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## SHORTHAND WRITING AND THE PRESS.

*From Harding's Universal Stenography, 1831.*

BY A BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY REPORTER.

The Romans invented short or abridged writing, which enabled their secretaries to collect the speeches of orators, however rapidly delivered. The characters used by such writers were called *notes*. They did not consist in letters of the alphabet, but certain marks, one of which often expressed a whole word, and frequently a phrase. The same description of writing is known at the present day by the words stenography, tachygraphy, and echography. From notes came the word notary, which was given to all who professed the art of quick writing. The system of notewriting was not suddenly brought to perfection—it only came into favour when the professors most accurately reported a most excellent speech which Cato pronounced in the senate. The orators, the philosophers, the dignitaries, and nearly all the rich patricians, then took for secretaries note-writers, to whom they allowed handsome pay. It was usual to take from their slaves all who had intellect to acquire a knowledge of that art. Gruterus has preserved for our information the notes of Tyro, the freedman of Cicero. The republic and the government of cities also maintained at their expense these secretaries. It is not necessary here to detail the history of these notaries in Europe who succeeded the *tabellions* of Rome. The intention is only to throw light on the origin of shorthand writing, and to prove the great estimation in which the art was held by ancient statesmen and orators.

Next to the art of printing, shorthand writing claims the admiration of mankind: it may be called the triumph of human intellect. The wisdom of the senate, the principles of legislation, and the *dicta* of legal tribunals, are now diffused over the British Islands with the rapidity of the eagle's wing. The learning, taste, and reason of the most distinguished, taken, as it were, from the lips of the speakers, and conveyed

daily and hourly by the press of Great Britain, must produce light and knowledge among the people, which no other system of education can impart.

The advantages derived from shorthand writing are not only great in a public point of view, but privately the art is useful. The student who attends lectures may bring away the very words of the lecturer, and impress upon the mind at leisure the correct ideas of a speaker, in a way that can never lead to error.

The art, some years ago, was not applied to any useful purpose in England. The debates in the British Parliament were reported, but the writers conveyed no valuable information to the public. The speeches reported were too often the mere composition of reporters, who wrote from memory. We have now, so far as the limits of the newspapers will allow, nearly the very words of the leaders in parliament, upon all important subjects. It is true, inaccuracy will sometimes occur, but every one who has attended the House of Commons, and the other branch of the legislature, must know that errors are occasioned by the want of proper facilities to report. The distance at which strangers or writers are placed from the speakers in the House of Lords and House of Commons is too great. It is impossible to hear persons who speak in a low tone of voice, and it is almost unnecessary to observe that a reporter cannot accurately report that which he does not distinctly hear, and clearly understand.

We are enabled to make what may be considered a bold assertion, but it is nevertheless true, namely, that a shorthand writer, placed in a situation where he can hear, may commit to paper, if necessary, every word uttered by a speaker. The skill evinced daily in the art of reporting must be considered one of the great foundations of public liberty, and every friend to the British constitution should stand forward the advocate of reporters, who have done much within the last twenty years to promote the liberty of the subject, the blessings of the British constitution, and the morals of the people.

It would not be difficult to prove that the present system of reporting is advantageous to domestic peace, and the stability of government. The people of England are the best subjects in the world, provided they find in their rulers due regard for the principles of that constitution which their best blood has been so often and so nobly shed to defend. Expose fairly the sentiments of