

THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF AND DUMB.

AN OUTLINE.

HISTORY informs us that it was a universal belief in the early ages that the deaf and dumb were "incapable of receiving education"; and, that this belief was supported by philosophical teaching, especially by the dictum of Aristotle "that of all the senses, hearing contributes the most to intelligence and knowledge." There is no doubt that we are to infer from the above quoted phrase that there were no known means by which the deaf could be educated, and not that their mental capacity was such as not to admit of their receiving instruction, for, deaf-mutes in those times must have given evidence that they were rational beings, as the uneducated deaf-mutes continually do at the present day; but, how the teaching of Aristotle referred to is sufficient proof to substantiate either supposition is not evident. This false notion of the mental capacity of the deaf must necessarily have resulted from a wrong conception of their psychical condition. Indeed, in our own times, very peculiar ideas exist among those who are not intimately acquainted with those unfortunates, regarding their state, and the difficulties of mental development consequent upon their affliction.

Deafness has often been likened to blindness, but, neither in their nature, nor in the results that follow from them are they similar. Blindness is an affliction of a physical nature, for the most part; it does not effect the main channel by which

knowledge is conveyed to the mind. Deafness may be said to be deplored entirely on account of the isolated condition into which it throws the intellectual faculties. Deafness is either congenital or adventitious. Under the first may be included not only those who were born deaf, but also those who have lost their hearing at such an early age that they never acquired a knowledge of language. Hence this class of the deaf know nothing—they apprehend objects and actions, but they have no language by means of which they could associate these objects and actions with the idea produced, and, moreover, for the same reason, they are unable to receive ideas. The adventitiously deaf, or those who have lost their hearing after having acquired language, are not to be compared with the congenital deaf in the matter of intellectual development.

Taking into consideration that the philosophical teaching of early pagan philosophers, among whom we may instance: Plato, was: a perfect society; deformed and afflicted children should be destroyed, it is easy to conceive the unfavorable manner in which the deaf were looked upon; and, taking this into account is it not reasonable to suppose that in the early ages referred to, no earnest endeavor was made to educate them; that the impossibility of doing so was a rash assumption; and, that they were consequently looked upon as imbeciles and treated as such?