

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, July 1, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. GRAND HOTEL DE LA PAIX Puerta Del Sol 11 ET 12 Madrid, July 1st., 1880. My dear Mrs. Bell:

Are you very much surprised to hear of our being here? Mamma says that Grace knows Papa too well to be surprised to hear of our starting for the Holy Land or the Cape of Good Hope so I am forced to pin all my hopes of creating a surprise on you and Mr. Bell. I certainly had no idea of getting here when I wrote last from Bordeaux but when we got to Biarritz on the frontier and right on the way to Madrid the temptation was too great to be resisted especially as we found that the children would be better off staying quietly at Biarritz than travelling right up to the Pyreenes as we had expected. Biarritz is a lovely place combining country and mountain scenery with one of the finest beaches I ever saw, smooth and hard. The surf is at times quite high but not too high to be perfectly safe for the children accompanied as they always are by an experienced bather who is teaching them to swim.

The railway journey from Biarritz to Burges which was as far as we got by daylight was one of the most charming, we any of us ever made — over and through the mountains, bold sharp peaks rising abruptly out of woods or exquisitely cultivated land. It was a great surprise to us to discover how hard working and painstaking the spanish peasant of these mountains must be. Only with the hardest druggery, unsparing expenditure of time and strength can these stoney mountain lords have been changed to the fertile meadows we saw. Every bit of land, even if only a few yards square among the rocks is utilized. Whatever the Spanish Grandee or the Spaniard of the cities of the Southern lands may be, the Spaniard of Castile and of the mountains is not lazy, indolent and shiftless as I 2 always supposed.

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As for Madrid I find it fascinating, for a short time at any rate. The town itself is modern, built very much in the style of Paris with no charming bits of Architecture as you see in France and Germany and the churches except for their wonderfully and lavishly gilt interiors are uninteresting. Nevertheless there is much that is still distinctly Spanish about the town, if only for the windows each with their balcony and the shop windows full of bright hued Spanish fans. I am delighted to find the graceful Spanish ?antilla still reigne supreme on the streets and that it is every bit as graceful and becoming as I thought. Among "carriage folks" I believe the bonnet is fast superceeding the mantilla, but they descend to the sidewalks far more rarely here than in any other city so that you don't see them and I feel my own headgear very conspicuous and yesterday very ridiculous when one of it's jet ornaments caught in the fringe of an owning and it hung suspended, in the air for sometime before I could get the strings untied. But if the Mantilla has seen it's best days I don't believe the fan has although I fear the genuine Spanish article has-banished by the still cheaper Japanese paper fans. I was trying to think what article of ladies apparel there was in such general use among us Americans as the fan is here and can think of nothing unless perhaps it is the handkerchief. Still I am doubtful, I am not sure whether the market women and beggars among us own such a thing, while they carry the fan here! It is too absurd to see the poorest woman or child bareheaded and often barefooted with their gay Japanese fan in their hand or spread out to shelter their faces from the sun. No little child old enough to toddle alone but carries her fan. Mamma and I have invested in quite a lot and thought we were going into the business wholesale until Mr. Reed, an American gentleman living here and married to a Spanish wife told us that his wife had no less 3 than three hundred!

The picture gallery here is wonderful, superior to the Lourve I think but it was impossible to see half of it even in two visits as many hours long.

But perhaps you will be most interested to hear of our visit to the Bull fight or perhaps you would rather not know that your daughter-in-law went? At all events she did not stay

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very long. Ten minutes were as much as she could stand and then she left trembling with shame and disgust and wishing never more to look on a Spanish face. Yes I am glad I went I would have always regretted not seeing it, and have refused to believe the worst of it. The opening was one of the prettiest sights I ever saw, the fine round arena and the handsome horses sat by gorgeously dressed Spaniards in the long black velvet capes and Spanish black hats familiar to me from pictures of the time of Phillip II. Then came the procession of Matedors, fine athletic men in brilliant long mantles finished with bright gold or silver lace and black three cornered hats. They all marched across the arena after the two horses 'till they came under the royal box and then off came all the hats with a fine swinging bow to the box and then to the people than with a flourish the horsemen disappeared while the matadors cast off their long mantles displaying their gallant figures all in blue and pink and yellow and scarlet trimmed with gold and silver lace and with white stockings and lo? buckled shoes. Then came the combatants on horseback, the gaily beribboned mules that were afterwards to drag out the dead animals and all went racing around the arena and then the mules went out and one of the horsemen rode into the center gave the key of the Bull's cage to an attendant and then galloped out. A Moment's pause and then the bull, a fine animal with pretty ribbons on his big cruel horns came dashing into the arena, poor animal he stopped short surprised, and then trotted slowly around undisturbed until he came towards the bright little group of men and then he stopped again 4 until the fun began, the men flinging bright scarlet and yellow mantels to him and then running away. There were so many of them and he was so perplexed going after first one man then another and they all escaped so easily that I was reassured and began to rather enjoy the excitement until they put the horses at the bull. Well, after that it was just butchery. I thought at first it must be an accident that the first horse was immediately gored but when another followed and I found they were determined that both wounded animals should be killed it was too much, I had thought the bull fight might really be a fight, a trial of skill where any injury to the horses was as much an accident as to the men but I found the people simply wanted to see the horses killed, simply wanted to see a most disgusting and revoltingly brutal murder, murders I mean. They say that the late

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King who seems to have been a good and fine man tried to gradually veer the people by having these fights real trials of skill as I had supposed they were, but it was no use, the populace must have their blood. Once a year a grand performance takes place for the benefit of the hospitals. I am rather sorry now that I have told you all this but I am too tired to write another letter. Sightseeing from 9 A. M. until 8 P. M. with only, breaksfor meals for two days and a half is rather hard work and this afternoon we go to Tiledo for a day.

My love to all, I hope you are well.

Yours lovingly, Mabel.