

Mr. Weeks followed with a paper on "The Purity of the Sign Language," which he delivered in signs.

THE PURITY OF THE SIGN LANGUAGE.

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The history of the progress and development of the sign language is the history of all languages. The farther they go from the original source, the more they lose in their original purity and strength. The English of to-day, while more practical and more universal than the English of Bunyan and Shakespeare, has lost much of its natural strength. The sign language, granting even all that may be said of its imperfections, is the grandest means yet devised for rapidity and clearness of communication with the deaf. But there are a few thoughts upon this subject to which I ask your attention.

1st. *Signing must be clear.* Everything else may be pardoned, but if signing is not plain, it loses its distinctive function as an instrument of thought. There are many other qualities necessary to the communication of clear and definite ideas, but this one of perspicuity stands at the head. It should be presented in all its original clearness, and its historical identity be preserved.

2d. *Vivacity.* Signs, even if perspicuous, will fail of making a permanent impression unless they are presented with some degree of vivacity. Energy in sign-making is just as desirable as energy in written composition, or in the delivery of an oral speech. Indifference diminishes the force of speech and makes its rendering dull and uninteresting.

3d. *The third point is Purity.* We must hold fast to the original purity and strength of our signs. There is a tendency to invent new signs, some of which mean nothing. Many of the good old signs have been chopped and clipped so that they have lost much of their original force. Loose signs coupled with mechanical signs take their place. Their identity is hardly perceptible, and as much of their force has been curtailed by cramping, they appear at a distance nearly as motionless as a

to acknowledge Mr. Weeks as a professor of the sign-language. Rut it was permitted for a pupil to sometimes disagree with his teacher. He disagreed with Mr. Weeks on one point. He did not believe, as Mr. Weeks did, that the sign-language had degenerated. We had plenty of examples to the contrary in the Convention.

Mr. Fairman, Mass., spoke a few words in eulogy of Laurent Clerc as a master of the sign-language.

But the climax of the discussion was attained when Mr. W. G. Jones, N. Y., took the floor in defence of the sign-language of to-day. Mr. Jones has a national reputation as a sign-maker. For ten or fifteen minutes he kept the Convention convulsed with laughter by means of his inimitable gestures. Yet he, all the while, managed to present some powerful arguments to the effect that the sign-language had *not* degenerated. When Mr. Jones had finished, all felt that no more remained to be said.