

Hotel Iturbide¹
Ensenada de Todos Santos, Baja California, Mexico
16th July 1897

My dear Kelman,

At last I am in Ensenada and this is the first letter I have written so consider yourself honoured. I wrote you from New Orleans, which I trust you received all right. I think I told you I saw Mr Purkis there. He was asking all about you and Jack². Uncle Bob³, to whom I wrote yesterday from San Diego, will have told you about my journey across the desert. It was frightfully hot. When you come across you must arrange to travel in the winter for then it is very pleasant.

At Yuma (Texas)⁴ I saw some fine Apache Indians, quite unlike the Indians in Vancouver. The Apaches are great big men, with long hair hanging down their backs. I christened one John Wesley, he was so like him in appearance if his long hair had been white instead of black.

I left San Diego last night by the company steamer "Carlos Vacheche", a steamer somewhat larger than the "[illegible]" and smaller than the "Culch" with sleeping cabins on deck. It was a lovely night, the full moon shining brightly over the water. We passed a beautiful hotel called the "Coronada"⁵, all lit up with the electric light. I could hear the band playing out in the gardens and it sounded splendid across the water.

We arrived at Ensenada at half past six this morning. I must say my first impressions were very favourable. The Bay of All Saints, for that is what "de Todos Santos" means, is very large with mountains rising in the distance⁶. It only wants a volcano to make it look like the Bay of Naples. The shore is all sand and splendid for bathing. There is a nice little cove where the gentlemen from this hotel go, and I am going to have my first sea bath this afternoon.

As soon as the steamer came to anchor a boat like a man-of-war's boat pulled out from the shore. Its sailors were dressed like English man-of-war's men. This boat contained the doctor and custom house officer and all the passengers had to be examined before leaving the steamer. I had no trouble with my baggage and soon was ashore in one of the company's boats, pulled by two Mexicans (servants of the company). I ventilated my Spanish at once and was soon gabbling, "Buenos días de Usted", etc. etc., to which the sailors responded with a heap of lingo that I did not understand. I just said, "Si, si, si, si," which means "Yes, yes, yes, yes." I think they must have thought it very funny for all I said was "Yes".

The manager of this hotel met me and took me up here. This is a lovely place, so large and roomy, no carpets on the floors, which are highly polished, only rugs here and there. I have got a nice room facing the sea with a lovely view across to the mountains. I'll try and get a photo of the view from my window and send it to you. There are several yachts in the bay at present and the scene looks lively.

After breakfast I "did" the town and when I tell you I went up and down the principal streets in ten minutes, you'll have an idea of the immensity (!) of this city. I think if you went up Osborne Road to Victoria Road and

¹ "By June of that same year, Ensenada had two hotels: The Pacheco and The Bay View; and on October 13, 1887, the Hotel Iturbide, a picturesque three-storied building perched on a hill with a stupendous view of the bay, was inaugurated. The population had grown to 1450." From www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/84winter/ensenada.htm, a web site which relates the history of Ensenada.

² Walter Darling Topping, Kelman's brother.

³ Possibly Robert Bruce Topping, Walter Frederick's younger brother, though there is no record of his having lived in Hornsey in 1897.

⁴ Now in Arizona.

⁵ Possibly the famous Hotel del Coronado ("the Del"), on the beach front at Coronado Island, San Diego, built at the end of the 19th Century. "For over 100 years, the Hotel Del Coronado has been host to Presidents, world dignitaries, movie stars and even it's own ghost. It is considered one of North America's most beautiful resorts. The Victorian Building, a national historic landmark, delicately combines historic ambiance with contemporary amenities and appointments."

⁶ See www.todossantos.cc

along down Tollington Park North to No. 10 again you would pass more houses than I passed this morning⁷. On my way back I passed the barracks, a building which reminded me of that toy fort of yours. It is a wooden building painted white with imitation holes for cannons and the arms of the Republica Mexicana painted in vivid colours over the door. And talking about the arms, it has got an eagle on it and you would think this particular eagle was laying eggs and was having a bad time over it. I thought of suggesting a dose of Carter's liver pills to put it out of its misery. Half a dozen Tollington Park School boys could knock the whole fort into smithereens in 5 minutes with a dozen stones each. The band was playing as I passed and it sounded like the Salvation Army in a fit. If Uncle Bob had been here he would have said the soldier playing the cornet must have had a big booze last night and I dare say he would be about right. I never heard such squeaks in all my life.

I then passed the Board School of Ensenada⁸ and you would laugh if you saw the place. Just imagine a wooden shack like those in Vancouver with the door wide open. It was not any bigger than your drawing room and conservatory put together. At the further end was a black board and the schoolmaster in his shirt sleeves with a great lump of chalk like half a brick trying to put on a few figures. The children (there were about 20) were sitting on benches facing the black board and their backs to the door, girls on one side, boys on the other, and they were chattering away like magpies and not paying any attention to the teacher. Immediately my shadow crossed the doorway, for I stopped dead looking at the scene, all the children ceased talking and with gaping mouths stared at me. The master, surprised at the sudden stoppage of their conversation, and interrupted in making a very bad 8, turned round and, with the half brick in one hand (I beg his pardon, chalk) and a dirty towel in the other, opened his mouth and gazed at me. "Buenos dias," said I. "Buenos dias," said the master. "¿Son ellos buenos niños?" ("Are they good children?") said I. "Si, si, señor," ("Yes, sir,") said the master and then all the children grinned. I could not say any more, my stock of Spanish was done. So, bidding them all goodbye, ("¡Hasta la vista!") I went on my way.

I have got a very nice office down town, there is an English clerk and 2 Mexicans in it. My table overlooks the bay and it is delightfully cool. Here the sun is always shining except for a day at a time in winter but the air is cool, the breeze coming up continually from the ocean. My hours are 8 am to 12 and 2 pm to 6 pm. Two hours in the middle of the day for lunch. I intend to get up every morning at 6 am (as we used to do at Osborne Road. By the bye, I hope you are keeping that up) and go for a bathe, then breakfast at 7 and off to business, about 2 minutes walk. My evenings I will spend learning Spanish. The hall of this hotel is very large with couches all round it and away in one corner a piano on which a young lady is playing at present. She plays badly so, if you cannot read this letter, blame the young lady.

I am anxiously looking forward for your first letter which I expect next week. I hope to hear you are still getting on well at school with no more lost marks. Tell me when you get your holidays. I wish you could come by cable to Ensenada. Wouldn't we have some fun?

Give my love to Aunties and Uncles and when you have read this letter send it to Jack as I am sure he and Molly⁹ would like to hear about the school children of Ensenada. Mother will give you a photo of the barracks which you can hang in your room. You'll see the eagle I wrote about.

Your affectionate, Father

⁷ The circuit Walter describes here is just west of Finsbury Park, London N4 between Crouch Hill and Finsbury Park tube stations. In 1897 the postal address was Hornsey, Middlesex.

⁸ "In 1891 Ensenada had the makings of a small, pleasant town with a park, a beautiful beachfront, kindergarten and a government grammar school." From www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/84winter/ensenada.htm.

⁹ Kelman's sister.