"The Milan Convention"

By Edward Miner Gallaudet

The readers of the *Annals* will remember that in the summer of 1878, during the progress of the French Universal Exhibition, a meeting of instructors of the deaf and dumb was hastily convened, to which the commanding name of International Convention (*Congrès Universel*) was given. Twenty-seven teachers attended this gathering, out of which number twenty-three were from France; Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, and Belgium each furnishing a single delegate. The character of the assemblage, therefore, did not correspond with its title, and as an attempted representation of the work and various methods of deaf-mute instruction in the world, as well as of the opinions held by instructors, the Convention of Paris was a failure. Moreover, it is well known that the management of the Convention was in the hands of the promoters of articulation, and more especially under the control of representatives of the Pereire Society, (*la Société Pereire*), an association established some years since in Paris for the purpose of securing the recognition of Pereire as the first teacher of deaf-mutes in France, and to bring about the general adoption of the oral method, which was practiced by Pereire. It is probably not so generally known that several great-grandsons of Pereire are now living in Paris; that they are united in a very wealthy banking firm, and that they have been contributing large sums of money during the past few years for the support of the Pereire Society, and the Pereire School for deaf-mutes, of which Mr. Magnat is the principal.

The Paris Convention appointed a committee of twelve of its own members to make arrangements for a second international meeting. Of those composing this committee, eleven were from France, and a very large majority were ardent promoters of the method of articulation. Milan was selected as the place in which the Convention of 1880 should be held, in which city are to be found two institutions formerly conducted on the

method of the Abbe de l’Epée, but which for the past ten years have been giving the greatest possible prominence to articulation.

When the Convention came to be organized, the head of one of the Milan schools, the Abbe Tarra, was made President, and the leading instructor in the other school, Professor Fornari, was made Secretary. Of the four Vice-Presidents and four Vice-Secretaries, seven were pronounced supporters of articulation.

Two days before the opening of the Convention were devoted to public examinations of the Milan schools, at which the delegates were earnestly urged to be present; and during one-half of each day that the Convention was in session no sittings were held, in order to leave the members free to visit the Milan schools.

All these facts are mentioned in order to show—which certainly cannot be disputed—that in arranging for the Convention the promoters of articulation secured every possible advantage to themselves, imparting a partisan character to the whole affair from the very outset. And the sequel will prove that the Convention at Milan was no more international or representative in its composition than that of Paris; that its formal utterances are no more to be taken as representing the sentiments of teachers of the deaf and dumb throughout the world than are the resolutions of a party nominating convention to be regarded as a fair expression of the opinions of the whole community.

And yet a journal of no less prominence and influence than the London *Times* gravely announces, in a labored editorial published a few days after the adjournment of the Milan Convention, that "no more representative body could have been collected than that which at Milan has declared for oral teaching for the deaf, and for nothing but oral teaching," and speaks of the actions of the Convention as expressing a "virtual unanimity of preference for oral teaching which might seem to overbear all possibility of opposition."

With such stupidity, if it be nothing worse, on the part of the conductors of one of the leading journals of the world, it is not easy to be patient.

If the editors of the *Times* had taken the slightest pains to inquire, they would have learned that out of the one hundred and sixty-four active members of the Convention *eighty-seven* or a clear majority of ten, were from Italy; that *fifty-six* were from France, making, with the Italian members, a majority of *seven-eighths*; that, of the eight English delegates, six were ardent articulationists, and only two at all favorable to any other method—a proportion which entirely misrepresents the present sentiment of English teachers of the deaf; that the only truly representative delegation present was that from the United States, consisting of five members, duly accredited to the Milan meeting by a Conference of Principals of American Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb held at Northampton last May, in which the supporters of the several methods of instruction now made use of in this country (including all that are known in the world) were assembled in friendly council; that the American delegates represented fifty-one schools, containing over six thousand pupils—a greater number than was represented by all the other one hundred and fifty-nine delegates taken together; that the Convention allowed the American delegates to be outvoted in the proportion of nearly ten to one by the representatives of the two schools of Milan, they being accorded *forty-six* seats in the Convention.

