EVENING SESSION.

The Institute met at 7:30 p. m. Mr. Alex A. Arnold in the chair. Music by the orchestra.

THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF.

J. W. SWILER, Supt. Wis. School for the Deaf, Delavan, Wis.

One of the most notable and at the same time one of the most helpful achievements of the nineteenth century has been the diffusion of popular education. In the past education was for the favored few; but, during the century now closing education has become a public duty, second only to the protection of life and property. Although the deaf and the blind did not receive their share of public attention till years after public schools were common, still the last fifty years have shown rapid advances in the education of these hitherto neglected children.

Wisconsin was set off as a territory in 1836; and, public schools were opened the same year. In twelve years the new territory became a state; and, four years after that, in 1852 the state legislature made an appropriation for the support of a school for the deaf at Delavan.

This city was chosen because there were people in its immediate vicinity who became personally interested in the education of the deaf children within the bounds of Walworth Co. for whom a private school had been started before the state appropriation was made. It is a pleasure to remember that this community has always shown a great interest in the welfare of the school and in times of need has never failed to respond generously to any and all appeals for help. In the early days when financial aid was needed it was not withheld; and when the fire came the homes of its people were opened to receive the inmates of the homeless school.

In thinking of the deaf and their education, do not consider them a separate and distinct class, unlike other people, but bear in mind that they are simply unfortunate members of our own families, whose defective hearing has made it more difficult for them to get an education; by which they may be in touch with the rapid movement of current events, and enjoy those delights of social life, which
depend upon hearing and speech. Their condition calls for increased activity and thoughtfulness on our part that they too may have an equal share in human joys and sorrows, know something of our common origin and destiny, and be better prepared for domestic life, the privileges of society and the duties of citizenship. While there are peculiar methods in the system of instruction which has been provided for them, the results are due simply to patient, persistent, hard work along lines of development which experience has pointed out.

The deaf are not odd, queer or peculiar in any sense except in that of a want of hearing. As little children they are just like others, and in many cases mothers cannot tell when deafness began; but, as life goes on and they are deprived of the tender tones and loving instruction of mother’s voice, the other children grow away from them and they are left in the midst of a silence, which excludes the advice, the warnings and the constant training, that comes from the childish prattle of other children, from the lips of mother, from the innumerable voices of nature and from the whisperings of those about them. We scarcely think of the inestimable value of sight till we are left in eternal darkness; nor do we prize sufficiently the pleasant voices of our friends until they are lost forever.

Have you ever thought seriously of what is implied in total deafness, or been properly grateful that you could hear and speak? Do you realize how much of your education has come in at your ears, as at an open door, almost without a conscious effort of your own? If not, think for a moment of those who have thoughts without the power to express them, whose ears are closed to the enjoyment of social conversation, to the loving tones of affection, and the common terms of endearment, which mean so much to us. Occasionally, when we are thrilled by the loftiest flights of inspired song, or stirred by the eloquence of an impassioned orator we feel that the voice is worthy of the highest culture, but under ordinary circumstances we are apt to lack appreciation of its value. Never having had speech the deaf are usually rather indifferent to its use. Thinking sometimes, that it costs more than it is worth; or, that their voices are unpleasant; or, that their speech is so imperfect that they are not readily understood; they fall in most cases to apprehend its true value. Aside from speech and hearing the deaf are just like other people; love, sympathy, kindness, attention and respect win their hearts; neglect, indifference, injustice and harshness touch their sensibilities exactly as they wound our own. No other people appreciate kindness and attention more than the deaf; and, none are quicker to resent real or fancied grievances.

There are four classes of people to whom the term, “deaf-mute,” is applied without discrimination; first, those born deaf, to whom it properly belongs; second, those who have hearing, being only semi-deaf; third, those who lost hearing before they had learned to talk; and, fourth, those who became deaf so late in life that they retain distinct impression of speech, themselves using speech; and hence are called semi-mutes. Of these the first class;—all those born deaf, and all without memory of speech, on account of deafness at an early age, are the most numerous and at the same time the only deaf people who should be called deaf-mutes. Their education includes all the difficulties that are found in teaching the deaf; while the education of the semi-mute and the semi-deaf might, in many cases, be carried on successfully in the public schools. All schools for the deaf improve the natural voice;
but, that is an easy task compared with the acquisition of articulate speech by those born deaf. A slight acquaintance with deaf people will enable one to distinguish the essential difference between the natural and the artificial voice.

