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DEAF-MUTISM.

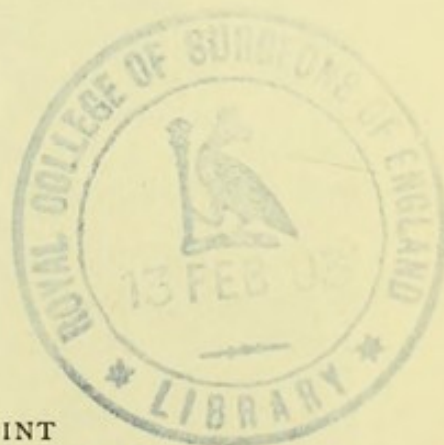
A brief account of the Deaf and Dumb Human Race.

From the earliest ages to the present time.

BY

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DEAF-MUTISM

BY THE LIGHT OF MODERN SCIENCE.



HISTORY records that human beings with sound mental development and unimpaired vocal organs, yet devoid of the faculties of speaking and hearing, have ever been met with in all habitable parts of the world.

In the early and middle ages, and indeed far into the Christian era, the so-called "Deaf and Dumb" were commonly looked upon as hopeless and helpless idiots, and a very general belief prevailed that they were under the dominating influence of evil spirits and witchcraft. At this advanced period of the world's history—this enlightened nineteenth century—when all belief in the power of evil spirits and witchery to effect such a purpose has long lapsed to "limbus fatuorum," and the science and art of medicine and surgery of the past half-century have been thoroughly exercised to remedy and avert this defective condition of the human organism, nevertheless not a few lacking the functions of the ear and tongue are still met with in all quarters of the globe.

The object of this article is to offer to the uninitiated a plain exposition of the elucidations of modern science as to the real origin, the nature, and course of perpetuation of what is termed deaf-mutism, and to give a brief account of the means and methods which have been devised and practised during the last three centuries for arousing and training the latent intellects of those lacking two of the chief faculties for mental culture; for rendering this naturally much isolated section of the community intelligent and useful members of society.

Before entering upon what is here designed, it will not be out of place first to state a few prominent facts respecting this sad phase of human existence, extending over long epochs of time.

In the eighth century B.C., during the rigid reign of Lycurgus the Spartan legislator, those incapable of speaking and hearing, with all others imputed to be or likely to become useless to the State, were sacrificed in early childhood on Mount Taygetus.

Herodotus, the great Grecian historian, relates that Cræsus, King of Lydia, 550 B.C., consulted the Delphic Oracle respecting his deaf and dumb son, Atys. The answer returned was, "Ah! woe worthy the day when ears should listen to the accents of his voice."

In the fourth century of the Christian dispensation, St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, interpreting too literally the dogma, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," excluded these unfortunates from the Church.

The Code, *Corpus Juris Civilis*, of the Roman empire under Justinianus in the sixth century, subjected them to various civil and legal restrictions and disabilities, and up to comparatively recent times they were mostly looked upon as a reproach of their families, and it was no uncommon practice to immure them in some solitary cloister or some secluded retreat.

It is now well known that the offspring of blood relations are subject to various mental and physical derangements.

In this connection Mr. George Darwin has accurately noted the proportion of children of first cousins who suffer from some organic defect or other, and not the least frequent nor the least distressing is total absence of the sense of hearing.

The principles of human physiology being ever the same, and there being no "Table of Kindred and Affinity" previous to 1568, with the object of restricting and regulating intermarriages of blood relations, it is quite reasonable to assume (bearing in mind Darwin's deductions respecting the offspring of marriages of first cousins) that some among the families of prehistoric times, as well as those of whom history records, lacked the power of hearing and speaking, and were unable to hold

intercourse in the vernacular of their nations or tribes.

This abnormal lineage of the human race forms no insignificant proportion of the whole population.

It is estimated that there are at the present time more than a million of this defective race throughout the world, and over two hundred thousand of these are in Europe.

