

The Old Year and The Now.

The old year's passing, bent and hoar,
With tottering feet a few steps more
To swell a mighty unseen band,
He dips beneath the shades of borderland.
A wearying sun, a traveller slow,
A pathway lost and crimsoned snow
All emblem of the way they tread
Who pass from this world of lying and dead
To life forever more.

The old year's past, they say he's dead,
Hush, let us move with solemn tread,
Not dead but sleeping, he yet shall rise
And stand before our wakened eyes
Yes, he shall meet us at the end of days,
And we must receive the blame or praise
Of good deeds done or left undone
Of generous acts but scarce begun,
Undone for evermore.

But list those silvery rhimes that swell,
Hinging the old year's parting knell
Hing too in tones so sweet and clear
A welcome to the new born year
So pure, so free, so glad it comes
Bringing sweet joy to our hearts and homes
Carrying down from the Great Heart above,
A sweet benediction, a message of love,
A message all our own.

What shall we do with this gift new-born
Given in place of the one that is gone,
What but present it to Him who gave
That He all its footsteps from wrong may save
That it be not a wasted, useless one,
But happy by acts of unselfishness done
A life so entirely given to Thee,
A thing so tuneful from self set free,
To echo thro' woe's of eternity.

FOR THE CANADIAN MUTE.

The Abbe de l'Epée.

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE, LABORS, AND THEIR RESULTS.

By J. C. Ball, B. A., Ontario Institution for the Deaf and Dumb.

This benefactor and friend of the deaf and dumb, Charles Michael de l'Epée, was born at Versailles, France, November 5th, 1712. His father was an architect in the service of King Louis XIV., and eminent for both talent and piety, and sought to impress upon his children moderation of desires, the fear of God and love for man. These impressions took such a powerful hold upon the nature of Charles, and "so pleasant and easy did goodness seem to him, that in after life he was often troubled because he could remember so few struggles with sinful inclinations."

When the time came to select a profession, his choice fixed upon that of the Christian ministry, and, after some opposition at home, he was allowed to enter upon a course in theology, at the University of La Sorbonne. In due time he graduated and received the title of "Abbe," usually bestowed upon theological graduates who, however, frequently followed other pursuits.

Having embraced Jansenism while a student, doctrine then under the papal interdict and frowned upon by the Jesuits of that day, his subsequent application for admission to the priesthood was denied, since he could not subscribe to the principles required and at variance with the dictates of his conscience and his intellect. This seemed the ruin of his hopes in that direction so he turned his attention to the law, which his father had at first desired, as being more speedily remunerative than the exercise of ecclesiastical functions. He soon passed the necessary stages, was admitted to the bar and began to practice the duties of his new profession. But he soon found this an uncongenial field of labor. He was shocked at the trickery and disgusted with the down-right villainy he discovered in all branches of the profession and at that day considered essential to success. Therefore he renounced his practice and proceeded to occupy himself with active benevolence among the poor and needy, turning his longing heart and shaping his every effort toward the priesthood wherein he longed to serve.

HIS FIFTY AND ZEAL

At length won for him the notice of Jacques Bossuet, a nephew of the famous Bishop Bossuet, of Condom and Meaux. Jacques Bossuet, then Bishop of Troyes, and well acquainted with the character and tenets of De l'Epée, called him to his service, admitted him to the priesthood and settled him in a small canonry in his diocese.

Now was his spirit uplifted in joy and gratitude toward that Providence in whose highest service he now deemed himself enrolled. He at once set to work, with an ardor all the more intense for the long enforced suppression. Priest, physician, comforter, counsellor, in season and out of season, ever laboring, always willing, entirely unselfish, following as closely as 'tis possible for a man, in the foot-steps of his Saviour.

But this was not to last. This was not his destined work, and the fiat went forth from the Power who shapes our destinies and all was changed. His

friend and protector, the one, among many who professed to follow, and wore the livery of his Divine Master, who saw and recognized the Christian spirit of De l'Epée, was laid away to rest. Quickly his successor to the bishopric removed him and obtained an interdict forbidding him from the exercise of all his priestly functions. Humbly, sorrowfully, he once more turned away, with his hopes of eminent usefulness seemingly forever dashed aside. But the Master had other and higher honors to bestow upon him, to whom His service was meat and drink, and the consciousness of His Divine approval, raiment, and soon was his task appointed him.

