First examination of the pupils
of the Deaf School 1842
(taken from the Bristol Mercury)

This was the common way in which Deaf schools displayed how well they were educating the pupils. It was also the way in which they could raise funds by having these public exams.
Thomas Eastman, of Bedminster, aged 16, who has been in the institution as a day scholar for five months, was next examined. He was described by the master as being remarkable for his capacity for rapidly acquiring knowledge. Dr. Kay stated, also, that out of the five months during which he had attended the school, he had been at home full one month. The names of various objects were given, for which he made the natural signs. Mr. Burns then made the signs for "cloud," "rays of the sun," "ice," "thunder," &c., which words the pupil wrote with great promptitude on the board. It may be as well to state that the "natural signs" are well calculated to convey to the mind the nature of the object they denote; and a great number of them are almost as intelligible to the audience as to the pupil: for instance, when the word "tailor" was given, the lad pulled up the end of his boot and made a motion as if sewing. At the word "soldier," he struck his hand briskly against his breast, raised his head, and appeared to take aim with a musket. "Sailor" he indicated by hitching up his trousers, pretending to thrust a quill into his mouth, and afterwards to ascend the rope-ladders of a ship. "Day" he denoted by spreading abroad his arms, and appearing to shrink beneath the rays of the sun. "Night," by folding his arms around him, and sinking his head and closing his eyes, as if in sleep. For "birds," he made a fluttering motion with his arms and hands as if in the act of flying. These motions were often elegant, sometimes humorous,—always expressive and interesting.

The pupil was then examined in arithmetic, and did some simple sums in addition and numeration, after which he was questioned on religious matters, and replied to the several queries propounded in a most satisfactory manner.

Master J. G. Arbuthnot was next introduced as having been five years under Mr. Burns's tuition, while that gentleman was master of the institution at Aberdeen, and eight months in the school in this city.

He was examined by Dr. Kay, the Mayor, and others, and the intelligence of his answers to the numerous interrogatories to which he was subjected elicited general and loud expressions of approbation. The following is a sample of the style of examination pursued:

He was first examined by Mr. Burns (to whom many of the questions were dictated) by "dumb articulation"—the motion of the lips, and after he had given his name, &c., was asked, What are you?—A deaf and dumb child. What do you think of your deafness?—It is a great affliction to me. You say it is a great affliction to you; why?—Because it deprives me of many honourable employments. Of what honourable employments?—Such as merchant, lawyer, both officers in the army and navy, a doctor, &c. Perhaps, too, of lord high chancellor?—O, no! How do you understand language?—Through the medium of signs. Are you very sorry that you are deaf and dumb?—Yes, I feel it; but I must bear it with patience: it is the penalty or punishment for my corrupted nature. Are you so vexed at your loss of hearing?—Yes, I vex at it bitterly. Would you prefer being blind, or deaf and dumb?—I prefer being deaf and dumb to being blind. Deaf and dumb! why?—Because, if I were blind, my eyes could not see the language of signs.
Dr. Kay observed that the deaf and dumb highly appreciated any language by which they could hold conversation with their fellow beings.

The following questions were then handed in and proposed:—Of what use is education to the deaf and dumb? The pupil without a moment's hesitation replied.—To change their minds from the nature of beasts to the dignity of men. The aptitude and dignity of the reply, as might be expected, called forth a spontaneous burst of approbation; we doubt whether any words that could be employed would convey a more correct explanation of the object and tendency of the institution, than was conveyed by the beautiful and fervent language of this afflicted child, who has felt the value of the instruction it affords.

Master Arbuthnot was then examined in geography, both sacred and profane; and afterwards in theology by Dr. Kay, and the Rev. Mr. Barrow, and he evinced a complete knowledge of the various branches of education on which he was questioned. A gentleman handed in a question, What is prayer? His prompt and beautiful reply was,—The desire of the heart.

