

VISITS TO SOME OF THE SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF
AND DUMB IN FRANCE AND ENGLAND.

BY LAURENT CLERC.

[Continued from the last number.]

ANOTHER day, being at the country-seat of a friend of mine, at the foot of the mountains which separate France from Switzerland, I was told by the landlord that there was in the village a poor woman about thirty years old, deaf and dumb from birth, who had never seen any deaf and dumb person, and that she could hardly make herself understood by others, except by her aged mother with whom she lived. I expressed the desire to see her, as I believed I could talk with her. I was told it would be of no use, as she was rather idiotic; but I insisted, and she was sent for, and came in the evening. There were several ladies present at my friend's, besides a number of gentlemen, among whom were the curate of the village, the notary, the judge of the peace and the physician; all very anxious to see how far it was possible for an educated deaf and dumb person to talk with an uneducated one. They were themselves as ignorant as that poor woman; for they did not imagine that the language of signs was universal and as simple as nature herself. At length, she made her appearance. She was a common woman, very awkward in her manners, and rather bashful than bold. I had scarcely cast a glance at her, when I pronounced her to be a woman of considerable intelligence, and that she wanted nothing but some one capable of arousing her intellectual faculties, too long kept undeveloped. The company were seated in a circle by a brilliant fire, for it was winter, and when the poor woman had taken her seat opposite me, I immediately entered into conversation with her, all eyes being fixed upon us both. I began with informing her that I was deaf and dumb like herself, that there were a great many others in the world besides ourselves, that there were schools for them where they were taught to write and read, that I could write myself, that I had gone a great way off to teach others, and that I had returned and was glad to see her. I showed her how we spelled with our fingers, and described many things that she appeared to understand very well. She was in perfect

astonishment and much pleased with all I said. I then asked her what she did and how she passed her time, and she said that she led the cows of her neighbors to pasture, and took care of them, and milked them morning and evening, made butter and cheese, spun in the evening, and helped her mother or friends in their domestic concerns. We talked on many other subjects, but it would take too much time to report them here. This scene was a very interesting one to my friends. They admired especially the striking accuracy with which we designated things by gesticulation.

I was asked whether I believed she had any idea of God, for the curate said she came to church *punctually* and *regularly*, and seemed to be *very pious*. I answered that I thought she did nothing but imitate what she saw other people doing, and that if she had any idea at all of a Supreme Being, she hardly could know his attributes; nor did I believe she had any notion of the immortality of her own soul. I was then desired to ascertain whether she could distinguish *right* and *wrong*. I accordingly questioned her, and her answers convinced me that she had rather vague ideas on this subject. When I asked her what would become of *good* and *bad* men after death, she pointed to heaven as the place where good men would go, and to the fire before us, where wicked men would burn until they were wholly consumed. I feigned to steal or to kill, and then asked her if what I had just done was *good* or *bad*. She said *bad*, and pointed to the fire; she gave the same answer to other bad actions; to the fire, to the fire. I inquired what in her would go to the fire; she said, *her body*. I further asked her what in her body made her think and will, and she said: "Something in my *head* and *heart*," that she could not explain. I moreover asked her who had made her, and she answered, "*my mother*." And who had made her mother? she answered, "*her mother*," and so on. And who was that man whom she saw on the cross in church? A good man whom her mother had told her that wicked men had nailed there. What for? She could not say, nor could she say what else he was. Here our conversation ceased. Here I must say that had she had any intercourse with other deaf and dumb persons, or had her parents or friends taken any interest in her in her childhood, she would be otherwise than she was now, even without having attended school,

and would have learned a great deal. I therefore think it necessary, nay, indispensable, that for humanity and Christ's sake, we all who are more blessed should occupy ourselves more than we do with founding everywhere schools for the instruction and education of these unfortunate beings.

I learned the next day that I had involuntarily rendered that poor woman unhappy. She cried, and would go to school with me, and lead the cows to pasture no longer.

After my return to Paris, in May, 1847, it was not long before I again repaired to the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb; so great was my desire to see the teachers among their pupils in their respective school-rooms. I took care to arrive early in the forenoon, that I might be present at the beginning of the school. Here I will inform such of my readers as may not know it, that in the Catholic countries of Europe it is not the custom, as in the United States, England and elsewhere, to admit males and females together into private or public institutions, schools, or seminaries. They generally occupy separate buildings, and are taught by persons of their own sex. No wonder, therefore, that I did not see more than seventy boys coming out of their workshops and going into their respective classes. The first class which I happened to visit was that of Prof. Berthier, a former pupil of mine under the Abbé Sicard, and now the senior teacher in the Royal Institution, who has since distinguished himself so much as to be the author of a great number of pamphlets and biographies, and the writer of several addresses delivered on certain public occasions. He made me sit by him, and we had so much to speak of that we little thought of his pupils, who were sitting at their desks studying their lessons. After taking a bird's-eye view of them, I stepped into the next room, which happened to be that of Prof. Vaïsse, a fine gentleman of about forty, who hears and speaks, whom the late Rev. Dr. Milnor, some twenty years since, on his return from Europe, brought with him as an assistant teacher in the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, where he remained a few years and then returned to Paris. From Prof. V.'s room, I was ushered into another, under Prof. Lenoir, a deaf and dumb gentleman of uncommon attainments; thence into another; and so on, until I had visited all the rooms. It was, on that day, a visit of mere formality; of course I could not bestow much