Possibly, if all these facts had come to the knowledge of the editors of the *Times* before the publication of the article quoted from above, less might have been said as to the "representative" character of the Milan meeting.

But we are not yet done with the "Thunderer" of Great Britain, for it is unfortunate in the correspondents it employs as well as in its editorial staff.

In an account of the public examinations, so-called, of the Milan schools, given on the two days preceding the assembling of the Convention, the *Times* reporter says:

"Let it be noted that the medium of examination—the sole medium of communication, in fact, between pupil and examiner, whether teacher or visitor—was speech—speech alone. Every word of the examination was uttered audibly; every word of the answer was spoken in like manner, audibly and loudly. There was not even in this country, where gesture and action so commonly accompany speech, the least resort to signs or finger language. * * * Deaf children were addressed just as if they were not deaf, in spoken language, and they one and all answered in spoken language, though in our country we call them dumb."

Now, while this was all true, the English letter-writer failed to report that the examinations followed very closely the printed programmes; that the answers were in many instances begun before the examiner had completed his questions; that no real examinations was made by outside persons; that many pupils were asked very few questions, while certain other pupils were examined at great length; that these discriminations were made by the teachers in every instance; that no information was given as to the history of the pupil—that is to say, as to whether deafness was congenital or acquired, and whether speech had been developed before hearing was lost or not; that the impression was thus sought to be conveyed to the audiences that all the speech possessed by all the pupils had been imparted to them by their teachers, which was certainly not the case. In view of all which we do not hesitate to characterize these so-called examinations as mere exhibitions, deserving to have very little influence with the professional observer.

The labors of the Convention began at noon on Monday, Sept. 6, and all the time of that day’s session was consumed in complimentary speeches as the election of officers.

The subjects presented for discussion by the Committee on Organization were grouped in four classes, as follows: (1) Those relating to buildings, and all material arrangements for the accommodations of inmates of institutions; (2) everything concerning the details of instruction; (3) the various methods of teaching; (4) special questions.

After what has been said as to the organization and complexion of the Convention, it will surprise no one that, among the many topics suggested in the programme, that of methods of instruction should have engrossed the time of the Convention to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Discussion was begun on the second day by the presentation of a printed volume of one hundred and sixteen pages, prepared by Mr. Magnat, principal of the Pereire school for deaf-mutes in Paris. In this brochure all the topics included in the first three groups were treated *in extenso*. A small portion only of this volume was read to the Convention. As an evidence of the *entente cordiale* existing between the head of the Pereire family and those who are working under its patronage, the dedication of this volume is interesting:

"A Monsieru Eugène Pereire, Président due Comité d'organisation du Congrès international de Milan. Hommage de parfait attachment.

"MAGNAT."

Mrs. B. St. John Ackers, well known to the readers of the *Annals* as an accomplished English lady who has been for some years superintending the education of a deaf daughter, read a paper on the "Mental development of the deaf under the German system."

Mrs. Ackers was followed by Miss Susanna E. Hull, of London, the mistress of a private school for deaf-mutes, in a paper entitled, "My experience of various methods of educating the deaf-born."

Both these ladies urged in eloquent language the superiority of the German or oral method over the French or sign method, but neither recognized the objection which may be raised against the oral method for *all* deaf-mutes: that, in point of fact, a large proportion of the deaf are incapable of attaining any real success in speech and lip-reading.

The writer of this article opposed the use of either the German or the French method to the exclusion of the other, and advocated a combined system, in which all available means should be employed, these being wisely adapted to the diverse conditions of those who are to be taught.

He admitted the propriety of maintaining schools in which the oral method should prevail, but insisted that at the same time other schools should be provided for the benefit of those who are incapable of success in speech.

These views, however, found little favor in the Convention, and after a debate, absorbing three entire days, in which the presiding officer, the Abbe Tarra, was the most prominent speaker, he occupying more than two hours on two successive days, the following resolutions were adopted, the only negative voices being those of the American delegates and one English delegate, Mr. Richard Elliott, headmaster of the old London Institution:

1. "The Convention, considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs, (1) for restoring deaf-mutes to social life, (2) for giving them greater facility of language, declares that the method of articulation should have the preference over that of signs in the instruction and education of the deaf and dumb."

