

With regard to the two pupils who remained at home after the holidays without having acquired even a fair amount of education, both, as being typical cases which may recur from time to time, demand my special notice:—

No. 1.—J. H., a girl of about fourteen years old, of excellent ability, has been at school two years and ten months. Her progress in speaking and lip-reading, in reading and writing, and in the understanding of simple language was, for the time, remarkable; her aptitude for domestic matters good. In a few years she would have been one of the most advanced and most creditable pupils in the school—in a position to learn millinery or dressmaking easily and readily. As it is, this girl will be kept at home probably for no other purpose than mere domestic drudgery. To say that an intelligent child like this will have no permanent benefit from the short training she has had would be extravagant; on the other hand, the Dutch proverb, “Standing still means going back,” is applicable; and it is evident that to make use in this manner of the provisions of the State’s labour and expenditure is tantamount to abusing a great privilege, because the object of humanising the deaf-mute, for which the institution at Sumner has been established, is thus in a measure defeated.

To check such abuses, I recommend that in all future cases in which parents wish to avail themselves of the State’s assistance in educating their deaf children a clause be inserted in the agreement binding the parents to leave their children under instruction for as long a period of time as the Minister of Education shall determine.

No. 2.—A little boy of eight year’s old, equally bright and favourably circumstanced. He attended school from the beginning of February, 1888, until Christmas of the same year. The usual course of articulation exercises and writing was gone through, so that at the end of the year the little fellow could, unassisted, clearly speak, properly write, and thoroughly understand such words as “come,” “go out,” “look,” “dinner,” “beef,” “pudding,” “play marbles,” “fire,” “ten,” “who is that?” “on the table,” &c. Imagine my astonishment when on the return of the pupils I was told by the assistant in charge: “F.’s mother could not send him, because the family doctor and the district schoolmaster were of opinion that F. would now learn to speak all right.”

No matter how flattering this dictum might sound, or how serious its import will be to the unfortunate child, one could not keep a serious countenance over such profound ignorance and utter nonsense. The deaf-and-dumb learning to speak in the ordinary way after a year’s training in the first elements of articulation! One might as well expect perpetual motion to proceed from the single stroke of a whip to a top. No, sir, the task of lifting the thick veil of ignorance from the deaf cannot thus be disposed of. If a life-long study of the deaf-and-dumb, and an experience of more than thirty years’ labour amongst them has impressed my mind with any fact, it is this: that by a combination of unceasing care, indomitable perseverance, patient industry, untiring energy under the guidance of skill and experience, *much* may be accomplished by way of *alleviating* the affliction of deaf-mutism, but this *much* is still comparatively little. In spite of all the labour and striving, much has to be left undone—much remains with which the ablest teacher of the deaf is dissatisfied; and I doubt if there be any sphere of human labour in which the earnest worker is so much, so often, and so forcibly reminded of the imperfection of all things human as in that of the teacher of the deaf-and-dumb.

The health of the pupils may be said to have been good throughout the year. One boy from Otago, intellectually, perhaps, the weakest in the school, returned in February with his hand in a dreadful condition. It appears that the lad had during the holidays by some means or other got possession of a piece of dynamite. Possibly under the idea that it was a rocket, he must have lighted the fuse, with the inevitable result that some of his finger-ends were blown away. I mention this to warn parents and foster-parents. Deaf children are meddlesome by nature; they have little fear, and are often ignorant of real danger; the less capable they are intellectually the more they require supervision and watchfulness.

An extraordinary *contra* to this piece of stupidity is presented to us in the person of an old pupil, F. B. by name. This young man, whom I visit occasionally to encourage him in his daily pursuit as a farmer, is an object of admiration to most of his more gifted brethren in the neighbourhood. His capacity for and industry in all kinds of farm-work is really astonishing; and not only is he to his parents a most valuable helpmate, but recently, during a very severe illness of the father, this deaf young man carried on the whole practical business of the farm—in sowing-time, too—including the direction of the men, satisfactorily and with success. Even in the choice and aim of his amusements he is rational, for he has taken to the pastime of rifle-shooting, one out of very few suited to the defect of deafness. Instead of being a source of danger and weakness he is an element of strength, and a credit to the club to which he belongs. How difficult it is, however, for deaf-mutes to share in the rational enjoyments of hearing persons, one incident may be mentioned by way of illustration: When this young man was present at a prize-firing some time ago in another part of New Zealand an objection was raised against his taking part in the chief matches on account of his deafness. The objection, emanating from a brother volunteer of his own district, being held good, prevented B., of course, from sharing the pleasure and excitement of the contest. He returned satisfied with his shooting, for he had gained a few prizes, but disappointed because he had been kept out of the sport of the interprovincial matches. Ever since his thoughts and hopes have been fixed on the membership of the Christchurch Reserve, which, he believes, would entitle him to take part in all matches. He presses me to give him every assistance. When I point out that the authorities may again object to his becoming a member on the ground of his natural infirmity he meets my objection with the pertinent remarks: He saw the lame and the deformed (meaning a cripple and a person with his neck on one side) take part in the prize-shooting at K., why should he, who can move about, and aim so much better, be excluded? This youth’s logic is, perhaps, not so irrational for a deaf-mute, for in times of war and real danger, when a man-of-war might be seen in our harbours, would the people and the authorities reject him as a marksman because he cannot hear? I doubt it.