

THE RATE OF DELIVERY OF PUBLIC SPEAKERS

By L. V. Percival, Toronto.

WHEN so eminent an authority as Isaac Pitman makes the statement that the average rate of delivery of public speakers does not exceed one hundred and thirty words a minute, one scarcely feels at liberty to question its accuracy. My own experience, however, has inclined me to the opinion that, at all events so far as cis-Atlantic oratory is concerned, Pitman's average is considerably below the mark. To a good reporter 130 words a minute is child's play. I can only say that I never had the good fortune to report so accommodating an orator. From personal experience I will venture to say that there is not one of the six members comprising the Cabinet of Ontario to-day whose fluency does not greatly exceed 130 words a minute. A great many tyros in the art of shorthand naturally assume, accepting Pitman's average to be correct, that if they can attain and maintain such a rate of speed, they will be equal to taking a verbatim report of almost any speech, whereas I am convinced that unless a reporter can, at least for a good many minutes at a stretch, follow the speaker at the rate of 150 words a minute, he will in nine cases out of ten be left behind. It is easy enough to report verbatim the opening remarks of any speaker, however rapid, but as the fluency and ease of the latter gradually increase, as a rule, the reporter's task becomes more difficult. This would naturally be the easier were it simply a question of putting on greater speed; but there is also to be considered the fact that every minute's strain upon his energies and powers of endurance tells, and adds to the difficulty of keeping pace with the speaker. In my humble opinion, therefore, a verbatim reporter must be able to maintain a speed of 150 words a minute, and must be equal, on emergency, to writing 180 and 200 words in a minute. There are fortunately but few speakers who can "stay" at that pace. I believe that there are very few reporters indeed in Canada who would care to wager that they could write legibly more than 9000 words of ordinary reading matter in an hour. I have heard of men in England and the United States who were credited with being able to keep up a speed of 200 words a minute, but I fancy such men, like angels' visits, are very few and far between.

In conclusion, I would offer the same suggestion to beginners as was made to a friend of mine by a shining light in the profession on the other side, viz: that they should aspire to writing the word "Nebuchadnezzar" in shorthand one hundred times in a minute, and having succeeded, should consider themselves in the front rank.

I hope in some future number of this magazine (which, by the way, I sincerely trust will meet with the success and support which it deserves), to read the experiences and opinions of some of

my confreres, many of whom, from the nature of the career they have adopted, will be better able to express an opinion on the subject of this article than one who has never been directly connected with the press.

A MELANCHOLY MUDDLE.

To the Editor of the SHORTHAND WRITER.

Sir: Pray let me tell you why I grieve,
Why this damask cheek is pale and wan;
And when you hear me you'll believe
I'm a very un-for-tun-ate man;
I'm unhappily weak, and try to please all my boon friends,
both short and tall
Hence my trouble; I can never—well, very seldom
please them all.

First let me say that among the craft
Of short-hand clerks I many know,
And they're so kind—both fore and aft
With opinions I'm racked—my brain's aglow;
But I've taken boxing lessons and the next that comes
along
With some new system, by Pitman's shades he'll catch
it hot and strong.

To begin, Jones said that Pitman
Was the only first-class style,
And so I studied it—ahem!
(I've got a cough) for quite a while.
Studied hard, from rosy morn; at night I did not sleep,
In truth he is a Pitman—he's very, very deep.

But just as I had mastered the leading features, Brown
Stopped me up short, called me an ass, an idiot and a
dunce, an
Got me to give up Pitman
And start to study Munson.
In confidence I'll tell you, that I found the difference
slight
But Brown said Pitman was a fraud, and of course I
thought him right.

I told Tom Smith (a Grahamite) that Munson was the
best;
Then Tom sat down and proved to me his book not
worth a song;
He was far, far worse than all the rest:
His entire book was wrong.
If ever in phonography I wanted to succeed
I really must drop Munson and Graham's book must
read.—

And so from morn till dewy eve these plaguey friends
they come:
I start to learn one system, and find out when I've done
That my next friend who comes along, will have a better
one;
And Graham, Munson, Pitman, Brown, my reeling
brain do bother
With all their many methods—each one better than the
other.

Now, my dear Sir, I've told my griefs; the tale has given
me pain,
But you perhaps can 'suage my woe with an answer
terse and plain;
Why have these many methods? Why not have one
general system?
We would have then no Grahamites, no "Munson men,"
no Pitman;
We could each read the other's notes—the space is small,
I cannot sum
The many weighty merits of this Shorthand Millennium.

Yours in Misery,
QUIZ.

THE EDITOR TO "QUIZ."

"Be sure you're right, then go ahead,"
So shrewd old Davy Crockett said;
Take his advice, and then you'll be,
Some day, perhaps, as great as he.