

Draper, Amos (1904). The Education of the Deaf in America. From the Proceedings of the World's Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Seventh Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, St. Louis, MO: August 21-27. (22-30).  
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## THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF IN AMERICA.

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### RELATIVE POLITICAL POSITIONS OF AMERICA.

In not a few respects the present position of the United States among the nations of the world is comparable with that of the Roman empire at the zenith of its power.

Not many years ago what the United States would say, think, or do in any given event was a matter of complete indifference to European people and rulers. Their opinion of America in general was expressed by Sydney Smith's flippant query, "who reads an American book?"

This attitude has been changed almost in a twinkling. To-day no European people or potentate thinks of taking any important step in commerce, war, politics, or foreign relations, without considering anxiously what the United States will probably say, think, or do, supposing that step is taken.

With the exception of some events occurring very recently this pre-eminence has, happily, been reached by wholly peaceful means. It is the natural and almost inevitable result of the possession of a virgin and almost boundless continent, rich in mine, field and forest, by a people homogeneous in spirit though various in blood, imbued with democratic principles, and, until very lately, untrammelled in trade and with the utmost freedom to pursue individual ambition in any field of effort.

### RELATIVE POSITION IN EDUCATION.

In the domains of education, art, and literature, we may not indeed claim such unquestioned influence for America as in the lines above mentioned; yet in certain departments of those domains the claim will hold good. One of these departments is the

### EDUCATION OF THE DEAF-BLIND.

This has been frequently attempted in the old world, but much less generally in America, where the attempt was contemporaneous with the efforts to educate the deaf. Originating in the

case of Julia Brace, and culminating with that of Helen Keller, public and private sympathy has gone out to each victim of this double or triple affliction whose sad fate became known. In many other lands people have seen such victims and sighed that

"Of all the woes mankind inherits,  
It surely most compassion merits  
To be both blind and deaf;"

but it was reserved for America to make a public and general task of easing this especial woe by giving its victims the boon of education. In not a few cases besides the two mentioned the task has been crowned with a measure of success that commands the wonder and admiration of thoughtful and tender-hearted persons in every land. Another of these departments is the

#### EDUCATION OF THE DEAF.

Within the memory of many persons not yet old it was the custom of those interested in this work to go, or greatly desire to go, to Europe, with the view of there making investigations and discoveries that would enable them to improve the work here. This was so from the days of the elder Gallaudet to those of the Milan Convention. Is it so now? On the contrary, has it not been reversed, or is it not in process of reversion? We hear of few or no American instructors going abroad for that purpose in recent years; yet in these same years we have had in our schools prominent investigators from England, Wales, Italy, Australia, Germany, Sweden, and other lands. This is an evidence of the fact that America is no longer the led, but is the leader in the education of the deaf. Having acquired the best ideas of the old world as a foundation, she is working at the problem in her own way—with the genius, energy, liberality, and flexibility that are a part of her way.

The results are certainly greatly to influence the education of the deaf throughout the world. That influence has begun. For example, many of these visitors were oralists of the strictest sect. It would be too much to expect that anything they saw in America should do away with the convictions of a lifetime, yet there is no doubt that these convictions have been modified, if not shaken. For instance, Heidsieck, after seeing the work of American schools of every type—pure oral, pure manual, and of every shade and combination between these two extremes—the number of these schools and the rich pecuniary provision for them, making moral, mental,

industrial, and physical education for the deaf practically free and universal; and the ingenuity and energy which produced the results that moved him, declares, somewhat sadly, "I therefore left the shores of the new world with a certain faintheartedness. Never has the question of the education of the deaf appeared more difficult to me than since my visit to the American schools. But at the same time the insufficiency of the pure oral method was never so clear in my mind, and never did I feel the necessity of a reorganization of the education of the deaf in Germany as imperiously as now, after the exciting impressions I received from the flourishing condition of the education of the deaf in the United States." And Ferreri, after a like thorough investigation, in an article bearing the significant title of "Victorious America," says, "Here I find the best schools for the deaf. \* \* \* They (the Americans) are doing the best which it is possible to do in the present condition of science; and in a not far distant future they will be our guide in the progressive development of our special line of education."

The deaf people of America and their instructors may well feel thankful that Providence has placed their lot in a land thus highly commended by qualified observers from the old world; it should not however, inflate them, but rather inspire them with determination to see that it shall be deserved—that no efforts of theirs shall be spared to carry the education and all the best interests of the deaf onward and upward toward perfection.

#### AURICULAR INSTRUCTION.

Within the last two decades there have been marked developments in this country in the education of the deaf. One of these is the systematic endeavor to keep alive and increase by use and practice latent powers of hearing among certain pupils. This like the education of the deaf-blind, is largely an American enterprise. Some individual experiments had been made in France, but long abandoned, when Mr. James A. Gillespie, of Nebraska, took up the work in 1881. Since then the effort has been pushed in many schools. It has stimulated the invention of devices to aid hearing. An association to promote it was formed in 1894. In 1903 there were 100 pupils in 18 schools taught wholly or chiefly by auricular means, besides many others receiving auricular training.

