

SESS. II.—1879.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEAF AND DUMB INSTITUTION

(FURTHER PAPERS RELATING TO).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,— 7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 18th June, 1879.

Referring to your letter No. 173, of 7th November last, I have the honor to inform you that I have, in accordance with the instructions contained therein, engaged Mr. Gerrit Van Asch to proceed to New Zealand as teacher of deaf-mutes.

I herewith transmit a special report from Dr. Abbott, Mr. Kennaway, and myself, with reference to the subject.

I trust that the decision arrived at will be satisfactory, and that Mr. Van Asch may prove to be a competent teacher, and one able to establish an institution for deaf-mutes in New Zealand which will give every advantage possible to those placed under his charge.

In consideration of Dr. Abbott's services in acting with Mr. Kennaway and myself in selecting the teacher, I have paid that gentleman an honorarium of £20, being a similar amount to that which I was authorized by the Governors of the Otago High School to pay to him when he acted as my colleague in the selection of a rector for the High School at Dunedin.

A formal agreement with Mr. Van Asch is now in course of preparation by Messrs. J. Mackrell, copy of which I shall probably be able to send to you by next mail.

Mr. Van Asch is under engagement to embark for New Zealand not later than the end of October next.

I have, &c.,

JULIUS VOGEL,
Agent-General.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

Enclosure in No. 1.

SIR,— 7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 10th June, 1879.

We have the honor to report that, after very careful consideration, we have decided that Mr. G. Van Asch is the most desirable person to appoint to the charge of deaf-mutes in New Zealand.

In reply to the advertisement, of which we enclose copy, as also copy of the printed particulars we furnished to applicants, we received seventeen applications. Of these applications, twelve were from persons who professed to teach on what is termed the combined system, three from persons who had no special knowledge of the treatment of deaf-mutes, and one from a professor of the German system.

It may be necessary to explain that the German system teaches its pupils to converse by means of articulate sounds, and to understand by lip-reading—*i.e.*, by interpreting the movement of the lips of speakers, to the exclusion of all signs except natural ones. The introduction of this system into this country is of comparatively recent date. It arose through two or three parents of deaf-mutes being wealthy enough to make special provision for their children. Mr. Van Asch, for example, came over from Holland specially to teach an afflicted child. He is probably the first gentleman who taught the system in England. It is twenty years since he came over, and he has devoted himself to teaching a few pupils. The more general introduction of the system is probably due to Mr. St. John Ackers, a wealthy country gentleman, whose only child, a little girl, lost her hearing in infancy. Mr. and Mrs. Ackers travelled all over Europe and through part of America with the object of convincing themselves by observation as to which system would be the best for teaching their child. They arrived at a conclusion in favour of the German system, and first employed an American lady, who, besides teaching the child, trained a teacher specially to succeed to that duty. Mr. Ackers was so delighted with the progress his child made that he has thrown himself enthusiastically into the cause of promoting the use of the system. A college for training teachers has been established under the auspices of Mr. Ackers and a number of very influential coadjutors. There are also two or three private schools on the system, and of these Mr. Van Asch has one. All the teachers who are being trained at the college are engaged

in advance, so that we had no resource there, even supposing we should have been inclined to select a gentleman possessing only a short experience of the system.

As we have said, the German system comprises the teaching of articulation and lip-reading. It is a cardinal point with the teachers on this system that systematized signals must not be used in connection with it. They, in fact, find it very difficult to bring to the use of their system children who have once been educated to a familiar use of systematized signals. By systematized signals are meant arbitrary signals (as opposed to natural ones) to express words or letters, or short sentences. It is unquestionably the fact that by the German system deaf-mutes may be enabled to compensate themselves largely for the loss of hearing and speech. They may be made to speak quite clearly, so that there is no difficulty in understanding them; they may also be made to read from the lips with a facility and correctness that must be seen to be realized, so astonishing is the result. They are brought to read and write with facility, and their education can be conducted up to limits which cannot be reached under the other system. The degree of excellence to which children attain under this system varies much with their intellectual ability. The advocates of the system contend that it is applicable to all children not idiots, and that there is no greater disparity in the results under this system than there is under the other system, in which they maintain that it is equally found that the ability of the afflicted children widely varies. On the other hand, the advocates of the systematized-signal system, or, as it is variously called, the French system, or the dactyl system, declare that the percentage of children capable of acquiring the German system is very small, and that the French system, and no other, is capable of imparting to such children the requisite instruction. They call themselves professors of the combined system—*i.e.*, a system which attempts to combine the teaching of articulation and lip-reading with the teaching of dactylology. Our opinion lies between the two extremes.

