

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE ADULT DEAF TOWARDS PURE ORALISM.

THE intelligent adult deaf favor every effort to preserve and improve natural speech. Those who have it know that it is priceless. Those who once have had it lament its loss. Those who never have had it feel their deprivation by contrast. Many among them perceive and regret that too little attention was paid to speech when they were pupils, and they rejoice at the change which is coming over all our schools in this respect. These are also the opinions of the deaf in regard to the treatment of defective hearing and to training in the art of understanding speech by sight. While, for reasons to be shown, the deaf are not given to expressing the above opinions, every one acquainted with large numbers of them knows that they do hold the same.

### THE DEAF OPPOSE PURE ORALISM.

To the deaf, pure oralism means *that method of teaching the deaf which has speech and the understanding of speech by vision as primary objects ; and endeavors to teach all the deaf to speak, and to teach them all branches of knowledge by speech ; and forbids, and by all means in its power prevents, the use of a manual alphabet and of signs.* No fact is more observable with regard to the adult deaf than that they are unitedly opposed to this theory of teaching. Not only in America, but in countries where pure oralism has full or great sway, as England, Scotland, France, Italy, Germany, and Austria, the adult deaf make this opposition known by voice, pen, and public action, often in organized bodies. Not only former pupils of schools not pure oral, but also those of pure oral schools themselves join in this opposition. In a word, it is practically the universal attitude of the adult deaf. The exceptions are individuals belonging to certain groups noted below.

### THIS OPPOSITION UNFORTUNATE.

It is certainly unfortunate that the adult deaf thus oppose a method of teaching which has gained the support of many able and enthusiastic persons. It cannot be an inspiring thought to any honest teacher to feel that his pupils will condemn his method as soon as they reach years of discretion and experience in life. Therefore ..

#### THIS OPPOSITION DESERVES NOTICE.

The opinions of the adult deaf as to what is best for deaf pupils ought not to be ignored by those who profess to be unselfishly laboring for their good. They should be taken up and considered, and only dismissed when they are found to be not well based in reason and in experience. In order to understand the opposition of the deaf to pure oralism we must know what are the

#### CAUSES OF THIS OPPOSITION.

To set forth some of these causes is the object of this paper. If the causes are found to be trivial, then the claim of the deaf to be able to judge of their own needs may be dismissed, and the problem of educating them worked out without regard to what they now or soon will think and feel about it. But if the causes are found to rest solidly in reason and experience in life, then the attitude of the deaf can by no means be for long ignored or discredited. If it has truth to back it, or a measure of truth, by just so much it will in time have due effect. Let, first, the

#### CAUSES ASSIGNED BY PURE ORALISTS

be noted. So far as appears, they are two in number. One is that the deaf are not capable of judging about their own condition and its best needs. This may be true of the deaf as pupils. It would be equally true of hearing pupils. But is it true of the adult deaf? On the contrary, does not personal acquaintance with them, as well as the work they are doing in the world, prove that they possess as good judgment in the affairs of life as other bodies of men in like circumstances? Why, then, should their judgment be reckoned of no value in this single direction? Do they not know where the troubles of life pinch them? Dismissing them with the remark that they do not is too much like giving the man with the tight boots a bland assurance that the pain is in his heel, and not, as his very soul asserts, in the infernal corn seated between his little toe and its neighbor. The second cause assigned by pure oralists is that the deaf are morbid. This was the one lately given by the principal of a pure oral school when a large number of her former pupils joined in a petition to the legislature praying for the establishment of a school which should give the deaf the freedom and advantages which they asserted lay in a combination of methods. This cause,

if true, is still more mortifying to the adult deaf and their friends. Deaf children are probably more open to this charge than hearing. The hardships that caused their deafness probably affect the clearness of their minds. But does that diseased condition continue through life and sway the minds of the educated adult deaf? Let them be judged as before, by their works. Does not the work they are doing, the positions they fill, and the infrequency of their presence in asylums of any kind,—in a word, the degree of their success in life,—prove that they have minds as sane as those of their hearing neighbors in like conditions?

