

DEAF AND DUMB FESTIVAL.

There was a deeply interesting assemblage at the Baptist Hall, Little Collins street, on Tuesday night on the occasion of a soiree in connection with the Deaf and Dumb Mutual Improvement Society. A large number of mutes, young men and young women, attended, but not the faintest sign appeared that any of them regarded it as affliction, for they were remarkably high spirited, indeed hilarious, being all well-dressed too, and in fact a most happy and healthy society. To be mute is a greater trouble than to be blind, if you are left to your own resources; but when education has been brought into play, the mute has an enormous advantage. Mutes nowadays enter into every department of business where speech is not absolutely indispensable. Among the audience was noticeable the gentleman who is affectionately called Dummy Muir, the most forward player of the Fitzroy Football Club. His strange white hair, without a cap, is always visible in the thickest of the fray, and he is the greatest favorite in the Victorian football field.

The meeting was entirely different to any conceptions one might form beforehand in regard to it. Emerson's most profound essay is on Compensation, and the same ideas formed the basis of genial addresses given by the Revs J. S. Lowe and F. Brown on this occasion. Mr Lowe's anecdote of his being left alone in the Desert, while on his travels in Arabia, or thereabouts, afforded a graphic parallel to the condition of the mute, with his concentration of ideas, which is a result of being thus isolated. The young ladies and gentlemen kept up a continual and lively noiseless clattering with their fingers and hands throughout the meeting. Who could tell if they did not quiz the visitors! The beauty of this finger chat, or semaphoring, is that it is not confined by distance, and the practitioners talk all over the shop, no matter what is going on.

About a million of deaf and dumb people exist on the globe, judging from the statistics of Europe and America. Mr Holt spoke feelingly on Tuesday evening of the many mutes neglected in Victoria, while those in and around Melbourne are so well looked after. Mr Holt is the missionary, and he interpreted other speakers to the deaf and dumb audience, on his fingers, keeping pace with them in an astonishing manner. The quick intelligence of the mutes could be perceived in their appreciative applause at the points, and laughter at the jokes. Mr Holt is wringful of sympathy, one of those men who may be described as a bundle of nerves, and it was really beautiful to see the complete accord in which he was with the mute audience. Hand-talking suggests phonography and stenography. It is not by arbitrary signs, but they are all based on the shape of the capital letters of the alphabet.

The writer may be pardoned if the thought came in his mind, viewing Tuesday night's meeting, "What an illustration is here of the goodness of God!" The ancients held that nothing whatever could be done for the mutes, and ranked them almost in the scale with idiots, while all throughout the Dark and Middle Ages they were put on one side as useless and miserable members of society, crawling on towards death as their relief. Scientific treatment of mutes only began about two hundred years ago. Now see what has been done. Instead of deploring against the cruelty of Providence, noble philanthropists have found that the affliction is essentially a light one, if human creatures only do their duty to each other.

Two systems exist of talking for mutes, the one-hand system of talkigraphy and the two-

hand system of talkigraphy. Both were practised at the Baptist Hall on Tuesday evening, but we did not observe any attempts at the system of signalling by mouth, which has been tried. There is something quite fascinating in the hand-talk practised by a lively young lady, embellished with all the witchery of nods and smiles, while occasional dots and dashes have to be put in by pointing to her mouth or eyes. Then there is a splash of one hand across the palm of another, which gives the final touch to an indefinable kind of attraction, like that possessed by an accomplished Frenchwoman. There is any amount of scope for bye-play.