attention on all I saw. But I promised myself the pleasure of calling again as often as would suit the convenience of the gentlemen to receive me, hoping to be then more at home, and to give less trouble and cause less interruption. Accordingly, I returned the next day, especially to witness the performances of Prof. V., who had been chosen, or rather, as I was told, who had offered to devote at least an hour, four times a week, before school hours, for a reasonable compensation, to teach articulation. About twenty pupils, therefore, selected from among the most capable, were formed into one class, and entrusted to the care of Prof. V. Candid readers, pray tell me, can you conceive it possible for *one man* to teach articulation to as many as twenty deaf and dumb boys at once, with advantage to themselves? I myself think it hardly possible; however, Prof. V. says it is possible, even easy, provided he perseveres in his enterprise, and his pupils are attentive enough to follow the motion of his lips, and he begged me not to speak of impossibility in presence of his pupils, for fear of discouraging them! I of course kept silence, and Prof. V., having required their attention just as he was going to commence, made them articulate *a, e, i, o, u*; then *ba, be, bi, bo, bu*; then *ca, ce, ci, co, cu*, etc. They, according to Prof. V., repeated very well. Then some short words, as *key, knife, watch, hat, cat, dog, ox, cow*, etc. And he had scarcely gone with the same vowels and words from one to five pupils, when I took the liberty to stop him, as I had seen how much time it took him to go through. And while he was thus engaged with one pupil, then with another, it was very difficult, if not impossible, to keep the other pupils still and attentive; so it was very often that I saw him say to them by signs: Boys, boys!—Hush, boys!—Be still, boys!—Stop, boys, do not make so much noise!

I then took a small slate, with the permission of Prof. V., and wrote a short sentence on it, and requested him to dictate it by speech to two of his most forward pupils; one of whom, after the second repetition, wrote it quite correctly; but it must be remarked that he was not deaf from birth, and that he could spell many words before he came to school; the other did not succeed so well, although he had been under constant instruction for upwards of a year. I had witnessed enough and did not wish to witness more, being more than ever convinced of the

little benefit to be derived from articulation, in comparison with the advantage of being able to express one's ideas in written language, which can be acquired in a much shorter time.

My next visit, another day, was to the pupils of Prof. Morel, who hears and speaks, a gentleman of great talents, the editor of the Annals of the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, and the professor of the class of perfection, so called, *i.e.*, of the highest class in the institution. It may be proper here to say something about the origin of *this class of perfection*, and what its object is. It originated in the wish of the late celebrated Dr. Itard, the resident physician of the institution for about thirty years; an old bachelor who, by his industry and eminence, acquired a great deal of money, not from the unfortunate deaf and dumb, but from a numerous class of patients among the nobility and gentry, and bequeathed the greatest part, if not the whole of his fortune, to the institution, with this provision in his will, that the interest on the capital should be employed for the support and tuition during two years of a certain number of such pupils as, at the expiration of six years, should be found to have excelled others in learning, but who still wanted more time to perfect themselves in written language; and it is in conformity with his design that this class of perfection was thus created soon after his death. Prof. M., as his talents well qualify him for the purpose, was appointed the fortunate professor of this privileged class. He had eight or ten pupils, a few of whom I recollect having seen at my visit of 1835-6. Prof. M. was exercising them in the geography of Europe, and they all answered and described remarkably well. The hour for dismissing school having arrived, I deferred my examination of them on other subjects.

Two or three days afterwards, I came again, but Prof. M. was absent. His pupils were studying by themselves. I took the liberty of writing on the large blackboard the following words in French; *to admire, admiring, admired, admiration, admirable, admirably, admirer*, and requested them to write sentences on their small slates, into which these words should be introduced according to the order they were written. I found but one willing to gratify me, and while he was preparing his sentences, I wrote on another board other words of the same family; viz: *to see, seeing, seen, having seen, having been seen,*