It will be observed that both the causes assigned by pure oralists can stand only by disparaging and discrediting the adult deaf, including their own former pupils, as a class generally incapable and diseased. This is certainly a melancholy conclusion. But may we not escape it,—may not

lie deeper, and make their assertion consistent with capacity and sanity on the part of the adult deaf? If we enter into their lives, may we not find that their opinions, like the opinions of other people, are the inevitable outgrowth of their experiences? It is in those experiences that this article seeks to find the true causes of the opposition of the deaf to pure oralism. The experiences will be largely given in the shape of concrete examples. Every one of these examples is "taken from life." Name, date, and place can, and, if it were consistent with kindness, would in each case be given. It may be objected that an example here and there proves little. The reply is that each example is a type,—it can be duplicated over and over by the writer and by others familiar with the deaf. The first of the causes claimed as the true ones is

THE FREQUENT INADEQUACY OF MECHANICAL SPEECH.

Pure-orally taught adults are generally accompanied in society by hearing associates, whom I shall designate as familiars. From long intercourse the deaf person and the familiar understand each other's peculiarities of utterance. Sometimes the familiar is a hired companion, but oftener he is a relative or friend. The relation is similar to that which exists between a deaf person and one who knows the manual alphabet, in that they are mutually initiated.

A lady, congenitally deaf, and having received the highest

pure oral training, was at a country inn, in company with a familiar. The innkeepers were uneducated but observant. They afterwards described their impressions, one saying :

"They got along pretty well together. An' twuz wonderful! She couldn't hear, but she watched his face *cluz* when he talked, and she understood a good deal what he said. An' *she couldn't talk nuther, but she made noises with her mouth* an' he could understand 'em, tew!" It will be observed that this is testimony of the highest character, since it is honest ignorance describing merely sense-perceptions.

Again, at an evening party, a lady visiting in the town and a stranger to most of the party said to a teacher of the deaf :

"Do you know Miss ——, of my town?" The teacher said he did not, and the lady went on :

"She was born deaf. I have known her from a child. She has just finished her schooling at —— [naming one of the prominent pure oral schools], and is at home. I often meet her. She is very bright and pleasant." The teacher expressed his interest, and asked :

"How well does she speak?"

"Oh," said the lady, with a little *moue* and shrug, "I feared you would ask me that. The fact is her utterance is such that every one shrinks from speaking to her in a company, knowing that her reply will draw all eyes upon them." Here, again, the testimony is of the highest character, coming as it does from an educated person and given with the reluctance of a friend.

The effect upon the innkeepers and upon this lady gives

The effect upon the innkeepers and upon this lady gives fairly the effect upon the public of many cases of utterance by the congenitally deaf. But the point I seek to bring out by these examples is, *What is the effect on those deaf persons themselves?* Few, if any, of them can take many steps on the rugged path of life outside their schools before reaching the bitter conviction that their utterance is but a stiff imitation of human speech, unintelligible or disagreeable, or both, to most persons except their familiars. What, then, is the effect upon them? Can it be anything but disgust and discouragement with efforts to use their utterance except with familiars? Evidently not, if they are ordinarily sensitive. What will be their impulse? Inevitably they will pitch upon the pencil, a manual alphabet, or natural signs, as a more certain and less unpleasant means of communication to hearing

people, and, quite as inevitably, human desires will impel them to seek the society of others who have the same or like disabilities.

When oral graduates come to this parting of the ways, there are three things that may keep them in the straight and narrow path of pure oralism. The first is wealth. A recent practical philosopher says that a good bank account is man's best friend, and the saying has special force when it comes to the deaf. In cases like the two above, if they have money they are sure to have associates who will bear with their peculiar utterance cheerfully, and if company palls or fails they still will have the independence and entertainment that money supplies. In a suburb of Boston, last summer, a lady told me of a neighbor living in a splendid house across the way. He was just come of age, and had become deaf a year before. He relied on lip-reading and writing, knowing nothing of other means of conversation. He was handsome and bright and she knew him well. I asked if he was happy. "Oh!" she exclaimed, her face wreathed in appreciative smiles, "he is rich. He has horses; paints a little; has acquaintances in plenty; can go anywhere and do anything he pleases. Why! it makes all the difference in the world."

