

**VISIBLE SPEECH: THE SCIENCE
OF UNIVERSAL ALPHABETICS;
OR SELF-INTERPRETING
PHYSIOLOGICAL LETTERS**

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Visible Speech: The Science of Universal Alphabets; Or Self-Interpreting Physiological Letters
by Alex. Melville Bell

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ALEX. MELVILLE BELL

**VISIBLE SPEECH: THE SCIENCE
OF UNIVERSAL ALPHABETICS;
OR SELF-INTERPRETING
PHYSIOLOGICAL LETTERS**

*To Mr. Ronald Ross
with Mr. James Coats' kind regards
12th May 1875*

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VISIBLE SPEECH:
THE SCIENCE OF
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UNIVERSAL ALPHABETICS;
OR
SELF-INTERPRETING PHYSIOLOGICAL LETTERS,
FOR THE WRITING OF
ALL LANGUAGES IN ONE ALPHABET.

ILLUSTRATED BY
TABLES, DIAGRAMS, AND EXAMPLES.

BY
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'STANDARD ELOCUTION,' 'EXPANDED LITURGY,'
'REPORTER'S MANUAL,' &c., &c.

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P227
B45

To the Memory of
EDWARD CHARLES BELL,
ONE OF THE FIRST PROFICIENTS IN "VISIBLE SPEECH,"
WHOSE ABILITY
IN DEMONSTRATING THE LINGUISTIC APPLICATIONS OF THE SYSTEM
EXCITED THE ADMIRATION OF ALL WHO HEARD HIM;
BUT WHOSE LIFE OF HIGHEST PROMISE WAS CUT OFF IN HIS
NINETEENTH YEAR,
ON 17TH MAY, 1867;
THIS INAUGURAL VOLUME IS DEDICATED
BY HIS FATHER.

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P R E F A C E.

THE scientific interest attaching to the Invention of VISIBLE SPEECH has alone induced me to consent to the publication of the System under Copyright. My desire was, that this Invention—the applications of which are as universal as speech itself—should at its inauguration have been made free from all restrictions; but my endeavours to effect an arrangement for this purpose have been frustrated.

I wish to put on record here a statement of the facts concerning my offer of the Invention to the British Government, and the reception of the offer.

The proposition made was to the effect that—If the expense of casting the new Types and publishing the Theory of the System should be defrayed from Public resources, I would, on this simple condition, relinquish *pro bono publico* all copyright in the Explanatory Work, as well as all exclusive property in the System and its applications, in order that the use of the Universal Alphabet might be as free as that of common letters to all persons. I made no stipulation for personal recompense; nor was the acceptance of the offer asked, save as the result of a satisfactory examination of the System. The primary proposition was therefore specifically limited to a request for an authorized investigation, the result of which should decide the question of publication.

This request was made in vain. The subject did not lie within the province of any of the existing State Departments, and the Memorial was, on this ground, politely bowed out from one after the other of the Executive Offices.

The proposition was, no doubt, an exceptional one—but so is the Invention. Even the idea which it realizes is entirely new; the idea, namely, of representing the mechanism of speech-sounds in their alphabetical symbols. It was a matter of course that such a subject could not have been included in the established routine of any Department.

Does not the fact that an offer of such a nature failed to *obtain a hearing*, indicate a national want—the want namely of some functionary whose *business* it should be to investigate new measures of any kind which may be presented for the benefit of society?

Before offering the Invention of Visible Speech to Government, I had subjected the System to a crucial variety of practical and public tests, so that a fair *prima facie* case had been made out to justify even so unheard-of a thing as investigation by a Royal Commission. But credentials could, of course, have no weight when the ground of rejection was that of inability to take 'official cognizance' of the subject.

This very unsatisfactory reason for neglecting an offer, which I was not alone in thinking both liberal and patriotic, as well as sufficiently important for recognition, induced me, before issuing the Circular announcing the present publication, to make a final appeal to Her Majesty's Prime Minister, specifying the amount to which the requisite grant for inaugural expenses might be limited. The following was his Lordship's reply :

" 10 Downing Street, Whitehall,
February 12, 1867.

Sir,—I am directed by Lord Derby to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 8th instant, and to inform you that there are no public funds from which he can make you the grant you desire.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

A. Melville Bell, Esq.

W. P. TALBOT."

This was at all events definite; and the fact of there being no available 'public funds' for such a purpose, certainly furnished sufficient reason for denial. But the fact is, nevertheless, remarkable. The price of a piece of ordnance, and a few barrels of gunpowder—the cost of an every-day experiment in target-firing—ought surely to have been forthcoming from some 'public fund' for the advancement of one of the foremost Arts of Peace.

The choice was now left but between two alternatives: either to withhold the Invention, or to publish it under copyright;—in the latter case, to impose local restrictions on what was in its nature universal; in the former case, to render nugatory the results of a long labour. For the System was of course worthless while unpublished.

Having put my hand to the plough, I would not turn back—

' Aut non tentaris aut perice'—

I therefore accepted the obligation which this 'Inaugural Edition' fulfils.