

sign is written with as much rapidity as a short one. It is not to be expected, therefore, that the phonetic system of Dr. Michela should be nearly as perfect a one as say, Pitman's. As this is destined for phonographers, however, some idea of it will not be amiss. The doctor's signs are the following six, viz. :—

. : u / n l

These are developed into twenty by means of change of position on the paper, and this number is increased by variety in grouping until the number of different signs is really raised to seventy-four, thus a letter is not represented always by one sign, but by an assembly of sometimes two, sometimes three. It is, however, always possible to get all the requisite characters under one's hand at the same time, so as to print each syllable completely at one stroke, each finger manœuvring two notes at a time if necessary. Notwithstanding the number of different signs, Dr. Michela claims that a sufficient knowledge of his system to admit of transcription, is to be acquired in fifteen days, and a rapidity of writing 200 words a minute with the machine in six months. As the characters are all printed, he claims further that they may be transcribed by any one who can read his system. Thus, while the machinist—that a reporter should come to be called a machinist—continues his note taking—which he can do for three hours without fatigue—transcribers can be engaged in writing out. The practice in the Italian Parliament, where the invention is in use, is to cut the roll of paper, on which the signs are printed, every five minutes while it continues to be unrolled. The inventor pretends, too, that his system is universal, and can be applied to all languages. This is not exactly correct, for many signs used in English, for instance, are entirely wanting. Thus he has no *th* or *dh* nor *w* sound; nor has he any means whatever of producing final consonants. The pretention, too, that anyone, even a person unacquainted with the language reported, can work the apparatus, whatever it may be worth in theory is groundless in practice. It is necessarily impossible to write phonetically, even by machine, unless one can thoroughly distinguish the sound uttered. Now, every one who has learned a foreign language in order to speak it, will bear me out when I say that the greatest difficulty which stops beginners in understanding a foreign tongue when spoken, is the impossibility of distinguishing the sounds which are really uttered by a rapid speaker. A word which is comprehensible enough in writing is often unrecognizable when spoken. I myself have reported French at a very fair rate of speed by means of Pitman's system, but only after I thoroughly understood the language. These, however, are effects which can be remedied or avoided. The object of this article is necessarily rather descriptive than critical, and I think it will not be denied that the apparatus of Michela, whatever its utility may turn out to be, is an ingenious one. Its success, of course, depends on experience. I doubt,

though, whether it is destined to be so universally adopted as its inventors seem to think.

I don't think any amount of mechanism, however subtle or however simple, can ever replace the intelligent reporter. This apparatus may answer well in assemblies where its workers enjoy all necessary advantages, but in a place like, say the press gallery, where the hearing is bad and a thousand other little difficulties intervene between the reporter and his subject, I doubt whether anything but the human machine—to borrow from Voltaire—can suffice. Besides the consequence of machinery is that the man is no use without it.

Still it appears to answer excellently in Italy where it is the only method in use in parliament, and its success at the Palais Bourbon is said to have been complete. The following account of the last public experiment is taken from the *Illustration* for 12th March :—

Mlle. Guilio, who worked the apparatus, being an Italian and speaking French very imperfectly, the experiment commenced by a bit of dictation, in Italian, from the *Journal Officiel* of Italy. M. Michela read rapidly a discourse on railways, recently pronounced in the Senate at Rome. The piece dictated contained no less than a page, which Mlle. Guilio, on being requested to read her note, read, without the slightest hesitation, as though she had the journal itself before her. Then, to complete the essay, the President of the Chamber caused two pages of the Chamber to be rapidly read, and in order that no difficulty might be spared the operator, he took a slight pleasure in throwing in interruptions in Latin. He entered into the discussion himself, and with good humored malice, provoked interruption and remarks which were faithfully reproduced. The curiosity of the assistants, however, was so thoroughly aroused that no one dreamt of interrupting. "It is not difficult to see that we are not in session," said Gambetta. "I have about as much trouble now to excite interruptions as I usually have to prevent them." Mlle. Guilio, although she understood but little of what was dictated to her, reproduced it with astonishing fidelity. Not having understood everything, she read badly, cutting words in two and forming eccentric locutions with the heads and tails of words cut off from each other; but her exactitude was none the less absolute, and indeed the trial was all the more conclusive because the intelligence of the reader could not in any way supply any possible omissions on the part of the machine.

I may add that M. Cassagnes is of opinion that the aid of electricity may be introduced into the invention, thereby permitting of several reports of a discourse to be instantaneously produced by a single operator at any distance from the spot where it is pronounced. Whether this idea will ever be realized, time alone can show.

Brethren, when you hear any phonographic news, "make a note of it," and send it to the WRITER.