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# An essay on the education of the blind

René Just Haüy

RE-PRINT, 1894

AN ESSAY  
ON  
THE EDUCATION  
OF  
THE BLIND

BY  
M. HAÛY

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(DEDICATED TO THE KING OF FRANCE)

PARIS, 1786

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LONDON  
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1894

TO THE KING OF FRANCE.

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SIRE,

THE Protection with which your Majesty honours distinguished Talents ascertains your Claim to their Reverence and Respect. But when their Productions have a Tendency to console the Miseries of suffering Humanity, they have still a more powerful Title to attract the attention of Louis the Beneficent. It was under the influence of Sentiments inspired by a Title so amiable, which is deeply engraven on all the Hearts of France, that I conceived the desire of presenting to your Majesty the Fruits of my Labours ; if they have any Value, they will owe it to the double Advantage of appearing under a Patronage so august, and of becoming Vehicles to the Bounty expected from their Sovereign by the Young and unhappy, who have been early deprived of the Benefit of Light with all its numerous and important Resources.

I am,

With the profoundest respect,

Sire,

Your Majesty's most humble,

most obedient

and most faithful subject and Servant,

HÂÛY.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE FRENCH EDITION.

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THE Frontispiece of the Original Work, the Dedication, the Preface, this Advertisement, the Notes, the Opinion of the Academy of Sciences, and that of the Printers, the Examples of the forms of the several operations in printing, which may be executed by the blind, and the Table of Contents, have been printed by blind children in the typographical characters generally used. For what remains of the work, they have employed the characters invented for their peculiar use\*, the impression of which they trace in reading, when the creases, made in the paper by the types, are not effaced.

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\* A specimen has been sent for from Paris, and will be annexed if it can be procured.

represented as marvellous and unaccountable, such circumstances as are its natural and proper effects. In offering thus a faithful delineation of our method, considered in its proper point of view, it is our intention to leave no impressions on the minds of the public with respect to our establishment, but such real and just ideas as they ought to entertain: to teach the blind reading, by the assistance of books, where the letters are rendered palpable by their elevation above the surface of the paper, and by means of this reading to instruct them in the art of printing, of writing, of arithmetic, the languages, history, geography, mathematics, music, &c., to put in the hands of these unfortunate people such arts and occupations as are merely mechanical; spinning, for instance, knitting, bookbinding, &c. From such an institution two objects are in view, both of which benevolent men will own to be of importance.

*First*, to employ those among them who are in easy circumstances in an agreeable manner. *Secondly*, to rescue from the miseries of beggary those to whom fortune has been parsimonious of her favours, by putting the means of subsistence in their power; and, in short, to render useful to society their hands, as well as those of their guides.

Such is the end pursued by our institutions.

## CHAP. II.

### *Answer to the Objection against the Utility of this Plan.*

THE public has done us the justice unanimously to agree that we have accomplished the first object of our institution in presenting an amusement to the blind who share the bounties of fortune, and if any doubt have arisen it can only be concerning the possibility of realising the hopes which we have given of blending in our establishment the useful with the agreeable. "In teaching your blind," say the objectors, "all the parts of education which you propose, can you have conceived the project of peopling the republic of letters and arts with men of learning, professors, and

“ artists, each of whom, though blind, shall be capable of making “ a distinguished figure in these conspicuous departments, or can “ they even be certain of deriving the means of subsistence each “ from the labours of his own vocation ?” No, we never pretend that those of the blind who even discover the most shining parts shall enter into competition, either in the liberal sciences or mechanical arts, with scholars or artisans who are blessed with the use of sight, even when their talents rise not above mediocrity ; but when any or all of these provinces are not properly supplied with persons who to the advantage of sight add professional abilities, the blind may then exert their powers, whether natural or acquired, as well in promoting private as public utility ; and in this view it requires no mighty effort of courage to recommend them to the public benevolence and attention ; and though their talents should not be sufficient to pre-engage the general taste in their favour, or the necessity of employing them, so considerable as to open a resource for their exigencies, yet the force of humanity alone may be adequate to produce an effect so desirable. How often have we already seen beneficence ingenious in prescribing tasks to these unhappy labourers, that it might have an opportunity of supplying their indigence without wounding their delicacy. This is what at first occurs as an answer to the objection urged against the general utility of our plan, till our readers be convinced by a detail of this work, and still more effectually by experience, to what degree our scheme of education may be carried, and how essentially it may contribute to the subsistence of those among the blind who are born in the depth of want and obscurity.

