

A PHILANTHROPIST OF THE LAST CENTURY  
IDENTIFIED AS A BOSTON MAN.

BY ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL.

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It is always interesting to look back to the beginnings of things, and all those who are interested in the education of the Deaf-and-Dumb naturally desire to know something of the origin of the art in America; and to look back to those philanthropists who first urged the education of the deaf in this country, and gave us information concerning what was done in earlier times in Europe. Now, the curious fact is found that these early philanthropists appeared anonymously. The results of their efforts have been very great. Today, we have under instruction, in American Schools for the Deaf, more than ten thousand deaf children, who, a few years ago, would have been termed "Deaf-Mutes," or "Deaf-and-Dumb." They are no longer deaf-and-dumb, for more than sixty-one per cent. are now taught to speak.

The first to urge the education of the Deaf in this country, was a writer whose articles appeared in the Boston newspapers. Under the pseudonym *Philocophos*—the friend of the Deaf-and-Dumb—he published in the *New England Palladium*, in 1803 (June 14), a card—"To the Reverend the Clergy (of every persuasion and denomination) of the State of Massachusetts"—asking for details concerning the Deaf-and-Dumb within their knowledge, for the purpose of obtaining statistics to show that there were in this country a sufficient number of Deaf-Mutes to warrant the establishment of an American School for the

Deaf. During the course of the year 1803, a number of communications from this writer appeared in the *Palladium*.

In the same year (1803) the *Palladium* published a series of papers upon the De L'Épée method of instructing the Deaf-and-Dumb, under the title: "Extracts from letters of the Celebrated Abbé De L'Épée, written in 1776, translated by Francis Green, Esq., of Medford."

On the first of November (1803) a short note appeared in the *Palladium*, which attacked the accuracy of the statements made by Francis Green, by stating that "the method of instructing the Deaf-and-Dumb ascribed to the Abbé De L'Épée is now said to have been invented by M. Perreire, a Spaniard." Whereupon the anonymous writer *Philocophos* wrote a letter to the editors (published 1803, November 11), in which he defended the statement made by Francis Green, and gave a one-column lecture upon the art of instructing the Deaf-and-Dumb. This remarkable letter showed that *Philocophos* was a master of his subject; and in it—for the first time in America—was brought together, by title and by specific reference, nearly the complete literature of the world relating to the education of the Deaf-and-Dumb. I say "for the first time in America," because a very similar list had appeared at an earlier date (1801) in a book published in London, England,—to which, however, *Philocophos* did not refer. He made no mention of the book, although it was—and still is—a standard work, from which instructors of the deaf, in English speaking countries, obtain their knowledge of the De L'Épée method of instruction, and of the early works relating to the education of the Deaf-and-Dumb. This book—like the letter of *Philocophos*—was published anonymously. It was an English translation of a work by De L'Épée, entitled:—"The method of educating the Deaf-and-Dumb: confirmed by long experience. By the

Abbé De L'Épée, translated from the French and Latin, London, 1801."

The translation was reprinted in England by Arrowsmith in 1819<sup>1</sup>; and in America, by the *American Annals of the Deaf*, in 1860 (Vol. XII., pp. 1-132).

The anonymous translator, in his preface, brought together the titles of nearly all the earlier books and articles relating to the education of the Deaf-and-Dumb; and yet—like *Philocophos*—he omitted from his list an earlier and well known book. This work was entitled:—  
"Vox Oculis Subjecta:—A Dissertation on the most curious and important Art of Imparting Speech and the Knowledge of Language to the naturally Deaf and (consequently) Dumb: With a particular Account of the Academy of Messieurs Braidwood of Edinburgh: and a Proposal to perpetuate and extend the benefits thereof. Written by a Parent. London, 1783."

To this book the world is largely indebted for its knowledge of the celebrated academy of Messrs. Thomas and John Braidwood, of Edinburgh, opened in 1760, where Deaf-Mutes were successfully taught to speak and to understand speech by watching the mouths of others. It also gives us our chief information of the early English writers upon the subject; and, indeed, to the author we are indebted for the preservation of much that had been written in England in the seventeenth century; for he quoted voluminously from the early writers.