There can be no question that the German system is the most beneficent in its results. It may win for the afflicted deaf-mutes lives comparatively unembittered by their misfortune. Under this system a deaf-mute may enjoy all the pleasure of easy and constant interchange of ideas with those with whom he or she is intimate, may to a minor extent enjoy the same advantage with strangers, and may become advanced in education, not to say exceptionally intelligent. We doubt if under the other system there can be an approach to such results, and we are convinced that under the French system there is a far greater danger than under the German system that deaf-mutes should shun the society of those who are not deaf, and thus, by congregating together, should in many cases increase the natural and inevitable disadvantage arising from their affliction. We are not quite convinced that the German system is applicable to all children who are not idiots. As we have said, its professors assert such to be the case; but we think there may be intelligences low in their nature, but above the level of the idiot, to whom the effort of learning by the German system would be so great that it would be more merciful to use the French system to furnish them with the little information they are ever likely to be able to acquire. But we are strongly of opinion that the number of those who are capable of learning by the German system is very largely in excess of that which the professors of the combined system are prepared to admit. The professors of the combined system neglect the cardinal point to which we have referred—namely, the exclusion of the systematized signals. They, in fact, teach articulation and lip-reading as a mere accomplishment, devoting half an hour or an hour a day to it; by the German method it is the sole medium of communication. The children under the German system think in words; under the French, or the combined system, they think in signs. It is not to be wondered at that under the combined system the result in articulation and lip-reading is so small. Indeed, it seems to us that the followers of the French system have adopted what they call the combined system as a means of meeting the growing feeling in favour of the German system. They hope by the compromise to still continue the general use of the French system. In our opinion, the combination answers no good purpose. The articulation so taught is a mere accomplishment, and the cases are rare, under the combined system, in which it becomes of any use to the learner after his education is completed. To be of use, the German system must be taught most thoroughly in its integrity, without any intermixture with the French system. We are not, however, convinced that the French system can altogether be dispensed with for pupils of an unusually low order of intelligence. But each should be kept distinct; and, in mercy and humanity to the child, the German system should be used where it can.

A careful consideration of these facts led to the inevitable conclusion that the superior position should be given to the professor of the German system, and we selected the only applicant we had under that system—the only gentleman, moreover, we believe, available for the purpose throughout this country. Before referring to Mr. Van Asch's qualifications, we may say a few words concerning the other applicants. The general salary paid to teachers under the French system seems to be about £100 to £150 a year. With the exception of one gentleman, we doubt if any of the applicants under the French system are in receipt of salaries exceeding £200. The exception was that of a clergyman whose emoluments are probably some £500 a year, but whose age was over fifty. With the exception of Mr. Van Asch, this was the only one of the applicants who might be considered entitled to a position of the kind required in New Zealand, with the rewards attending it. We mention this because—assuming we are right in supposing that the German system may not prove all-sufficient in New Zealand—we make no doubt that a gentleman, competent to take a separate class, or classes, under the French system, could be easily obtained at a salary of £300 a year, or about double what he would receive in this country. There were certainly none amongst the candidates, excepting Mr. Van Asch, whom we could have deemed ourselves justified in selecting.

Mr. Van Asch appeared to us to be quite suitable for the appointment. He has a thorough knowledge of the German system; and the results, as witnessed by ourselves, on his pupils, are astonishing in the extreme. The testimonials submitted by him show that he has entirely satisfied the parents of children who have been with him. The pupils we saw—about ten in number—were of various ages—from seven years to seventeen, or upwards; and their general behaviour and obvious cheerfulness impressed us no less favourably than their proficiency in articulation and lip-reading. Mr. Van Asch is accustomed to take the whole charge of his pupils, including their

board and lodging, and would therefore be suitable for the duties of that nature required by the conditions set forth in the instructions of the Government. Although Mr. Van Asch is a foreigner by birth, yet a residence of twenty years in England has enabled him to speak English with perfect accuracy, with perfect clearness, and with an entire freedom from foreign accent or idiom. On the whole, we deem him very suitable for the position he will have to occupy. By his means the German system will take firm root in New Zealand; and the French system, if hereafter required, can be superadded with little cost and inconvenience, as occasion may arise. Had a commencement been made with the French system, it would have been as difficult to replace or amend it as has proved to be the case in this country.

We have, &c.,

JULIUS VOGEL.

EDWIN A. ABBOTT.

WALTER KENNAWAY.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

By Authority: GEORGE DIDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1879.

Price 3d.