### CHAP. III.

#### *Of Reading, as adapted to the Practice of the Blind.*

READING is the only method of adorning the memory, so that it may command the stores which it has imbibed with facility, promptitude, and method. It is, as it were, the channel through which every different kind of knowledge is communicated to us.

Without this medium literary productions could form nothing in the human mind but a confused heap of disarranged and fluctuating ideas. To teach the blind, therefore, to read, and to form a library proper for their use, must constitute the object of our first care. Before our time various but ineffectual experiments had been tried; sometimes by the assistance of characters moving upon a board and raised above its surface (*a*); at other times by the use of letters formed upon paper with the puncture of a pin (*b*), the principles or elementary characters of reading had been rendered obvious to the perception of the blind. Already had the wonders of the art of writing, which before had appeared chimerical, been realised. Already, under their touch, which was now found a substitute for vision, had the conceptions of the blind assumed a body. But these gross and imperfect utensils only presented to the blind the possibility of attaining and enjoying the pleasures and advantages of reading without affording them the proper means for acquiring them. We had no difficulty in exploring them; their principles had existed for a long time, and were daily exhibited to our eyes. We had observed that a printed leaf issuing from the press presented to the eye, on the contrary side, the letters higher than its surface, but reversed both in their position and in their order.

We ordered typographical characters to be cast of the form in which their impression strikes our eyes, and by applying to these a paper wet, as the printers do, we produced the first exemplar which had till then appeared of letters whose elevation renders them obvious to the touch without the intervention of sight. Such was the origin of a library for the use of the blind.

After having successively employed characters of different sizes, according as we found the touch of our pupils more or less delicate and susceptible, it appeared proper to us, at least during the first

(*a*) It is without doubt, by these means that the blind man of Puiseaux, of whom M. Diderot speaks in his letter on the blind, p. 8, taught his son to read.

(*b*) We have seen some words thus marked by punctures upon cards in the hands of Mlle. Paradis. This virtuosa is 20 years of age; she was born in Vienna in Austria, the place of her ordinary residence. A kind of apoplexy deprived her suddenly of her sight, at the age of two years. She has principally applied herself to music, and constituted in 1784, at Paris, the chief pleasures of the spiritual concert.



## CHAP. IV.

*Answer to various Objections against the Method of Reading  
proposed for the Blind.*

1. "THE elevation of your charaters will doubtless be very soon "depressed," says an objector, "and of consequence no longer perceptible to the blind by touch." No person is ignorant of the acuteness of that sense in several individuals, who from their infancy have been obliged to use it, in order to supply the want of that which nature has denied them. A surface which appears the smoothest to our eye, presents to the fingers of the blind inequalities which escape the notice of that organ, though by its assistance those who see exult in being able to perceive the remotest stars that adorn the spacious concave of heaven ; and when our pupils distinguish a typographical character by feeling, which may elude even a microscopic eye, when between the thickness of two given objects, if the one differs from the other only by the fourth part of a French line, they can clearly perceive that difference ; when, in short, they read a series of words, after the elevation of the letters is depressed, what have we to fear from the frequent use of their books, except the absolute destruction of the volumes themselves, a misfortune to which those who see are equally liable ?

2. "Your books," it is objected, "are too voluminous. You "swell a 12mo to the enormous and unwieldy size of a folio ; and "by thus altering its convenient form, you render it less portable "and useful." We might satisfy ourselves with answering to this objection that our art of printing is yet in its infancy, but progressive, and may perhaps one day become perfect, as that which is obvious to the sight has already done ; that it may likewise have its Elzevirs, its Barbous, its Peters, its Didot, &c. And since its commencement, how many and how important are the obligations which it already owes to M. Clousier, printer to the King, who assists us by his advice with as much zeal as disinterestedness,

We add that during the interval between its present and its more perfect state we are employed in adapting a method of epitomising, which will considerably diminish the size of our volumes. Of this we hope to give the first specimen in a work which will be immediately printed after this is finished (*d*). Besides, we will make a selection of authors, nor shall any one enter into our press but such works as by their reputation have merited that distinction; so that on one hand, if by the magnitude of our characters we enlarge our volumes, on the other we shall lessen them by a judicious abridgement; and perhaps one day the library of the blind may become the library of taste and learning.