2. "Considering that the simultaneous use of signs and speech has the disadvantage of injuring speech and lip-reading and precision of ideas, the Convention declares that the pure oral method ought to be preferred."

On the fifth day of the meeting the writer of this article was invited by the President to read a paper he had prepared on the higher or collegiate education of the deaf and dumb, suggested by the second of the social questions proposed in the programme:

"Where and how can those whom deafness has prevented form pursuing classical studies receive an education equivalent to that of the higher schools open to hearing and speaking students? Should it be in a higher department of the institutions for the deaf and dumb, or in a special institution? Which special or with ordinary instructors?"

The writer argued in favor of the establishment of colleges for the deaf in the several countries of Europe, and maintained that, even with the highest possible facility in speech and lip-reading, the number of deaf students that could pass successfully through an ordinary college would be very small. The effort to give the higher education in each institution to the mere handful that would be capable of receiving it was objected to as expensive and impracticable. The writer demonstrated the practicality of his ideas by giving a history of the successful progress, during the last sixteen years, of the National Deaf-Mute College at Washington.

The suggestion of the founding of colleges for the deaf in Europe was warmly endorsed by Mr. Hugentobler, of Lyons, Padre Marchiò, of Siena, and the Abbe Balestra, of Paris. The President expressed the thanks of the Convention for the paper on Collegiate Education, and desired a copy for publication.

The suggestion was made that the Convention give a formal expression of its approval of the idea of establishing colleges for the deaf in Europe, but Herr Treibel, of Berlin, followed by others, urged that the higher education should not be undertaken Europe while so many deaf-mutes were unable to secure even the primary education.

The discussion on the subject was closed by the adoption of the following:

"Considering that a great number of deaf-mutes do not receive the benefit of instruction, and that this is due to the poverty of their families and the want of suitable institutions, the Convention resolves that Governments ought to take the necessary steps so that all the deaf and dumb shall

receive instruction."

The writer had the pleasure of stating to the Convention that the provision urged by the resolution was already made, with very rare exceptions, throughout the State of the American Union. The remainder of the session of Friday was occupied in the discussion of a few details in the work of teaching, more especially concerning instruction in grammar.

On Saturday, the closing day of the meeting, resolutions were adopted urging the preparation of special text-books to be used in deaf-mutes by the oral method; advising the entrance of pupils into schools between the ages of eight and ten years, and their continuance under instruction for at least seven years; advising that no more than ten pupils be assigned to one instructor, and counselling a gradual and progressive substitution of the oral method in institutions in which it is not now employed.

It was decided that the next International Convention should be held at Basle, in August, 1883, and after the usual complimentary speeches and resolutions, the Convention adjourned.

The following papers prepared for the Convention were not read, but will be published in the proceedings: "Advantages to the Deaf of the ‘German’ system in after life," by B. St. John Ackers; "On the Education of the Deaf" by Arthur A. Kinsey, Principal of the Training College for Teachers of the Deaf on the German method, Ealing, near London; "Speech and lip-reading for the Deaf. A teacher’s testimony to the German system," by David Buxton, Ph.D., Secretary of the Society for training teachers of the Deaf and Diffusion of the "German" system in the United Kingdom; and "The Combined System," by the venerable and eminent Monseigneur De Haerne, of Brussels, whose labors and writings in behalf of deaf-mute education are so well known and so highly appreciated in America.

That the business committee did not arrange for the reading of this last paper is an additional proof of the partisan character of the management of

the Convention, for in the discussion of the matter of methods fully nine-tenths of the time was occupied by the advocates of the pure oral method. It is, however, not difficult to understand that, in a convention largely made up of ecclesiastics of the Roman Church, the promoters of the pure oral method should have preferred that so high an authority as Monseigneur De Haerne should not be heard in opposition to their views. Had he been present at the Convention, it is probable that the majority in favor of the pure oral method would have been considerably less than it was. And in this connection we are constrained to mention a fact that is not without a certain significance in estimating the value to be placed on the conclusions of the Convention.

