

In 1867 the Sign Schools employed the Sign-language without articulation; and the oral schools used articulation without the Sign-language. The two methods of teaching were thus diametrically opposed; and it is difficult for us to realize today how bitter was the contest between them. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that oral teachers and sign teachers found it difficult to sit down in the same room without quarreling; and there was intolerance upon both sides. To say "oral method" to a sign teacher was like waving a red flag in the face of a bull! and to say "sign-language" to an oralist aroused the deepest resentment.

On the one hand the sign teachers, who were largely men, looked down upon the oralists as visionary enthusiasts pursuing impracticable schemes. They honestly believed that the idea of teaching congenital Deaf-mutes to speak and read the lips was absurd, and they therefore considered the oralists as little better than charlatans pretending to accomplish the impossible. Equally impossible and absurd appeared the idea that Deaf-mutes could be educated without the use of the sign-language and they even questioned the veracity of those who asserted the contrary.

On the other hand the oral teachers, who were largely women, were not a bit behind the others in the intensity of their feelings. The idea of teaching Deaf-mutes to speak appealed to them as a holy cause. They threw themselves into the work with all the zeal of religious fanatics. They were glad to become martyrs in such a cause; and I have no doubt that some of them would even have been willing to lay down their lives if need be, in order that the Deaf and Dumb should be taught to speak. They considered it actually a crime to deprive a deaf child of the power of articulate speech by neglecting to instruct him in the use of his vocal organs:—A crime aggravated by teaching him a special language, peculiar to