3. "But confess, then, that your blind scholars read slowly, and that the spirit of the most animated composition will evaporate beneath their fingers, while the words are languidly pronounced without energy and without emotion." Our pupils, it is true, read in slow succession; besides the little practice, which an institution so lately begun allows them in reading, they have the disadvantage of only perceiving one letter at once, as readers who see themselves must do, were their eyes obliged to traverse an opening between each letter equal to the space occupied by one typographical character in this work.

But we hope that after frequent practice in reading and in making use of the abbreviations we have mentioned above, our blind pupils will proceed with greater quickness. Besides, we have never entertained the ambition of qualifying them to be readers for princes, or to declaim in public with all the graces of oratory. Let them only, by means of reading, learn the elements of science; let them find in this exercise an effectual remedy against that intolerable melancholy which corporeal darkness and mental inactivity united in the same person are too apt to produce; these ends attained, will fully accomplish our wishes.

4. "But what good purpose will it serve to teach the blind the letters? Why instruct them in the art of printing books for

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(*d*) Examples of these abbreviations, within the capacity and reach of all readers, are in the Treatises of Philosophy, in the Dictionaries, the new Methods and other Elementary Books of Education.

us by your exertion of corporeal sight, if the fatigues of unre-mitted labour for our instruction should one day extinguish that organ, permit us at that unhappy crisis to offer you the means at once of continuing the benefit of your lessons to us, and to you the enjoyment of an advantage of which they are in some measure the agreeable fruits. Homer, Belisarius, and Milton, afflicted with blindness, would with pleasure have consecrated to the service of their country those years of their lives which followed that catastrophe.

## CHAP. V.

### *Of the Art of Printing, as practised by the Blind for their peculiar Use.*

THE analogy which the manner of reading adapted to the blind has with their method of printing, having reduced us to the necessity of giving by anticipation, in detail, some circumstances which relate to the origin of their art of printing, it remains for us to explain the principal operations of that art, as adapted to their practice. It will be much the same case with respect to the mechanical operations of printing among the blind as with those who see. It is doubtless impossible for every individual to have an exclusive possession of it (*g*). The necessity of habitually knowing and practising the different branches of that art, the multiplicity and high price of the utensils requisite for its execution, the civil privileges with which its professors must be endued, all these conspiring obstacles limit its pursuit to a society of the blind, solely formed and intended for its practice. It is in our academy for their education where we hope to constitute the chief place (if we may use the expression), from whence will issue such typographical productions, for instance, as are proper for the use of all the blind who, in their misfortune, shall have the

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(*g*) One knows how easy it is to abuse printing in all respects; and not satisfied with the rectitude of our intentions, and the indulgence with which people have honoured our infant printing, the productions of which bear a character of originality easily distinguishable, we have formed to ourselves an inviolable rule not to suffer anything printed to issue from us without the sanction of M. Clousier, printer to the King, and which has not been executed under his eyes, or those of some person commissioned by him.

their extremities, the four pages of a sheet coming from the press ; and then the arrangement of the cases is made in an order different from that of persons who see. Thus the leaves being pasted, they form them into books, by simply stitching and covering them with pasteboard without beating them.

The office of the ordinary printing-press is easily done, by help of a cylindrical press, which is moved by a lever from one extremity to the other, along two bars of iron, between which are placed the forms, or pages that are set, after the manner of printers (*i*).

We may employ with success the same process for printing in relieve for the use of the blind, musical characters, geographical maps, the principal strokes of designing, and, in general, of all the figures of which the knowledge may be obtained by means of touch. It is upon account of these last objects, above all, that we hope the admirable discovery of M. M. Hoffman will be precious to the blind ; we share by anticipation their sentiments of gratitude towards those estimable artists (*k*).

To the press of which we have spoken a little above we have thought it proper to add a kind of tympanum, by the assistance of which the blind may, at their pleasure, tinge with black, copies of an edition perfectly similar to those which they print on white paper for their own private use.

This procedure, which is equally applicable to music, to geographical maps, or to designs, &c., puts the blind artist in a capacity not only of giving an account to himself of all the productions which he wishes to convey to those who see, but likewise easily to direct their studies by the similarity of copies, on the supposition of his being employed to give them lessons.