A majority of the French delegates were members of an ecclesiastical order called the Brotherhood of St. Gabriel. Many of these brothers expressed the opinion freely in private conversation that signs could not be dispensed with in the instruction of deaf-mutes, and also that not all deaf-mutes could succeed under the oral method. They took no part, however, in the debate until towards the close, when Frère Hubert, inspector of the schools under the direction of the Brothers, rose and announced his conversion to the "pure oral method," closing his little speech by giving thanks to M. Eugène Pereire, though which liberality the members of his brotherhood had been enabled to visit Milan and attend the Convention. And not a brother of St. Gabriel voted against the method of Pereire.

Having now given a brief outline of the proceedings of the Convention, and having demonstrated, as we believe, that it was wholly partisan in its management and not at all representative in its composition or manner of voting, we will attempt to show that the declarations of the Convention (as to methods) are in some respects inconsistent with the expressed views of their prominent supporters, and that these conclusions are based on unsound premises; in fine, that they are deserving of no weight whatever with broad-minded, candid, and progressive friends of deaf-mutes.

If the reader will turn back to resolutions one and two, and will consider them together, it will be perceived that not only is the method of articulation given the preference over that of signs, but that signs are not to be used

simultaneously with speech: in other words, all use of signs is to be prohibited in the instruction of deaf-mutes. That such was the requirement of the "pure oral method" its supporters maintained most earnestly at certain points in the debate, and yet at certain other stages of the discussion it was admitted that signs are used under the "pure oral method," and Professor Fornari offered a resolution in which he endeavored to state in terms to what extent signs were to be employed. This resolution was supported by Mr. Hugentobler and several of the more conservative supporters of articulation. But the radicals felt that the admissions of Fornari's resolution would be inconsistent with the term "pure oral," with which they had resolved to christen their method, and of course did not maintain the motion.

Unfortunate pure oralists! Either horn of the dilemma was found to be an uneasy and painful resting place. If they admitted that signs were employed, the world would smile at the use of the words "*pure oral*." If they told the world they had banished signs, the records of the Convention would testify against them, for it was distinctly acknowledged that "natural signs," "those which are used and understood by hearing persons," "might be employed in the earlier stages of instruction."

The writer recalls an incident which occurred during his boyhood, when a young Frenchman, just arrived in this country and quite ignorant of English, visited his father's house. This young man had never before seen a deaf-mute, but on meeting the mother of the family, who was a mute, he at once began talking with her by signs, and continued conversation for more than a hour on a great variety of subjects, making, of course, only such signs as are "used and understood by hearing persons."

It is well known that the signs in use among the Indians of North America, who are certainly "hearing persons," cover a wide range of ideas.

But it is unnecessary to pursue the subject further to show that the so-called "pure oral method" exists only in name. We are not done, however, with the inconsistencies of some of its prominent supporters.

None of the delegates at Milan were more earnest advocates of the "pure oral method" than Mr. Arthur A. Kinsey, who was kind enough to present the writer with a copy of the paper he had prepared for the Milan Convention [See above.], from which we quote the following:

"Before proceeding further, I should propose to classify those for who we are laboring according to their physical and mental condition. I shall ask your consent to placing the simply deaf on the one side, and those deaf and otherwise afflicted on the other: in this latter class I include those suffering from defective brain power, imperfect vision, extreme constitutional weakness, or serious malformation of the vocal and articulating organs.

"The first division it is proposed to instruct on the ‘German’ system; *the second one on the ‘French.*’ [The italics are ours.]

"At the present time the serious schools in Germany do not reject those suffering other serious aliments in addition to deafness. All the deaf are admitted to the advantages of instruction, regardless of other defect being unhappily present.

"But the question which I desire to present to you is—Should this continue? "Where time, money, and teaching power are limited, where pupils are in excess of school accommodation at the special institutions, would it not be wiser to teach those merely deaf upon the ‘German’ system,—those who would really profit by such instruction and put it to real practical and valuable use in after life,—than to keep back such pupils for the sake of doubly afflicted ones, who, despite all effort and skill, would only be advanced to a *certain attainment in spoken language of trifling and most uncertain value*. [Again the italics are ours.]