To Dr. Joseph C. Gordon, Superintendent of the Illinois Institution for the Deaf-and-Dumb, we are indebted for the discovery that the Translator's Preface of the De L'Épée translation of 1801, contains internal evidence that it was written by the author of "Vox Oculis Subjecta"; and to Dr. Samuel A. Green, Librarian of the Massachusetts

<sup>1</sup> See "The Art of instructing the Infant deaf & dumb" by John Pouncefort Arrowsmith, London, 1819. To which is annexed the "method of educating mutes of a more mature age which has been practised with so much success on the continent by the Abbé de l'Épée."

Historical Society, we are indebted for the information that "Vox Oculis Subjecta" was written by his kinsman,—Francis Green, of Medford, Massachusetts (the same who published translations from De L'Epée in the *New England Palladium*, in 1803),—and that Francis Green was also the anonymous writer *Philocophos*.

Dr. Green also made known the fact that Francis Green left an autobiography, which still exists in the possession of a grandson, Commander Francis M. Green, of the United States Navy. This unpublished autobiography, in the handwriting of Francis Green himself—(written in 1806)—confirms and verifies the conclusion that Francis Green,—*Philocophos*—the author of the De L'Epée translation of 1801—and the author of "Vox Oculis Subjecta,"<sup>1</sup> were one and the same person.

Francis Green was born in Boston in 1742. In 1745, his father (Benjamin) accompanied Sir William Pepperrell, as his private secretary, to Cape Breton, and after the fall of Louisburg he remained in that city, holding official positions, and later he received a government appointment at Halifax, N. S., where he settled permanently with his family. Francis, however, spent a portion of his school days in Boston. He was a pupil in Mr. Lovell's school, and at the age of fourteen years entered Harvard College. The following year, 1757, his father having previously purchased for him an Ensign's commission in the British army, he was ordered to his regiment, where he served for some time. He received his degree at Harvard in 1760, and in 1766 sold his commission in the army, returned to Boston, married his cousin, Susanna (daughter of the well-known patriot Joseph Green), and established himself as a merchant in that city. He was an importer of general merchandise. He owned a vessel "The Susanna,"

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<sup>1</sup>A copy of "Vox Oculis Subjecta," containing many notes in the handwriting of Francis Green, may be found in the Volta Bureau for the Increase and Diffusion of Knowledge relating to the Deaf, 35th and Q Streets, Washington, D. C.

which plied between Boston and London, and his business extended to several of the New England colonies. He had five children; two died in infancy. By a second marriage he had six children. The youngest of these, Mathews Wyllly Green, was the father of Commander Francis M. Green before mentioned. As his political prejudices were not in strict accord with those of John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and others, but were more in sympathy with the loyalist party, he removed from Boston when Gen. Howe evacuated the town, and for several years he appears to have been somewhat of a wanderer. His wife died in 1775. In 1776 he was in Halifax, N. S. In 1777 he was in New York. Here he lost one of his little boys by accident; the child was shockingly burned and died in a few hours. In 1778 Francis Green was proscribed and banished, and in 1780 he went to England. His only living son, Charles Green, was deaf and dumb; and in February, 1780, when about eight years of age, he was placed under the instruction of the celebrated Thomas and John Braidwood, in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Braidwood Academy had then been established for about twenty years, and had become famous all over the world for its successful instruction of the deaf and dumb. In May, 1781, Francis Green paid a visit to Edinburgh to see his son; and the little boy, anxious to exhibit his accomplishments, eagerly advanced and addressed him by word of mouth:—"How do you do, dear Papa!" We may imagine the father's surprise and delight. "It exceeds the power of words," says Francis Green, "to convey any idea of the sensations experienced at this interview." He remained in Edinburgh for about six weeks and was every day at the Academy. He wrote a letter from London to his friend, Mr. Richard Bagley, of New York, describing his visit and the impression made upon his mind by what he saw. This letter, although written in 1781, was not published until 1804—twenty-three years after its date—when it appeared in a

medical journal (but without the writer's name), as an article "On teaching the Deaf to understand Language and the Dumb to Speak."<sup>1</sup> This article, ultimately, after many years, had an influence on the foundation of the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb.