sight ; visible, visibly, visibility, vision, visionary, etc. ; and just as I was about to invite some other pupils to introduce the above words into short phrases, in came the monitor. Each professor has a monitor to supply his place in case of his absence, and these monitors are generally young men, either hearing and speaking or deaf and dumb, who, desiring to qualify themselves to become teachers of the deaf and dumb, are hired for one or two years, like apprentices or clerks among merchants. They are boarded and lodged in the institution, but without any salary whatever, and their business is not only to attend the daily lessons of the professor ; to occupy his place in case of absence or sickness ; but also to attend with the pupils at their meals, or play, or study ; to accompany them whenever they go to walk, to sleep with them in their dormitory ; in one word, to be with them at all times ; for the professors are not allowed to reside in the institution, no matter whether married or not, although there could be room for them, even for their families ; for the institution is a very spacious one, capable of accommodating upwards of three hundred persons, and there were but two hundred, comprising pupils of both sexes, guardians, servants and others employed, besides the director, the superintendent, and their families!! While I am on this subject, I must say I do not think this plan the best ; for the professors, obliged to reside where they can, do not always find houses in the neighborhood of the institution, so as to be able to come to school with punctuality. No wonder, therefore, that some of them arrive rather late, while they must leave their school early enough to reach their houses. The director, Mr. Delannean, himself, I regret to say it, does not attend to his duties any better, and I am afraid he sets a bad example. Were he more regular and more faithful, his assistants would be so likewise ; for like master like man, as says the proverb. He is seldom to be seen, nor does he ever visit the school rooms, or have any intercourse with the teachers or pupils except on extraordinary occasions. He is one of the twelve mayors of Paris, and the duties of his office call him out almost every day, to the great injury of the institution. He has the largest salary. He occupies with his family the whole first floor of the wing of the north building, with a pretty garden attached to it, and that for doing what ? Ah ! very little indeed. He has never

taught the deaf and dumb, nor is he much acquainted with the method of instruction. He knows but a few common signs, and talks with his fingers very slowly. Why, then, was he appointed *Director*? Nobody could say, unless it was for political purposes. When I was introduced to him, he received me kindly, and gave me free entrance to the institution, and permission to visit the classes of both the boys and girls as often as I pleased, and this was all. He did not condescend to inquire after the American Asylum; nor did he say one word about the deaf and dumb!!

The steward of the institution has the whole second floor above Mr. D.; for, in the opinion of the administration, an agent or steward is more indispensable, nay, more important than a teacher!! The priest, who is charged with the task of catechising the pupils and giving them a religious lecture on Sunday, is the only one who occupies the whole third floor; too large and too many rooms for one single priest!! While these three great personages have the best accommodations and the largest salaries for doing so little, is it astonishing that those poor professors who devote themselves to the instruction and happiness of their unfortunate fellow beings, should have reason to complain of the smallness of their salaries? Is it astonishing that most of them, after the labor of school, look out for doing something else, and go to give private lessons in town, for the sake of increasing a little their income? They do not seek to make large fortunes by their profession, but there can be no reason why they should not seek to gain more than a bare support. They should, at least, have enough to support their families, and to educate their children.

The French Chambers, or rather the ministers of the king, are, and have ever been, very liberal towards the institution; they annually appropriate a very large sum for the support of the pupils and the salaries of the teachers; but it is not their province to look into particulars: it is the business of the committee of administration, and unhappily the members who compose it almost all belong to the aristocracy, and it does not agree with the aristocracy that the democracy should be superior or equal to it in point of emolument or honor.

But let us return to my examination of Prof. M.'s pupils. I was giving them certain words, to see whether they could intro-

duce them into correct sentences, when the monitor made his appearance. He was rather officious, and entered into conversation with me without ceremony, and kept me so busy in answering his questions that the hour for dismissing school soon arrived, and the pupils effaced what was written on their slates, so that I had no opportunity to read what they had written; nevertheless, at a subsequent visit, I ascertained that most of them had acquired great knowledge, although some of them made some very singular mistakes in composition.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

THE DEAF MAN'S SOLILOQUY.

[Our promise was that the *Annals* should contain original articles only, but we must ask the privilege of making an exception in favor of an occasional page of poetry. In this department, more than in all others, our readers doubtless would prefer *selected* excellence to *original* mediocrity. [ED. ANNALS.]

To me, while neither voice nor sound
From earth or air may come,
Deaf to the world that brawls around,
That world to me is dumb.

Yet well the quick and conscious eye
Assists the slow, dull ear,
Sight can the signs of thought supply,
And with a look I hear.

The songs of birds, the waters' fall,
Sweet tones and grating jars,
Hail, tempest, wind, and thunder—all
Are silent as the stars;

The stars that on their tranquil way,
In language without speech,
The glory of the Lord display,
And to all nations preach.

Now, though one outward sense is sealed,
The kind, remaining four,
To teach me useful knowledge, yield
Their earnest aid the more.

Yet bath my soul an inward ear,
Through which its powers rejoice.
Speak, Lord, and let me love to hear
Thy Spirit's still, small voice.

So when the archangel from the ground
Shall summon great and small,
The ear now deaf shall hear the sound,
And answer to the call.

James Montgomery.