* *

"The children that this method [the Germans] is incompetent to deal with should be cared for by other means not requiring so much capability on the part of the afflicted."

If we may be pardoned for the use of a little slang, we will venture the opinion that few instances are to be met with of a more complete "give-away" of one's self than the foregoing. Consistent pure oralist! In the convention he votes and shouts for "*la méthode orale pure*," and then submits a paper in which it is proposed to establish and maintain schools on the "French" or "sign" method, in which it is acknowledged there are certain deaf-mutes with whom the "German" method is "incompetent to deal," and who, under it, "despite all effort and skill, would only be advanced to a certain attainment in spoken language of trifling and most uncertain value." We beg to call the attention of the London *Times* to this record, and to suggest that if Mr. Kinsey is to be taken as a specimen "pure oralist," there may be something unreliable in the declarations of that "representative body" "which at Milan has declared for oral teaching for the deaf, and for nothing but oral teaching." But we forgive Mr. Kinsey his inconsistencies, and gladly take him on his record, and extend to him the right hand of fellowship.

Far from being a "pure oralist," he is plainly in favor of a "combined system"—a system which welcomes every practicable means of advancing and perfecting the education of all the deaf and dumb; a system which approves of the establishment of schools in which the oral method may be employed, provided that at the same time other schools can be maintained for the benefit of those who are incapable of success in speech; a system which is in operation to-day in New England, with its oral schools at Northampton, Boston, Portland, Providence, and Mystic; with the large and well-known institution at Hartford, where the sign method is still employed with excellent results.

Lest some of Mr. Kinsey's friends should think we are too fast in placing him where we do, we will consider for a moment, before passing to other matters, just how much is involved in his division of deaf-mutes into two

classes, as quoted above.

In this he displays more far-sightedness than we had given him credit for, and we cannot but admire the discretion with which he leaves an open door, and by no means a narrow one, for the convenient exit of those with whom the "German" method is found to be "incompetent to deal."

"Defective brain power:" most happily-chosen expression! For it is applicable to imperfect or weak memory, lack of the imitative faculty, slowness of apprehension, nervousness, and a score of other conditions familiar to those who have had to do with deaf-mutes. "Imperfect vision," including "nearsightedness," "far-sightedness," and other abnormal states of the visual organs, (common among deaf-mutes,) which would stand in the way of success in artificial speech, for this is an achievement of the eye no less than that of the vocal organs. "Constitutional weakness" would furnish a very considerable percentage of the whole number to be educated, and we drop the word "extreme," for surely a predisposition to colds, sore-throat, and catarrhal affections operates seriously against the attainment of speech by deaf-mutes.

And when we add those suffering from "serious malformation of the vocal or articulating organs," we have an aggregate sufficiently large to call for not a few of the "French method" schools Mr. Kinsey so wisely recommends.

But enough has been said to show that the expressed views of prominent "pure oralists" in the Milan Convention are inconsistent with the "declarations" for which they voted. We will now endeavor to make it apparent that these declarations are based on unsound premises.

Taking into account the whole body of deaf-mutes, and the time and money that is available for their education, it is not true that the method based on speech has an "incontestable superiority" over that based on signs.

And first of all, for that class with which, on the authority of Mr. Kinsey, the "German method is incompetent to deal," the boot is quite on the other leg. As to the proportion indicated by this class opinions differ, but in the judgment of some of the ablest instructors of articulation in Europe it outnumbers the other with whom success in speech is practicable.

As to the "incontestable superiority" of speech even for these, all depends on the environment. Given ample funds, implying a large proportion of teachers, and ample time, implying a long term of school training, the superiority of "speech" is admitted. On the other hand, with a period of teaching restricted to four or five years, and funds so limited that but one teacher to twenty or more pupils can be allowed, then we do not hesitate to claim that results of greater practical value to the deaf-mute have been reached and will hereafter be attained under the method of De l’Epée than under that of Heinicke.

