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(For the COSMOPOLITAN SHORTHAND WRITER.)

HOW I BECAME A PHONOGRAPHIC REPORTER.

BY JON SKOT.

Twenty-five years ago, when I was a young man, I became influenced by an intense desire to learn the art of verbatim reporting. The mystic characters of shorthand excited and stimulated my curiosity. That, by means of these cabalistic and perplexing signs, thought could be transmitted to paper as fast as the speaker uttered it in words, was astonishing. I was fascinated by the mysterious art, and resolved to discover the secret of the adroit and rapid manipulation which achieved such wonderful results.

Upon inquiring I found that very few people, even among those of superior education, knew anything about shorthand except that it was extremely difficult to learn, requiring years of patient labor before the student of the art could report a speech verbatim. It was also intimated to me that it was a much more difficult task to read shorthand than it was to write it. That this should be the case appeared very singular. Experience, however, verified the observation; although, so far as Phonography is concerned, I discovered, in time, that the cause of embarrassment in deciphering it is not so much in the art itself as in the excessive use of arbitrary abbreviations, and because of its being badly written.

Investigation disclosed the fact that there were several systems of shorthand, each of which claimed for itself the distinction of being the best. A method of "writing by sound," termed "Phonography," had, a few years previous to the time of which I write, been invented by Mr. Isaac Pitman, of Bath, England. As a system of shorthand it had proved superior to all that had preceded it. Instead of taking as its basis the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet

and representing each by an arbitrary sign, it took the forty-two elementary sounds of the language, and represented these by straight lines, curves, and dots, which bore such a relation to each other, and to the elementary sounds, that by the principle of association of ideas they were comparatively easy of acquisition. This art of Phonography was based upon the underlying science of Phonics, and thus had a philosophical foundation. Each of the signs of its alphabet represented but one sound, consequently the word "though," instead of being spelled with six letters, was spelled with but two, as there are but two sounds to be represented. I made up my mind to study Phonography, and as I determined to master the art, I procured such instruction books as were to be obtained at the time, and such as were afterwards published. These I carefully studied, and by doing so I found that while the basic principles of Phonography remained about the same as when first invented, the art, in practice, was greatly modified, changed, and even confused, by the introduction from time to time, of "improvements," many of which were mere individual conceits. Through adopting these innovations I had to unlearn many things which I had learned; my progress in speed and accuracy was retarded; and I had, at last, to rely upon the results of my own experience in actual reporting, and upon the experience of thorough practical reporters with whom I became acquainted. In order that others may be spared the delay, perplexity and drudgery which I endured in becoming a phonographic reporter, I give here the results of my experience in testing the merits of the various "systems" of Phonography.