(*i*) This press is the invention of Sieur Beaucher, chief lock-smith. It has amply and successfully accomplished our wishes, as to the facility with which it is managed without any great effort by a blind child, and by which it admits the mechanism which we have adapted to it. We believe, however, that a perpendicular pressure given to the whole leaf at the same instant, will leave behind it a more solid impression ; we hope to find this in a press of another kind, which the Sieur Beaucher has described to us.

(*k*) Although in pages 8 and 14 of this work we have not repeated the names of some of the distinguished printers whom we have heard celebrated, we cannot forbear to confess that according to our manner of thinking, there are many others who appear to us to exercise their employment with *éclat*. We even perceive, in those who compose the body of this society, a general emulation. And obliged, by the nature of our institution, to serve a kind of apprenticeship to this art, we would quote with pleasure a considerable number

found few kinds in which they have not succeeded. We have seen them successively compose, adjust, impress, moisten the paper, touch it, print, &c., &c. (*m*). We appeal, besides, to competent judges in that affair, and we refer our reader to the report of M. M., the printers, which agrees with that of the Academy of Sciences.

## CHAP. VII.

### *Of Writing.*

THE example of Bernouilli, who had taught a young blind girl to write, and that of M. Weissenbourg, who, deprived of sight from seven years of age, has procured for himself the advantages of fixing also his ideas upon paper by writing, have encouraged us to try the means of putting the pen into the hands of our pupils. But always occupied in our real point of view, that is to say, in rendering our institution in every respect useful to those individuals who were its objects, we have thought that it could not but be curious to cause the blind to write, if they could arrive at reading their own hand; this is what engaged us in causing to be made for their use a pen of iron, the top of which was not split, and with which writing without ink, and supported with a strong paper, they produce upon it a character in relievo which they can afterwards read, in passing their fingers along the elevated lines on the back of the page. This elevation, however slight it may appear, is always sufficient, especially if care is taken to place below the paper upon which the blind write a soft and yielding surface, such as several leaves of waste paper, of paste-board, or of leather. With respect to the proper mechanism of teaching the art of writing to those who are born blind, it is by no means difficult to be executed; you have only to teach your

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(*m*) If there is any operation among the blind which requires to be directed by those who see, it is printing for the use of these last we acknowledge. This speculation has been often repeated to us upon other different branches of our institution. But have not clear-sighted persons who labour at the press themselves need of a guide to whose skill they are obliged to pay deference? And in the other states of life do we not see persons more enlightened, directing those who are less, whilst those are in a situation to conduct people less experienced than they? 'Tis thus that, in the day of battle, the general of an army gives orders, the intention of which his subaltern officers are ignorant. It is thus that the pilot conducts to the end of their voyage the learned academicians, who are unskilled in the art of navigation.

pupil to trace, with a pointed instrument, the characters ranged in form of lines. But instead of directing the process of this pointed instrument by means of characters in relief, as M. Weissenbourg has done, it is better to conduct it by letters graven hollow on some plate of metal. We have besides this precaution taken that of giving our printed letters the form of written, in order early to accustom the blind pupil to catch the resemblance. At last, when he has acquired the habit of distinguishing their forms, there remains nothing more for him to write straight but to place upon his paper a frame internally furnished with small rising lines, parallel to the direction of the writing, and distant from one another about nine-tenths of an inch. These parallel lines serve to direct his hand, whilst he transports it from left to right, in order to trace the characters.

## CHAP. VIII.

### *Of Arithmetic.*

WE have admired the ingenious tables of Saunderson (*n*) and those of M. Weissenbourg (*o*); the reason why we have adopted neither of these methods was from another view, viz., that we might preserve, without interruption, the strictest analogy possible between the means of educating the blind and those who see, we have thought that the manner of these last ought to be preferred. Likewise, when our pupils calculate, one may follow their operations step by step.

We have caused to be made for them to this end, a board pierced with different lines of square holes, proper for receiving moveable figures and bars for separating the different parts of an operation.

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(*n*) The arithmetical table of Saunderson was formed of a board divided into small squares placed horizontally and separated one from the other at equal distances; each little square was pierced with nine holes, viz., one on the midst of each side. It was by the different positions of the pegs uniformly placed in different holes that Saunderson could express any kind of number.

