

Engelhardt

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEAF

UNDER THE

“GERMAN” SYSTEM.



A PAPER

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BY

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THE subject of the Paper which I have been asked to write for this most interesting Congress is "The advantages of the articulation method over that of signs; looking at it chiefly from the point of mental development without ignoring its relation in a social point of view."

Now one of the chief objections urged against the "German" system of teaching the deaf (*i.e.* by articulation and lip-reading) by those who advocate in preference the "French" system (*i.e.* by signs and the manual alphabet) is that the mental development of children taught under the former is far behind that of those taught under the latter. Our earnest attention having been called to the subject of the education of the deaf by the fact of our only child losing her hearing at three months old, we, in the years 1872 and 1873, most carefully visited something like forty institutions and schools for the deaf, some on the "French," some on the "German," and some on the "Combined" system, in America, on the Continent of Europe and in Great Britain,* and

* For further particulars see "*Vocal Speech for the Dumb*," a Paper on the education of the "Deaf and Dumb," "German" system, read April 25th, 1877, before the Society of Arts, by B. St. J. Ackers. Published by Messrs. Longmans & Co., London.

we not only saw the pupils at school, but also after they had left it—some many years. Having examined the pupils thoroughly, not only those in the higher classes, but in almost every instance working our way up through *every* class, from the lowest to the highest, we feel anxious to give our unqualified support to the “German” method, as affording to its pupils greater advantages in point of mental development than the “French” method, and I cannot help thinking that those who urge that the “German” system “dwarfs the intellect,” do so without knowing what the “German” system is. Many speak and write as if the mere development of the mechanical part of articulation constituted the “German” system. They do not now deny that deaf children can be taught to speak, but many still insist that when they do they only talk like trained parrots.

Many teachers of the “French” system too, good and earnest people as they are, anxious for the welfare of the deaf, and anxious, if possible, to take an unprejudiced view, yet both speak and write about the “German” system without having investigated, except in the most superficial way, what that system is.

As an example, one writer of great authority, the Principal of a large institution on the “French” system, who commences his remarks in an article comparing “Articulation with the manual method,”*

* See an Article in the American Annals, July, 1878, “*The greatest good to the greatest number,*” by I. L. Peet, LL.D.

by saying that "adequate opportunity has been afforded in connection with this institution for thorough investigation, and that a degree of interest has been felt sufficient to justify a claim to an impartial expression of opinion," yet goes on to say, "Articulation, without lip-reading, is a source of annoyance rather than convenience. Lip-reading, if generally possible, would have far the greater value of the two, as it would give the deaf-mute an idea of what was being said in his presence. *It is however a still rarer accomplishment,*" showing how entirely he fails to appreciate the fact that, with pupils taught properly on the pure "German" system, articulation, lip-reading, and writing are all simultaneous. One branch is not allowed to get ahead of the other. A pupil is taught to pronounce a word which is then explained to him, he reads it from the lips, and then has it written down, and the whole course of instruction is upon this principle. Though in the very early stages of teaching, the same amount of *ideas* may not be given to a child as might be in the same time on the "French" system, that is still no criterion that his mental powers are not being quite as much developed—*e.g.* a child taught on the "French" system, having no practice in articulation and lip-reading to occupy his time, may be in a position to begin a certain amount of geography, arithmetic, history, &c., months, or even more, before a child taught on the "German" system; but surely no one will say that therefore his mental development is

greater. The memory is exercised, the powers of observation and reasoning are cultivated, habits of attention and studiousness are being fostered quite as surely and as carefully in the "German" system pupil as in the "French"; only those powers are being devoted to the study of the language (articulate, read from the lips, and written,) of his own country, instead of to a variety of other subjects. When the language is once acquired sufficiently to enable general subjects, *i.e.*, Religious teaching, arithmetic, geography, &c., to be taught by it, those subjects are taken up and grasped by the pupils quite as quickly and infinitely more accurately than by pupils taught under the "French" system. And it must not be supposed that a long time elapses before "German" system pupils attain sufficient language to enable them to be taught general subjects through it.

To show how soon this is the case I may give one or two samples of the general knowledge attained by children of different ages at "German" system schools. One, where the teaching was rather below than above the average, for it was too poor to allow of more than five teachers to eighty pupils, children of all denominations were received, and when they had been three years at school they all knew sufficient language and lip-reading to be in a position to be taught religion by their respective Clergymen, who came in at stated hours to give them regular instruction. While we were there the Roman Catholic Priest came in, and we saw him giving a

lesson to some of his flock. Children who had been only two years at school were doing simple sums. Another class was having a geography lesson. They understood both me and the German lady who acted as interpreter to my husband, and did the sums she suggested very well. Those in the next class above, aged fourteen, were having a lesson in history not connected with their own country—which lesson they were to write out the following day.