In 1782 Francis Green again visited his son at the Braidwood School, and was greatly surprised and gratified by the progress he had made. During his visits to Edinburgh Francis Green had become aware of the fact that large numbers of deaf children had been denied admittance to the school because their parents were unable to pay for their instruction; and he soon conceived the idea of establishing a Charitable Institution which should furnish free instruction for the deaf. This was the motive that led him, in 1783, to publish his book, "Vox Oculis Subjecta," in which he developed his plan for a public institution in London to be supported by subscription. He was aware of the fact that schools for the education of the deaf had arisen in various countries during the preceding centuries, and that these schools had perished when their founders died; and he was disturbed by the thought that the Braidwoods, "the present professors of this art, like all other men 'whose breath is in their nostrils,' may be suddenly taken away before any successors are duly qualified."

"To render this art universally successful," he says, "it is necessary that some ingenious young men should be instructed and qualified to assist and succeed the present professors, and that a fund should be established under the direction of proper managers, to be applied to the purpose of educating those whose parents are altogether unable to defray such expense, and to assist others who can afford a part but not the whole, by which means *all* the deaf, however scattered, might be collected and taught,

<sup>1</sup> See "The Medical Repository, & Review of American Publications in Medicine, Surgery, and the Auxiliary Branches of Science." N. Y., 1804, Vol. II. (for May, June & July), pp. 73-75. The article has been republished in the *Association Review*, Mt. Airy, Philadelphia, Feb., 1900, Vol. II., pp. 66-68.

and consequently rescued from certain ignorance, from idleness, and from want, as well as every defect in speech (however inconvenient and violent) rectified."—*Vox Oculis Subjecta*.

To the great disappointment of Francis Green, the Braidwoods did not take kindly to his well-meant plan for the perpetuation and extension of their system, and preferred to go about it in their own way. They moved their private school from Edinburgh to Hackney, near London (1783); and succeeded in creating a family monopoly of the whole art of instructing the deaf in Great Britain, which lasted at least until the year 1815. Teachers were even placed under heavy bonds to keep the methods of instruction secret. The Braidwoods published nothing, and indeed, as Francis Green remarks, "so far from allowing the world at large the knowledge of their advances or the benefit of their improvements, have rather, like Perreire and Heinicke, been desirous of keeping them in obscurity and mystery; and (to borrow the comparison of a recent writer upon an occasion not very dissimilar) 'like the Jewish Talmudists, who dealt in secret writings, of allowing no persons to be professed *practical conjurers* but the Sanhedrim themselves.'"—*De L' Epée, translation of 1801*.

Francis Green was wofully disappointed with the Braidwood family; and in 1784 he returned to America and took up his residence near Halifax, N. S. He retired to his farm at Cole Harbor and became High Sheriff of the County of Halifax. Here his deaf son, Charles, joined him, after completing his education at the Braidwood School. He did not long, however, enjoy the pleasure of his son's society, for, in less than a year after his return, the young man was accidentally drowned at Cole Harbor while engaged in shooting. His death occurred in 1787 (August 29). In November following, his father resigned the office of high sheriff, and for several years afterwards

we have no definite information concerning him. In 1790 and 1791 we find him in Paris, France, where he was a frequent visitor at the De L' Epée School for the Deaf and Dumb, which was then carried on by the Abbé Sicard, De L' Epée having died in 1789.

The Abbé De L'Epée had been a philanthropist after his own heart—a man who had devoted his life and his fortune to the unfortunate Deaf-and-Dumb—a man who refused payment for his services, allowing the wealthy to educate their own children by other teachers, and devoted himself to the poor, without emolument. Although the inventor of the system of instruction which bears his name, characterized by the use of a conventional language of signs, De L'Epée was not wedded to anything save the good of his pupils. He taught them to speak, and to read speech from the mouths of others, as well as to communicate by finger-spelling and signs :—But the Abbé Sicard had given up teaching them utterance, conducting their education solely by silent methods of instruction, a plan which grieved the kind heart of Francis Green, who had tender recollections of the success attained in this direction with his own son.