(*o*) We have seen, in the hands of Mlle. Paradis, arithmetical tables which we believe to have been those of M. Weissenbourg. But without a particular study, one cannot follow the operations which are performed by the help of these tables. We do not know if our pupil could operate with equal swiftness and certainty by these means as he could by those of persons who see, and we have no other merit but that of rendering them palpable to him.

We have added, to render this board more useful, a case composed of four rows of little boxes, containing all the figures proper for calculation, and which are placed at the right hand of the blind person while he operates. The only difficulty which occurred was to represent all the possible fractions without multiplying the characters which express them. We have thought of causing to be cast 10 simple denominators in the order of the figures 0, 1, 2, &c., even to 9 inclusively ; and likewise 10 simple numerators in the same order, moveable in order to be adapted at the head of the denominators. By means of this combination, there is not a fraction which our pupils cannot express.

One may see from what has been said, that our method has a double advantage.

1. A father of a family, or a tutor, can easily direct a blind child in the study of arithmetic.

2. This blind child, when once instructed, may also conduct, in his turn, the arithmetical operations performed by a child who sees.

The blind have, besides, so great a propensity for calculation that we have often seen them following an arithmetical process and correcting its errors by memory alone.

## CHAP. IX.

### *Of Geography.*

WE owe to Madame Paradis the knowledge of geographical maps for the use of the blind. She herself had it from M. Weissenbourg ; but we are astonished that neither the one nor the other has carried to a higher degree of perfection, the utensils which contribute to the study of that science.

They mark the circumference of countries by a tenacious and viscid matter, covering the different parts of their maps with a kind of sand mixed with glass, in various manners, and distinguish the order of towns by grains of glass of a greater or lesser size.

We are satisfied with marking the limits in our maps for the use of the blind, by small iron wire rounded ; and it is always a difference either in the form or size of every part of a map, which assists our pupils in distinguishing the one from the other.

These means we have chosen in preference, on account of the ease which they afford us of multiplying, by the assistance of the press, the copies of our original maps for the use of the blind. It will, besides, be more apt than any other to offer itself to the execution of details the most delicate which can affect the touch of these individuals; and the first of our pupils have brought themselves to such admirable perfection in the use of geographical maps, that people see them with surprise, at our exhibitions, distinguish a kingdom, a province, an island, the impression of which is presented to them, independent of other parts of a map, upon a square piece of paper.

## CHAP. X.

### *Of Music.*

In tracing the plan of the education of the blind, we have at first looked upon music only as an appendage fit for relaxing them after their labour. But the natural propensity in the greatest number of the blind for this art; the resources which it can furnish to several among them for their sustenance; the interest with which it inspires those who deign to be present at our exhibitions, have all forced us to sacrifice our own opinion to the general utility.

The blind have natural propensities for this art. A considerable number of them, deprived of the means of living, seize with eagerness, through necessity, an employment towards which their inclination had already so powerfully attracted them. It is only the want of instruction, without doubt, which reduces some of them to the necessity of wandering in the streets, from door to door, grating the ear by the aid of an ill-tuned instrument, or a hoarse voice, that they may extort an inconsiderable piece of money, which is frequently given them with an injunction to be silent (*p*).

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(*p*) If the taste and inclination which certain blind persons have shown for the violin, or for such instruments as can easily be joined with it, were directed by art, perhaps they might make use of it for gaining more decently their livelihood. An estimable citizen,\* who approves of all the parts of our institution, without discovering for any of them a particular predilection, suggested to us in the course of one of our exhibitions, that one might usefully employ in the train blind musicians at festivals.

\* Mr. Thierry, Author of the Traveller's Almanack.



Others less unfortunate, and giving themselves up by choice to an instrument which affords them more resource, follow the career of Couperin, of Balbatre, of Sejan, of Miroir, of Carpentiers (*q*).

Our institution will furnish all of them with assistance, whether in the study or practice of their art. Before our time, teachers of the blind were obliged to make them comprehend, by playing them over and over, the small pieces of music which they wished to execute. We have caused to be cast musical characters proper to represent upon paper all its possible varieties, by elevations on its surface in the manner of those which we have devised to represent words (*r*).

By the assistance of our printed music, then the blind pupil may learn at present the principles of that art, and impress on his memory the different pieces of music with which he wishes to enrich it (*s*).