Again, suppose oral graduates have genius, or talent approaching it. Then, also, they will have the friends, or, failing them, the independence, higher and sweeter than that which money confers, flowing from absorption in delightful labors. They can feel with immortal Milton,—

Mid books and papers in my study pent,  
If this be exile, sweet is banishment.

Of such is Humphrey Moore, though he was never taught orally.

Lastly, when living in a large circle of relatives or friends who have enthusiastically adopted oral principles, oral graduates will be under little temptation to depart from them.

If an adult deaf person can be found preaching and practising pure oralism, he will almost surely be among one of these three groups. But how is it with the vast majority of the deaf whom no such happy lot befalls—who have neither the entertainments of wealth nor the resources of genius nor the happy immunity of a protected environment? How is it in cases like the following:

A married deaf couple were recently assaulted in a Boston

tenement by a thief, while both slept. The man bravely rose up and beat off his assailant, and by cries aroused his neighbors and the police. Next morning the Boston daily papers described the couple in staring headlines as "deaf and dumb," "deaf-mutes," and said the neighbors mistook the cries for "dogs barking in the house." The Associated Press despatches to all centres again described the couple as "deaf and dumb." Now, this couple were graduates of a pure oral school. Why, then, all this prominence of dumbness? Did they or did they not use what speech the school had conferred upon them? If they did not, then it was useless to them in a supreme moment. If they did, then it was equally useless, for it was not understood by "the intelligent reporters" nor by the police,—their uncouth utterances only conveyed the impression that they were "deaf and dumb." How long did it take this couple, after they left school, to discover that their speech was speech only to themselves and to those who bred them? What did they do then? They fell back on natural signs, and for sympathy they married one another. All these are natural inferences; they are also ascertained facts. One who has known them during and since their school days says

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“their education is very poor, and to get to an understanding with them one must be acquainted with the natural signs generally used by the pupils of that (the said pure oral) school.” Is, then, the judgment of the deaf poor when they think that all the years of time, toil, and trouble lavished in the Sisyphean effort to endow this couple with speech would have been better spent upon their mental development? And is it without reason that the deaf, finding themselves in the pass this couple were in, or seeing their friends struggling through it, fail to be convinced of the truth of the recent, complacent, sweeping dictum that “oral methods are sufficient?”

The second of what are claimed to be the true causes of the attitude of the adult deaf is

#### THE LIMITATIONS OF LIP-READING.

In an evening party of hearing persons in a metropolitan city was a lady entirely similar to the two above mentioned. She was accompanied by a familiar. The two practised pure oralism. The party was an elegant social affair, composed of the most refined and intelligent people of that city. It had nothing to do with the deaf. Now, when the familiar talked to the lady and she did not understand, he would frown, and shake



his head, and by his manner chide her while he repeated,—and the company stood by noticing it all with polite though forced composure. How did the lady feel during these episodes? If she was sensitive,—she certainly is in other respects,—was she not keenly conscious of the fact that she was importing kindergarten features into that elegant company, and thus offending the first canon of good society, which is that all shall be consonant and none *outré*?

Again, in a summer hotel was a fourth young lady entirely similar to the three above and likewise supported by a pure-oral familiar. At breakfast one of the guests told how he had collected a tin can full of black-bass bait the night before but that some miscreant had pulled off the lid during the night and all his precious bugs, beetles, and frogs had scattered over land and water. All laughed. The young lady looked inquiringly at her familiar. The latter began to tell the story to her. The whole table ceased to ply knife and fork and watched the process and waited for the effect. Soon the familiar came to the word “frog,” at which the lady stuck hopelessly. Then the familiar began the usual repetitions, frog—*frog*—FROG—FROG—*frog*—frog, and so on, *diminuendo ad crescendo, crescendo ad diminuendo*. But meantime there was no *diminuendo* in the emotions of the guests.

