

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Gardiner Greene Hubbard, November 23, 1875, with transcript

most important Salem, Mass., Nov. 23rd, 1875. Dear Mr. Hubbard,

I was so taken by surprise the other night — that I suppose I must have said a great many things to you that I did not intend to say. I shall feel sorry if I have given you the impression that I do not respect your opinions and feelings — for I do very sincerely.

The truth is — I felt so indignant that my father's life-work was so little appreciated by you as to be made an obstacle between Mabel and myself — that I know I must have said many things to you for which I should now be sorry if I could remember them. Allow me to apologize for anything in my conduct that might have seemed disrespectful — or that may have given you offence — for it was not intended.

And now let me say a few words about myself — in sober earnestness, and not in unpremeditated words.

(The circumstances of my life have brought me here against my will. I entered upon the work in which I am engaged because I felt that I was needed — and needed badly. My whole education and former life had qualified me to enter upon this peculiar work — as no one else could — and the successful operation of my father's plans depended — and still depends — mainly 2 upon my exertions.

Under these circumstances you must not suppose for a moment that I intend to forsake the work now — whatever you or others may think of it.

I confess that there are many things about “Visible Speech” that I regret — and that I would change were I free to do so — among other things the name itself which is distasteful to me — but I can not. I have to accept “Visible Speech” as it is — as my father

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is jealous of any alterations or emendations made by me. Whatever the defects of the system may be — I believed in the great practical uses pointed out by my father — and it will ever be one of the main objects of my life — to bring about — by publications and by private teaching — the stupendous reforms aimed at by him.

N When I came to Boston it was with no expectation of any pecuniary profit to be derived from Visible Speech.

I felt that I was young and could afford to devote all my energies, and every cent of my money — to the advancement of a scheme that I felt sure was destined to play an important part in the history of the world.

To my surprise I found that my exertions on behalf of Visible Speech as applied to the instruction of the deaf & dumb — had attracted the attention of 3 persons to myself — who were in no way connected either with Visible Speech — or with the Deaf & Dumb. And I found at last that a profession was rising up under my feet — which not only supports me at the present time but gives promise of being as profitable as any profession can be. My chief support during the past two years has been derived — not from Visible Speech — nor from the instruction of the Deaf — but from the correction of defective speech in those who hear. When pupils come to me with defects of utterance so gross as to shut them out from all society — and when these defects have been corrected my merely pointing out the mechanical formation of the sounds affected — I have felt indignant at the ignorance that has occasioned so much unhappiness — and at the apathy so generally displayed by parents concerning the correct acquisition of speech by their children.

I confess however that the sort of labour involved in teaching is too mechanical to be much to my taste. So far as personal inclination is concerned I should infinitely prefer to be employed in other ways.

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Still — at the present time — I know that I stand alone — and that my services are absolutely required.

I shall certainly not relinquish this profession until I find something more profitable profession 4 until I find something more profitable to do (which will be difficult) — nor until I have qualified others to work in the same field. I am sorry you do not like the work in which I am engaged — as I should rather have you satisfied than not. Still I do not see why you should object to my profession if I can make it yield me a good income and in an honorable way.

I do not intend to make any alteration in my profession merely on account of any feeling or prejudice against it that may be in your mind or those of others — It will be the dollars-and-cents argument alone that will weigh with me. My profession is at present certainly not worth less than between four and five thousand dollars a year. — This has been created by my own exertions in three years — and I do not see any reason why it should not increase indefinitely — if I pay proper attention to business matters.

Should Mabel learn to love me as devotedly and truly as I love her — she will not object to any work in which I may be engaged so long as it is honorable and profitable.

If she does not come to love me well enough to accept me whatever my profession or business may be — I do not want her at all. I do not want a half-love — nor do I want her to marry my profession !

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I do not think you fully understand the cause of my objection to your proposed action in regard to telegraphic matters. It is not only that I am satisfied with the arrangement originally made with you and with Mr. Sanders — as eminently just and fair. I have an objection to any change in that arrangement on account of the new and peculiar

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relation in which I stand in regard to you — a relation that I feel is particularly liable to misconstruction.

You are Mabel's father — and I will not urge you to give — nor will I accept if offered — any pecuniary assistance whatever otherwise than what was agreed upon before my affection for Mabel was known.

I shall be able to manage by myself — if you will have patience with my conduct for a little longer. In the matter of foreign patents — if I cannot raise money enough by myself — I can borrow from my father — only I am averse to doing so unless absolutely necessary.

I appreciate fully your feelings in regard to my actions — and I am sorry that I am compelled by circumstances to act as I do.

Your whole conduct towards me has shown me that you have a sincere interest in my welfare independently of any pecuniary interest you may have in my inventions — and I am deeply grateful to you for it.

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Please bear with me for a little longer.

Yours respectfully, A. Graham Bell. Gardiner G. Hubbard, Brattle St., Cambridge.