

## No. 2.

## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR.

SIR,—

School for Deaf-mutes, Sumner, 22nd May, 1903.

I regret having to report that the influx of new children during the year 1902 was unexpectedly large—larger in number and more varied in intensity of affliction than that of any previous year. As many as 10 arrived on reopening the school in February, and although one of these, at the request of the Medical Officer, was sent back, 5 more were admitted in June, thus swelling the number of 46 pupils remaining on the roll to a total of 60—namely, 35 boys and 25 girls.

On former occasions attention has been drawn to the fact that in all institutions for the deaf there are a number of inmates who possess either a vestige or a considerable degree of hearing-power. It has also been pointed out that by adopting a symbol, say 1 A, by which the hearing-power of a normal person may be indicated, and 0 A showing the absence of all hearing-power, all the pupils in a school for the deaf may be graded according to this scale. In 1892, for instance, there were 25 out of 39 pupils in the Sumner school more or less sensitive to sound-vibration. The position of the favoured class falling under  $\frac{7}{8}$  A, however (see Report, 1893), remained unoccupied then.

This gap in the scale now no longer exists, for four of the June arrivals fall within the limits, and though practically deaf-mutes—that is, mute in consequence of deafness—they are technically better described as very dull hearers. What such dull hearers really are may be gathered by the general reader by my stating that when these four children were diagnosed they proved to possess enough dormant hearing-power to notice the sharp sounds of an ordinary plain speaker, but not clearly enough to appreciate the delicate vibrations and *nuances* of tone produced by his articulated words. Single vowel-sounds were perceived at a considerable distance and imitated by these children, but the proper use of such letters as t, b, c, k, v, f, n, l, ng, w, d, g, j, ch, sh, as they occur in words, was foreign to them, and if attempted these were mutilated. What little speech these dull hearers had was at best a kind of jargon, for the few short words and easy names they uttered were barely intelligible. One of the four referred to had at one time been sent to the village school, but was soon after sent home and pronounced unfit.

Another misfortune hanging over these dull hearers, and, indeed, over all deaf children, and demanding our attention is the serious mischief wrought by sympathizing friends and by antiquated family practitioners in holding out false hopes to naturally anxious parents with regard to their children's ultimate recovery from deafness, and in offering them cheap and silly advice against paying prompt attention to their education. But enough to show that the very fact of these dull hearers having a slight natural advantage over their less fortunate fellow-sufferers is in reality often a source of great danger to them. What, it may be asked, is there, then, to guide wavering parents with children of this description? Are they to continue giving ear to foolish advisers, to keep on wavering and hoping, and thus injure the mental life and physical condition of their suffering offspring? Common-sense and modern science alike protest. Both direct all interested to go and watch the proceedings at a modern school for the deaf, where these dull hearers, in a separate class, or in company with others less *mentally* dumb, are taught in accordance with approved principles as interpreted by experienced teachers; where their organs of speech are patiently and daily exercised; where, with the use of improved ear-tubes and without them, they are trained to clearly speak out the vowel-sounds and to listen to their own voices; where they are taught to properly articulate the letters unknown to them, to combine in speech letters and vowels into words and sentences; where they are practised to employ these in ordinary language for the purposes of having intellectual intercourse within themselves and with their fellow-men; and where they are trained to read, from the various movements of the facial muscles, the distinctly spoken language of nearly every patient speaker. That my remarks are not extravagant but to the point I know from my own experience, extending over well-nigh half a century. Doubters may test their worth by referring to the writings of such eminent teachers as Hill and Vatter, in Germany; Bickers, in Holland; others in Italy; and by consulting such a publication as “*Die Taubstummheit auf Grund Ohrenärztlicher Beobachtungen*” (Deaf-mutism as observed from an Aurist's Point of View), by Dr. Bezold, professor in the University of Munich; published by J. F. Bergmann, Wiesbaden, 1902.

For the first time in the history of the school has its magnetic influence been felt in every province of the colony. Eighteen pupils were present from Otago, 13 from Canterbury, 3 from Westland, 2 from Nelson, and 1 from Marlborough; 9 from Wellington, 4 from Taranaki, 2 from Hawkes Bay, and 8 from Auckland: giving a return of 37 pupils from the South and of 23 from the North Island.

Six girls and two boys were sufficiently advanced in their general education at the end of the year to return to their respective homes. Several of the girls have since taken up dressmaking as a means of gaining a living, and one is assisting her father, who is a widower, in his household. The boys, it appears, experienced greater difficulty in securing places to learn a trade. Master mechanics were evidently frightened at having to pay the regulation wage of 5s. a week as well as being obliged to teach a boy his trade in spite of his affliction. At any rate, as stated in a letter of thanks and appreciation that I recently received, it was this having to pay wages from the beginning of his employment that was understood by the widowed mother of one of the boys to be the great objection to his being employed.

The progress of the inmates varied with their natural ability. That of several was excellent, of the majority good, of a few hardly satisfactory, while that of one, slightly imbecile, only admitted on trial, was practically nil. The opportunity of testing the mental powers of this boy has served a useful purpose, however. It has enlightened the younger members of the teaching-staff and convinced them that a school for deaf-mutes cannot at the same time be an asylum or harbour for deaf imbeciles, however slightly affected.