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CIRCULARS OF INFORMATION

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BUREAU OF EDUCATION.

No. 2-1884.

THE TEACHING, PRACTICE, AND LITERATURE OF SHOPTHAND, BY JULIUS ENSIGN ROCKWELL, STENOGRAPHER.



WASHINGTON: GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.

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LETTER.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF EDUCATION, Washington, D. C., February 26, 1884.

SIE: This Office, in endeavoring to meet the enormous demand for information on the general lines of educational work, has been able only occasionally and to a limited extent to follow up various specialties of great importance in themselves and having vital bearings upon our progress in education. Among the specialties not considered as I have desired in the past has been instruction in shorthand. The Office has received and preserved all data respecting this subject coming to it in the usual course of the discharge of its duties and as far as possible has answered specific inquiries, but the growth of interest in shorthand and the great demands for information touching it led me to commit a special inquiry into the condition and progress of its instruction to the stenographer of the Bureau, Mr. Julius Ensign Rockwell. He has very effectively used the facilities of the Office in gathering from a vast and surprising variety of sources the data now available showing the history and condition of education in this specialty. In his devotion to the subject, it should in justice be said, he has performed a large share of this work out of office hours and, as in all such cases, without additional compensation. Among the items of extra-official work, I should specially mention the exhaustive bibliography of works on shorthand in the English language as entirely prepared out of office hours and at considerable uncompensated personal expense.

The economic value of stenography is already abundantly illustrated in connection with congressional and all other legislative work in the country; the administration of our national, State, and municipal courts, and in the conduct of all extensive correspondence, whether official or private. The demand for this clerical qualification has greatly increased within a few years. Our educators and all others interested in meeting this demand specially need the valuable and instructive facts contained in the accompanying manuscript, and I therefore recommend its publication as a circular of information.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN EATON,

Commissioner.

The Hon. SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

Publication approved.

H. M. TELLER, Secretary. 17-18 346) (R. K. (R. K.

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THE TEACHING, PRACTICE, AND LITERATURE OF SHORTHAND.

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SHORTHAND SYSTEMS.

Although some forms of abbreviated or word writing were undoubtedly practised in the earliest times among the Egyptians, Persians, and Greeks, yet no positive proof of the existence of a true system of shorthand is found previous to the year 60 B. C. At that time Marcus Tullius Tiro, the freedman, namesake, and friend of Cicero, invented a system of "notæ," which, with various additions by Seneca and others, was commonly taught in schools, became a part of the education of emperors, and was extensively practised for several centuries. Owing to the general use of wax tablets among the early Romans, our knowledge of the system is mainly derived from manuscripts written after its popularity had declined. The characters, derived from the letters of the alphabet and variously modified to represent words, were numbered by thousands. Through the Middle Ages the art seems to have been entirely neglected.

Modern shorthand dates from the revival of learning in the reign of Elizabeth, "the Augustan age of literature," as it has been aptly termed. when Dr. Timothe Bright, once rector of Methley, in Yorkshire, and the author of several medical and other works,1 issued a small treatise on the subject, entitled "Characterie An Arte of shorte, swifte, and secrete writing by Character Inuented by Timothe Bright, Doctor of Phisike Imprinted at London by I. Windet, the Assigne of Tim. Bright, 1588 Cum prinilegio Begiae Malestatis. Forbidding all other to print the same." This was dedicated "To the Most high and mightie Prince Elizabeth, by the Grace of God, of England, Fraunce, and Ireland, Queenc, Defender of the Faith, &cc." "Cicero," he said, "did account it worthie his labor, and no less profitable to the Roman common weale (Most gratious Soueraigne) to innent a speedie kinde of wryting by Character, as Plutarch reporteth in the life of Cato the yonger. This invention was increased afterwards by Seneca; that the number of characters grue to 7,000. Whether through iniurie of time, or that men gaue it over for tediousness of learning, nothing remainsth extant of Cicero's innention at this day. Upon consideration of the great vse of such a kinde of writing, I have invented the like: of fewe Characters, short and easie, every Character answering a word: My Inuention meere English, without precept,

¹ Hygieina; Medicium therapeuticm pars, 1583; De dyscrasia corporis humani, London, 1583; In physicam G. A. Scribonii animadversiones, 1584; A treatise on melancholie, London, 1586; De sanitate tuenda et restituenda, 1588; An abridgement of the booke of Acts &c., London, 1589.

³ Title, with other valuable data, courteously furnished by Edward B. Nicholson, eeq. librarian of the Bodleian Library.

or imitation of any. The uses are diuers: Short, that a swifte hande may therewith write orations, or publike actions of speach, vttered as becometh the grauitie of such actions, Verbatim. Secrete as no kinde of wryting like. And herein (besides other properties) excelling the wryting by letters and Alphabet, in that, Nations of strange languages, may hereby communicate their meaning together in writing, though of sundrie tonges.⁹

After rehearsing his reasons for dedicating his "Characterie" to the Queen, Bright adds: "If it may be so happy as to injoye the influence of your Maiesties fauoure and good liking, I doubt not, but it will growe up, be embraced, and yeeld profitable fruit unto many, & I myself thereby shal have atteined for my particular respect, that which in a lower degree, many shal enjoy the vse of this my incentio, which I hope (be it said with modestie) wanteth little to equal it, with that olde deuise of Ciceroes, but your Maiesties alowance, & Ciceroes name."³

The only copy.º of this work of which positive information can be obtained is in the Bodleian Library, at Oxford. The descriptions of the volume in the several histories of the art are so meagre and inaccurate that a brief statement of the method may be interesting. For this we are indebted to Mr. Edward Pocknell, of London, the author of Legible Shorthand, who has recently prepared a paper on this subject for presentation before the Shorthand Society. The system was not alphabetic in the sense in which that term is commonly understood. The author alludes to the signs as alphabetical, however, and in his "Characterie Table" each alphabetical group of words is represented by signs identical at their beginnings. Thus all words beginning with A were composed of a perpendicular stroke, the signification of the words depending on an addition at the base. There were four slopes that could be given to each letter and twelve ways of varying the base, so that forty-eight words could be written under each letter of the alphabet when necessary, though this was seldom done. For instance, under A in the "Characterie List" are twenty-four words, under B forty, and under C (which includes K and Q) the full quota of forty eight, each separate part having also its own alphabetical arrangement, doubtless to assist the memory. The alphabetical signs are the following:

The character for C represents also K and Q; that for I, J and Y; and U, V and W.

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¹Anecdotes of Literature and Scarce Books. By the Rev. William Beloe. London, 1807, vol. I, pp. 223 and 224.

^s Ibid., p. 225.

³ This belonged to the celebrated collector, Mr. Douce. Another copy was in 1856 in the possession of Mr. Benjamin Hanbury, of Brixton. See Notes and Queries, second series, vol. II, p. 334.