According to the census enumeration for 1851 (the first taken of them as a separate class) in England and Wales there were 10,314—one in every 1738·18 of the population. By the census of 1891 they numbered 14,193—or one in every 2043·47. (This proportionate decrease is chiefly due to advanced medical science and improved sanitation.)

Their geographical distribution and social condition present certain characteristics and peculiarities.

The actual number of them in any particular locality depends largely upon the physical features of the country, and the habits of the people.

They are more numerous in dark, damp, and mountainous regions than in level countries. In Switzerland, for instance, there are 24·5 in every ten thousand of the population, while in the Netherlands there are only 3·35 in the same amount of population. (This is mainly due to Cretinism, a physical and mental degeneracy which is endemic in Switzerland and absent in flat countries.)

They are more numerous in rural districts than in cities. The poor are more frequently afflicted than the rich—and they are incomparably more numerous in Isrealitish than in Christian communities.

These last three circumstances are plainly owing to two conditions: to consanguineous marriages and heredity.

Biology, the science which treats of the forces and phenomena of life, demonstrates that inborn characteristics and peculiarities of the human frame are usually transmitted from parent to offspring.

During the past half-century various views and theories have been propounded and elaborately set forth, in elucidation of the operation of the agency or influence effecting heredity; nevertheless all scientific research, aided by the microscope and the subtlest chemistry, hitherto fails to afford any satisfactory or settled solution of this mystery of organic life. However, in the case here under consideration one principle involved is clearly "selection."

Deaf-born persons intermarrying, their abnormal condition is frequently transmitted to their offspring, but when either of them have relatives similarly afflicted, their abnormality is still more likely to be inherited.

A congenitally deaf person marrying a hearing cousin, whether either of them have deaf relatives or not, their progeny is very likely to be affected.

But the congenital, or the adventitiously deaf, marrying hearing persons, not being cousins, and not having deaf relatives, are not so likely to have deaf offspring.

Deafness also frequently occurs where no clue to its source or origin can be traced.

It not infrequently happens in families of several children of deaf parents that some are deaf and some have their hearing perfect. The fortunate ones, though they exhibit no indications of their parents' peculiarity, may nevertheless inherit the taint or virus—and it may develop and become pronounced in the next or some succeeding lineal or collateral generation. Instances also occur in which all the boys are deaf and all the girls are free, and *vice versâ*.

It has been mooted and accepted as possible, by scientists devoted to the subject, that by *constant* intermarriage of the *deaf-born*, a distinct—a non-speaking—variety of human race would result. This hypothesis seems favoured by the following facts and figures.

When one parent is congenitally deaf, and the other has perfect hearing, the proportion of deaf offspring is as 1 to 135.

In instances of both parents being congenitally deaf, the proportion of deaf children is as 1 to 20.

In small and restricted communities, where intermarriages of blood relations of some degree or other frequently occur, the proportion of deaf population is exceptionally high.

In Chilmark, a small village in Massachusetts, twenty per cent. of the population in 1880 were deaf-mutes.

A Royal commission, sitting at short intervals at Westminster from 1885 to 1888, to enquire into the condition of the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind, in the United Kingdom, in its report, presented to Parliament in 1889, recommended that "intermarriage of congenitally deaf persons, as well as of blood relations, especially where any hereditary tendency to deafness prevails in the family, should be strongly discouraged."

Besides the inscrutable agent or influence which so frequently annuls the function of the aural organs, other more objective and traceable conditions and circumstances give rise to loss or impairment of the sense of hearing.

Mental and physical shocks to an *enceinte* will arrest or disturb the due development of the nervous system of the embryo. Diseases incidental to, or by any chance happening in, infancy and early childhood, notably scarlet fever, small-pox, affections of the brain and its coverings, scrofula, and other blood conditions, injuries to the head previous to the period for vocal articulation, may so permanently affect the external or internal structures of the ear and throat as to induce deafness in all varying degrees, from what is termed "hard of hearing" to total annihilation of the function of the ear.