It is true that this work affects only a comparatively small number of pupils; yet to these few how great the boon! They

may be graduated as hard-of-hearing persons; may receive instruction, at school and in business, through the ear; may by the same means enter into social relations, at least with individuals; and any powers which they possess of understanding speech by sight will be strongly reinforced. This is, therefore, a development that should receive the fullest sympathy and support of all the deaf.

#### USE OF MANUAL ALPHABET.

Within the same period there has been a decided movement to use the manual alphabet as a means of instruction. One large school and departments in two others, these last among the largest in the country, have made it, with writing, the basis of instruction. In many other schools individual instructors have striven to implant the habit of its use among pupils. The movement is sound in reason and powerful in effect. When a pupil tries to tell in words his wants, pleasures, woes, emotions, and adventures he tries to think in words and when he has gained the power to think in words and express his thoughts in words with measurable clearness his education is already half accomplished. This therefore, is another development which merits the hearty appreciation and aid of all the deaf.

#### SPEECH AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF SPEECH BY SIGHT.

Great as have been the developments in the above directions they have yet been exceeded by that in the teaching of articulation and the understanding of speech by sight. This movement began somewhat earlier than the period above named, but during that period it has increased with great rapidity. In 1883 there were but 14 professedly oral schools in the country, while in 1903 there were 63. (Many of these are, it is true, merely classes rather than schools, in some cases almost consisting of the ideal oral school of one pupil.) Taking schools of every kind the number of pupils in professedly oral schools has increased in the above period from 9 plus to 23 plus per cent. If the comparison be confined to well established schools of reputation the increase will be less marked, being from 7 plus to 14 plus per cent. In this comparison no account is taken of the large number of pupils in schools not professedly oral who are taught speech, or are taught wholly or chiefly by speech, because statistics are not obtainable for the

earlier part of the period; but it is known that the number of these has also very greatly increased, and at the present time they far outnumber those taught in professedly oral schools.

This increased attention to speech is another development that merits and should receive the sincere approval of all intelligent deaf persons. It is a fact that the cultivation of speech was too long neglected in American schools. Even the speech of semi-mutes suffered by this neglect. Everyone must rejoice that this is no longer true—that every pupil who can speak, and every pupil who cannot speak intelligibly but seems capable of learning to do so, can have his powers of speech preserved or evoked, and improved to the utmost.

On the other hand no fears need be felt that this development amounting to a reform—for such it is—will finally go beyond reasonable bounds. Many have had such fears. About the time of the Milan Convention, for instance, the sign language was to pass utterly out of existence; the manual alphabet was to be a thing unknown; writing was to be dispensed with as far as possible; the great minds that labored for the deaf nearly a century and brought about such beneficent results were, with those results, to be discredited; the orally taught were to enter schools and colleges for the hearing, and by virtue of oral training shine in contrast with all who had not that training, etc., etc. These fears were groundless. None of them have been realized. None will be. If the reform has seemed rapid, it is because it began suddenly and almost from a standstill. The American people may be trusted not only to adopt any improvement upon past methods, but also to hold fast that which is good in those methods.

#### DAY SCHOOLS.

There has been a decided increase in the number of day, denominational and private schools, it being from 16 in 1883 to 71 in 1903. In so far as these schools serve as feeders to organized institutions which are fully equipped to teach trades as well as all other branches of education, they may become a benefit; but in so far as they prevent attendance upon the well-equipped institutions they may become an ultimate injury to deaf children. Although the great majority of them have been set up as a result of oralist enthusiasm and to promote oral aims, nevertheless the most competent and experienced quasi oralists and pronounced oralists alike concur in this view. Of the former, the late Dr. Gordon, in the

ablest and most exhaustive paper he produced, sums up the matter by showing that "special institutions remain a necessity for the great mass of deaf children, and they continue to offer superior results, with the greatest economy of time, money and men. And this is true regardless of methods, systems, or devices of instruction"; of the latter, Dr. Crouter of the Mt. Airy school, comes to practically the same conclusion in his Report for 1902-'03.

#### FEMALE TEACHERS.

There has been a very great increase in the number of female compared with the number of male teachers in the period named. The former now outnumber the latter more than 2 to 1. This preponderance is especially marked in oral schools. More than 85 per cent. of the teachers in the Mt. Airy School are women. In the Clarke Institution all are women; and of the 77 teachers sent out by its training class all but 2 have been women. In the numerous day schools begun here and there the teachers are, almost to a woman, women.

This is a development that obtains in schools for the hearing also. It is a development to be regretted upon very high grounds. Women are naturally fitted by talent, tact and patience, to be teachers of little children and of primary classes; but these children, arrived at youth and approaching young manhood and womanhood, need for their fullest growth daily contact with the sterner attributes of human nature, the more logical faculties, and the stricter sense of justice that are masculine characteristics. Observant women admit this. So do managers of oral schools, as witness the remarks of President Carter of the Clarke Corporation in the Report of that school for 1903.

