

DEAF AND DUMB CONGRESS.

The Deaf and Dumb Congress was continued at the Independent-hall, Russell-street, yesterday. Mr. E. J. D. Abraham presided. There was a very good attendance, though hardly so large as on preceding days, owing to 50 of the delegates having gone down the bay. The session was marked by the really wonderful spirit of cheerfulness which has characterised the whole proceedings. The double affliction of the deaf mutes is borne with a cheerful resignation, which impels admiration. It is a pity that the hearing and speaking public have not attended the congress in larger numbers, even if it were only to note the fortitude with which the delegates bear their great affliction.

The business of the day consisted in the reading and discussing of papers. Mr. Victor Fisher (N.S.W.) contributed a paper on the "Social Status of the Deaf." Contrasting the present position of the deaf with that in early Rome, when they were regarded as imbeciles and prohibited from exercising civic rights, the essayist said it was no uncommon thing nowadays to meet well-educated deaf mutes in all parts of the world, young men and women fit to adorn any position in life. Socially the educated deaf were now on equality with those around them. In Great Britain 82 per cent. of the deaf followed unproductive pursuits, 26 per cent. industrial, 7 per cent. agricultural, and 3 per cent. domestic, whilst 1 per cent. found employment in commercial and professional circles. Social distinction and equality depended largely upon character, the cultivation of high ideals, and aspirations towards whatever was "pure and lovely and of good report." As a rule the highly educated deaf made better use of their powers than those possessed of all their senses. With increased diligence and perseverance the deaf would command the respect and confidence of those around them.

Mr. S. W. Showell (Queensland) read a paper on "The Family Life of the Deaf." He contended that under proper conditions the family life of the deaf could be quite as happy as that of hearing and speaking people. Unfortunately, parents of deaf children frequently neglected to acquire the art of manual spelling. This created a gulf between parent and child, which widened as the years passed. The neglect was often the result of an exaggerated idea of the difficulty of learning the system. As a matter of fact, the manual alphabet could be learned in half an hour, while three days' practice would give a fair facility. In contemplating marriage, deaf mutes should seek partners among those similarly handicapped. The unmarried deaf mute was the centre of an ever-contracting circle, but the married man was the centre of one that was ever widening.

"The Capabilities of the Deaf" was the subject of a paper by Mr. E. A. Sturcke (N.S.W.). While the disadvantages of the deaf and dumb were manifold, there were advantages which were sometimes overlooked. They were unable to hear the evil that was spoken in the world, and at work they had an advantage over those who could hear in not being interrupted by idle talk. In conclusion, he urged them to strive for the highest standard of success, which, however, must be the Christian standard.

Mr. F. S. Booth (N.S.W.) read a paper written by Mr. S. Watson, principal of the New South Wales School for Deaf and Dumb. Mr. Watson recently returned from a visit to England and America, and his paper was mainly a summary of opinions collected from experts in the education of the dumb. There was a preponderance of opinion in favour of women teachers for young children, but preference was given to

open on in favour of women teachers for young children, but preference was given to male teachers for advanced pupils. There was a great difference of opinion regarding the relative value of the pure oral and the combined systems. Of the opinions obtained a majority favoured the combined system. Incidentally, it was mentioned that the highest standard of education obtained in America, where a deaf mute may attend school, at state expense, for from 14 to 17 years.

In a paper on "The Past, Present, and Future of the Deaf," Mr. M. Miller (Victoria) expressed regret that education of the deaf was not compulsory and free. Without compulsion there would always be parents who, through want of knowledge, negligence, or blind love for their children, would condemn the latter to lives of misery by allowing them to grow up without instruction. Matters had improved very much in this respect during the past 30 years, and, with sympathy and encouragement from the hearing public, further advantages would soon be gained. With the object of bringing deaf mutes into closer communication with the rest of the community, he suggested that large cards, bearing the deaf and dumb alphabet, be distributed among ordinary schools.

A paper on "Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions" was given by the president, Mr. E. J. D. Abraham. All the papers, with the very numerous criticisms, were given in the sign language.

The congressional business was brought to a close at an evening session, when a number of resolutions were adopted—(1) advocating free and compulsory education for deaf mutes, and protesting against the Government assistance at present given being classed as charitable grants; (2) condemning the application of the words "asylum institution" to educational establishments for deaf mutes, on the ground that such designations tend to give the public a wrong impression of the mental condition of the pupils; (3) deploring the recent appointment of a clerk from a city office as superintendent of the establishment on St. Kilda road, when the services of a first-class expert teacher were demanded; (4) appointing a committee to urge upon the board of management of the Melbourne school, or if necessary on the Government, the claims of Mr. F. J. Rose to a pension as a reward for his services in promoting the education of the deaf and dumb; (5) strongly urging the establishment of homes and farms for aged, infirm, and mentally deaf mutes, as in South Australia; (6) approving the formation of an Australian Association of Deaf and Dumb, on the lines of the British and American institutions; (7) joining with the deaf mutes of Great Britain, America, Germany, and France in protesting against the use of the pure oral system in the instruction of the deaf.

Delegates from the other states warmly congratulated the members of the Melbourne Deaf and Dumb Mission on having commenced the erection of a church and institute in Flinders-street, and the meeting closed with votes of thanks to the press, the president, and officers of the congress.

To-day the delegates will make a trip down the bay in the Hygeia, at the invitation of Messrs. Huddart, Parker, and Co., and on Thursday a cricket match will be played between teams representing Victoria and New South Wales. At half-past 7 o'clock there will be a ladies' conversation and conference in the Independent-hall, and the delegates and visiting cricket teams will be entertained at dinner at Lucas's Cafe.