

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE SCIENCE OF RAPID WRITING.

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SHORTHAND is not a modern invention. —It has been in use in England three hundred years, and two hundred systems have been published in that country alone during that period. In the olden methods the spelling of words was represented by a set of symbols for letters, but such a plan was insufficient for reporting purposes.

About thirty-five years ago, a great impetus was given to the study of shorthand by the invention of a system of phonography by Isaac Pitman of Bath, England. It consists of an alphabet composed of the simplest geometrical signs, which accurately represent the sound of spoken words, easy to write and legible to read. Less than a hundred years ago, it is said that an apprenticeship of seven years was required before a shorthand student was deemed qualified to report a speaker. To-day phonography has been brought to such a state of perfection that its principles can be learned in a few hours; and an hour's daily practice for a few months will enable any one of ordinary ability to apply his knowledge of the useful art in his correspondence, and if he truly loves the study he will soon be seen in the church or lecture room with note-book and pencil trying to report the speaker. But his first "takes" in public will not be as perfect as he anticipated. Rapidity in writing can only be attained by long and continued practice after the learner has acquired a knowledge of the highest brevity of the art.

"Where little marks comprise
Whole words—a sentence in a letter lies."

Benn Pitman, a brother of Isaac Pitman, the founder of phonography in England, came to this country 1850, and, desiring to introduce his own and his brother's works, in a few years published upwards of thirty works of phonography. None but stenographers of skill and established reputation are engaged to report important law cases or speeches by eminent speakers. The great trial of Benjamin Hunter for murdering Armstrong in Camden, a few years since, was reported by R. A. West, one of the ablest stenographers in the country. Benn Pitman, on arriving in this country from England, settled in Cincinnati, and was engaged in some of the leading law cases, such as the trial of the Lincoln assassins.

Of all the numerous systems in use at the present day, Pitman's, for easiness and beauty, is undoubtedly the best, and every practitioner of his system will say, I think, that Pitman's phonography is used by three-fourths of the shorthand reporters in the United States.

One of the first obstacles—and to some a very formidable one—to be overcome by the student in his arduous task to become famous in the profession, is to learn to decipher his notes with accuracy and facility. The wife of Benn Pitman was almost as expert a shorthand writer as her husband,

and was peculiarly apt in deciphering her husband's notes. When taken in a great hurry he could hardly decipher his characters; she always read them as easily as ordinary print.

A phonographer named Gales, who reported the great speech by Daniel Webster, in reply to Hayne, could not decipher his own shorthand after an interval of a few days. It frequently occurred that when he could not read his notes, Mrs. Gales could, and to her all honor is due for the preservation of Webster's memorable oration. It is said that the statesman rewarded Mrs. Gales with a thousand dollars as a Christmas present.

Far be it from me to discourage anyone from commencing the study of shorthand, or the beginner from continuing it; but unless the learner who reads this paper possesses certain qualifications for professional reporting he will not be likely to achieve much success. He must make himself content in some other field of shorthand labor. David Crosby, at an annual dinner of the Law Stenographers Association, in New York, some years ago, said his experience gave him great respect for the art. He had learned its difficulties, and he could not but think in looking around him how many failures in phonography each gentleman present represented. He presumed it was safe to say that for one person who had achieved the facility each member of the association possessed, at least one hundred have tried and failed. Another member said the requisite qualifications are possessed by few even in this land of public schools.

Some one has said: "The lovers of beautiful things will find in phonography sufficient to satisfy the most fastidious taste. Its faultless curves and graceful outlines are the admiration of all, making a page of phonographic print or writing bear more resemblance to a finely executed picture than anything else." I do not think the uninitiated, in gazing upon a page of shorthand manuscript hurriedly written, will see anything very graceful or picturesque about it; while the advanced student will study the same page as some will study a painting and take infinite delight in deciphering the insymmetrical characters, some of them void of all semblance of geometrical shape.

The demand for shorthand writers is increasing. Not only are stenographic notes taken of the proceedings in the Courts throughout the country, but shorthand amanuenses are being employed by merchants, lawyers, authors and editors, railway companies, conventions, boards, committees, societies, and other bodies wishing a faithful report of their proceedings. The art of shorthand is familiar to many men of erudition and learning. Charles Dickens, it is stated, was one of the most able stenographers that ever sat in the reporters' gallery in the British House of Commons. Hon. Chas. Sumner was a skilled writer of phonography, and it is used by a number of prominent men to-day, such as W. B. Crittenden, and others whose names I cannot at present recall. Many ladies