



# AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN SYSTEMS OF DEAF-MUTE INSTRUCTION COMPARED.

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A REVIEW of the history of deaf-mute education reveals the fact that great diversities of opinion as to the most desirable means of instruction have been coexistent with the work itself. A record of controversies, of angry disputes even, appears in a department of labor, where from its nature, and from the sad condition of its objects, one would naturally expect the gentlest feelings of the heart to be ever uppermost.

These differences seem to have had their origin in opposite conceptions formed of the psychological condition of the deaf-mute. This was thought on the one hand to be an abnormal state of being. Dumbness was considered a positive quality, the presence of which rendered its subject a monstrosity. The command of spoken language was deemed absolutely essential to a development of the intellectual powers. The possibility of education was therefore thought to depend on the ability of the pupil to acquire the power of speech. Hence all labor was directed primarily to the education of the

mute from his supposed abnormal state, and his induction, as far as possible, into the normal condition of speaking persons.

By another class of thinkers the deaf-mute was deemed to be a normal creature; that is to say perfect of his kind, although lacking some of the powers of other men. Dumbness was regarded as a negative quality, inability to speak constituting no obstacle to a full and vigorous mental development. Education on this theory, therefore, sought means to adapt itself to the condition and capabilities of its object. The initiatory step in both cases necessarily being the establishment of a competent channel of communication between teacher and pupil.

Samuel Heinicke, who founded in Germany, in the year 1760, the method in which the deaf-mute is regarded as an abnormal creature held to the view that "the written word can never become the medium of thought. That," said he, "is the sole prerogative of the voice. Without an acquaintance with spoken language a deaf-mute child can never become anything more than a writing machine, or have anything beyond a succession of images passing through his mind." Consistency, therefore, with such a foundation, left him no alternative in the use of material for his superstructure.

Speech! speech! speech! from base to turret.

The Abbé de l'Epeé, on the other hand, the author of that method which ascribes to the deaf-mute nothing unnatural or monstrous as to his condition, which sees no inherent obstacles in the way of mental fruition, took him as he found him, already possessed of a language, imperfect it is true, but of easy acquirement by the teacher, and as susceptible of expansion and perfection as any dialect of spoken utterance. Denying the dependence of thought on speech, de l'Epeé found a means of communication between himself and his pupils in a visible language, which conveys thought from one to another as surely through the medium of the hand and eye as is done by means of that which employs the tongue and ear. The theory entering into the construction of this foundation, unlike that of Heinicke, imposed no restriction on de l'Epeé in the use of materials in his edifice, but on the contrary left him and his disciples free to adopt whatever means ingenuity might devise

or experience recommend as serviceable in the great work they had to perform.

The real point of difference then, between Heinicke and de l'Epeé is discovered to lie in a purely philosophical question, the solution of which, in a hundred years of practical labor, proves the former to have been plainly in the wrong, and the latter as clearly in the right.

That much of real good to suffering humanity has resulted from the efforts of both these pioneers in the work of general deaf-mute instruction every candid person will admit; that either was faultless or omniscient none will claim; nor yet, it is to be hoped, will it be maintained that the system of either is entirely destitute of worth. To that of Heinicke must be accorded the merit, if merit it be, of having the more ambitious aim, though experience has proved his object to have been unattainable; while to that of de l'Epeé must be awarded the praise of practical success and much wider applicability.

In reviewing the present condition of deaf-mute schools in Europe all the systems in use are found to involve one or both of these fundamental methods. In certain places articulation is made the object of transcendent importance, while in some localities it is entirely rejected; and again, institutions are found where attempts have been made to harmonize and combine the once conflicting methods.

The imparting of the power of intelligible oral utterance to one born totally and incurably deaf is an achievement so nearly approaching the miraculous as to dazzle the mind and well nigh unseat the judgment of him who, for the first time, has convincing proof of its possibility. Indeed, one of the earliest recorded instances of deaf-mute instruction, in England, in the seventh century, by the Bishop of Hagulstad, is alluded to in the well known work of Bede, as a miracle, when it was doubtless nothing more than has been accomplished by teachers of articulation in later times. That *toto-congenitally* deaf persons have been taught to speak fluently, and in tones that could be understood by strangers is an indisputable fact. The inference, however, drawn by some writers, and even, though rarely, by practical teachers, that because success is attained with one such case, it is therefore to be expected with all, or

nearly all, has not been sustained by actual results. Among more than one hundred instructors recently consulted by the author of this Article during his examinations of forty-four of the most prominent deaf-mute schools of Europe, but one was found who claimed that success in articulation might be looked for as the *rule* among deaf-mutes. And this gentleman acknowledging that many deaf-mutes, even in respectable German schools where articulation was made the basis of instruction, did not acquire the power of speech, ascribed the failure to a want of skill or industry on the part of their teachers, thus assuming to sit in judgment on the great body of German instructors, whose zeal, ability, and infinite good temper have received the applause of their most decided opponents.