A short time since the writer met for the first time a deaf-mute of about forty years of age, a resident of Natick, Mass. He communicated with us by signs, through the use of the manual alphabet, and by writing. He had never learned to speak.

What followed may be taken as a fair sample of this deaf-mute’s ability to use his vernacular, while the facts brought out will give some idea as to his success and pleasure in mingling with those who hear and speak. In presenting the following questions and receiving the answers writing was the sole medium of communication:

"Were you born deaf?"

"Yes sir; I was born deaf and dumb. I can hear loud whistle of an engine plainly."

"How many years were you at the Hartford Institution, and in what year did

you leave school?"

"Six years. I was nine years old when I went to school; 1847; left there in 1853.

Before I went to school my mother learned me the finger-alphabet and many words, and also learned to write. Mrs. Vice-President Henry Wilson was my school-mate."

"How have you been employed since you left school?"

"When I left school, farming with my brother seven years; left it on account of hard work. I went into a shoe manufactory, where I have been employed eighteen years, and am still at work."

"Have you had any difficulty in earning enough to support yourself?"

"No, sir; I have not had any difficulty in earning enough to support myself since I left school. Now I am in very comfortable circumstances, and will be able to support myself for as long as I live. My wages in the shop are good."

"Have you made many friends among hearing and speaking people?"

"Yes sir; a great many. I enjoy associating with them very much. They are very good and kind to me."

"How have you conversed with these friends?"

"By writing, and one and two-handed alphabet."

"How many persons have learned the finger alphabet, so as to be able to talk with you?"

"A good many. I cannot count them. They enjoy talking with me very much. Very often they tell me what they are speaking with the others and what the others say."

"When a train of through passes through your mind, do your ideas take shape in signs or in words?"

"In words always, since that is the way in which my ideas are expressed."

That among the graduates of the deaf-mute schools of this country large numbers may be found who have been equally successful in making their way in the world, equally happy in their relations with hearing people, and equally correct in their use of language with the person just alluded to, is too well known to be successfully disputed.

Now, if the person above described could have had his term of study extended fifty per cent, and could have acquired speech and lip-reading, in addition to what he secured at Hartford, he would, of course, have been the gainer. But with his school-term limited to six years, with, perhaps, only a second or third-rate ability to acquire speech, necessitating the devotion of the greater part of his time to speech alone, we do not hesitate to claim the "incontestable superiority," in his case, for the method based on signs. And what is true in this instance will apply in many others.

We now desire to direct attention to a few glaring misstatements to be found in papers presented to the Convention by some of the English delegates, giving evidence of a degree of ignorance or carelessness on

their part which, if it is to be taken as an index of their general method of investigation, will readily account for this greatest of all blunders in ascribing an incontestable superiority to the method of speech over that based on signs in the general education of the deaf.

Towards the close of Miss Hull’s paper we find the following:

"When we look at the home life, the social life, and, above all, the religious life of the deaf, at how much greater advantage are those who can freely converse with others by speech and lip-reading, compared with the disciples of the sign languages, who must necessarily confine their intercourse within a circle—the limited circle—of those who have learned the same mode of converse with themselves."

The reader of this paragraph is plainly left to infer that a deaf-mute, educated without speech, has no means of holding intercourse with his fellow-men save through the use of the language of signs. We beg to inform Miss Hull that deafmutes taught on the "sign method" learn to read and write; that they often carry on extended conversations with hearing people in writing; moreover, that they have in the manual alphabet a means of communication easily and very frequently acquired by their hearing friends, which is in many particulars, and under many circumstances, a much more satisfactory medium of conversation than speech and lip-reading.

In the paper presented by Mr. Ackers the following will be found on page 8:

"The contrast was most marked between those taught under the ‘German’ system, with whom we conversed by word of mouth, and those who had been taught under the ‘French’ system, unable to converse with us who whose attempts at writing were most difficult, an in many cases impossible to understand owing to the language of their country being to them a foreign language. That the language of their country will be ever thus, even to the most highly educated, will be admitted by even the staunchest

supporters of those systems. Dr. E. M. Gallaudet acknowledged this to me, and said that I might mention that even one so highly gifted by nature and education as his own mother never, even in later years, could be said to have lost in her writings all ‘deaf-mutisms.’"

