

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Gardiner Greene Hubbard, October 28, 1877, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Gardiner Greene Hubbard. 115 Jermyn Street. October 28th, 1877. My dear Papa-in-law:

I have ever so many things to write to you about and ever so little time to do it in. Inventions are accumulating in my brain ad nauseum — and telephonic business here is looking bright and hopeful. However, I must leave all details for another letter. I write specially to acknowledge receipt of your letter for Herr Rein with the other letters enclosed.

The Norwegian Engineer to whom Herr Rein referred (Herr Hopstock) by name left Norway for America in search of me — and fortunately discovered when in London that I was in this country. We had just concluded all business arrangements — and I had appointed him General Agent for Norway, Sweden and Denmark when your letter came. I enclosed your note to Herr Rein at the same time telling him of my arrangements with Hopstock. Mabel will send you a copy of my letter to Rein and of my agreement with Hopstock.

I have consulted a doctor in reference to our return to America and he says that although he would hardly be prepared to say that there would be any danger for Mabel in a return just now — still as there would be a certain amount of risk involved, he would not recommend the voyage unless my business rendered it inconvenient to remain. We have therefore decided to remain for the present. Mabel is and has been exceedingly anxious to have rooms and etc., including kitchen and to employ a cook 2 and I have been as anxious that she should not. We have now, however, compromised matters thus. There is in London a Miss Horne who has lived in our family in various positions for about 40 years. She was my grandfather's house-keeper for over twenty-five years. She is in London now in very poor circumstances and Mabel has taken a fancy to her. We have arranged that

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Miss Horne is to make her home with us during our stay here — and resist Mabel in any way in her power. This takes a load of anxiety off my mind — for now I know that Mabel need do no more of the house-keeping than she feels inclined — that we have with us an experienced house-keeper who knows the prices of things — who can go shopping with Mabel — do occasional sewing and etc., look after our servant — and in fact take off Mabel's hands all the anxiety and worry of our house — without presuming to oppose Mabel herself. Did I not know Mary Horne intimately — I should fear that she might usurp the authority of the rightful mistress of the house, but knowing her as I do — I have no fear in the matter.

She is the Adelheid of our family — but has occupied a still higher position with us. As it is likely I shall be called off to lecture occasionally and as I cannot take Mabel with me — it will be a comfort to me to feel that she will be safe in her own home with Mary Horne till I return.

We have been searching London for a small furnished house — which I intend to take for six months with the privilege of remaining for a year if we desire.

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We have the refusal of two houses that suit us and shall decide next week.

One other matter and then I must close — and that is in regard to our immediate future.

It troubles me to see our little pile of money grow smaller and smaller day by day and the thought inevitably runs “What shall we do when it is all gone?” Of course this must not be and I must at once do something here to replenish our failing stock. My only resource at present is in my lecturing abilities but I cannot bear to think of this as each lecture will now entail separation from Mabel. As I think over our prospects — I cannot tell you with what intense feeling I regret my unbusiness habits and uneconomical ways. It is likely that the Norwegian, Swedish and Danish Patents will bring me some immediate return — and England will do so too if Colonel Reynolds succeeds in organizing a Company as seems

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probably for they will want my services for a time as Electrician. However, that is still among the eventualities and there is only a chance of England, France, Belgium and etc., benefitting us at the present time — for of course all the proceeds are to accumulate for Mabel. It has struck me that it might be possible to make the continental patents benefit us now as well as hereafter — if some arrangement could be made — to appoint me General Agent for these Patents until the organization of companies there — with a commission.

There is one thing to be said in favour of my business qualifications for such a position and that is — that never having 4 been engaged in any business in my life — no person can tell what dormant business ability I may possess!! Several persons have wished to be appointed agents in France, Belgium and etc., and if I am to be trusted (which however, I am myself inclined to doubt) I could introduce the Telephone at once into these countries. Should you think it advisable for me to take upon myself any work of this kind please let me know at once. The only thing is that business (which is hateful to me at all times) would fetter me as an inventor. Still I must do something for a living and do it now.

I submit the following proposition for your consideration:

While you are deciding what to do with the continental patents — appoint me your General Agent for these patents with a commission say of 50 percent.

I would then appoint agents for the different countries making agreements like that made with Hopstock — and thus we might be enabled to derive an immediate income from these patents without defeating our object of accumulating a fund for Mabel's benefit.

If you don't like this can you suggest a plan by which I can make money this year without the necessity of leaving Mabel.

It is necessary to do something here at once on the continental if I had power in the matter could negotiate I think profitably. Edison is trying to be first in France and etc., — so I have sent telephone to Paris to be exhibited.

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I have found it convenient to draw out a large sum upon our letter of credit — and to deposit it in the consolidated bank so as to be able to draw by cheque. Our expenses so far amount to £182. Please write and advise me what to do this winter. Mabel 5 is fast asleep upon the sofa. We are both well and I weigh 201 pounds!! With much love to all.

Your affectionate son-in-law. Alec.