

would be churlish, and that, I think, is not the character of our profession. It is not unreasonable that such help should be sought by those who need it; but let me say, as emphatically as I can, that it should be sought at the right time, and not when the reporter is actually engaged in note-taking. Nothing is more annoying or irritating than to be interrupted, when you are following perhaps a difficult speaker, by a reporter at your elbow who has not caught a word or phrase, and who perpetually turns round and asks you what it is, just as you are straining your ear and your pen to catch the last words of a long and complicated sentence. This is not only a breach of good manners, it is a positive injury, and should not be permitted at the reporters' table. It is sometimes committed by those who have no deafness to plead as an excuse, and then it is simply intolerable. If there is a pause during which a question can be asked, as for instance during cheers, or quite at the end of a speech, there can be no objection to the enquiry, but any interruption during the act of writing is unpardonable. I have no doubt it arises from a want of consideration, the reporter, it may be, forgetting that although he does not want a verbatim report himself, the friend whom he is interrupting does. Some reporters are so well-known to be addicted to this objectionable habit, that those who have suffered from it make a point of not sitting near them if they can avoid it. I have more than once sat between two offenders of the class I have mentioned, and have regarded it as a kind of purgatorial discipline for one's sins, which ought, in justice, to secure one a good deal of future exemption. I have very rarely been troubled with deafness, but once or twice my hearing has been slightly affected after taking cold. The discomfort of such a state is always great, but the annoyance it produces when note-taking is extreme. There is a constant strain to catch what ordinarily falls on the ear, and a dread of losing an important word or phrase which cannot well be supplied. Sometimes one ear alone is affected, and in such case the reporter naturally selects a seat where the other ear will be chiefly employed, and will take care to be as near the speaker as possible. I was once seriously recommended, when going to a very draughty cathedral to take notes of a sermon, to put some wool in my ears as a protection. I did not try the experiment, concluding that the wool would be an obstacle to the sound. I have heard it stated that those who use wool in this way hear all the better for it, but I confess a little incredulity on that point.

No one who suffers habitually from deafness should think of following reporting as a profession. But it often happens that the deafness comes in after the choice has been made, and when it is not easy to make a change of occupation. In such case one can hardly recommend the reporter to abandon a profession in which he has perhaps been successful and is earning a good income, and begin the world afresh. But, of course, where the deafness is serious and

obstinate, reporting is absolutely out of the question. For verbatim work especially the hearing should be perfect. It is often difficult to hear a fairly good speaker, but where the tone is low and the recollection imperfect, the effort to catch the words is painful even to a quick ear, and to one only slightly deaf is an impossibility.

The mistakes made by deaf persons in ordinary conversations are sometimes very serious, and often absurd. A tailor who was rather fond of pushing himself into good society, once went up familiarly to an officer, one of his customers, who was a little deaf, and claimed acquaintance. The officer, who had been talking to some friends, did not recognize him, and asked his name. "I made your breeches," whispered the tailor. "Gentlemen," said the officer, turning to his friends, "let me introduce you to a fellow soldier, Major Breeches!" I have known as ridiculous mistakes made by reporters, owing to their defective hearing, to the imperfect utterances of the speaker, or to the extreme similarity in sound of certain words and phrases which have very different meanings. These last can hardly be called cases of mis-hearing, because the acutest ear might not be able to distinguish the exact sound intended unless the speaker were unusually precise. I have in my own practice, been doubtful whether a speaker said "alone" or "a loan." Indeed I remember a case of a witness who was asked to explain which of the two he meant, as either would have been intelligible, and neither judge nor jury understood which was intended.

I once heard a speaker, as I thought, use the phrase "timber of memmel," which was utter nonsense, and I had to puzzle a long time before I could even guess what the words actually were. A sudden inspiration suggested the "Temple of Mammon," and as these words made the sentence perfectly intelligible I adopted them. On another occasion I wrote "over-tax," which nearly over-taxed my power of comprehension. I had obviously mis-heard the word, and a careful study of the context showed that "overt acts" were probably the words that were uttered. But the most curious case of mis-hearing I have ever met with in my own practice occurred to me not many years ago. A speaker who was not very accurate in his pronunciation, was reciting some lines of his own composition, in which occurred the words as I heard them:

"Watching from the Roman Eye."

I knew, of course, that I was wrong, but adopting the plan I always follow of writing down exactly the words as they reach the ear, however absurd they may be, I wrote in my note book "Watching from the Roman Eye." These were obviously not the words of the petty orator. Instead of pouring over them and trying to solve the almost inscrutable problem which they presented, I asked the speaker to lend me the manuscript from which he had been reading; and there, to my intense amusement, I discovered that the words were

"Watching from their home on high!"