The whole of the pupils present were then placed before the audience, and Dr. Kay read a report, of which the following is an outline:—

The committee set out by observing that they could not allow the friends who had favoured them with their attendance at that, the first examination of the pupils, to depart without addressing a few words to them explanatory of the present arrangements and future prospects of the establishment. The first inmates were received in the house, Orchard-street, so recently as last October, and when it was recollected that the pupils, with one or two exceptions, had before that period been wholly destitute of instruction, and that the majority had enjoyed its advantages only for a small portion of that period—in some instances only for a few weeks—when, moreover, the tender age of the pupils, and the nature and character of the instruction communicated—"even the instruction which maketh wise unto salvation"—were taken into account, the committee perhaps would be forgiven if they hesitated not to express feelings of unfeigned satisfaction and delight at the success which had hitherto attended their labours. The number of deaf and dumb children under instruction is 20, viz.:—3 private and 4 public boarders, 7 day and 6 Sunday pupils. The hours devoted to tuition are from 9 to 12 in the morning, and from 2 till 4 in the afternoon; the girls are likewise instructed in needle work at convenient hours, and the boarders of a certain class are familiarised to household duties. The committee proposed when a child presented any particular taste or talent, to cultivate it as a source of innocent relaxation, or possibly in some instances as a means of permanent employment and maintenance. From 5 to 7 years or more, varying with the age and faculties of the deaf mute, would be required to impart the necessary degree of instruction.

This attained, and the age and other things being suitable, it was intended to apprentice the pupil to some useful mechanical or other occupation. To boys many means of obtaining a livelihood readily presented themselves, such as drawing, engraving, printing, basket-making, gardening, &c. In the case of girls, needlework and domestic duties seemed to offer the principal resources. The affairs of the institution were con-
girls, needlework and domestic duties seemed to offer the principal resources. The affairs of the institution were conducted by the general committee, meeting monthly, by weekly sub-committee, and the ladies' committee, who regulated matters of a domestic nature. The school was open to the public during the hours of tuition, and a book kept in which visitors are invited to make their observations. The committee bore testimony to the talent of the master, Mr. Burns; never was sympathy with his fellow-creatures suffering under a common infirmity more strikingly manifested, nor kindly feeling for its alleviation more ardently displayed than in his constant and unremitting exertions in the discharge of his arduous but pleasing duties in instructing his fellow deaf mutes. The committee next adverted to the state of their funds. Their receipts from annual subscribers had only amounted to £13; from donations, including two anonymously presented contributions of £50 each, to £90. 60l. had been given also towards a building fund. The bequest of 500l. by the late J. W. Ricketts, Esq., with accumulations, would, it was expected, be shortly received by the treasurer. The present subscriptions were totally inadequate to meet the expenditure, and, unless they were increased, the committee would be brought to the painful necessity of refusing all future applications for instruction. The committee expressed a confident hope that so benevolent and useful an institution would not, in these days of Christian philanthropy, be suffered to droop, and they concluded by urging its friends to exert themselves to augment the number of subscribers, so as not merely to enable the committee to meet the present very limited expenditure, but to proportionally extend the benefits of the charity.

The Mayor then said he was sure all present must have felt delighted with the proceedings of the day, and would agree with him that they were greatly indebted to the committee who had brought the institution to such a state of, he would say, prosperity (cheers). Reference had been made to Mr. Burns, and he (the Mayor) was sure they were all equally indebted to Dr. Kay (cheers); they knew the great attention he had paid to the subject, and must have been struck with the fine feeling and manly sympathy he had that day manifested in behalf of his afflicted fellow-creatures. He (the Mayor) felt proud that he was a citizen of Bristol, and hoped that there were many such to be found. He begged to move their thanks to Dr. Kay, accompanied by a sincere desire that the institution, whose interests he had so much at heart, might flourish in every possible way (loud cheers).

Dr. Kay, in acknowledging the compliment, expressed the gratification it would afford him to be permitted to receive the names of new subscribers. The Mayor, who has paid a life subscription, immediately handed in his name as annual subscriber also; several other persons followed his example, and thanks having been voted to his worship for his kindness in taking the chair, the meeting broke up.