Deaf-mutism, strictly speaking, signifies the abnormality, which is characterized by the existence of deafness and dumbness, and is therefore dependent upon an unusual condition of the auditory organs, either congenital or acquired in early childhood, which prevents the natural acquisition of speech; or, should speech have been acquired before the loss of hearing, makes its preservation by the aid of hearing alone more difficult. People are described as deaf-mutes even when their speech has been acquired by a special system of instruction, because their speech is peculiar and not easily understood. Deaf-mutism is really an ill-defined condition, which cannot be distinctly separated from other conditions related to it. This is a natural consequence of its being a term founded, not only on a symptom, deafness, but also on the intensity of that symptom and the period of its occurrence. There is also a contradiction in the term deaf-mute as applied to many, since it includes not only those who cannot, but also many who can speak. Deaf-mutes are now generally mentioned as the deaf, and, as this is a specific term, defining the condition of those who are deaf but not uniformly dumb, it is coming into general use.

Although there is frequent mention of the deaf in sacred and profane history, they did not receive much attention or any consideration, which would place them on an equality with other people, until the civilizing effects of Christianity were felt after the revival of learning in the seventeenth century. The Romans held that no art could reach the deaf, while the Greeks had deaf infants destroyed as unworthy a place in the Republic, and of no possible benefit to the community. Aman in Holland and Wallis in England, during the latter part of the seventeenth century had pupils whom they taught to speak, and they also published their methods of instruction; but it is to be remembered that this, and all former instruction, was for the benefit of wealthy or influential people who could afford to pay well for the costly instruction required in the education of a deaf person. It was not till the last quarter of the eighteenth century that the Braidwood family in England and the Abbe De l’Epee in France gave instruction to large numbers of deaf children in organized schools. Soon after this Joseph Watson in London and the Abbe Sicard in Paris were teaching classes of deaf children, although their education did not become general till much later. The Census of 1871 in Great Britain gives the number of the deaf as 19,237, while at that time there were only 1,979 deaf children in the schools.

The first school for the deaf in Germany was established at Leipzig in 1778 by Samuel Heinicke, the most distinguished of German teachers, whose labors were rewarded with notable success in the oral instruction of the deaf.

Although several previous attempts to teach the deaf in America had been made no permanent school was opened till 1817. Benevolent people in New England, whose attention had been called to the condition of the uneducated deaf, knew that the deaf were being successfully taught in England; accordingly they sent Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a young Connecticut minister, a graduate of Yale and also of Andover Seminary, to Europe to inform himself in the art of teaching the deaf. He first went to Joseph Watson, head master of the Old Kent Road School near
London, but was unable to make such arrangements with the manager of that school as would enable him to acquire the art of teaching. He then went to Edinburgh, but did not meet with much better success than in London, for he found access to that school so hedged about with difficulties that he concluded to go elsewhere. Fortunately, while in London he met the distinguished Abbe De l’Epee, who invited him to France, and gave him a cordial welcome to the Paris school, over which he then presided, and the largest liberty in acquiring its methods. He soon became familiar with the process of instruction, and it was here that he met one of the Abbe Sicard’s most promising pupils, Laurent Clerc, whom he persuaded to return to America with him, to become a teacher of the deaf. Thus, assisted by Laurent Clerc, Dr. Gallaudet opened the first permanent school for the deaf on this continent at Hartford, Conn., April 15, 1817, with seven pupils. The school, since known as the American School for the Deaf, is still in vigorous operation, and is one of the best and most progressive schools in existence, with a long roll of graduates including many of the most distinguished deaf people in America.

When the Wisconsin School for the Deaf was opened in Delavan in 1852 it became the fifteenth state institution for the deaf in the United States; since that time other states have established similar schools till there are now fifty-seven state schools for the deaf, not including Public Day-Schools, or Denominational institutions in which the deaf are instructed. These state schools are attended by 10,760 deaf pupils, requiring for their instruction eleven hundred and thirty teachers. Most of the states have one school for the deaf and the larger and more populous states like New York and Pennsylvania have more than one. In addition to these state schools there are fifteen denominational and private schools in the country, and a large number of day schools in towns and cities which instruct deaf children, while in residence at their own homes.

