

## Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, December 19, 1891, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. Steamer "Werra" Mediterranean Sea Dec. 19th, 1891. My dear Mrs. bell:

We have left Gibraltar behind us, but before its strange and wonderful image loses its distinctness in my mind, I must tell you about it. I have of course heard often of this Rock of Gibraltar one of the ancient Pillars of Hercules, the strongest fortress in Europe, but the sight of it was far beyond my ideas. It is like one of those rough boulders one sees often, fallen from some rocky mountainside or broken off from some sea girt cliff, sharp angular with no smooth rounded sides. Such is the Rock of Gibraltar magnified a thousand fold, a gigantic stray boulder dropped on the edge of a flat tongue of land. A scanty vegetation spreads like moss on the western face, and at its foot and crowding one on top of the other cluster groups of houses. Thoroughly southern and old worldish in appearance. A strong stone embankment seems to keep the town from slipping into the sea. On the eastern side the rock is cut sheer down into the sea a precipice a thousand feet high, either that or a steep sand incline on which nothing grows and is terminated by another low precipice like the settlements of a fortress. We first saw the rock at ten last night, bathed in the moonlight a most impressive sight, and we lay too in the beautiful bay all night. I am sure the bay of Naples is not more beautiful. There is the great rock, solitary sentinel guarding the projection while beautifully shaped hills fringe the deep bay raising and falling in graceful gentle lines as peaceful as the rock is warlike. I had been most anxious to go ashore, but up to this morning no one, not even the 2 Captain seemed to know how long we would be in harbor after sunrise, and they said we were three miles from shore. However one adventureus young couple risked losing their passage and went ashore, and a most jolly time they seemed to have. The young fellow, seeing I suppose that we looked rather lonely and wistful came up and while sharing his narcissus and sweet violets

## Library of Congress

told us of their drive through the narrow streets, of the strange looking turbaned Turks and white hooded Arabs they saw, the English soldier dude strutting about, the goats driven from house door to house door and milked before the housewife's careful eyes, the tiny donkeys scarcely big enough for a child to ride, laden with fruits and vegetables. I wished dreadfully that Alec had allowed me to stop there, as I had desired, but wasn't so sure when I saw one poor fellow traveller completely beset by a shouting gesticulating pushing mob of boatmen offering their services. How they did jostle each other to be sure, thrusting grimy fingers over each other's shoulders into the gentleman's very face, some even leaning over his shoulder and taking hold of his coat lapel. He seemed quite undisturbed to take it all as a matter of course, as it is, still I did not like to fancy myself in his place! To be sure it occurs to me that Italians have a reputation for just this sort of thing, but, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof", and today is cold and grey and Elsie wants to know "why the Mediterranean isn't any bluer than the Atlantic".

Stiff unaesthetic, but fresh and to sea weary eyes, beautiful bouquets of flowers adorn the two chief tables, and we watched them bring great baskets of fresh vegetables and big fish with strange names. Bomtosa, Deradoes and the like, on board from the little steam tug. They looked very nice and perhaps we will have more appetite. The courses 3 are so long you see and the variety so great that trying to decide what we will take we often don't take any at all! Perhaps this last is not exactly Gospel truth, but it sounded better so.

I think of setting up an opposition weather bureau of my own. Nearly all my weather predictions in Baddeck come true, and if you will remember I told you that as there had been several severe storms on the ocean as you said, we were certain of good smooth seas when we came across. Sure enough I don't remember ever to have had such a smooth passage before even when crossing in summer. I can't conceive why any one should have been sick, unless on the same principle as the lady who when she drank green tea at night without knowing it, slept soundly all night, but if she was aware of the dreadful deed invariably staid awake all night!

## Library of Congress

Would you be so kind as to let my mother and Alec see this as I don't like warmed over dishes and I want them to know about Gibraltar. I forgot to say that we could see Africa from Gibraltar, not so plainly to be sure as if it had been a clear sunny day, but enough to see that it was a land of high hills and distant mountains which was not at all what I expected of Africa. Much love to you all. Alec's cable said all well it was most delightful. I only hope it includes you all.

With very much love to you all.

Affectionately, Your daughter, Mabel.