While prosecuting his benevolent quest among the poor one morning, he entered a lowly room where two young women were seated sewing. His knock passed unnoticed, he spoke, but received no reply. Astonished at the seeming rudeness, while he was yet hesitating whether to retire or reprove them, their mother entered the room and at once explained the circumstances. She told him, weeping, that they were twin sisters, her children, and both deaf and dumb. She further added that Father Yamm, a priest, had made an attempt to teach them some religious truths by the aid of pictures and objects, but he had recently died and she feared no other would be found to interest himself in them.

"Believing," said De l'Epée, "that these two unfortunates would live and die in ignorance of religion if I made no effort to instruct them, my heart was

FILLED WITH COMPASSION,

and I promised that if they were committed to my charge I would do for them everything that was in my power, and having no occupation for my business except to bring the precepts of religion and morality to the relief of the unfortunate, I entered upon a path of activity absolutely unknown to me.

Thus unconsciously do we find him entering upon his life work, a work for which his previous training and experience had eminently fitted him, a work whose results should in future serve to sound his praise throughout the continents, where thousands with reverent affection now name his name.

While the Abbe was a student he had imbibed the principle from one of his tutors, "that there is no more natural and necessary connection between abstract ideas and the articulate sounds which strike the ear, than there is between the same ideas and the written characters which address the eye." This was regarded as a heresy at the time, the learned holding that speech was indispensable to thought. The Abbe, however, held to his conviction, and believing that written language might be made the means of awakening thought in the minds of the deaf and dumb, he set about discovering the process of this awakening, to make them understand the significance of written and printed words. With rare acuteness he reasoned that the sisters must have some means of communication between themselves, and that their own natural signs would form the simplest and easiest instrument. On inquiry he found that they had such signs, and he at once became a learner. Showing them bread he obtained their sign for "eat," for water, the sign "to drink," for chair the sign "to sit," and so on. Finding in all their signs some natural attribute of the designated object or action, he at once grasped the key to the problem, that it was the language of nature and the closer he assimilated his signs to the nature of the object the more readily did his pupils form a notion of it and comprehend him.

HERE WAS ENCOURAGEMENT,

such as we who practice these methods nowadays cannot know or feel to the full, as he did, their discoverer. He invented, arranged, enlarged and corrected his signs, until he had as perfect and methodical a means of communication as was at that time possible. From nouns he proceeded to verbs and led his pupils on, by gradual steps through every form of the verb and all words derived from it, until he could dictate to them long sentences in signs, in the order of the French language, and secure to them written translations, full and exact. His system enabled them to obtain a knowledge of a great number of words, the parts of speech to which they belonged and their inflections, and began to have the pleasure derived from the intelligent reading of

books and periodicals. This was a astonishing success.

Public interest was aroused and excited at the novelty of his undertaking and his processes, and he soon found himself in charge of a number of deaf children, leading them out of the depths of intellectual darkness and heathenism into the broad sunshine of intelligence and Christian morality, developing "spirit" into "soul."

About this time some one brought him a book written by one Juan Pablo Bonet, a Spanish monk, published at Madrid in 1620, and relating to his (Bonet's) methods of instructing the deaf and dumb and teaching them to speak. It contained a 'manual' or finger alphabet. De l'Epée received it with delighted surprise, since he had not heard of it or of others. Thinking it might assist him in his work to learn the Spanish language so that he might read it himself, and adopted the alphabet with some changes of his own. This alphabet was afterwards brought to America by Dr. Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc in 1816 and improved by the latter to what it now is, the most beautiful single hand alphabet now known, and universally employed to supplement the sign language in this country. Here the Abbe obtained another facile instrument for the prosecution of his plans and work, an aid to the exact rendition of language for the deaf.

The school of De l'Epée was wholly supported at his own private expense, and as his means were small the most rigid economy was necessarily practiced. Nevertheless he was unwilling to receive pecuniary assistance, lest he should be charged with mercenary motives. "It is not to the rich," said he, "that I have devoted myself, it is to the poor only. Had it not been for these I should never have attempted the

EDUCATION OF THE DEAF AND DUMB.

Several anecdotes are extant, showing how little he was to be dazzled by opportunities of personal aggrandizement. In 1780 the Empress of Russia sent him her congratulations upon his success and offered him valuable gifts. He refused the gifts, but suggested that Her Majesty send him a poor mute to educate instead. The Emperor Joseph, of Austria, called upon De l'Epée when on a visit to Paris and offered him the revenues of one of his estates in Austria. His answer is worthy of a Christian diplomat. He said, "I am an old man. If your Majesty desires to confer a gift upon the deaf and dumb, it is not my head, already bent toward the grave, that should receive it, but the good work itself. It is worthy of a great prince to preserve whatever is useful to mankind." The Emperor understood and soon after his return he sent one of his ecclesiastics to Paris, who, after a course of instruction from the Abbe went back to Vienna and established the first National Institution for the deaf and dumb. These will suffice to show that he was a true philanthropist and Christian philosopher. This, then, is the man whose name the deaf of Canada, the United States and France, delight to honor and proclaim, for the admiration and example of those who, like him, in humble abnegation seek to dare and do in the walks of philanthropy and love.

