

ADDRESS
DELIVERED AT WASHINGTON HALL,

IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,

ON THE 30th MAY, 1826,

AS INTRODUCTORY TO THE EXERCISES OF THE PUPILS OF THE

New-York Institution

FOR THE

INSTRUCTION

OF THE

DEAF AND DUMB,

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE

Exercises, and Notes and Documents,

IN RELATION TO THE SUBJECT.

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BY SAMUEL AKERLY, M. D.

PHYSICIAN AND SECRETARY TO THE INSTITUTION,

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PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE DIRECTORS,

For the Benefit of the Institution.

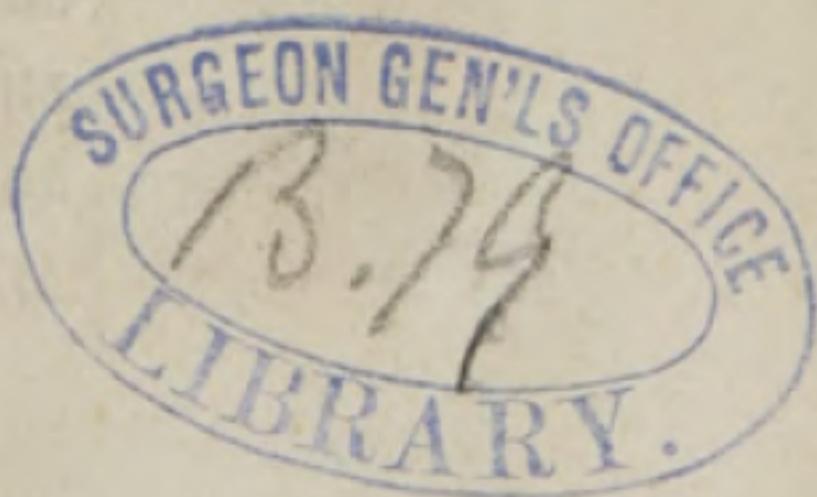
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would be glad of the opportunity thus offered, and the Directors take this occasion to mention the proposition, that others of the United States about establishing schools, may profit by the information.

There are five distinct grades or series of signs employed to instruct Deaf Mutes in the school of this city.

1. The first series consists of the manual signs, or signs for letters, being the single-handed alphabet of De L'Epee and Sicard. Words are spelled by using these manual signs, either with the right or left hand.*

2. The second embraces the greatest number of signs, being those which represent words. Words either spoken or written are employed by us to express our ideas, hence the speaker or writer must first be supplied with a stock of words for that purpose: so with the Deaf and Dumb. Their minds are stored with words, and a knowledge of their signification, by the representation of objects, and definitions by signs; and these signs are afterwards combined and used to express their ideas. Verbal signs, however, are sometimes arbitrary and indefinite, or contractions of sign-definition, and cannot alone be depended upon. If it should be attempted to teach Deaf Mutes by these alone, the attempt would fail, as did the predecessor of Sicard, the worthy Abbe de L'Epee. He however made very considerable progress in the art of instructing Mutes, and must be considered as the first inventor of the art. His principal error consisted in adopting arbitrary verbal signs, instead of defining words by pantomimic or gestural definition.†

3. There is a third series, which is denominated (a series of) comprehensive signs, or signs for ideas. These relate either to words or sentences. If the idea contained in a word is complex, or requires a long definition, the teacher gives that definition by signs, and if necessary, adds examples in illustration. When the definition is understood, or

* See Note C, or Deaf and Dumb Alphabet.

† Sicard, after giving examples of the errors of his predecessor, makes the following remarks in his Theory of Signs, (vol. I p. 37, Introduction.)

"En général, les autres signes des mot exprimant les opération de l'intelligence n'etoient pas plus heureux; aussi l'inventeur, qui ne pouvoit se le dissimuler, les faisoit il toujours précéder de la lettre initiale du mot. C'est ainsi qu'il se flattoit de réparer, d'une manière mècanique, ce qu'avoit toujour de défectueux le signe qu'il donnoit à l'idée, lequel ne pouvoit jamais être un signe convenu."