*Their* part, beginning in interest and sympathy, mounted successively to suspense, pity, commiseration—until at last one merciful soul could stand it no longer, and, lifting a hand at her seat across the table, *spelled* to the lady f-r-o-g—and, presto! the lady's face grew radiant with comprehension, the familiar sought refuge in subsidence and perspiration, and the whole company dropped off the tenter-hooks with sighs of relief. Now, how did this lady—she is a true lady—feel, in and after such occurrences? Let all delicate and intelligent minds give answer.

The third cause of the attitude of the adult deaf claimed to be true is that in one to them most important direction

PURE ORALISM DENIES THE DEAF CHANCES OF EMPLOYMENT.

In schools using a combination of methods some adult deaf persons have almost always been employed. They have been cooks, scullions, hostlers, gardeners, seamstresses, matrons, monitors, supervisors, and teachers of every grade. Since the establishment of collegiate instruction among them, not a few have reached the highest places in the profession, being to-day

teachers of the highest classes and principals of leading institutions. This they have done and are doing, not only with the approbation but by the choice of hearing principals and directors, who have deemed them better fitted to fill these places than any hearing persons then obtainable. Now, under pure oralism, all this must cease. It is one of the tenets of that creed that no deaf person should be employed in any school for the deaf in any capacity whatever. Pedagogy is the only one of the learned professions that is open to any considerable number of the deaf. Pure oralism would shut them out from it even more rigidly than they are shut out from medicine and law. It asks all deaf persons now employed as above to leave, and, moreover, to yield their support to a plan which shall bar out all deaf persons who might in time succeed them. Is not this asking much of the deaf? Ought not pure oralists to be able to show them most indubitable justification for such a request? Only one such showing might command success. If pure oralists could bring the deaf to see by their own experience in life that pure oralism makes the great mass of the deaf wiser, happier, and more prosperous than any other method or combination of methods, then, indeed, the deaf might fairly be called upon to vote to banish themselves and future generations of the deaf from the career of education

and all its services. The deaf by no means consider that such a showing has yet been made in this or any other land.

The fourth cause claimed as true is that

PURE ORALISM OFTEN MILITATES AGAINST HAPPINESS.

Happiness, after all, is the one end for which all mankind strives. The deaf are no exception to the rule. Happiness is the fruition of all one's tastes, desires, and faculties. Its largest factor is the enjoyment of social instincts. Under a combination of methods the adult deaf in a measure obtain it, both among the hearing and among themselves. In the intervals of daily toil they meet and enjoy social converse, wit and humor, dramas, debates, and intellectual and religious exercises of every sort. Oralists sometimes admit the value of these meetings. Said one of its prominent promoters, speaking of a certain deaf missionary among the deaf, "He is doing a good work. His efforts are helpful and his influence elevating; his lectures, too, are excellent—in fact, he is the Whitefield of the deaf." "Well," said I, "what will the deaf do for aid and comfort like this when you have abolished the sign-

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language?" "Oh," he replied, "we shall have to wait a long time for that,"—a statement in which we perfectly agreed.

But the theory of pure oralism forbids the deaf such indulgencies. After educating the deaf man, it would have him live among the hearing alone. From a scientific standpoint its position may be sound. From that point the adult deaf should not assemble, much less form social friendships, far less marry. From that point, when pure oralism has polished each deaf person to its utmost and set each in his separate niche among the hearing, there should he stay, remote from, oblivious to those whom life affects as life affects him, as an island in the Pacific to an island in the Atlantic. That is science. But is science the whole of life? Shall we allow for nothing in the human being that is not scientific? Will the mass of these deaf persons so isolated be happy? Alas! no. Evidence accumulates with every sunset that they cry out with the poet:

We are not cunning casts of clay!  
Let science say we are,—and then?  
What matters science unto *men*?