Then again at another school, which was decidedly a good one, the children who had not been two years at school were extremely quick with mental arithmetic. The teaching was by articulation almost exclusively (not by writing), and the sums not even written but given orally. Those in their fourth year at school were conjugating a difficult German verb, and the following day we saw this same class having a lesson on some story which had only been given them to read the day before. One boy, who lost hearing at two years old, related the whole from memory capitally, and nearly all were intelligent and quick in their answers. Pupils who had not been quite five years at school had a Scripture lesson before us, which they did very well indeed. The interpreter and I examined and cross-examined them, not only in the lesson, but in general knowledge of the Bible, and their answers were most satisfactory. She examined every class in our presence by articulation, and we proved the teaching to be most thorough, for while we were examining pupils the teacher (as in many other

of the German schools we visited) left the room for some time, so that we had the examination quite to ourselves. Arithmetic and geography were very satisfactory. Composition was but very imperfect in that particular school, though even then it was far beyond what we ever found pupils of the same age able to do in institutions conducted on the "French" method, and beyond, too, what most pupils of *any age* in such establishments could have done—while in some of the other "German" system schools we saw, the composition done by pupils in the higher classes, five or six years under instruction, was exceedingly good.

I have entered into these details in order to give some idea of the mental development of the pupils we saw in "German" system schools, and may add that our interpreter, who was well acquainted with the ordinary schools of her country, more than once gave it as her opinion, after carefully examining the pupils—and I may here mention that we were most particular in examining *all* the pupils, not picked ones only but all, bad and good, dull and bright, without any exception—that "they had done better in language, exercises and general attainments than children of the same age in primary (hearing) schools, and equal to those of the middle class in Germany" and this from our own experience in other countries we fully believe to be correct.

Moreover that this view is corroborated by others who have visited "German" schools for the purpose

of investigating the education, is apparent. Professor Jørgenson, the Teacher of the Royal Institution for Deaf Mutes at Copenhagen, reported of Mr. Arnold's school at Riehen, a school where the "German" system was carried out in its most thorough manner, that the pupils of the higher grades were able to "converse with ease and fluency, using as good language as hearing people of their age. They were well versed in geography, history, mathematics, natural history, and natural philosophy. Those of the high class were reading 'Wilhelm Tell,' by Schiller, rendering each sentence into prose, thus giving evidence that they fully understood the text." They were able to converse tolerably in French*—and it is a fact that Mr. Arnold's two sons (hearing boys) were educated at his school with the deaf children of the same age, because they could not get so good an education at any school for the hearing in their neighbourhood. There is indeed no limit to the branches of study which may be successfully followed by pupils taught on the "German" system.

Not only their own language, but foreign tongues, may be acquired with fluency, and we know cases where three languages at least were so learned.

Can a system which can produce such results be in any possible way justly accused of dwarfing the intellect or impeding mental development? No. Surely language is the great means by which the

* See an Article in the American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb, January, 1879. "*The Natural Method.*" By D. Greenberger.

powers of the mind are developed, whether in the hearing or the deaf. And what is language or speech? It has been defined by one of our English writers as "the conveyance of ideas from mind to mind in logical method."

It is that great gift of God to man which enables him to hold intercourse not only with those immediately around him, but with those who would otherwise be separated from him by distance and by time; which enables him to share the thoughts and reap the benefits of the experience of the good, the noble, and the great men of past ages, and by which their influence instead of being limited to their own immediate circle is handed down to future generations. And we maintain that this precious power of language is given to the deaf far more fully under the "German" than under the "French" system. Teachers of the latter often speak as if *written* language to "French" system pupils was the equivalent, and more than the equivalent, to spoken language in "German" system pupils, forgetting that the latter, in addition to their spoken language, have more command of written language, and use it much more easily than those taught on the "French" system, being able to write it grammatically and idiomatically.

Of course we must not compare pupils from "German" system schools who have not more as the maximum than about seven years' teaching, and on an average only five years, and leave school usually from thirteen to fifteen years of age, with those

“French” system pupils in America who have generally the advantage of many more years of education, and are much older when they leave the institution. Compare the former with pupils of the same age and who have had the same number of years teaching, on the “French” system—and our experience is that whether in England, Scotland, France or America, the latter will be far behind the “German” system pupils in written language—deficient, in fact, in that very power of conveying ideas from their own minds to the minds of ordinary hearing people.

We found too among the “German” system pupils that even those who having had but a very short time at school left when their education was but very imperfect, yet, having the key to knowledge—*Language*—were able afterwards to educate themselves by means of books in the same way as hearing people, and when we saw them they had a knowledge of, and delight in, the literature of their country far beyond what we had ever seen in the most highly educated *toto-congenitals* on the “French” system.