Of necessity the large state institutions are boarding-schools, which provide subsistence and all necessary attendance to their pupils in residence, including supervision, medical attendance and nursing, when required; they also impart a disciplinary training somewhat incidental to the domestic economy of a large household; but at the same time one of the most potent factors in the development of youthful character; and an important part of their work. There are now two diverse schools of training recommended by those interested in the education of the deaf; first, by those who hold that, as the abnormal ear causes mental inactivity by excluding sound, the deaf need special instruction and peculiar training, not only in language and speech, but also in all that goes to make up the habits and disposition; and, to this end a residence, at a boarding school, among their equals, in which they may have the guidance of teachers who understand their needs, and in association with those who have neither physical nor mental advantage over them is most helpful. The necessity for an environment in which they shall not continually be reminded of the superiority of their associates, becomes more apparent, as growing older they become conscious that their condition of deafness shuts them out of the family conversational circle, excludes them from a full participation in the games and sports of childhood, and shows more clearly their inability to join in the laugh, the song or jest that passes current among their hearing brothers and sisters, or if at school, makes them a marked and peculiar class among their hearing playmates.
On the other hand there are those who believe that although these children are deaf, they need not in consequence be dumb; they hold that their relations and intimacies with hearing children may be kept up by constant association, and that if they are spoken to, and treated as other people are, their domestic and social relations will be better preserved and their education, if carried on with normal children, will make them grow more like others, and naturally lead them to acquire speech.

These two ideas, so essentially different, suggest two methods of instruction, the one in congregate boarding schools, under suitable discipline, which undertakes to care for, and to direct the forces of the whole being, and the other by day-school instruction and a residence at home to carry on the process of education after the public school model, either or both, employing writing, gestures and the manual alphabet, or depending on writing and speech alone. Of these two methods, oral home instruction is the older, having been practiced by the monks three hundred years ago in Spain and Italy, at a time when writing was not common, and oral speech was thought necessary to rational thought. But, for a variety of reasons the boarding school has become the most popular, even though it requires an enforced and protracted absence from home, principally because the environment is better adapted to study, and the provisions made for manual, mental and moral training are more complete. Home is naturally the best place for children; the influences of a good home cannot be perfectly reproduced or equalled elsewhere; and if the home affords leisure to the father or mother, so that the parental authority may be applied to the deaf child as it is to the hearing child, thus supplementing the day school instruction and counteracting the pernicious influences of the street, the ideal condition is secured and the home school is the best; but, it too often transpires in our complex and hurried modes of life that the home does not afford the time for suitable training, and the brief hours of a school day are too short to do all that is required in straightening crooked ways, so that between the two there is some neglect, aggravated by the difficulty of communication along the lines of admonition and advice. As a part of its system the boarding school must maintain discipline and order, regular hours and a regimen of diet at once plain and wholesome; this necessity secures a fixed habit of movement, work and study in the pupil, with a training in system and order, physical and mental, that has a salutary effect upon mature life. The well equipped state school provides the most intelligent care, trained nursing and the best medical advice, regular hours and a dietary that insures favorable conditions for growing children; but its greatest work is in cultivating moral restraint and an experience that teaches respect for the rights of others. In addition to this the school provides all that is best in the new education, literary culture, and training, instruction in art, manual training with tools and appliances suited to boys and girls of tender years, physical culture carried on by teachers of both sexes, in regular gymnastic work, and an opportunity to learn trades that places the boys and girls on an independent basis as wage earners and fits them for positions in some remunerative employment that they could never hope for without suitable preparation.

The Wisconsin School for the deaf has two-hundred pupils of all ages from eight to thirty years; they come from all parts of the state, and usually stay ten years. In the beginning they are placed in oral classes and
taught to speak, if intelligible speech is a possible attainment, as it is in the majority of cases. Along with this oral training, a knowledge of words is imparted by the various approved methods of the best primary schools, until it appears, either that this method is securing the desired end, an intelligible use of both spoken and written words, or if the results are not satisfactory, that it is time to try what the manual method can do.