Returning to London, after his visit to Paris in 1790 and 1791, he became again imbued with the idea of establishing a charitable institution in London for the free instruction of the deaf. He at once set about the undertaking, and then found that a few gentlemen had already begun to take steps upon a similar enterprise. Without inquiring as to how far they were indebted to him for their first ideas upon the subject, through his publication of "Vox Oculis Subjecta" in 1783, he at once abandoned his own plans, and united with them to bring about the practical execution of their ideas. These efforts were successful, and in 1792, there was established in Bermondsey, near London, under the patronage of the Marquis of Buckingham, the first charitable institution for the education of

the Deaf-and-Dumb ever opened in English speaking countries. The school still exists as the Old Kent Road Institution in London. Francis Green's name does not seem to have been publicly associated with it in any way. His philanthropy, however, was of so broad and generous a character, that he was satisfied with the fact of the existence of the school, without claiming that personal recognition which was his due. He evidently, however, was proud of this achievement; for nearly all the copies of "Vox Oculis Subjecta" which exist in this country, contain a note, in the handwriting of Francis Green, facing the title-page, to the following effect:—

"P. S. Since the publication of the following a public charitable institution has been happily effected in England under the patronage of the Duke of Buckingham, and other benevolent characters."

In 1793, we find him again in his Nova Scotia home, and in December of that year, he became First Joint Treasurer (*pro tempore*) of the Province of Nova Scotia; and in January, 1794, he was appointed a Justice of the Court of Pleas. In 1796, his lands and buildings at Preston, Cole Harbor and Dartmouth were purchased in order to make a settlement for six hundred Maroons, who had arrived from Jamaica, and now he determined to return to the land of his nativity and to the city of his birth. In June, 1797, he settled in Medford, near Boston, which remained his home until the day of his death. He visited Europe again about the beginning of the present century, and was grieved to find that De L'Épée, the great philanthropist, was almost forgotten, even in his own country, France, although only a few years had elapsed since he passed away.

Francis Green at this time seems to have formed the resolution of rescuing from oblivion the writings of De L'Épée. He translated his latest work into English, and published it in London in 1801; and after his return

to America he continued his labors of love, by translating and publishing, through the columns of the *New England Palladium*, in 1803, extracts from the earlier writings of De L'Épée, which had not been reproduced in the former work. At the same time, under the pseudonym *Philocophos*, he urged the establishment of a school for the Deaf in America.

During three years, 1803, 1804 and 1805, he continued his public appeals for an American School for the Deaf; and in 1805 he offered to donate for this purpose the profits of a book he had translated (Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*).

“But” he says “the *philanthropy and charity* of the present æra seem to be elbowed off from the stage by the predominant speculations of the *banking mania*, and the universal *lust of lucre*. Neither *Compassion*, *Humanity* nor *Taste* are likely to avail. ‘*Crescit amor nummi, quantum ipse pecunia crescit.*’ The lust of Lucre keeps pace with the increase of Pelf.<sup>1</sup> ‘*O Tempora! O Mores!*’ Oh the Times! Oh the Manners!”—(Autobiography, 1806).

These seem to have been his last words upon the subject. He died in Medford, Massachusetts, on the 21st of April, 1809, without having accomplished the object he had so much at heart.

In regard to his claims to recognition<sup>2</sup> I may say that Francis Green was the unknown translator of De L'Épée; and the anonymous author of “*Vox Oculis Subjecta: a Dissertation on the most Curious and Important Art of imparting Speech and the Knowledge of Language to the naturally Deaf and (consequently) Dumb.*” He was the first to collate the literature of this art; the earliest American writer upon the subject; the first to urge the education of the Deaf in this country; the pioneer promoter of free

<sup>1</sup> *Crescit amor nummi quantum ipsa pecunia crevit. Juvenal, Sat. xiv., 139.*

<sup>2</sup> This succinct statement of his claims to recognition was prepared conjointly by Dr. Joseph C. Gordon and A. Graham Bell. See *Association Review*, Vol. II., p. 61.

schools for the Deaf—both in England and America; the first parent of a deaf child to plead for the education of all deaf children.

It may be interesting to know, in this connection, that a tablet has been erected to his memory "By the Parents of Deaf Children in his native City," in the porch of the Horace Mann School for the Deaf, 178 Newbury Street, Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For further details concerning Francis Green, his publications, and labors for the Deaf, see *The Association Review*, an educational magazine published by the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf, edited by Frank W. Booth, Mount Airy, Philadelphia Penn., Vol. II., pp. 33-69; 119-126.

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