The subject of teaching deaf-mutes to speak having been discussed at some length in our public journals during the past two or three years, and the claim having been made in certain quarters that the German system of instruction was productive of far more beneficial results than that obtaining in this country, it seemed important in the tour of examination already spoken of, that special attention should be paid to the matter of articulation in the European states generally, and in the institutions of Germany in particular. It is this peculiar line of effort, and this alone, which essentially differences many of the European deaf-mute establishments from those of this country. Hence in the comparison of methods proposed in the title of this Article, attention will be mainly directed towards a consideration of the practicability of teaching deaf-mutes by a system based on articulation as the prevailing principle of instruction.

The metaphysical blunder of Heinicke, the founder of this system, that thought is impossible without speech, is now everywhere acknowledged, even by the most zealous supporters of his practices. The single instructor to whom reference has been made, as claiming the possibility of teaching all deaf-mutes by articulation is the able and distinguished Mr. Hirsch of Rotterdam, who may be taken as the most extreme and ultra advocate of this method in Europe. His views on the subject are clearly expressed in the following terms, quoted from

an address delivered by him before the ninth Scientific Congress of the Netherlands convened in Ghent last August:—

“The object to be attained is to render possible the admission of the deaf-mute into society by teaching him to see, that is, to understand the movements of the lips, and to speak in his turn.

“To attain this end the act of seeing or comprehending and of speaking must be made the exclusive principle of instruction, and neither the palpable alphabet nor the language of signs can have any connection with it.

“The daily observations which I have made for more than thirty years, that I have devoted to the deaf and dumb, have convinced me that *the art of seeing speech in the movements of the mouth is the most important* of all the branches of instruction, and that, therefore, it should be most sedulously cultivated.

“Next to the art of seeing or understanding, the act of speaking is the principal object of the instruction of the deaf and dumb. By this system ninety-nine out of every hundred deaf-mutes may be taught, and their progress will depend entirely on the talent and patience of the teacher; this truth, too long and coldly doubted, is now penetrating everywhere.

These claims and opinions gravely put forth, and no doubt fully believed in by Mr. Hirsch, so far from being sustained by facts are refuted and proved wholly untenable by a mass of evidence too strong to be questioned for a moment. Not in a single instance was an instructor of deaf-mutes met by the writer of this Article who supported these last cited views of Mr. Hirsch, and in critical examinations of schools containing in the aggregate upwards of three thousand deaf-mutes, far less than fifty per cent. were found succeeding with articulation.

Probably no practitioner of the so-called German method more faithfully represents the views of his class of workers in Europe than Mr. Hill of Weissenfels in the Prussian province of Saxony. He has been engaged in teaching the deaf and dumb for upwards of forty years, has published many valuable professional works, and is everywhere looked up to as authority among his countrymen.

Mr. Hill says, in answer to queries recently propounded in regard to the proportionate success of his pupils in learning to speak and read from the lips:

“Out of one hundred pupils, eighty-five are capable, when leaving school, of conversing on common place subjects with their teachers, family, and intimate friends, sixty-two can do so easily.

“Out of one hundred, *eleven* can converse readily with strangers on ordinary subjects. Others learn to do this after leaving school.”

So far from agreeing with Mr. Hirsch that "the language of signs can have no connection with the process of instructing deaf-mutes," Mr. Hill, in a recent work, takes decided ground in favor of that leading agent in the system of de l'Epeé, which Heinicke declared to be no less than "delusive folly, fraud, and nonsense." Speaking of those who pretend that in the German schools every species of pantomimic language is proscribed, he says :

"Such an idea much be attributed to malevolence or to unpardonable levity.

"This pretence is contrary to nature, and repugnant to the rules of sound educational science.

"If this system were put into execution the moral life, the intellectual development of the deaf and dumb would be inhumanly hampered. It would be acting contrary to nature to forbid the deaf-mute a means of expression employed even by hearing and speaking persons, \* \* \* \* it is nonsense to dream of depriving him of this means until he is in a position to express himself orally. \* \* \*

"Even in teaching itself we cannot lay aside the language of gestures (with the exception of that which consists in artificial signs, and in the manual alphabet, two elements proscribed in the German school), the language which the deaf-mute brings with him to school, and which ought to serve as a basis for his education.