Some three decades of years since a French *savant*, Monsieur Broca, distinctly defined an area in the human brain where is situated the faculty of speech—a space corresponding to about a square inch, a little in front of and a little higher than the left ear.

Actual speech, however, is not inherited, is not transmitted from parent to offspring; it is only acquired by imitation of the voice of a speaker.

Archbishop Whately, in his work "Lessons on Reasoning," states: "A deaf-mute, before he has been taught a language, either the finger language or reading, cannot carry on a train of reasoning any more than a brute. He differs, indeed, from a brute in possessing the mental capability of employing language, but he can no more make use of that capability until he is in possession of some system of arbitrary general signs, than a person born blind from a cataract can make use of his capability of seeing till his cataract is removed."

Professor Max Müller remarks: "The un-instructed Deaf and Dumb, I believe, have never given any signs of reasoning in the true sense of the word."

Language of any kind, not articulate speech alone, is idea, will, and reason in active exercise.

"To instruct the dumb, no art could reach,
No care improve, no wisdom teach."

Thus wrote Lucretius eighty years before the Christian era.

Accounts here and there occur in the literature of the early centuries of the Christian era of a deaf-mute or two having been taught to articulate a few words and sentences, but it was not until the beginning of the sixteenth century that philosophers and philanthropists first practically and effectually turned their attention to this sad phase of human existence.

To Jerome Carden, of Pavia, who flourished during a great part of the sixteenth century, must be accorded the credit of first propounding the principles upon which the potential intellects of deaf-mutes may be brought into activity, viz.—that writing is associated with speech, and speech with thought; but written characters and ideas may be connected without the intervention of the voice.

Pedro de Pounce, a Benedictine monk, in Spain, 1570,

John Wallis, a Professor of Mathematics in Oxford, 1660,

John Ammon, a Professor of Medicine at Haarlem, 1690,

The Abbé de l'Épée, a French monk, 1754,

Samuel Heiniche, a Saxon schoolmaster, 1754, are some of those who devoted much of their time to the practical application of the principles enunciated by Carden.

The systems or plans which have been gradually developed during the last three centuries, and are now in vogue for carrying on this work, are :

The Sign-manual or French ; the Oral and Pure Oral or German ; and the Combined.

The *Sign-manual System* consists of signs and gestures and dactylogy—*i.e.* finger alphabet. By the labours of the Abbé de l'Épée and Abbé Secard, of the eighteenth century, and others, these now form a fairly complete language.

Dr. Gallaudet, President of the Deaf and Dumb College, Washington, when before the Royal Commission, gave as his evidence :

"The *sign and gesture* language was in no respects inferior, but in many respects superior, to articulate speech, as a means of communicating ideas, when their whole lives were taken into account, in the facility it affords for free and unrestrained intercourse."

This picturesque language, this facile mode of communicating ideas and feelings, is best suited for religious services and administrations, for lectures, debates, etc.

The *Oral System*, or what is spoken of as lip-reading, consists in deciphering words and sentences by the movements of the lips and tongue and expressions of the face of a speaker, and training the vocal organs to mechanically articulate, first a vowel, then a consonant, next a word, then a sentence, each associated with an object or picture.

"Nihil est in intellectu, quod non ante fuerit in sensu."

This mode of instruction was known and practised to some extent more than two centuries since. This is evident by the following piece of quaint literature taken from a work entitled "Philocarpus, or the Deaf and Dumb Man's Friend," published by Bulwer, 1648 :

"A nobleman of great quality in Spain—the younger brother of the Constable of Castile, born deaf, was so deaf that if a gun were shot off close to his ear he could not hear it. Physicians and surgeons had long employed all their skill, but all in vain. At last a priest who undertook the treating of him, to understand others when they spoke, and to speak himself, for which attempt at first he was laughed at, yet after some years he was looked upon as if he had wrought a miracle, for the knowledge he had of what they said sprang from observing the motion they made with their lips, so that he conversed correctly in the light, though they whispered never so softly; and I have seen him at the distance of a long chamber's breadth say words after, that I, standing close by the speaker, could not hear a syllable of, but if he were in the dark, or if one turned his face out of his sight, he was capable of nothing one said."

