeth's illness was a shock, I had not heard of it and have sent her a posy and a line, and Poor Vicky and her husband, it's a grim enemy, but its good news that things seem to be going well. Is there anything I can do for good faithful and devoted William, if he cares to have remembrances and friendly greetings sent, please convey them. Again I had not heard of Mr. Thacher's illness - "pain decreasing" sounds as though he had had a serious time. Please tell me. He wrote saying he was going to Europe on May first and had five months leave of absence. Do you imagine Milrob may also go eastward rather than westward?

Only you know what it means to both of us to have to close the door on Dumbarton and our love of it. Fortunately there are memories and abiding affection.

Your ever loving Garden Twin

Trix
s.

No letter has gone to Mr. Thacher, will you speak of the meat of this letter with him, or shall I write him "officially"?