

## THE STATE OF DEAF MUTE EDUCATION IN AMERICA

BY GEORGE W. VEDITZ, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO.

The optimist will find it a very pleasant task to review the condition of deaf-mute education in America, and, aside from partisan proclivities, the pessimist, like Othello, would find his occupation gone, were he to essay a similar undertaking. By "partisan proclivities" I refer to the two rival camps into which the profession of educating the deaf has split in this country; the pure oralists, to whom, as to Goethe's Faust, *la Parole* is the first manifestation of the creative quintessence, and the combattant for the combined system, whose watchword is "the greatest good to the greatest number."

I must confess that I am not free from these "partisan proclivities" myself, otherwise I would not be an American; but my task is not to review the merits of rival methods, but rather the condition and results of deaf-mute education itself.

Referring to the last tabular statement of American schools for the deaf, published in the January, 1893, issue of the *Annals*, we find that the total number of deaf mute schools in this country and Canada is eighty-seven, eighty being in the United States. Of those in the United States, sixty-two are public schools, that is are supported by the respective States and Territories in which they are located. The remaining eighteen are classed as denominational and private schools.

The amount appropriated for the public schools during the last fiscal year ranged from \$110,829 received by the New York Institution, and \$550 appropriated for the Wasau, Wisconsin, Day School, and aggregated, for fifty-one schools from which returns were received, \$1,564,688. The amount received by each school is of course proportionate to its size and the wealth of the State, all the States being generally quite liberal in the support accorded. The denominational and private schools depend upon tuition fees and voluntary contributions, and their revenue is therefore a variable quantity.

The value of the real estate owned by the fifty-two schools aggregated, in round numbers, \$10,430,000, Pennsylvania, the wealthiest, being credited with a round million, and ten others owning between \$350,000 and \$750,000 each. These figures will serve to demonstrate that our American commonwealths are not governed by a niggardly policy in the support of their special schools, but provide comfortable and adequate buildings, grounds and other facilities.

The total number of pupils under instruction during the school year was 9,264; 8,865 in the public and 399 in the private and denominational schools. The number attending Canadian schools was 780, giving a total for eighty-seven schools of 10,044. These pupils, besides being taken through a course of study that fitted graduates for admission to the National Deaf-Mute College also received instruction in various mechanical occupations, the chief trades

taught being printing, shoemaking, carpentry, cabinet making and tailoring. Thirty-eight other industries are included in the list, so that in a great majority of the schools the range of choice is so great that each pupil can be taught the trade for which he is best fitted by inclination and natural capacity. The value of these mechanical departments is demonstrated by the fact that by far the larger number of adult deaf receive good wages and make a comparatively comfortable living at skilled handicrafts, and that there are very few who are non-supporting and have become a burden in the community.

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, there are two great and widely distinct methods of instruction in vogue—the combined system and the pure oral method. To these should be added the manual method and the manual alphabet method. The number of schools in which the manual method is observed is seven, and the number of pupils taught seventy-two. Most of these schools, as may be guessed from the small number of pupils taught, are day schools or private and denominational schools. The sign language, the manual alphabet, and writing are the chief means used in instruction. Articulation and lip-reading have no place on the programme, either as a means or an end.

The manual method is employed in but two schools, the Western New York (where it originated) and the Notre Dame school, at Cincinnati, Ohio; 152 pupils receiving instruction in the former and eight in the latter. As may be inferred from the name of the method, the manual alphabet is made the principal medium of instruction, though speech and speech-reading are given great importance, all the pupils receiving training in these branches.

The oral method will need no definition. Its tenets and purposes are too well known to require mention. The sign language is rigorously banned with candle, book and bell, and wherever its cloven foot dares to show itself, exorcism more or less severe is called into service. This is what the leading schools following the method profess, but nevertheless the strange fact remains that on leaving school their graduates are generally a great deal more proficient in the use of gestures than in that of their speech apparatus.

Twenty schools follow this method, and of the eighteen denominational and private schools, eleven are found in its ranks. Seven hundred and seventy-six pupils received instruction on the 15th of November, 1892. Trades and mechanical occupations were taught in but eight of these schools.