The deaf do look at their case from the cool pinnacles of science, but they insist, also, on viewing it from the warm precincts of religion, humanity, and love. More than five hun-

dred graduates of pure oral schools met in Berlin last summer, and held exercises in the sign-language,—this in Germany, a country that has done all that bureaucracy and autocracy can do to stamp out that language.

“Alas!” sighs an American pure-oral graduate, “we are mongrels, fitted to enjoy freely neither the society of the hearing nor that of the deaf.” Another, one of the brightest of her class, says, “However intelligent, well educated, and deserving the pure-oral graduate may be, and no matter how good a conversationalist and lip-reader, hearing people in general will hold aloof from him.” This she sets down to prejudice, whereas it is due to the same cause as the indisposition of those persons to converse by writing; they have learned that oral converse with the deaf is, like writing, a more or less limited and laborious process, and, moreover, involves, as writing does not, the element of uncertainty. Of this fact my note-book supplies many instances. The president of a university said of a congenitally deaf lip-reader, “I know she is an estimable person, but I shrink from meeting her in a company, because I am uncertain whether she understands me and am certain that I do not understand her.”

It may be asked, would a training involving a combination of methods help the deaf in such cases? Infinitely, often. Last spring I was with a young lady who was well acquainted with the manual alphabet. We were in a large open car going to a lawn party that involved nearly two hours' sitting, and were closely girt by other persons invited to the same house. At first I read her lips by littles and in littles, but gradually we fell into real conversation, she spelling and I speaking. We talked of everything,—books, politics, poetry, the scenery, our fellow-travellers, the coming party, and—ourselves. I had a capital time. If the young lady did not, she is capable of admirable deception. Had I been—instead of an ordinary one—the best lip-reader that ever lived, I could not have had, under like conditions, a conversation so perfect in range, freedom, spontaneity. It is simply a physical impossibility.

Again: last summer, at a seaside hotel was a young semi-mute with a hearing wife. He was sociable, and took part in much of the *gayety* about the place. His wife spoke to him habitually, but if he failed to “catch on” she instantly *spelled* the word that tripped him, and both were up and away at once. They were not conspicuous, and therefore not offensive. *That* was the combination of methods in real life.

Within a month, in an evening party at which I was the only deaf person, a gentleman and a lady among the guests came to me at different times of their own motion. One was a stranger. Both made the same remark—that they had noticed the celerity and ease with which my wife spelled to me; and they went on to compare it with the lack of those characteristics in the efforts of pure oralists to communicate which they had witnessed in society. One of them further described those efforts as “painful.”

#### CONCLUSION.

The deaf believe in all wise efforts to preserve and improve natural speech and impaired hearing, and in training in the art of understanding speech by sight. They would in very many instances appear in support of this belief were they not placed on the defensive as against claims of pure oralists which they think aggressive in spirit, idealistic rather than practical, and not supported by their results, viewed broadly and apart from special cases. The deaf do not believe in long-continued efforts to endow the deaf-born with mechanical speech, except in rare instances. They believe that pure manualism is like a log, clogging many. They believe that pure oralism is like a bicycle—a very elaborate machine, highly praised by its makers, but quite unfit for rough roads, and extremely liable to have its tires punctured and otherwise to get out of order in seventy-seven different ways. They believe that a manually taught deaf man is all the better off if he has any modicum of speech. They believe that a pure-orally taught deaf man, even if he reads the lips like a prescient angel, is better off for knowing the manual alphabet. They believe that perhaps all the deaf, and certainly the vast majority of them, receive untold aid and comfort through the sign-language. They believe that three stout strings to the bow are better than one. They, in short, believe in a combination of methods.

Finally, in giving reasons for the faith that is in them, the deaf rest in part upon theories of pedagogics, but more upon what they have encountered and have seen their deaf friends encounter in the storm and stress of life.

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