To those who are at all familiar with educated deaf-mutes in this country it will not be necessary to say anything in reply to the misstatements contained in the above paragraph. But for the benefit of the general reader we will state that we know of no even moderately staunch supporter of the ‘French’ method who admits that the language of their country ever remains as a foreign language to the most highly educated of the deaf and dumb taught under that method; that thousands of deaf-mutes in this country have a fair mastery of verbal language, though they remain dumb; that the writer’s mother, far from being "highly gifted by education," had the misfortune to have reached adult years before the first school for mutes in this country was opened, and enjoyed only three years of instruction; that she, in spite of these disadvantages, gained so good a command of the language of her country as to be able to sustain a voluminous correspondence with members of her family and others, even into extreme old age, never experiencing any difficulty in expressing her ideas in verbal language, which, if not always correct, was usually so, and was certainly more free from errors than that of many hearing persons who have enjoyed far greater educational advantages than were hers.

We venture to promise our friend Mr. Ackers, whose disinterested and generous labors in the cause of deaf-mute instruction command our warmest admiration, that on the occasion of his next visit to America we will place him in communication with educated deaf-mutes whose attainments in verbal language will greatly modify his present views as to the possible results of the "French" method of instruction.

In Mr. Kinsey’s paper we find the following on page 22:

"These remarks are addressed, not at my ‘German system’ brothers, but at those engaged on other methods in my mind far less satisfactory, and I

think are not uncalled for, when I remember the words addressed by the head of a National College for the Deaf and Dumb, viz., that he ‘had felt diffident about conferring a degree on a young man upon his graduating who was not competent to construct a grammatically correct sentence in his own native language.’"

We will not say that the above is an intentional misrepresentation, but we will say that it is entirely an unwarrantable statement. What we did "address" to Mr. Kinsey on the occasion alluded was, that in a certain instance we hesitated to confer a degree on a young man who, while he had sustained all the examinations required for his degree, was not always able to use her vernacular correctly. And Mr. Kinsey does not need to be informed that among the hearing and speaking graduates of colleges, both in England and America, there are to be found those who are not always faultless in their use of their "own native language."

Perhaps the most glaring evidence of a lack of knowledge of the subject with which one was attempting to deal with is found in an utterance of the President of the Convention, the Abbe Tarra, whose professional reputation is that of a master of the sign method, which he once taught, as well as of the oral, of which he was the high-priest and apostle at Milan.

He closed his oration in favor of the pure oral method as follows:

"Speech is addressed to the intellect, while gestures speak coarsely to the senses. I used signs for many years in my religious teaching, but decided definitely to give them up and adopt the pure oral system, because I became convinced that my pupils, instead of understanding the abstract ideas I intended to convey to them, were only placed in possession of grossly material images."

Nothing more than this is needed to stamp the Abbe Tarra, in the minds of accomplished instructors of the deaf under the sign method in this country, as a mere tyro in the use of the language of signs. For every *master* of that

language knows how completely it may be made to convey and clearly express the highest religious and moral truths and sentiments.

The limits we have assigned ourselves in this article will not allow the insertion of a number of points we have in mind quite pertinent to the general line of thought suggested by the proceedings of the Convention, and we can only express the hope, in closing, that, in spite of the little value to be attached to the so-called *conclusions*, good results may flow from the meeting, in an increased interest towards deaf-mutes throughout Europe. And we believe that the sober second thought of many, even, who were carried away by the enthusiasm of the hour at Milan, and were led to vote for impracticable and even impossible things, will deter them from attempting manifest absurdities.

Originally published in:

American Annals of the Deaf , Vol. 26, January 1881, pp. 1-16.

Republished in:

Education of Deaf Children, edited by Joseph C. Gordon, 1892, pp. 105-110.

LINK:

http://saveourdeafschools.org/edward_miner_gallaudet_the_milan_convention.pdf