What is now known as the *Pure Oral System* consists of lip-reading and vocal articulation, all signs and gestures as far as possible excluded, and the finger alphabet absolutely disused.

This mode of training the mental faculties and cultivating articulate speech was not much known, or at least not much practised, in this country until the year 1867. At that date, by the benevolence and personal efforts of the late Baroness Meyer de Rothschild and Mr. Van Praagh of Rotterdam, it was introduced and taught here.

From the time of, and as a result of, the International Convention of Deaf-Mute Instructors at Milan in 1880, this mode of instruction has become the most popular, and is now adopted in most, if not all, educational institutions in Europe. It secures the beneficent result of restoring to their normal position in society that very large section of the so-called Deaf and Dumb—the *semi-deaf*, those who have some hearing; and the *semi-mute*, those who have acquired some speech previous to becoming deaf.

Educating and training the mental faculties of the congenitally deaf, and teaching articulate speech to those whose brain-centre for speech has never been reached by the tones of the human voice through the medium of the auditory nerve, this system of instruction partakes much of the nature of a Herculean labour.

Natural endowments of a high order, quick mental perception, good eyesight, commencing the

work at the age of six or seven, close and continuous application, both on the part of a specially trained teacher as well as of the pupil, for eight or ten years, are all essential towards securing anything like a practical and useful mastery of this new faculty. By thus bringing the vocal organs into play, the air-passages and lungs are strengthened and the whole constitution consequently invigorated.

The Combined System is where the education is carried on by the sign and gesture language, and by writing ; together with lip-reading and articulation as accomplishments.

For this mode of instruction it is claimed that it affords the greatest good to the greatest number. Be this as it may, like everything else where the attention is divided, it fails in the efficiency which is attained by the sign or oral systems when studied and practised separately.

The State in all European and American countries, and in many of the Dependencies of Great Britain, has long considered its Deaf and Dumb subjects "Wards of the Commonwealth," and made annual financial grants towards their maintenance and education. In the realms of Great Britain and Ireland these afflicted subjects of her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria have, until the present year, been left almost entirely to private benevolence.

A Bill, having for its objects the making better provision for the elementary education of blind and deaf children in England and Wales, was prepared and brought before Parliament in 1893 by Mr. A. Acland and Mr. Mundella. It quickly received the Royal Assent, and came into operation in January of the present year.

The Committee of Council on Education during the past month arranged to make grants at the rate of three guineas and two guineas a year for each deaf child who has attended a certified school for not less than one complete month during the school year, provided that his or her attainments in

general and technical subjects are found to be satisfactory, regard being had to "necessary" disqualifications.

Seventeen of the Board-school centres in the Metropolis and others in the provinces have separate classes for these defective children. They are mostly taught on the pure oral system. Those not making satisfactory progress in language are after a time transferred to special classes on the sign-manual system.

Many associations and institutions exist for the temporal and spiritual welfare of deaf-mute adults after quitting school, and for those of advanced age.

The chief of these is *The Royal Association in aid of the Deaf and Dumb*. It was founded in 1840, and now has its chief centre in the west of this Metropolis. It is of the nature of a missionary society. It has its chaplains, missionaries, and honorary lay-helpers.

It provides religious and secular instruction, and attendance of the sick and others, under the direction of parochial clergy, at their homes throughout Greater London.

Thus by the developments of science, general social progress, and educational opportunities of the present century, particularly of the Victorian era, the long-neglected deaf-mute class has been brought from the gloom of social isolation into the bright light of intelligence, and rendered capable of "holding its own" and competing, and that successfully too, with those in full possession of all the five senses of organic life and mental culture, in science, in the fine arts, in commerce, and most of the undertakings of industrial life.

HENRY W. HUBBARD.

ELGIN CRESCENT, W.

August, 1894.