"In general, the other signs for words expressing the operations of the mind were not more happy, as the inventor (De L'Epee, who does not dissemble,) always made them by the initial letter of the word preceding the sign. It was thus he flattered himself that he would repair in a mechanical manner, the defects of the sign which he had given to the idea, and which could never be a conventional one."

the idea contained in the word is comprehended by the pupil, the teacher adopts a single definite sign for the word. If the word relates to a sensible object, that object is described by gestures, and then a part of the description or a single gesture is employed to denote the word.

The ideas contained in a sentence in like manner, must first be explained to Deaf Mutes by pantomime, before they can understand the arrangement of words, which with us is artificial, and not always in the order that the ideas arise in the mind.

4. The fourth series is employed for numbers. The Abbe Sicard used the manual signs, after the manner of the Roman letters for numerals. This method is defective and embarrassing in the expression of high numbers. A method has been adopted in this Institution, the invention of the first teacher* of the Deaf and Dumb in New-York, and is an improvement of the system of signs for numbers. It is simple and easily acquired by the pupils, and any amount can be expressed by it, from unit to hundreds of millions.†

5. The fifth series embraces the grammatical signs, including those used for the expression of the moods and tenses of verbs. The signs employed to express the different parts of speech, as explained in Sicard's Theory of Signs,‡ are used in this Institution. But the signs for the moods and tenses of verbs in English, must necessarily, in some degree, differ from those of the great master, (Sicard) on account of the difference between the construction of our language and that of the French.

These several varieties of signs will be best understood by examples which will be given by the teacher and pupils, in the exercises of the evening.

Until within a few years, the Deaf Mutes of this country have been outcasts in society, and with the best efforts of the friends of humanity, only a small number of them have as yet been raised from darkness, ignorance and barbarism. Schools, however, for these children of misfortune are increasing, and it is hoped that public bodies and the community at large, will encourage the efforts of all those who are engaged in their instruction. The extent of the United States, renders it necessary that many other schools should be established, as those already in operation, cannot instruct a fifth part of them.

* A. O. Stansbury. † See Note D, where it is explained.

‡ Vol. 2. p. 559—and in the grammatical process explained in his Course of Instruction for a Deaf Mute.

Objections have been raised as to the propriety of giving them instruction, but the objections are made in such vague and general terms, as to be applicable to other children as well as to Deaf Mutes. The argument therefore requires no answer, since no one in this country doubts the propriety of instructing the rising generation. The Deaf and Dumb are a part of the human family; they labour under deprivations brought upon them without their own agency, most generally in the period of childhood; and they are peculiarly entitled to the sympathy of the community. If the means to raise them to the state of human understanding have heretofore been concealed, the veil is now withdrawn, and through the goodness of the Supreme Being, methods have been pointed out to compensate them in a great measure, for the privations they have suffered in the loss of hearing. They require, however, aid and assistance from those to whom the Deity has been more kind, and who enjoy their senses in perfection.

It has been said that they can work and be made useful to themselves and to society, without instruction. This is true only in a very limited sense; and if it were unexceptionably true, they would be no better, or in no higher grade of condition, than brute animals. Many look upon them in this light; and it is a fact, that Deaf Mutes are generally considered as a heavy affliction to their parents, and a great burthen to themselves and to society. But to parents who have mute children the prospect now brightens, and the establishment of schools to give instruction, promises relief. Instead of finding them the depressed beings they have heretofore been, we shall see that instruction opens their eyes to a new world, expands their ideas, elicits intelligence before unknown, and makes them a useful part of the human race, without degradation.

Objections have been raised to the establishment of schools for the Deaf and Dumb, on the presumption that they were few in number, and that the expense incurred was out of proportion to the benefits received by them. It has been estimated that they exist in the ratio of one in every 2000 of the population, and consequently, as the United States contains over ten millions of inhabitants, there will be more than 5000 Deaf and Dumb in the country. A teacher cannot instruct so many as in schools where children hear, and there are difficulties and peculiarities not attendant upon ordinary instruction. The art is yet in its infancy, but when it has been known and practised for some centuries, perhaps there will be such improvements as may reduce it to the facility and cheapness of the Lancasterian schools.

NOTE C.

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Deaf and Dumb Alphabet.**A a****B b****C c****D d****E e****F f****G g****H h****I i****J j****K k****L l****M m****N n****O o****D**

P p**Q q****R r****S s****T t****U u****V v****W w****X x****Y y****Z z**

&



*Monosyllables of three letters, represented by sensible Objects,
used in the commencement of Instruction.*

