

**THE INTERMARRIAGE OF
THE DEAF; ITS
MENTAL, MORAL AND
SOCIAL TENDENCIES**

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The Inter-marriage of the Deaf; Its Mental, Moral and Social Tendencies by Hiram Phelps Arms

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HIRAM PHELPS ARMS

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THE
INTERMARRIAGE OF THE DEAF:

175

MENTAL,
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TENDENCIES.

BY

HIRAM PHELPS ARMS.

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INTRODUCTORY.

It is with feelings of deep indignation that I record a protest against Professor Bell's suggestion that legislation be called upon to pass a law prohibiting deaf-mutes, who may have deaf relatives, from inter-marrying.* I protest against this as an unwarranted would-be interference with the affairs of other people, these people being as sane and as capable of forming a concept of a proper line of action as any other class. The text of Professor Bell's proposed law is given elsewhere. I must do the author justice, however, to claim for him the best of motives in this controversy, as he looks at it; I only regret that he has not shown more heart in the matter. He proposes a policy of interference by relatives and friends where the law would prove nugatory—such a policy, of course, would be legitimate when one or both of the principals to the difficulty are in their minority, but the moment this is passed, then such interference would not only be unkind, but useless and unseemly.

Professor Bell states his faith in the system of having deaf-mutes attend school in their respective districts, arguing that the cost per capita now paid (\$223.00) for their education, would be sufficient to employ a special teacher, who could take three or four pupils, a number large enough to insure a salary of \$669, or \$892 per year. This non-segregational scheme is offered as a means to bring about the inter-marriage of deaf-mutes with the hearing; in other words, Professor Bell would ask society to do what he as an individual certainly would not do (allow a son or daughter of his to marry a deaf-mute). The inconsistency is so broad, that it is surprising that it should have escaped his notice. With the advance of education and a larger field to choose from, even the non-congenital deaf-mute will

* My attention was drawn to Prof. Bell's theory but a few weeks since, the occasion being a report of an interview he gave a Rochester, N. Y. paper.

decline to form a union with a congenital deaf-mute. This deviation is even now being manifested to a marked degree. Professor Bell's essays tend (and here for once I can agree with him) to encourage this movement. The inevitable result will be to force the congenital deaf-mute to seek out members of its own class with which to contract marriage. This is certainly, from the standpoint of those more fortunate, and who wish well of humanity, a sad and bitter conclusion to arrive at, but can it be helped? It could be, no doubt, held to a slower growth by forcing them to a union with the non-congenitally deaf, and with the hearing, but this would be at the cost of the more fortunate class, and as such would be opposed to equity.

The one comforting feature in this movement looking towards the isolation of congenital deaf-mutes, is, that an all-wise Creator has provided for them to an extent sufficient to enjoy life as fully as those who hear and speak. He has endowed them with minds capable of receiving instruction, with no limits as to advancement. He has given them a language, and hearts to regulate their emotional life, with strength of body to labor. He has in a word, constituted these people precisely as other people are constituted, differing only in manner of communicating thought. It is for the sake of these people that I lift my voice against Professor Bell's proposed measures, as tending to degrade them to the level of incapables!

It is no pleasant task I have undertaken, in writing these papers, for the very people whose own respect I am endeavoring to shield from the attacks of Professor Bell and others of his mind, not only refuse to encourage my efforts, but flatly condemn them. Still, I believe, there are deaf-mutes, whose nobility of character will enable them to speak the truth, however bitter it may be, and say with me, that it is not only hazardous to marry a person so different from them as the hearing and speaking, but that it is the height of selfishness to encourage such infatuations.

I know a hearing gentlemen who married a deaf woman, and the universal opinion is that his wife is a drag upon him, socially. He is generous, she is selfish, is the verdict on every tongue.

Under the head of *Psychological Aspect* I define the emotions. *Part Second, Physiological Aspect*, treats of the laws of heredity; the question of deterioration or non-deterioration of intellectual

power in deaf-mutes, and their general health. *Part Third*, gives the *Sociological Aspect* of the question. Under this head I speak of domestic life; the difficulties under which the deaf labor in their association with the hearing; the ease with which they live their own life. From all of which I make the following deductions:—

First.—From eighty to ninety-five per cent. of the deaf marry the deaf.

Second.—That of the remaining portion, the majority who marry the deaf are led to the connection by selfish motives, presumably the acquiring of property.

Third.—That where this predisposition to the acquisition of property has not existed, then other motives have ruled, such as a greater or less timidity or effeminacy on the part of the one who hears (if it be a man), and age, widowhood, or the blight of divorce (if it be a woman).

Fourth.—That inferiority of birth and station, benevolence and infatuation, are clearly defined factors controlling the selection by the hearing of deaf-mute partners.