The Abbe de l'Epée died on December 23rd, 1789, at the age of 77 years. His funeral was attended by deputies from the National Assembly of Paris, the Mayor, and all the representatives of the Commune. Two years after his death his school was adopted by the National Government and is known to day throughout the civilized world as the Royal Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, at Paris.

THE SUCCESSOR OF DE L'EPÉE.

The Abbe Sicard, a young man whom he had trained to be an instructor at Bordeaux, was in every way worthy of his master. He it was to whom went Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, the founder of the system in this country, when weary of the selfish and mercenary spirit which reigned in England the instruction he sought for the benefit of the deaf mutes of this continent, unless he would pay a price and bind himself to a term of service and to secrecy. It was the Abbe Sicard who welcomed him to all he had, instructed him in all he knew himself and sent him home to Hartford, Conn., rejoicing. That is why we stand to day the foremost of nations in the superiority of methods and distinguished results.

With Gallaudet, in 1816, came Laurent

Clerc, a deaf-mute, and an assistant of the Abbe Sicard. Two organized what is now a school for the deaf, under the name of De l'Epée. From Hartford Clerc to Philadelphia, organized a school already there by a benevolent Harriet Seixas, and to instruct in New York, on a similar mission, the same system. These three, with others since founded, have forth teachers throughout the country and now, in this year 1897, we can name ninety schools in the United States, and seven giving instruction to 11,064 children, most of whom owe all their progress and intellectual attainment to the furthered efforts of this great Charles Michael de l'Epée. The remainder are in greatest measure indebted to the same first cause of enlightenment.

France has remembered her benefactor at Versailles, the citizens have erected a handsome bronze statue to his memory. On the 21st of May, 1879, a statue was unveiled on the grounds of the National Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Paris, executed and presented by Martin, a deaf-mute sculptor, upon whom the decoration of the Legion of Honor was bestowed by the Emperor in recognition of his talent and generous spirit so displayed.

There is a great and widespread misconception of the object of institutions for the deaf. They are not hospitals, asylums nor reformatories.

THEY ARE SCHOOLS

and, to the greater number, are actual homes, during the period of their school life, since no where will they receive the "home" which is so necessary to their progress and peculiarly unformed character. They differ from other schools in their boarding schools, and their own specialists. That the progress throughout the school year is necessary to the keeping of discipline, and to the keeping of instruction, manual, intellectual, domestic and moral.

It is conceded by every one who knows aught of the matter that a foreign language is more easily learned and exactly mastered by those who have constant communication with those who use it. Just so it is with the deaf and dumb who are learning in their own foreign tongue, of which the sign language is the medium of transfer to them.

When we who can hear, understand a foreign language we learn English with which to compare the rules to which it can be made conform and upon which to base our comprehension of it. But the deaf, in language whatever, no speech, no hearing, whereby, like hearing children, they learn from repetition, nor even the dumb signifiers of thoughts, as burn, maybe, as fervently as you name. Here, then, does the sign-gesture language find its eminent proper place, as a powerful and efficient instrument in overcoming these difficulties inherent in deaf mute instruction. It is the means of drawing forth the ideas which have no vehicle of expression on the one hand, and on the other it is giving ideas to some, of awakening thought in the minds of those who have, apparently, no ideas to start with or thoughts wherewith to clothe them for the drawing out.

As the accomplished linguist is comparatively rare among the hearing, so is the accomplished deaf-mute among the deaf, as to language. But there is a difference in favor of the deaf who deserves the greater need of preparation for his proficiency, since he has mounted far greater obstacles in the mastery of the English language, the most difficult and perplexing language under the sun, - than his hearing compeer with a mother-tongue to assist him. The deaf as a class are simply lifeless students of a foreign tongue, and there is nothing peculiar to them, except that of hearing and therefore speech, which is not peculiar to almost any foreigner.

THE SIGN LANGUAGE

of De l'Epée, as handed down and improved, is a most powerful emblem of language, penetrating to the most depths of our being and drawing forth response far more quickly than the music of spoken words, because the sign conveys the thought, the idea itself.

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