

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, March 3, 1892, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. March 3rd, 1892.

My dear Alec:

I am so furious, and I don't know whether you and Mr. McCurdy oughtn't to come in for a share of my fury. At all events I have been mad enough to want to make as many people uncomfortable as I can. It is all about my precious Florentine Mosaic. If it was hurt before it is killed now. Instead of having been lifted tenderly and borne with care everybody who had anything to do with the poor thing which I have guarded so carefully seemed to have had a special spite against it and interest in getting it smashed. To show you how utterly wanton the destruction is, let me tell you that the frame which was sound and as capable of bearing a second journey across the Atlantic as the first is all broken and smashed also. I could never understand why you allowed it to come from Genoa by freight when you knew I never would trust it to the express companies. There was absolutely no reason why it should not have been easily and perfectly repaired when it left Washington, now the men say the design is lost and will have to be made all over again, and only a few of the pieces can be used at all. They say nothing can be done, but the proprietor was not at home and I am going to interview him tomorrow with Miss Clark. Anyway the restoration will be a difficult and expensive job, and I feel so distressed and unhappy about the whole thing. The first injury was an accident this was simply indifferent carelessness. Why the frame was loose in the box and the box wasn't even marked "With care this side up." All that however wouldn't have mattered if it had been carried as I intended 2 all the way under our own eyes.

We were all very sorry to leave Rome, it was just beginning to be at its loveliest and I think if we had not engaged our rooms here we would have staid. Not at that hotel however,

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my bill was fearful, and I do not know if it was correct, I was all packed and ready to leave before going out in the morning, but understanding from the porter that we were not to leave until half past two I did not come up from lunch until two, and then I was told we must leave immediately, consequently the bill had to be paid without studying the items. And after all we had to wait ages at the station. I do not think however that I would have staid for I am sure that so long as we remained in Rome Elsie would have been on the watch for the young man who stood and threw bouquets at her at the Carnival, especially since Daisy saw him in the street. I am glad we don't have Carnivals in Washington. Surely the license it gives to strange young men to show attention to pretty girls cannot be a good thing.

I offered a seat in our balcony to Miss Garrett of Baltimore on the last day, and she proved very nice and pleasant. She is very simple, quiet and unaffected, and I think I should like her very much. The Queen too appeared at her balcony opposite for the first and only time. She was most enthusiastically received when crossing and recrossing the Corso and at the balcony and I thought her most graceful, sweet and pretty. There were quite a number of people in the balcony waiting for her, and she talked to them so easily and friendly, there seemed little formality and when she left she extended her hand to each one, some of whom courtesyed and others 3 kissed her. She evidently had afternoon tea in the Palace to which the balcony belonged as she was absent for quite a while with the hostess a horrid vulgar old lady I took quite a dislike to as she smoked cigarettes, not in the Queen's presence though, and when she the Queen returned she began putting on her gloves. This somehow struck me as a very democratic thing for the Queen to do. I never thought anything about it before, and of course it is much less trouble to put one's gloves oneself than to have somebody else do it, still I suddenly felt that the Queen was very much a woman like myself. Another thing that surprised me was that the people should have thrown bouquets at her, and so recklessly that one struck her nearly in the face and rested on her shoulder until she removed it. I thought it must be rather

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difficult to look at once dignified, gracious and pleased as she managed to do under such circumstances.

The Mocoletti was the finest part of the carnival, and was the prettiest, most picturesque and artistic spectacle. It's no use your talking about machine work being superior in beauty to hand-work, it is not, it's very regularity and precision is destructive of beauty. For the same reason that a curved line is the line of beauty, the irregularity and differences in hand-work of all kinds forms an element of beauty. It has also the added charm of the unexpected. Having seen a yard of machine lace, you have seen the whole, but no two yards of hand-make lace is precisely alike, and that is so much the more interesting, it gives a reason for examining each inch carefully and speculating on the reason for each slight change. Then I had no idea I was starting on such a tirade, and you must be wondering what the Mocoletti has to do with lace machine or hand-made! Nothing that I know of unless there may have been something lace-like in the delicate sparkle of the candle-light. But what I meant was, that the spontaneous, individual, haphazard candle-light illumination of the Mocoletti bore the same relation in a way to the precise machine-like regularity of gas-jets illumination that hand-made lace or work of any kind does to machine work. It was irregular, no two tiny twinkles at exactly the same height, and so absolutely haphazard, here a house all in darkness, there one ablaze of light up to the third story, but never with a whole row of windows lighted or lighted the same. There was the charm of unexpectedness and the beauty of wavy and wavering lines, and here and there the flush of a chance red Bengal light contrasted with a green one further on, making in all a scene which might well have been the creation of an artist's brush, and which America with its passion for gas-jets can never see, and I wish you could have seen it. You missed it last time also, and this and the wonderful Italian crowd are the best things in the carnival. The masking in the streets did not amount to much, and I thought the costume makers must have lost money, their cellar-like shops seemed as full of ready-made costumes the first day as the last. Still there was quite as much display as we witnessed ten years ago. I wonder what it will be ten years hence.

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I am too tired to write any more or I would tell you what a warm welcome we received on our arrival and how nice it seems to be here again. I am afraid you felt rather like a big Newfoundlander in a pussy cat's dainty nest while here, but without you we are better 5 off here than anywhere else and Elsie especially is better here with a regular quiet life and its appointed duties, she is much brighter already than she has been for some time. She really does not enjoy sightseeing as Daisy does and as I thought she would, but I am inclined to think part of the trouble lies in lack of physical strength. She is well but not fully strong yet. Your telegram from Gibraltar only arrived yesterday, and I have had no letter, I thought I would have one.

Lovingly always, Mabel. March 3rd, 1892. Your birthday, a great many happy returns with us together.