"To banish the language of natural signs from the school room and limit ourselves to articulation is like employing a gold key which does not fit the lock of the door we would open, and refusing to use the iron one made for it; \* \* \* at the best it would be *drilling* the deaf mute, but not *moulding* him intellectually and morally."

Mr. Hill then goes on to make an extremely philosophical analysis of the sign language, and its special uses, under thirteen different heads, which it would be tedious to detail in this connection, but which has been translated, and will be given to the public at no distant day.

It is to be borne in mind that this gentleman is one of the most successful teachers of articulation living, that he was trained in a German school, and has given a lifetime of labor to this peculiar species of deaf-mute instruction. When he claims, therefore, but eleven per cent. of his graduates as being able to converse readily with strangers on ordinary subjects, the inference is unavoidable that the system founded by Heinicke, which would make articulation the fundamental principle of instruction, has, *as a system*, on which the mass of

those for whose benefit it was devised may be taught, most completely and signally failed, and this, too, in a country where it has had every opportunity for success that could be afforded by governmental patronage, private benevolence, undisputed sway, the labor of scores of talented and indefatigable men, and a hundred years of trial. Nay, more, the schools of Heinicke and his disciples have only been able to succeed in educating the large majority of their pupils by the adoption and practice of that much abused, but ever indispensable language of signs, the discovery and adaptation of which will reflect immortal glory on the memory of de l'Epeé. And it is not until within a comparatively brief period that this fact, long understood by experts, has been admitted in the frank and honest manner of Mr. Hill.

This adverse judgment as to articulation as a system of education for the mass of so-called deaf-mutes must not, however, be taken as a total condemnation of its practice in cases where success is possible. Among this class there always appears a varying proportion of persons who acquired deafness after having learned to speak. The power of speech in these, having already germinated, may, in nearly every instance, be cultivated and brought to a good degree of perfection.

Others also, who having once heard became deaf before gaining any command of language, may in some instances learn to speak and read from the lips. Others still, born partially deaf, and retaining defective hearing, may do the same: while a very few are found born totally deaf, who may acquire artificial speech to a useful extent. But taking all these classes together, we fall short of reaching a majority, or even a large majority, of the so-called deaf and dumb who can achieve sufficient precision or clearness of utterance to be able to make themselves understood by strangers.

No argument will be necessary to secure from intelligent minds the admission of the fact that not all persons are endowed with a talent for music; that not every human being can succeed in art essays; that few men are capable of oratory, and fewer still of poetry. So well established by the experience of ages are these conclusions that a teacher of youth would be thought little removed from insanity who should attempt

to make all his pupils poets or orators, or artists or musicians, though all might learn to sing, to draw after a fashion, to declaim, and even to rhyme. And at the same time he who should endeavor to foster and develop talents for painting, sculpture, oratory, or poetry, wherever among his pupils he found these choice gifts in existence, would draw forth universal commendation.

Thus experience proves it to be with articulation among the deaf and dumb. To the mass it is unattainable, save in degrees that render it comparable to those sculptures and paintings that never find a purchaser; to books and poems that are never read; to music that is never sung. Involving much patient labor on the part of teacher and pupil, it exhibits only that limited degree of success which honest criticism is compelled to stamp as no better than failure. And yet, when the congenital mute *can master* oral language, the triumph both of teacher and pupil is as deserving of praise as the achievement of true art, music, poetry, or oratory.

The actual removal of the affliction of deaf-dumbness may be looked for only at the hands of Him who, when on earth, spoke the potent *Ephphatha* as a proof of His divinity. But those who labor in His name in behalf of his stricken ones should welcome *every* means of lessening the disabilities under which the objects of their care are found to rest. And so while articulation has failed *as a system*, the *method* has proved so useful in certain cases, that it has been accepted among the institutions of Europe, until of thirty-three continental schools, recently visited by the writer, but one was found where it was not regularly taught. The introduction of stated instruction in artificial speech and lip reading to those found capable of acquiring it (this task to be performed by additional teachers), would undoubtedly prove a valuable accession to the system of deaf-mute education as now carried forward in this country. And no obstacle stands in the way of the adoption of such an improvement by the existing institutions.

In those European schools where articulation has been accepted as an adjunct, the main reliance being on the language of signs, the manual alphabet and writing, the highest degree of general success in a given term of years has most unques-

tionably been attained. No time is wasted, out of respect to exploded but ancient ideas, in vain attempts to achieve that which if gained at all will be of no practical value to its possessor, while at the same time no efforts are spared to impart any and every species of useful knowledge, attainable to the pupils according to their various abilities.

