

## COMMUNICATIONS.

## EMPLOYMENT FOR SHORTHAND WRITERS.

To the Editor of the *Cosmopolitan Shorthand Writer*.

DEAR SIR,—Your publication for October has just reached me, and I wish to make a few remarks with regard to some of the statements contained therein. You copy an article from the *Napanee Express*, written by a stenographer who was present at the recent Shorthand Convention in Toronto, in which it is said: "During the convention the subject of shorthand in schools was touched upon. There was considerable diversity of opinion, but the majority decided that it would be a much needed reform. It was clearly shown that with shorthand at least one-third of the time of a school course would be saved, and this itself is a great point in favor of the introduction of shorthand into schools."

Now, sir, I was present at that convention, and I deny that the majority of those present who heard the discussion decided that "it" (meaning the teaching of shorthand in the schools) would be a much needed reform. Nor did they decide that the teaching of shorthand in the public schools is a much needed reform. Nor was it decided by a majority of those present that the teaching of shorthand in the public schools would be a reform at all. It may have been clearly shown to the writer of the article in question that "with shorthand at least one-third of the time of a school course would be saved," but I can assure you there were others present who still doubt that such an amount of time can be saved to the pupil in the public school who is there taught shorthand.

It seems to me that this shorthand "boom" will share the fate of the "boom" in Northwest town lots. Already you are beginning to feel that you have "boomed" shorthand matters so strongly that some amanuenses are taking pupils, and to that extent at least spoiling your business. And so it will be all the way through. I don't deny that my object in writing thus to you is a selfish one. Self-preservation, etc., you know. Yet my motive is one that all shorthand writers who are earning their salt at the business will appreciate, and I don't think many of them will condemn it. I believe in the greatest good for the greatest number—that you can secure good for. But it is possible to overdo a good thing until it becomes of no value to anyone, and that will be the result of shorthand as a business if the present "boom" is kept up. In the Chicago Sunday *Tribune*, of October 22, I find advertisements calling for shorthand writers to the number of four, and advertisements by shorthand writers seeking situations to the number of eight, six of whom profess to be good typewriter operators. One man has the unmitigated cheek to advertise for a "newspaper steno-

graphic reporter" at a salary of \$12 per week. I leave your readers to draw their own inferences. In the meantime, I am,

Yours truly,

FRED. W. WODELL.

Hamilton, Ont.

[NOTE.—There was no formal decision of the question so ably discussed in the Convention by Mr. Wodell *against*, and Mr. Huston *for* the introduction of Phonography in the Schools. The majority of others who participated—if not all—opposed Mr. Wodell. If the question had been put to vote, we imagine the majority would have voted *yea*; but this is simply conjecture, biased, perhaps, by our own belief in the advisability and feasibility of making Phonography a school study. Now Mr. Wodell reiterates the argument, elaborated in his essay, as to the "abuse" of Phonography. It should be borne in mind that there is an important difference between the *personal* and the *professional* use of Phonography. It is recommended as a school study because of its value in mental discipline, and for its use to the pupils as a time and labor saver. A very small proportion of these would ever become stenographers, or even "shorthanders." Over 160,000 copies of Pitman's "Teacher" have been sold, while the text-books of other systems have been distributed to more than double that number; but where are the 500,000 shorthand writers? They are not all dead, truly; but they are certainly not all "live." If, therefore, a very small proportion of present and past pupils have made it their means of livelihood, it is reasonable to suppose that a similar proportion of pupils, studying for other professions, will do so, especially if the shorthand business goes on degrading at the rapid rate indicated by our correspondent. But, let come the worst—or, as we consider it, the best—and granting that there would be scores of reliable shorthanders where now there is but one, would not the problem be solved by the eternal principle of the "survival of the fittest"? The possession of first-class facility in this art-science argues a wide range of knowledge, and a mental training fitted for other professions. As the profession develops, the lines will be drawn more strictly, and while the weakest will go to the wall, if crowded, the strongest will come to the front. If, being there, they are not satisfied with the stipend, it should not be a great effort to find more lucrative employment in another profession. Even an unskilled employer can soon detect slop-work, and as the demand for shorthand grows, and the number of practitioners increases, employers will be at once more critical and more appreciative. This subject is important, and if there are two sides to it let us hear them. As to our "boom" proving a "boomerang," if we suffer by it it will be because of modesty in urging our claims; but we shall have this consolation, that if we be guillotined on the machine of our own construction we shall die in the interests of science, if not for the