A reform in this matter must be of slow growth. Yet the formation and maintenance of a correct public opinion upon it may be trusted finally to bring about an improvement. The Normal Department of Gallaudet College has done something to start such an improvement. Of its graduates more than 82 per cent. have been men.

#### TRADES TEACHING.

This paper would not be complete without a reference to industrial training. In no small sense it is the most vital of all instruction to the deaf. Endowing them with education, but not with the power to earn bread, is only to prepare for them a sharper

sting in poverty, a more poignant shame in dependence. It is to be hoped that the paper to be read to the Congress on this subject will show that the schools are alive to this greatest of needs and sparing no effort to meet it; and every deaf person should exert all his influence to promote this aim of the schools.

#### THE SIGN LANGUAGE.

Various causes, chiefly the increased use of speech and of the manual alphabet, have combined during the period under review to lessen in some degree the prevalence and in a greater degree the perfection of the sign language. The language remains, but fewer deaf people and still fewer instructors of them become accomplished masters of it. Perhaps the coming generation of the deaf will see fewer, if any, men like the Turners, Gallaudets, Peets, Gilletts, and Noyeses, who by means of this language have stirred the hearts, kindled the emotions, uplifted the souls, touched the humor, and swayed the minds of multitudes of the deaf. If that be so, it is one of the prices that the deaf must pay for improvement—or effort at improvement—in other directions. No fear need be felt, however, that the sign language will not survive in vigor, for it is as rooted in human nature as the passions and emotions and aspirations of which it is the swift, easy, capacious, and accommodating vehicle.

#### DEAF TEACHERS.

In the United States, taking schools for the deaf of every kind, more than 16½ per cent. of the instructors are deaf. If the comparison be confined to well-equipped public schools the percentage is decidedly greater. Great as it is, it is less than formerly, and probably destined to grow still less. Notwithstanding, no fear need be felt that properly qualified deaf people will not always find an opportunity for life-work in the sphere of teaching in this country. So cogent are the factors in their favor that they have in some cases been kept even in oral schools. Every deaf man "who hath this hope in him should purify himself"—should strive to make himself so fit to teach, in character, in ability, and in attainments, that his natural qualifications for the work derived from personal experience will thereby shine forth in still stronger light.

#### THE COLLEGE.

Gallaudet College continues to be the only institution in the world where deaf persons not possessed at the same time of uncom-

mon ability, uncommon hardihood, and considerable money, can obtain a higher education. Lacking any one of the above necessities, the endeavor to educate deaf persons in colleges for hearing persons will result, as common sense would indicate, in pain and humiliation, if not in ultimate defeat. Even oralists are arriving at this decision after testing enthusiasm by experience, as may be seen in some wise words of caution in Superintendent Crouter's Report for 1902-'03.

During the period under review the College has tried to meet every need as it arose. Five important developments have resulted: (1.) It has admitted young women, at first experimentally. Certain disadvantages have been found to attend co-education here, as in other colleges where it is established; still, and considering the limited number of the deaf fitted for a higher education, the experiment must be deemed successful, and the best solution of the problem of giving a higher education to both sexes obtainable under present conditions. Certainly the young women, both by conduct and scholarship, have proved themselves as worthy of the privileges of the college as has the other sex. (2.) It has set up and carries on a system of investigations looking to the discovery and improvement of latent powers of hearing among students as they enter. (3.) It has begun and maintains a regular system of practice and training in speech. No student who has ability to speak or understand speech by sight, or both, need fear that those powers will suffer by residence in the College, provided only he have the wish and the will to preserve and improve them. (4.) It has arranged the last two years of the course so that the students desiring to enter any one of the many excellent schools of technology for the hearing may be fitted to do so. (5.) It has set up and maintains a normal department from which 49 hearing persons have graduated with degrees, of whom 40 were men. A large majority of these are now engaged in teaching the deaf, and are doing good work. There can be no question that this department, rightly conducted, is capable of exerting a decidedly uplifting influence upon the profession of teaching the deaf. The deaf may justly and rightly ask that if this department be kept up it shall admit only graduates of colleges, persons of the highest type that can be secured, both as to character and attainments, and, as a rule, men.



## CONCLUSION.

Upon this showing as a whole, the deaf people of America may fairly felicitate themselves that as time sweeps forward into the twentieth century so many forces combine to benefit them as a class. In no region known to mortals is that class so favored. Good and able men and women, backed by a generous public, are striving on every hand to work out the problem of discovering all that is best for the deaf. If the deaf people of America view their lot with joy and hope, as they should, still more should they feel overflowing gratitude to that Providence and abounding pride in that nation which have so signally blessed them. They should, each and all, highly resolve to prove, by every word and act and service of theirs, that the labors of their instructors and the resources of the state were well and wisely invested in their education.