Fifth.—That where a hearing person and a deaf person (one who is more or less dependent upon dactylology as a means of receiving and giving communication) have married in equal circumstances of birth, station, and intelligence, divorce has in many instances been the sequel of such marriages.

Sixth.—That as a matter of fact, only those deaf people who by great success in vocalism and lip reading, can hope for a continuation of their happy marital relations with hearing partners. But even here the element of risks attends such unions; for in proportion as a person becomes, through success in the acquirement of speech and lip reading, his or her other qualities, station, and intelligence being taken for granted, in that proportion is he or she enabled to mingle in a higher order of society, with the result of a desire to select partners from that order. And it is these very people who, by their liveliness and social qualities, are liable to regret having married deaf persons; it matters not how easily this deaf person mingles in hearing society. It is with this class of deaf people to whom the question of inter-marriage assumes such a complex affair.

The only solution that I can offer for a deaf person thus situated is, first, that in forming a connection with a hearing person, this person's predominant characteristics should be, passiveness, and a manner more or less unassuming; or, second, that he marry a person similarly situated as himself. In this latter case, however, it is only those couples to whom public opinion has adjudged to be well matched in intellect and other qualities, and whose social position is beyond question, who can marry and be exempt from that unpleasant feeling of self-consciousness of deafness, that only needs participating at a large reception to bring out in bold relief. If the wife is a woman of intellectual force and tact, and the husband a man who can command respect and applause, the combination would be such as to effectually counteract this feeling of self-consciousness.



PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT.

CHAPTER I.

BENEVOLENCE.

"The justification for the ethical feeling is that it exists. The justification for any code of morality is that it exists."—*Spencer's Data of Ethics.*

I begin this analysis with Benevolence, as being the first and chief emotion to spring from the common root of Sympathy. I shall demonstrate how Gratitude, the complement to Benevolence, can be perverted from its original channel, and I will also point out how Benevolence fails of its aim, through inequality of distribution.

In the marriage of A., who is a deaf-mute, with B., who is a man able to hear and speak, A. will have an *excess* of gratitude, joined to an excess of selfishness, by virtue of her (A.) dependence and exaction upon B. for intercourse with the outside world. B., on the other hand, will have an excess of Benevolence [proved by his marriage with a less perfect person than himself and one who imposes upon him the labor of a dual existence, that of sound and that of pantomime], and he (B.) would also have an excess of selfishness, *vide* his excess of Benevolence. Paradoxical as this latter statement may sound, it is a truism, nevertheless; for as Benevolence is simply a pleasure with the doer, he is merely doing that which gives him pleasure. He would take an equal pleasure in feeding, caressing and cherishing a dog. The dog would appreciate this treatment for a time, then growing weary of it, become spoilt; and, finally, would either run away, or be unceremoniously bounced by the very man responsible for its sins!

Benevolence is not love, and its reward is not love, but gratitude; and this is not a pleasant feeling when carried to extremes, not even with a brute.

Aristotle, in his Nicomachean Ethics, speaking of Benevolence, says: "But those who are Benevolent [only] do not on this account love each other the more, for they only wish well to those to whom they are Benevolent; but they do not cooperate with them in anything, nor do they endure any molestation for their sake. Hence it may be metaphorically said, that Benevolence is sluggish friendship; yet not that friendship which is founded in utility, nor that which is founded in delight; for Benevolence does not subsist on account of these things. * * * * * Benefactors love and are fond of those they have benefited, though at present they derive no advantage from them, nor are likely to derive any in the future. And this, also, happens to be the case with artificers, for every artist loves his own work more than he would be beloved by it if it should become animated. Similar, therefore, to this is that which pertains to benefactors, for he who is benefited is their work. Hence, he loves the work with a parental affection, because existence also is dear to him. But this is natural, for what the agent is in capacity is indicated by the work in energy. At the same time, also, to the benefactor that which results from the action is beautiful, so that he is delighted with him in whom it is inherent, but to him who is benefited nothing is beautiful in the benefactor, but if any is it is utility, and this is in a less degree delightful and lovely." Now, taking up the two formulas, A. and B., with their respective concomitants, Gratitude and Benevolence, and then assimilating the two, you are surprised in your stupid ignorance that the resultant is not the full, perfect, equalized *one* which you set out to fashion, but is instead a mixture of antipathetical emotions wrought by that disregard of equality of parts, the whole held together, not by natural laws, but by the laws of Sociology. Many endure this indifferent or unhappy existence in silence, rather than brave the exposure of their mistake; others invoke the decree of society to set them free, and many others resort to that savage, natural method, assassination; and still others take that cowardly and infamous expedient, desertion, to sever the bond that binds them!

This ignoring the laws of psychology in the blind pursuit of a physical result has been the cause of much unhappiness in the marital affairs of the deaf, as I shall presently show.