We now come to the great, distinctly American system of instruction in vogue both in this country and Canada—the combined system. The great motto of this system is "the greatest good to the greatest number," and its great beauty is that it can and does adjust itself to all sorts and conditions of mental capacities, from the poor child verging close on imbecility to spirits burning with celestial fire. It recognizes the value and importance of speech and lip reading and gives them a due place on its programme, but it does not bow the head and bend the knee in fanatic devotion to its claims. The manual method is accorded equal rank and recognition, the sign language flourishing like a green bay tree, and out of school hours pupils can indulge themselves in its use without restriction, and without dread of a warning "don't."

This system obtains in fifty-eight of the eighty-seven American schools.

The number of pupils in attendance November 15th, 1892, was 7,620. Of these pupils 3,238 were taught speech and speech reading, and 908 were taught wholly by the oral method. I have no doubt that by far the great majority of the deaf men and women present at this Congress owe allegiance and filial gratitude to this system.

Seven hundred and six teachers are employed in the eighty schools in the United States, and seventy-five in Canada. Of these 781 teachers, 479 are women and 302 men. The articulation teachers number 324. It is a significant fact that by far the greater number of these articulation teachers are women. The deaf teachers number 181, or about 23 per cent. of the whole. If the articulation schools are left out, where their employment is necessarily out of the question, the percentage is increased to 27. If all articulation teachers are left out of the computation, the proportion is 39 per cent., or a little less than two deaf to three hearing teachers. I believe that, so far as numbers go, deaf teachers are steadily holding their own, notwithstanding the fact that a prejudice is cropping out against them in unexpected quarters, as instanced by the very original report and recommendations of the Honorable William Rhinelander Stewart, advocating the removal of all deaf teachers employed in the New York schools, some time last spring. But such statements coming from such sources, and so utterly ridiculous and unsubstantiated by evidence, are calculated rather to strengthen than undermine the cause of really deserving and capable deaf teachers, and they can easily afford to serenely ignore such attacks.

I believe that notwithstanding the encroachments made by articulation and pure oralism, the proportion of deaf to hearing teachers is very likely to remain about the same. Even before the introduction of articulation into this country the ratio was never more than one to two. I doubt that it will ever become greater, nor would a consistent adherent of the combined system desire such an increase.

I am not prepared to discuss in detail the question of salaries. In many schools there is a marked discrepancy between the pay received by deaf and that received by hearing teachers. In others no such difference exists, deaf teachers getting even better compensation than their hearing colleagues, as I think is the case in Ohio and Minnesota. Where there is discrimination, the removal rests with the teachers themselves. It is my candid opinion that truly capable, efficient and deserving teachers who do not hide their light under a bushel, rarely have reason to complain of the salaries they receive, for the heads of our schools are quick to recognize their value, and do not hesitate to offer them sufficient inducements to stay.

Referring again to the question of methods, it may be said that the pure oral is distinctively aggressive, and the combined system on the defensive. The former is demanding and the latter making concessions, but it cannot be said that in thus giving greater prominence to speech and lip-reading, the combined system has lost any of its distinctive features nor have any proselytes been made among the schools in which for the last quarter of a century it has been followed. The decision whether one method or the other is to be ob-

served rests with the superintendent and governing board of each school, but if the question were left to the deaf themselves to decide, there is little doubt as to what the result would be. The petition presented last year to the Kaiser by eight hundred of the most prominent deaf mutes of Germany is a significant pointer in this matter.

Summing up, I believe I may say without fear of contradiction, that notwithstanding the divergent and conflicting views held by the advocates of differing methods, the state of deaf-mute education in America is such that in this, as in so many other matters, we lead the world. With flourishing and well conducted schools, no matter what the method, in every State; with liberal financial support and endowment in land and buildings; with compulsory education laws; with earnest and progressive teachers; with finely equipped industrial departments; with an attendance outranking that of any other country; with the only collegiate institution for the deaf in the world; and lastly, with the preponderance of the best method, and the prevalence of that priceless heritage of the deaf, of that medium through which this Congress is holding its proceedings—the language of signs—the result could not be otherwise.

The Chair: The paper that follows will be read by M. Gaillard for the author, who is not present.

French Committee of Participation in the International Congress of Deaf Mutes in Chicago.