He may likewise form to himself a library of taste, composed of the most enchanting musical productions ; and in short he himself may transmit to us the fruits of his own genius (*t*).

With respect to the music introduced into our particular exhibitions, we beg of our readers only to consider it as a decent recreation, which we have seen ourselves obliged to grant to our pupils. Our institution is, in its origin, a kind of workhouse, the different artists and labourers of which amuse their toils from

(*q*) All the world knows the merit of Mr. Chauvet, blind organist of Notre Dame de Bonne-Nouvelle. They quote in France several other blind people whose talents ascertain the utility of this study for our pupils. How comfortable for us will it be one day to have extracted from this art of harmony the means of subsistence for a part of these unfortunate people, and to have seen them become, by a happy choice, the instruments of beneficence.

(*r*) It has been objected to us with propriety, that our blind pupils cannot execute and feel the musical characters at the same time, which people who see call performing at sight, but this never was the end which we proposed. What matters it though they perform a piece of music by heart, provided they perform it correctly and faithfully.

(*s*) No person is ignorant how faithful and sure are the memories of the blind, and with what readiness they furnish them. It is likewise known what a clear conception the greatest number of them discover in difficult operations of mind ; talents so astonishing, that one would almost doubt whether nature was more parsimonious in her gifts with respect to them, or anxious to recompense them for those which she has refused.

(*t*) Mlle. Paradis, who was employed in the study of composition during her continuance in Paris, and who then sought the means of figuring the chords, learned with pleasure that we were making trials on the same subject. We regret that her abrupt departure to go and reap, under another climate, the fruits of her talents, did not leave us time to offer her the result of our procedures, to assist her in fixing upon paper the matter of her study.

After these first trials, we will neglect nothing to put early into the hands of a blind child, born of indigent parents, an occupation from which he may one day draw his sustenance. We will thus extirpate the inclination to beggary; and we will finish (if the expression may be allowed us) by grouping our picture, as well as by giving animation to the individual figures it contains.

## CHAP. XII.

### *Of the Manner of Instructing the Blind, and a Parallel of their Education with that of the Deaf and Dumb.*

As we have principally attached ourselves to simplify the means and the utensils proper for the instruction of the Blind, we flatter ourselves we have placed their education within the reach and compass of all the world. This operation, besides that it is easy in itself, requires more courage than knowledge in a master. We believe then, that upon this subject we have no particular advice to give.

By the aid of our books in relievo, every one can teach them to read. Upon the musical works formed in our press every professor of that art may give them lessons. With an iron pen, with plates and moveable characters, executed according to our models, the first masters in writing may teach them that art and arithmetic. In short, there wants nothing but maps in relievo to direct their studies in Geography; and so of other things (*y*).

We cannot conclude this reflection on the degrees of facility with which the blind may be educated, without drawing a parallel between it and the method of educating the deaf and dumb. However surprising to the eyes of the public the result of our procedure may appear, we are very far from implicitly joining in that rash admiration of some persons who are very willing to give

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(*y*) We will take pleasure in directing the construction of utensils useful for the instruction of the blind who are strangers. The books and works of music shall be furnished by our blind pupils, and sold for their benefit alone. When we shall have put the last hand to the objects which demand our chief care, we hope to employ ourselves in their amusements, and in everything which can form a decent and innocent recreation for the blind. We believe that it ought equally to enter into our views to teach blind children to walk alone, and without a guide.

besought him to read his elementary books to him. He, more employed in objects of amusement, shut his ears to the solicitations of his unhappy brother, whom a cruel disease carried off very soon.

These different examples soon convinced us how precious it would be to the blind to possess the means of extending their knowledge, without their being obliged to wait for, or sometimes even in vain to demand, the assistance of those who saw.

If the execution of these means appeared to us possible, it did not fail at first to present us with some difficulties. We had need of encouragement, we confess. Mademoiselle Paradis arrived in this metropolis. She shewed us her attempts, and those of M. Weissenbourg. We collected those of the blind who lived before our time; we put into execution several of their proceedings; to these we joined the results of our own, and we formed a general plan of the Institution. There was only wanting a person upon whom we might try our first experiments. Providence deigned, without doubt, to direct our choice upon him.

