

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Alexander Melville Bell, Eliza Symonds Bell, September 5, 1869, with transcript

Copy of a letter written by Alexander Graham Bell to his parents. Richmond House, Ilfracombe, September 5th, 1869. Dear Papa and Mama:

You are no doubt wondering whereabouts I am now — and where I have been — so now I write to let you know. Since you heard from me last, Chess and I walked from Braunton to Ilfracombe which we both voted a delightful place. On Friday after exploring the town, and bathing in the sea — we set off for Combemartin. The coast scenery between Ilfracombe and Combemartin is splendid . We finished the day — and ourselves too (nearly) by walking to Barnstaple. We must have walked over 23 miles that day. However, this is nothing compared to our walk from Crediton to Torrington w hich was 27 miles (!) let alone our exploration of Crediton before starting. Yesterday (Saturday) having “done” Barnstaple Chess left me for the South. I suppose he is with David Brown long ago. We have had a very pleasant time of it together — and we have been projecting innumerable imaginary toures for the future. We would undertake now, even with the little experience we have had to travel comfortably and fare sumptuously for 2/- a day each!!! When Chess left me I set off once more for this delightful watering-place. Ilfracombe has quite charmed me — and I anticipate many a pleasant ramble among the coves and Elgin-like Cliffs on the shore. Already I have become quite a resident. I have taken private lodgings for a week. A very nice bedroom — and snug sitting-room over-looking the sea and the fashionable parade. For bedroom and sittingroom I pay — how much do you think per week? Only 6/-.

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I have discovered an eating-house where I can get a good breakfast for 6 d with eggs 8 d . Yesterday I had a good tea-dinner — as much cold beef as I could eat; bread and

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butter ad.lib. Tea ditto and all for 10 d . Last night I astonished the neighbourhood with a velocipede performance. The roads however are too hilly to make much velocipeding practicable. Before it was too late last night I joined a circulating library; — and if you could have seen me to-day you would have found me a mile out of town perched in a comfortable nook on the top of a cliff ( really 200 ft. high this time ! ) — deep in the second volume of Shirley. I had a splendid view from my lofty station. Far away across the water I could see the dim outlines of the Welsh mountains, to my right I had the rugged coast for miles — and to my left lay Ilfracombe — just behind the Capstone Hill, Wildersmouth and Runny Cleave — where, the guide-book says “parties amuse themselves in an endless variety of ways; some read, — others sketch — whilst some are listlessly reclining upon the rocks — others are seen jumping from orag to orag ardently bent on a geological examination of the strata, or in search of the shells which are found in the sand between the rocks.” Indeed I easily verified what the guide-book said with my telescope. It is really a capital glass and I could see all that went on on the parade or in the boats, and could even scan the faces of happy couples seated in romantic coves without moving from my elevated position. Yesterday morning a vessel foundered just outside the harbour. She had been run into in the night by a steamer. She tried to make the harbour but went down just about 200 yards from the mouth. 3 The tops of her masts are still visible above the water. All the crew were saved. In the old churchyard at Braunton I took down some choice epitaphs. There seemed to be no end of them — good — bad — indifferent — chiefly i ndifferent !

But there was one which so excelled the others in l udicrous badness that I have added it to my collection.

It is to the memory of three individuals — one of whom met his death by falling over a precipice.

It is as follows: —

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Here unto all you standers By; as you am now so once was we As we am now so you must be Prepare for death and follow me.

To die in Jesus O how sweet You need not shed a tear Why should you wish me back again You have no cause to fear.

When i was on the cliffs so high I little thought death was so nigh The fattle rock that shatterd me, Lord let me hide myself in thee.

Now all by me a warning take And think of danger befor to late.

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As a specimen of the really pretty but medium epitaphs — I may give you the following,

“Ere sin could blight or sorrow fade Death came with friendly care, The opening bud to heaven conveyed And bade it blossom there.”

But here are the two gems of the whole churchyard. The first is exquisitely touching — and the last is so good that I suspect it must be an extract from one of our standard poets.

She was the partner of his joys and woes, She followed to partake of his repose; As she had shared his gladness and his gloom, So now she shares with him his silent tomb.

The last is so good that it must have a page to itself — So turn over —

Sacred to the Memory of William Robbins died 1841.

This modest stone — which few vain marbles can May truly say Here lies an honest man. Calmly he look'd on either life; and here Saw nothing to regret, or there to fear; From Nature's temperate feast rose satisfy'd Thank'd heav'n that he had lived and that he died.

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Letters will reach me if directed to Richmond House, Ilfracombe.

Love to all

Your affectionate son, Aleck. Professor A. Melville Bell.