

VIEWS OF A VETERAN SHORTHAND WRITER.

The opening meeting of the English "Short-hand Society" was held on Tuesday, November 1st, 1881, at the City Club, Ludgate-Circus, London, and was remarkably well attended. The President (Mr. Cornelius Walford, F.S.S., F.I.A.), delivered a lengthy address. We have space for extracts only.

If I were required, said Mr. Walford, to indicate what I regard to be one of the indications of a higher state of intellectual superiority in man, I should at once say that it was to be found in the initiation, and yet more in the practical use, of shorthand!

I need not enter minutely into the debatable question of the precise period when the art of stenography was first contrived or brought into practice. Whatever the period, it will be found one of advancing civilization. It may be that the claims of the "Tironian Notes" carry the discovery back to the time of Cicero—1st century B.C.—an epoch of great intellectual advancement. It is equally probable that the advent of the printing press and its adaptation to the events of everyday life in the development of newspapers was really the advent of the actual practice of stenography.

The art, whenever invented, is to be regarded as closely associated with the progress of an enlightened administration of justice. From the time that evidence, in the sense of the term now understood, came to be admitted in the course of legal proceedings—by no means coeval with the institution of trial by jury, for until within the last two or three centuries the jury did not constitute an impartial body, independently selected to determine upon the weight of evidence; but themselves were rather the accusers, and were selected from the fact of their having a prior knowledge of the matters in accusation, or of the general repute of the person charged—from the period, I repeat, when testimony came to be used in an independent sense, it became necessary to have available the means of recording such testimony apart from the tedium of written questions and answers—a process which is only retained in one remaining form of a court of inquiry, viz., the court-martial.

And what a wonderful advancement was the application of the art of stenography, as against the previous impunity of perjured witnesses—aye, and even against the machinations of unjust judges. The actual testimony of witnesses on record in the possession of impartial reporters, it became common to both sides, and was, indeed, available to be placed, if need were, before the highest court—that of public opinion!

The art of shorthand, in the light of being a handmaid and something more—an incorruptible associate and protector—in the administration of justice, has not, in my opinion, been heretofore sufficiently considered. The shorthand writer engaged in judicial proceedings, exercises a high and important function. It is

quite a common occurrence in cases of appeal, to have references to the stenographers' notes, alike for the purpose of determining the weight of evidence as for ascertaining the direction of the judge to the jury. Hence it is of consequence that the reporter be sufficiently qualified for his work—otherwise, instead of aiding the cause of justice, he may (unwittingly indeed) prove an agent in its miscarriage. To say that he must be a man of integrity seems, in such a connection, quite superfluous.

The first recorded instance I have met with of the stenographic reporting of a trial is that of Rich, who reported the prosecution of Lieut. Colonel John Lilborne (or Milbourne) in 1651, for treason in writing a paper called *England's New Chaiues*—a trial regarded as so important that there have been published 200 books and pamphlets relating to it and the surrounding circumstances, most of which may be found in the Library of the British Museum. Here the accused gave a certificate of, or bore testimony to, the accuracy of the report.

In the matter of freedom of speech, too, the function of the stenographer has been one of growing importance. Freedom of speech has developed with the growth of the newspaper press. Oratory may, indeed, be addressed to the masses personally present, who hear and judge for themselves. But where one assembly is held for no other purpose than that of influencing those personally present, an hundred are held whereat the proceedings are intended as much for the thousands who are absent as for the scores who are present. It is the peculiar province of the stenographer to perform the important function of placing on permanent record such proceedings. Here again proficiency in the art is of high consequence, for it is required to be known, not what might have taken place, or ought to have occurred, but what did actually take place—that is what was said (i.e., the substance of it), and the order in which it was spoken.

It is, perhaps, almost unnecessary to say to this assembly, many of whom are proficient in the practice of reporting, that a man may be able to write shorthand and may yet be totally unqualified to present a true and faithful account of what has really transpired on any given occasion. Yet this has been made lamentably clear quite recently in the case of the Irish police reporters. Many of these, probably, were able to record quite accurately certain disjointed phrases of speech. But if they took these ever so accurately, without the surrounding and continuing context, it is easy to imagine what great injustice might be done; and this was the charge continuously made against them.

This leads me further to say that a mere shorthand writer may lack many of the qualifications of a reporter. A shorthand writer may be a born expert. A reporter (in the true sense of the word) is a creation—created by long and varied experience—educated in the