

# VAIL-MORSE CONTROVERSY.

## Stephen Vail on His Father's Claim to Telegraph Invention.

To the Editor of The New York Times:

The space accorded me by the courtesy of THE TIMES, in which to respond to the letter of Mr. Edward Lind Morse, in its issue of the 21st inst., is so inadequate to the proper reply to his statements that I am unable to make any allusions to them in detail, and as well, to his charges against myself, for my efforts to place the real status of S. F. B. Morse before the world.

Mr. Morse's knowledge of the invention of the telegraph has been acquired entirely by hearsay, and mainly, if not altogether, from his father, whose vanity enabled him to forget all sense of gratitude, honor, and justice to Alfred Vail, his friend, benefactor, co-inventor, and the maker of the fame and renown with which the name of S. F. B. Morse was, and is, so wrongly credited. Morse allowed no opportunity to escape in which he might obliterate all record of Alfred Vail's connection with the invention.

Mr. E. L. Morse's very positive statement that "Alfred Vail never claimed for himself that which has been claimed for him," is without foundation, and Mr. Morse's assertion would indicate that he must have been a prodigiously precocious prodigy, for at the time of my father's death, in January, 1859, this more or less veracious chronicler of Alfred Vail's mental operations was but an infant in arms.

A diligent search through the letter of Mr. E. L. Morse fails to disclose any evidence in support of his very general denial of anything claimed for Alfred Vail as being the real inventor of the telegraph. The editors of The Electrical World were self-constituted judges, and their opinion is worth as much as any one else's, perhaps, but no more. Mr. Morse very conveniently forgets that not all the writers in that series were of his mind.

Alfred Vail lived up to the spirit, no less than to the letter, of his contract with Morse, as he believed that he, as an honorable man, should, and to this fact is due the other fact that to Morse (who never evinced the slightest hesitancy in accepting it) has been accorded the fame and renown of an invention of which, instead of being the inventor, he was but the instigator and promoter.

Alfred Vail believed that this contract with Morse so fully covered everything that he might accomplish in the development and improvement of the telegraph that (notwithstanding that he was compelled to cast aside as absolutely impracticable Morse's crude, original apparatus, with its cumbersome vocabulary, and, alone and unaided by Morse, invented the new "recording receiver," "the sounding key," and the "dot-and-dash" alphabet, which they necessitated) he considered that he was but doing his duty in strict accordance with his understanding of the terms of his contract, and that to Morse belonged all that he had accomplished.

I have an abundance of evidence that Morse's treatment of my father with reference to the invention, before his death, and of his memory since that event, was characterized by ingratitude and duplicity, which stopped at nothing that could stifle all evidence that Alfred Vail had aught to do with the invention beyond that of furnishing some money to S. F. B. Morse.

A strong sense of the injustice done to my father's fame (not only by Morse, but by many writers upon the subject of the invention, who have never investigated the subject but simply repeated that which others have wrongly written) has produced within me a profound desire to properly place before the world the most important part taken by him in that invention, and while I shall probably be characterized as bitter and unkind in some of my allusions, the truth needs no apologist, at least in this instance, for he who assumes to be that which he is not, has only himself to blame if his disguise is eventually torn from him and his real character be exposed.

Amos Kendall, the friend and counsel of both my father and Morse, at a meeting of the Board of Directors of the telegraph company, called to take action at the time of my father's death, said: "If justice be done, the name of Alfred Vail will ever stand associated with that of S. F. B. Morse in the history and introduction to public use of the electro-magnetic telegraph."

Notwithstanding Mr. E. L. Morse's assertions to the contrary, I have in my possession the following written and signed statement made by my father:

"Oct. 23, 1846.

"This lever and roller were invented by me in the sixth story of The New York Observer office in 1844, before we put up the telegraph line between Washington and

Baltimore, and the same has always been used on Morse's instruments.

"I am the sole and only inventor of this mode of telegraph embossed writing. Prof. Morse gave me no clue to it, nor did any one else, and I have not asserted publicly my right as first and sole inventor because I wished to preserve the peaceful unity of the invention, and because I could not, according to my contract with Prof. Morse, have obtained a patent for it."

STEPHEN VAIL.

New York, June 25, 1904.