François le Sueur, struck with blindness in consequence of convulsions at the age of six weeks, had not, at the age of seventeen years and a half, any notion relative to literature. Descended from a respectable family, but entirely deprived of the advantages of fortune, and constrained to seek the means of subsistence in the place frequented by people least easy in their circumstances, although perhaps the most laborious, the blind youth scarcely enjoyed the use of reason, when he was afraid of being burdensome to his parents; he soon found himself under the necessity of going and presenting himself at the gates of our temples, there to crave that kind of unsubstantial and momentary assistance which is given by those who enter, which the indigent often obtain with difficulty from the rich, who industriously avoid their importunities. Full of joy at the least acquisition, he flies with eagerness to the bosom of his unhappy family, to divide the fruit of his solicitations, with the authors of his being, and with three sisters and two brothers, whereof the last is still upon the breast. It was in the midst of this hard life, as little calculated to inspire as to favour a taste for the sciences, that our first pupil began his education. Soon did a

noble enthusiasm wholly take possession of him ; he snatched from the necessity of labouring for his existence, those moments which he consecrated to study. His efforts were not slow in being followed with success. They demanded of us to see the result of our proceedings ; we seized the favourable circumstance of an Academical Assembly, where we were appointed to read a memorial. We took for its subject certain reflections on the education of the blind. M. le Noir, then the magistrate, charged with the administration of the police, was president of this assembly. He saw our first attempts, received them with that concern with which he presently inspired Ministers, protectors of arts and indigence. M. le Comte de Vergennes, M. le Baron de Breteuil, Mr. Comptroller General, and Mr. Keeper of the Seals, were kindly willing to permit that the young Sueur should perform his exercises in their presence, and all these respectable witnesses encouraged our first pupil by their beneficence.

But whilst we were employed in delineating our plan of education for blind children, already had a company of beneficent gentlemen, composed of members of the first distinction, for their birth, their employments, their fortune or their talents ; depositaries of the public benefits of which every one inclines to increase the mass according to his wealth ; who snatching an interval from their business or their leisure hours go twice every month to employ themselves at the bottom of a cloister, far from the public observation, about the means of diminishing the number of the unfortunate ; already, I say, had the Philanthropic Society laid the foundation of this institution. Twelve poor blind children received from this company each one the assistance of twelve livres per month. Satisfied with our first trials, they designed to intrust us with the care of these unfortunate people. We were not slow in conceiving the hope of adding, to the assistance which they had given them, the product of their labours. What obligations have we not to acknowledge to the whole of this respectable society ? And why is it not permitted to us to name those of its members, who having neither reputation nor fortune to acquire, have shared with us, modestly and in silence, the numerous details into which the education of this establishment leads us ?

(Very soon did our institution acquire a new degree of importance in the eyes of the public. Then they ceased to believe that the power of receiving by touch the education which we proposed was restricted to an individual alone favoured with the propensities inspired by nature. Of the fourteen blind children instructed in the first rudiments, there were then found only three whose progress had been slow ; because enjoying still a weak ray of light, they obtained at least from touch what remained to them almost entirely lost from the weakness of their sight.

There remained no more to put the last hand to this establishment but the testimony of the learned upon these means. The Academy of Sciences has designed to employ itself in examining them, and drew up the report which we have inserted at the end of this work.

Led by the suffrages of people instructed, by their own experience, by the emotions of a heart disposed to favour the good, the public have been eager from all quarters to contribute to the expense of rearing a house which we have built for suffering nature.

The Royal Academy of Music performed on the 19th of February, 1786, for the benefit of blind children, a concert, in which the audience were divided on one hand between the noble disinterestedness of the members, and on the other between the talents which they displayed on that occasion.

In short, the Lyceum, the Museum, and the Hall of Correspondence disputed among themselves with emulation the agreeable satisfaction of seeing, in the midst of their academical meetings, young blind children lisp out the first elements of reading, of calculation, &c., and in the scenes of learned emulation, where Genius alone had till then found encouragement, beneficence has, for the first time, been seen decreeing a crown.

Enthusiasm gained over particular societies ; and the exercises of blind children were always terminated by some acquisition in their favour, sent to the house of the Philanthropic Society, who joining their assistance to what was produced by the funds of the Institution, distributed the sums to them with the tenderness which a good mother equally feels for every one of her children.





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