It may not be irrelevant to notice here the facility with which in “German” system schools anyone may thoroughly test for himself the exact amount of knowledge attained by the different pupils.

A stranger can ask questions of any kind he pleases, and can judge by the answers how far the pupils are proficient in the subject; but in schools on the “French” system, on the contrary, the attempt to find out by means of language the knowledge of

the pupils is but very very unsuccessful. If the visitor be unacquainted with signs, almost all the questioning has to be done through the medium of the teacher who receives your questions, signs them to the pupils, receives back from them in signs their answers, and then interprets them to the visitor, which must surely be looked on as in itself a very unsatisfactory form of examination. And if the visitor then desires to make the examination more thorough, and, therefore resorts to writing, the language of the pupils is so limited, and they have so little power of expressing themselves in it that it is impossible to find out by their written answers what amount of knowledge they really possess.

Teachers of the "French" system do to a certain extent feel and mourn over this want of language in their pupils, as may easily be seen by many passages in their writings. Take for instance the interesting articles by Mr. Patterson, of Columbus, Ohio,* in which he says :---"Is it then a matter of wonder if he (the deaf-mute) should on his graduation day, with diploma in hand, fall far behind his hearing brother, of say twelve years of age, in the use of language?" "He thus passes through his school career like a meteor, and lands in the world in the confusion and smoke of broken English;" and again, "the mute develops but little of real conversational skill. True he picks up enough to enable him to talk glibly in the

* See the American Annals, 1878, January and April numbers.

sign language, but even his best talk proves to consist of few and meagre ideas which scintillate into a thousand different signs, like the beams of the sun reflected from a piece of broken mirror." "He fares even worse when it comes to talking in English."

Yet with all these admissions, I question whether any "French" system teacher thoroughly appreciates the isolation of his pupils, even the most highly-educated ones, in the hearing world, apart from their immediate friends who have learnt for their sake signs and finger talking. Written language takes so much time, and even had they command of it, is cumbersome compared with spoken language or the manual alphabet. Those hearing persons who are unaccustomed to the deaf are shy of using it, and do not like to think that the small talk of conversation is written down; and the deaf themselves are chary in producing their tablets, because it calls general attention to them and they think it is a trouble to strangers to be asked to converse in writing.

We have met grown up people who were remarkably well educated and intelligent, yet who would not attempt more than the shortest and most meagre conversation in writing, and not unfrequently some who refused to attempt any conversation, because they knew we did not understand the manual alphabet or signs—whereas persons much younger, and on account of their age less accomplished people, taught on the "German" system, were only too pleased to enter into conversation, and would go out

of their way for the sake of another chat with us. Indeed we rarely came across an instance, whether amongst poor or rich, where they did not show pleasure at conversing with us.

That they do soon learn to think in spoken language is evident from the fact that they constantly talk in their sleep.

That speech is a real delight to them, even in the early stages, when it is yet very imperfect, no one who has spent many hours with them will deny, though I question whether people who have had no opportunity of seeing them have any idea of the amount of delight which it is. As soon as even a few words are mastered the little voices may be heard all over the house, calling to parents, brothers, sisters, teachers, servants—yes, even to their animal pets—and as the child gets older the eagerness with which it will rush up to talk about anything that has interested it, the delight of pouring out its thoughts and ideas can hardly be appreciated unless seen. Over and over again one has to say “Now you must really not talk any more, or you will not finish what you are doing,” or “I am too busy, you really must not go on talking to me,”—and the usual answer back from the deaf child is “Bye-and-bye, when you are ready, may I talk to you?” As autumn evenings drew in our own little daughter has often come to her governess with the request—“Please light the candles, I want you to talk to me,” and this in her playtime, when she might have amused herself as she pleased.

Precious indeed is the gift of articulate language to a deaf child—as precious as to a hearing one. Mind I do not say it is *perfect* as in a hearing child, but I do say that though it may not be fully perfect it is of as great practical use to a deaf as to a hearing child, and such a source of intense delight that it adds immensely to the enjoyment of its life—in fact that it becomes a part of that life—that the expressions of joy, of sorrow, of astonishment or amusement, burst forth as naturally from the lips of a deaf child that has been taught on the pure “German” system, as from a hearing one.

In conclusion then let me only add that we, who as parents daily witness this in the case of our own darling child—we who have seen the inestimable boon that it is to all classes, and the practical use that it is above all to the poor—earnestly trust that the result of this International Congress will be to extend to the deaf, far and wide, the benefits of the “German” system, so that they may no longer have withheld from them in any country that most precious gift—the use of speech.

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