In answer to the question, "How long are you in selecting pupils for speaking or sign classes, or in what grade do you finally decide that certain pupils shall continue under oral instruction and others in manual classes?" it might be said that every individual case is acted on separately, and strictly on its merits, so that there is no fixed time at which we say, "the trial is now ended, the probation is over, these must continue through the course in speaking classes and those in sign classes," but, as a matter of fact it is seen that no doubtful oral cases remain after the third grade is passed; and, consequently we may say that usually the third grade determines the oral success or failure of the pupil, although there are exceptions to this rule, in which pupils continue under oral instruction until they are in the more advanced grades and then, pursuant to their own request, or at the solicitation of parents, are transferred to the manual classes. As a matter of fact a majority of the pupils of the Wisconsin school are now in classes in which the recitations are carried on orally, and ten of the fifteen teachers in the literary department of the school devote all their time to the instruction of speaking classes. In the other departments of school work, writing and drawing is taught to seventy-nine pupils; different forms of work in wood, after sloyd and manual training methods, with mechanical and architectural drawing, to forty-two boys; casting, molding and forging to ten boys; cabinet-making to fifteen; shoemaking to eighteen; printing to ten; sewing and embroidery to sixty-five girls; dress-making to sixteen; cooking to sixteen girls; and the practical details of domestic employment to all the girls in the school.

Statistics show that in institutions for the deaf in the United States (exclusive of day schools), during the past year, more than three-fifths of all their pupils were taught speech, and fully forty per cent. of all deaf children in such schools were taught wholly by the oral method, a gain of at least seven per cent. within the last two years, or since January, 1898. Since January, 1894, or within the last six years, the number taught exclusively by speech in American schools for the deaf (exclusive of day-schools) has increased from 2,056 to 4,089, showing that twice as many children are now orally instructed in the state schools as there were in 1894. In other directions as in manual training and in physical culture, schools for the deaf are not behind the times. In the Wisconsin school gymnastics and physical training has been systematically carried on for many years, and, in more recent years, the construction of an admirable Manual Training Building has placed our school in the front rank, in the efficient employment of the best form of manual training for both boys and girls, under competent instructors. Here the boys are taught all forms of work in wood, from the simplest knife work, to the higher forms of carving and pattern making, including turning and joinery; this is supplemented by forging and casting and accompanied by mechanical drawing; for the girls this branch of the school affords opportunities for sewing and cooking, for drawing and designing second to none. Additional time is allowed for the industrial pursuits of the school, with-
out any diminution of the grade work, and the co-ordination of the two increases interest in both, and at the same time secures better results from each.

Eleven hundred and sixty-four pupils have been admitted to the Wisconsin School for the Deaf, since its organization in 1852; and, it is worthy of note that more than 250 of these remained through the entire course and were graduated with the highest testimonials which the school is entitled to bestow. The Course affords opportunities for study in all the branches of a common school education, and in addition to that such proficiency in the use of spoken language as the circumstances of the case permits. Moreover the courses in manual training in connection with work in the trade schools prepare boys and girls for profitable employment in after life. It is especially gratifying to know that the alumni of the school, with few exceptions, are honorably supporting themselves and those dependent upon them in a great variety of pursuits, in which they are winning good positions and the esteem of their fellow men, as sober, industrious people. They are engaged in many profitable industries, in which they are earning a living as farmers, printers, shoemakers, carpenters, cabinet-makers, harness-makers, coopers, barbers, lumbermen, painters, jewelers, laborers, machinists, engravers, tailors, railroad hands, agents, trunk-makers, pattern-makers, post-masters, and mail carriers.

It is the purpose of the state to give the deaf a practical education that will enable them to enjoy more of life, to secure remunerative employment, and to increase their usefulness as citizens of the state and nation. That this end is secured is abundantly in evidence, as shown by the condition of the adult deaf, and the intelligent manner in which they are assuming the higher privileges and duties of citizens.

Although the deaf may not be able to distinguish themselves in professional life, they are entirely capable of attaining skill and experience in mechanical pursuits, in the productive arts, and in agriculture. Each special field of labor has its own peculiar difficulties and, I think, that you will agree with me that the education of the deaf is no exception to the general rule. The deaf need your aid and sympathy, only in getting a start in life, and then they will be able to take care of themselves; and, they need this assistance, mostly because their voices, even at the best, are not as distinct as those of hearing people and communication by writing, or by any other means than the voice, is of necessity slow and inconvenient. Do not expect too much of them, but give them a chance to prove what they can do, and you will find that they will pursue with great persistence and growing intelligence whatever they may undertake.