

## The "Hard-of-Hearing" Speechless Children in our Schools for the Deaf.

PAPER READ BY R. S. RHODES, OF CHICAGO, AT THE FOURTEENTH CONVENTION OF AMERICAN TEACHERS OF THE DEAF, AT FLINT, MICHIGAN.

"In what manner can we best serve the interests of those pupils in our institutions, who have a good degree of hearing?" I find this question asked in the reports of the superintendent of one of our large institutions, issued June 30, 1894. I also find in this report a statement that of "384 children whose hearing was accurately tested, 60 had a record of hearing varying in degrees up to ten per cent.; 35 a record varying between ten and twenty per cent.; 47 between twenty and thirty per cent.; 18 between thirty and forty per cent.; 7 between forty and fifty per cent.; and 16 of fifty per cent. and over"—in all, 183, or nearly fifty per cent. of all children tested, are not totally deaf, but are simply hard-of-hearing people.

In 1879, I visited many schools for the deaf in this country, and tested the hearing of many deaf children, and in 1880, I visited many institutions and schools in Europe, and have made accurate tests of the hearing of the deaf children wherever I have been; and I find that

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forty per cent. of the children in the institutions and schools throughout the world possess ten per cent. and over of hearing, and are capable of being educated to speak through the sense of hearing with mechanical aid. This being the case, and this question being asked by the superintendents of several of our institutions, showing a willingness on the part of the superintendents of these institutions to utilize this hearing and teach aurally to speak, well, then, may this convention pause to consider this question, affecting the interests of half of the children in the institutions represented by you gentlemen present. And let me say that it not only affects the interests of those children in these schools at the present day, but will affect the interests of those in all time to come, not only in this country, but other countries throughout the world. Most of you have up to the present time ignored the fact that these children could hear, and have treated them as totally deaf children, and they have been graduated as such, and in most institutions in the world to-day are being graduated as such. Well, I say, may we consider "in what manner we can best serve the interests of those children who have a good degree of hearing," and well may this convention give much of its time to this important question, and let us answer wisely. God has bestowed upon half the children whose welfare is in your charge ten per cent. and over of nature's own means of learning to speak. This being known, shall we longer ignore the fact? We see adults on every hand, more deaf than many of the children in your schools, using



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mechanical aids to hearing, and enjoying the use of their own voices, and understanding others well. What they can do with mechanical aids, you can teach these children, with an equal degree of hearing, to do. Forty per cent. of the children in your schools hear better than I can. My degree of hearing in the left ear is about seven per cent., and nothing in the right, and I can hear with the audiphone, at conversational distances, almost perfectly, and can hear my own voice, when speaking against it, quite perfectly. You will allow that if the deaf can hear others and can hear themselves, there is no reason why they cannot be educated aurally, if they have mental capacity. No, there is no reason why they *cannot*, but there is a reason, and a potent reason, why they *are* not, and that reason lies with you, the teachers of the deaf. But you cannot be wholly blamed for this, because I allow that even with this instrument which I carry, you, with perfect hearing, find no improvement. But those with imperfect hearing will find great improvement. You hand the instrument to one who has never enjoyed the benefit of hearing, in learning articulation, and you find he answers you that he can hear but little, and you use his judgment and say that he cannot hear sufficiently with it to learn to speak, when you should know that they who have never learned to speak know nothing of the value of sound, and are perfectly ignorant as to how well they should hear to enable them to learn. You know you are succeeding in some degree in teaching them to speak when they hear nothing; if, then, they may by any means acquire simply the vowel sounds of our language, by hearing them, what a great advantage would this be to them in learning to speak! And I assert that

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where a person enjoys one per cent. only of natural hearing, this instrument will improve his hearing to a degree that will enable him to acquire a knowledge aurally of the vowel sounds, and thus enable you to teach him to speak. Sixteen years ago when I visited the institutions in this country and Europe, for the purpose of urging that the hearing be appealed to, and carried with me this device, and selected classes that could hear, and freely presented this instrument for their use, every child was being instructed as though it were totally deaf, and in some instances I was told that a slight degree of hearing rendered a child more difficult to teach by "our" method. That may be very true, for some of these children possessed twenty or thirty or even fifty per cent. of hearing, and I should suppose that it would be natural for them in such cases to be at first inclined to listen, and it would be some trouble to overcome this inclination. As for me, I believe that ten per cent. of nature's means, ten per cent. of natural hearing power, is worth more in learning valuable speech than one hundred per cent. of substituted methods. I could teach to speak two languages to a bright student, with ten per cent. of hearing, before you could teach him to speak one with all methods ever used, without the hearing. Yes, ten per cent. of a sense that God has endowed us with is too valuable to throw away, and we have no right to ignore even one per cent., when we have a device which will improve it and make it valuable to us, as in this sense of hearing we certainly have. I am sure the audiphone will improve thirty per cent., and bring one per cent. within the scope of the human voice, and valuable speech may be taught. With the audiphone one may speak to



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a dozen or two dozen, or three dozen, at one time; and the sounds that reach the listener with the audiphone, according to my judgment, are far more natural than those reaching the listener by any other instrument. Music itself is perfectly enjoyed with the audiphone, whereas, there is no other instrument that will reveal the harmonies of music in their perfection, and therefore, I say, it is the preferable instrument for teaching, but it is not the only instrument.

