

## DEAFNESS AN ECONOMIC LOSS TO THE COMMUNITY

Deafness is a scourge from which humanity has suffered throughout the ages, and to a degree that never has been known and never will be known. No tabulation has ever been attempted of the many millions of those affected with impaired hearing. Moreover, the interest shown in the malady by the peoples of the world has not at any time been commensurate with its momentous seriousness.

For this apathy, covering all these generations, there has been one very evident reason, viz., that, unlike other major afflictions of the human body, such as cancer, tuberculosis and diabetes or such virulent diseases as smallpox, diphtheria and typhoid, deafness as a rule does not shorten or even endanger the physical life of its victim. Rather has it the malevolent characteristic of prolonging their miseries, which usually increase with a relentless insidiousness, so that, indeed, in their later years it becomes a moot question whether they experience life in death or death in life.

Perhaps another reason for this widespread inaction has been an almost universal reluctance, on the part of those of impaired hearing, to assert themselves publicly in any way. Some deafened people even go so far as to pretend that they are not deaf, a shockingly foolish attempt at deception, of course, but all too common nevertheless.

There is a third reason, I believe, for this lack of interest, viz., that people of normal hearing lose patience with their deafened brothers and sisters, because of habits engendered by their handicap, and shrugging their shoulders say to each other: "Too bad! But we can do nothing. It's no fault of ours. They'll simply have to grin and bear it."

Now it is, if possible, in order to instill into the minds of you who are seeking to improve conditions of life in this community, that this shoulder shrug and these thoughts are all wrong, that I have consented to appear before you to-day.

It is not my intention to dwell upon those phases of deafness that naturally would call for your sympathy, such as the heart rending anguish endured by the young man or woman after he or she has been told by a specialist that no longer is there any hope for relief, that there is nothing to look forward to but a life of awful silence and of grim separation. I shall not tell of the gradual loss of friends, of being shunned on all sides, of the diminishing interest in every kind of pleasure and pastime, of the unsatisfied craving for music and the singing of birds and all the beautiful sounds of nature, and above all of the inability to do the things that others do, and particularly to fill efficiently one's vocations in life, and all too frequently even to earn a decent living. It was Beethoven who said "For me there can be no recreation in the society of my fellows. No refined intercourse, no mutual out-pourings. I must live like an exile."

I could without difficulty employ my whole time in this manner, and I know that I could break your heart strings if I wanted to, but I have a more important role to play to-day, for I want to convince you, upon cool and calculating lines, that the community suffers even more than does the individual when its members become deafened, and that it behooves the community