

ways of the world, in the intricacies of public life, and has to possess faculties which find no place in school examinations, and which have—perhaps from sheer want of appreciation of their merits—received no recognition in university honors.

The main function of a reporter is to render, as it were, a miniature view of actual occurrences, omitting nothing material, especially following the language of a speaker, yet curtailing perforce his wearying tautology, and amending, as almost of necessity, his mutilated grammar.

We all of us remember the old style of reporters, who were entirely innocent of the art of stenography in its scientific application. There is, indeed, now a class of persons—summary writers of the proceedings in parliament—who, by long training, have learned to abandon notes, and to record, as it were upon the brain, the very essence of the debate they are to reproduce. But even these occasionally find the power of taking an accurate stenographic note of vast service. They belong to a different school to those longhand summary writers of the preceding generation, who rendered good service to journals limited alike in space and scope.

When I speak of the reporters of the old school—some of whom were stenographers, but the greater proportion of whom, as already stated, were not—I am driven to think of the difficulties under which those who had mastered stenography labored. Of the many systems which existed before the advent of Isaac Pitman, I am bound to say that I regard them, with hardly an exception, as singularly imperfect. They showed, indeed, what could be done by arbitrary signs and cabalistic combinations! But they were in no sense scientific systems, capable of being extended to all the requirements of modern stenographic practice. Their authors, almost invariably, fell back upon arbitrary signs for nearly all beyond those ordinary words which can be expressed by a single character or by the most simple combinations. The characters, indeed, do not admit of extended combinations in an intelligible form. Arbitrary abbreviations being not only admissible but absolutely essential, every stenographer could make his own, and usually did so. It was in many cases easier to invent than to remember—besides it was at best but a game of individual ingenuity and power of adaptation.

I shall never forget how nearly I was being driven from the pursuit of stenography in despair. I had learned Odell's shorthand when I was a lad at school. I tried my hand at sermons of course—had ground to begin on—no pauses for cheers or laughter—not even a solitary "hear, hear," to relieve the tedium. The system, if it may be called so by bare courtesy, was utterly inadequate. But many of the phrases of the preacher were capable of easy conversion into arbitraries, and so I got along as a matter of speed. But when I ventured upon a translation the result was too often

quite distressing. Next, I tried my hand at local agricultural meetings. But here another and quite different set of arbitraries came into play as expressive of the mysteries of deep draining and the fattening of prize cattle. Finally, a trial in the Law Courts proved the shortcomings of all the aids I had previously devised, and I grew entirely out of heart.

The next incident in my stenographic career is one still deeply impressed upon my memory. The scene was the opening of a literary institution, the principal actor a baronet of honored name, and of some aspiration to learning. Parnassus-hill had been raked over for high sounding words, running into any number of syllables, richly interlarded with poetry, and moderately so with quotations. I had been offered a respectable fee by a local publisher if I would render something like a verbatim note of the address, which it was not expected would be a formal written one. The first five minutes convinced me that my stenography was altogether up a tree on this occasion. I faltered and finally broke off, endeavoring to cover my defeat by appearing deeply absorbed in the speaker; and in some measure I was so, for I discovered the thread of the discourse seemed to strike chords not altogether unfamiliar. In truth I began to think I could spot passages from Channing's works, *Elegant Extracts*, and *Knox's Essays*, and that therefore my memory and past reading might go a long way towards helping me in reproducing what my stenography had utterly failed to accomplish. All was going on pleasantly in this direction, when a sound of continued rustling of paper immediately behind me arrested my attention. On turning round to discover the cause, I recognized a face I had seen at meetings of importance elsewhere. It was, in truth, one of the principal reporters of the leading county newspaper. My nose was now entirely out of joint. The work would be done over my head, but I found consolation, at least diversion, in a new direction, and this was in carefully watching the contortions of the pencil of my accomplished rival. I had never seen such characters in any system of stenography with which I was familiar. They were not only far more complicated than the Chinese characters, but they were much larger. Many of these characters so rapidly produced—built up apparently with the wildest dashes of the pencil, void of system, to say nothing of science, as it seemed to me—were as large as half-grown pieces, and resembled more than anything I could then, or since, imagine, caricature faces. I was fairly carried away into an entire forgetfulness of time, place and circumstance. The operator became suffused in a dense perspiration from his labors—for the reader of the address seemed intentionally to increase the rapidity of his utterance. I too, perspired in amazement. I felt myself indeed a novice in stenography. Could it be possible that such a performance constituted a necessary portion of the duties of a perfected shorthand writer? An hour had