No candid person at all conversant with the wants and powers of the deaf and dumb, and familiar with the workings of our American institutions for this class of persons, who will examine critically similar institutions in Europe, can escape the conviction that in essentials ours equal the best, and far surpass the great majority of foreign schools.

So entirely defensible, both in the soundness of its theories and the success of its practical workings, is the American system of deaf-mute instruction, that he who should attempt, in the light of the present advanced age, to build anew from the starting points of the Holders and Wallises, the Ammans and the Heinicks of former centuries, or even to experiment with methods of whose worthlessness the most ample proofs exist, would richly deserve the contempt and reproach which would be swift to follow upon his certain failure.

With the addition, easily effected, of classes for articulation in our existing institutions, in the manner generally adopted on the continent of Europe, the deaf-mute schools of the United States may justly claim to be exercising every means at present employed in any country for the most thorough and enlightened education of their pupils.

And yet it must be confessed that there exists a common defect, from which no system can claim to be free. It is a fact, admitted abroad as well as at home, that very many deaf-mutes of fair intelligence, on leaving school after a five, six, or seven years' course of study under faithful and accomplished teachers, have not acquired an ability to express their thoughts on all subjects in absolutely correct written language. In other words, they have not learned to think in their vernacular. They commit errors in composition that are termed by their teachers "deaf-muteisms," and which can hardly be described except by examples.

It will be unnecessary to enter into an argument to prove

that a child born deaf labors under great and peculiar disadvantages in acquiring language. All teachers, whether basing their efforts on articulation or signs, agree in acknowledging the difficulty of imparting to their pupils the power of idiomatic, and absolutely grammatical, composition. The great loss of that daily, and almost hourly, tuition in conventional and exceptional forms of language, received passively, but none the less effectively, by hearing children, is apparent in the deaf-mute at almost every stage of his education. Common justice would seem to demand that a period of tuition in schools equally extended with that afforded to their more favored fellows, should be accorded to the deaf and dumb. That such a length of time is secured when they are limited to five or six years for the acquirement of a new and complicated language, and for all the education wherein they are ever to receive the assistance of competent teachers, no one will undertake to claim.

That the defect just alluded to might be removed in great measure by an extension of the period of tuition, and the beginning of the education of the mute at an earlier age than has been customary, is most probable. Great interest, therefore, attaches to efforts recently inaugurated in England, and in this country, for the establishment of infant schools for the deaf and dumb.

At Manchester, England, an institution of this description has been in operation several years, but not as yet a sufficient time to exhibit full results; and if the school recently opened at Northampton, Mass., be kept rigidly within the bounds of its present organization, it may solve the question whether a general system of infant schools for mutes be desirable, than which a more important point does not remain to be decided in the whole range of efforts for this class of persons.

The idea has been brought rather prominently before the public during the past two years, that special institutions for the deaf and dumb are to a great extent unnecessary, and that this class of persons may, with little difficulty, be educated wholly, or in large part, in schools for hearing and speaking children. The opinions and writings of a certain Dr. Blanchet of Paris, have been cited in support of this theory, and it has been claimed that success has attended efforts exerted in this direction.

To one who has made the instruction of the deaf and dumb his daily labor for any extended period, the discussion or even the suggestion of an idea so impracticable seems the height of absurdity. The public generally, however, understand so little the condition and capabilities of the deaf-mute that they may be led to believe the most impossible things as quite feasible, provided he who recommends them be ingenious in his arguments, and persistent in his efforts.

In several countries of Europe attempts have been made to effect the education of mutes in the common schools, ending uniformly in failure, the highest end attained being the preparation of the child in some small degree for the essential work of the special institution. The recommendations of Dr. Blanchet have been followed in certain schools for a considerable period, with results so decided as to lead to the hope among the true friends of the deaf and dumb that all further experiments in this direction may be abandoned.

A single incident which came to the notice of the writer in Paris will serve to show how entire has been the failure of the so-called "Blanchet system." On entering the office of the Director of the Paris Institution one day he found there a mother and son, the latter fifteen years of age. The boy was deaf and dumb, and had been attending for eight years a common school where the teachers had endeavored to instruct him on the Blanchet system. He had attained no success in articulation, and in his attempts at written language committed errors that would be regarded as inexcusable in a pupil of two years' standing in our special schools. His mother was seeking to secure his admission into the Paris institution that he might be educated before he became too old; and it may justly be claimed from what was seen and heard on the occasion now referred to that the benefit he had derived from his eight years' instruction in the common school was less than would have been secured by two years' enjoyment of the advantages of the Paris institution. Professor Vaisse, the Director, stated that this was but one of many similar cases which had been brought to his notice, and that the testimony of competent witnesses was agreed as to the entire failure of the Blanchet system in France.