Each child carries an instrument of value, which I believe has never before been spoken of or used, and which I would like to explain to this convention. You may simply allow a deaf child to close his teeth firmly; this brings the upper jaw in tension, and when his teeth are firmly closed, he may speak and hear his own voice more distinctly. You will not hear him so well, but he will hear himself better, and he may study in this manner, with his teeth firmly pressed together, until he can acquire the knowledge of every sound in the English language, and one must be exceedingly deaf—I would say totally deaf—if he cannot hear himself speak with his teeth firmly closed together. Now, you gentlemen of perfect hearing may try this; you will find it gives you no results, but do not decide at once that what I have said is not true. Let those who are deaf try it, and they will find that they can hear. Thus, the deaf have some advantages; it requires a deaf person to hear through his teeth. This may be one reason why some teachers decide that the audiphone is not of value to the deaf, simply because they of perfect hearing cannot hear with it. With the double audiphone you speak between the discs, and you get back to yourself the double power

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of your voice—that is, the deaf will get it back. One with perfect hearing will see no results, because the same result will be attained through the natural organ first, but one with defective hearing will receive the results. I would place the audiphone in the hands of each child with any degree of hearing remaining, and have him study his own voice at his seat, while speaking against it. He would have to study aloud, as it is *his* voice we wish to cultivate. It is more important that the child should hear himself speak than that it should hear others, and when the child comes to recite, its articulation of mispronounced words may be corrected. Very slow progress would be made if it was required to speak aloud only at recitations, and very hard work on the part of the teacher could be avoided by having the child study the sounds it produced at its seat, and while studying its lesson. I would advise that where many are being taught, the class should pass into a quiet recitation-room. It has been my experience in institutions I have visited that I have been able to teach classes of a dozen children to speak plainly thirty to one hundred words in two or three days, whether they have received previous instruction in articulation or not, and at this rate it would require but a very short time to give them a vocabulary that would be of practical value to them. I have, however, selected those possessing the most hearing, and that would be faster than the average could be taught; but all intelligent children, with five per cent. of hearing can be taught as valuable speech as I possess. My articulation may be defective, but I think you have been able to understand what I have said, and, poor as it is, I would not part with it for all the possessions any



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one of you may have. And here, gentlemen, you are depriving half of the children in the institutions that you teach of an articulation that might be as valuable to them as mine is to me, or as yours is to you.

I have known institutions where the teachers themselves have used this audiphone, and have taught children who could hear naturally better than themselves, and did not allow them to use it. By what line of reasoning they can justify this I do not know; or why they should deprive the innocent child of the blessings they appropriate to themselves. And these poor children, ignorant of the value of the slight degree of hearing God has conferred upon them, are sent to the schools for the deaf for instruction, and thousands are being sent forth from these institutions ignorant still of the great value the hearing they have would have been to them had it been utilized in teaching them to speak. Teachers, will you continue to do this? Will you continue to graduate this large class of hard-of-hearing children as children perfectly deaf? If you do, you commit a grievous offense and an offense which will not be forgotten or forgiven. You will deprive fifty per cent. of the afflicted children given to your care of valuable speech and an education to articulate sounds. You deprive them of the enjoyment of God's most valuable gifts, speech and hearing. You in a great measure deprive them of the means of making a livelihood. The hard-of-hearing, speaking person will succeed well in most callings. The responsibility for the present rests with you; in the future this will all be done. Are you prepared to say, "We will not do it; we will leave it to the future; we will continue in our old methods," or will you rise equal to the occa-

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sion and deserve the blessings of future generations? As for me, I would rather be the inventor of this little device I hold in my hands, and the author of these few words I have addressed to you, knowing them to be true, and feel the satisfaction I feel in having devoted the past sixteen years of my life to this cause, than to be the inventor of any device that merely serves commercial purposes. Commerce may be benefited in a thousand ways, whereas an affliction may be alleviated in but few.

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#### A Vote of Thanks.

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On motion it was

*Resolved*, That the thanks of this convention are due to Mr. R. S. Rhodes for his valuable paper.







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