Newspaper Cutting 1:

[Transcription starts:]

[Inscribed in ink above cutting]: ‘From the Times, Feb 8th 1870 [?] by John Bird’

Literature for the Blind. The Rival Systems of Relief Type. The Blind and those friends desirous of gaining a clearer insight into the history of this long-vexed, but little understood question, cannot do better than consult the following: -- 1. The Juries’ Report of the Exhibition of 1851; pp. 311 and 413. Very full, valuable but not complete.

2.—Tomlinson’s Cyclopaedia of Useful Arts; part 32, article, “Printing for the Blind,” written in 1852 or 1853, in which are pointed out the defects of the above. The Type of Louis Braille, explained with woodcuts; price 1s. Published by Virtu and Co., Ivy-Lane, Paternoster Row.

3. An Article in the “Social Science Review” on Relief type, May 1863.

4.—Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of Printing for the Blind, with Practical Hints, &c, by James Gall, 24 Niddry-Street, Edinburgh 1834.

Anyone reading the above would perform an act of great kindness and much usefulness by cutting it out and sending it to any Blind person, *who would understand its real value*, and would be thankful for a kind of information that too seldom reaches those who best know how to make use of it.

[End transcription]

Newspaper Cutting 2:

[Start transcription]

The London Mirror.

Saturday, February 19, 1870.

The Battle of the Types for the Blind.

During the last few weeks several communications have appeared in our columns bearing on the old and still vexed question of the best form of type for teaching the blind to read, and resulting from our republication of a highly-instructive article in the *Times* on this subject. It is but natural that those who have made it their study should select this journal as the medium for the expression of their various opinions and views. Having thought and written much on the theme, we hope we can fairly claim for the LONDON MIRROR a participation in that deep interest felt by our correspondents, and, indeed, by the sad lot it is to be dwellers in the Land of Darkness. Feeling it to be of paramount importance that a subject so surrounded with doubts and difficulties should be discussed calmly and dispassionately, with the view to the ultimate reconcilement of the many points of divergence which now unhappily exist, we freely open our columns to all who approach it in such a spirit, and whose opinions, however opposed, carry with them weight and authority. For ourselves we can say, in all sincerity, that we are wedded to no particular system for the instruction of the blind. Our sole desire is to see the Bible, in all the beautiful simplicity of its truthfulness, and, as far as may be, the Literature of the world, brought home to the blind in the easiest and most universal form, so that to the acquisition of knowledge may be superadded the most facile means of intercommunication, not only with themselves, but with their fellow-creatures at large. Unfortunately, there is too much truth in the remark made by Mr James T. Hammick, FSS, one of the assistant-commissioners of the census of England and Wales, in a paper entitled “Some Results of the Census of the Blind and the Deaf and Dumb in England, 1861; published in the second volume of the Congres International de Bienfaisance de Londres”, in which he says, “The want of unity of effort and principle amongst the friends of the blind and the deaf and dumb is much to be deplored. The experience that has been acquired has never yet been turned to practical advantage in the solution of many important questions affecting the well-being of these classes, such as the most successful methods of instruction, the best form of relief type for the blind, and the kind of instruction best calculated to meet the requirements of both young and old. On the approval of this last class the success of any particular system must ultimately depend, and throws out the very feasible suggestion that, in order to assist in the advancement of the cause, and in the more general diffusion of knowledge on the subject, [appears to be text missing, next sentence starts on a different cutting]

On referring to a work already alluded to, “Congres International de Bienfaisance de Londres,” we find in chapter XL, under the heading “Notice sur le Moyens d’Ameliorer le Sort des Aveugles et des Sourds-Muets Indigents,” that this subject was discussed on the reading of a paper by the Rev. R. G. Baker, rector of Fulham, in the section presided over by Lord Shaftesbury, and that a Government inquiry into the condition of both these classes, with the view to State aid, as is the case in Belgium and America, was advocated by Mr. Hammick, Mr John Bird, MRCS, himself blind, M. Aug. Visshers, and M. Ed. Ducpteaux, and that resolutions to that effect were carried. It is however manifest, that before the department over which Early de Grey and Ripon presides could thus make an exceptional departure from the course which has already been pursued in the administration of Parliamentary grants, there must be a commission of inquiry into the actual number of the blind, as well as their physical and intellectual wants, and that if the latter are to be provided for, there must be some one system of universal education applicable to them. It would be impossible for Government to enter on even this preliminary step, when they are met at the outset by so wide a divergence of views as at present exists as to the best system of teaching, and therefore it is all the more important that the friends of the blind should set themselves seriously to work to settle this moot point.

In another part of our impression today will be found a letter from Mr John Bird, to whom we have just alluded, and which deserves the most attentive perusal, since it emanates from one who has worked [image 2] long and laboriously for the benefit of his fellow-creatures afflicted like himself. It will be observed that he divides the blind into three classes—first, the young in schools, who must learn the system there preferred; secondly, those who attend reading classes, in which a given system is insisted on; and thirdly, “those blind, independent of school or class—voluntary readers, who desire books, and read them for their own pleasure and satisfaction.” He considers that on the approval of this last class the success of any particular system must ultimately depend, and throws out the very feasible suggestion that, in order to assist in the advancement of the cause, and in the more general diffusion of knowledge on the subject, the benevolent cannot confer a greater favour than by adding to parochial, town, and free libraries, one or more of the Gospels, or the Psalms, in the different types, which would give the librarian, or any unbiased friend, the opportunity of observing which of the different types was preferred by the blind of that district, freed from compulsion or other inducements—“the surest, if not the only, test to guide their friends, which type to select in adding future volumes.” The idea is novel, and its practical working would doubtless prove valuable. The only argument against it is that it would take a length of time to ascertain the opinions of the blind themselves by such a process. Still, delay is infinitely preferable to forcing on them this or that system, and then, without consulting their best interests, jump at the conclusion that one is preferable to the other, according to our own particular bias. It is full time that the uncertainty with which this grave subject is involved, should be speedily terminated, and, if possible, to the satisfaction of all contending parties.

[End Transcription]

Newspaper Cutting 3 – note, this is the letter by John Bird referred to in Newspaper Cutting 2.

[Start transcription]

To the Editor of the “London Mirror”

Sir,--The question of Relief Type has again, as it did in the autumn of 1868, attracted much attention, and not long since the Rev. B. G. John asked to be heard, on the plea that he had been engaged in eighteen years in the instruction of the blind.

During the twenty-four years that I have been struggling in blindness, and devoting time and energy to the various questions involved in the permanent elevation of the blind, it has been my constant endeavor to keep them all clear of and unwarped by that spirit of sect and party which has so long impeded their progress.

This line of conduct, as might have been expected, has brought on me much ill-will from many interested quarters, without, however, disqualifying me from offering the results of careful observation, long experience, and much reflection, should it be in your power to afford me space for the following remarks. In the early years of blindness I hoped much and labored hard under serious difficulties, and, like many blind who had preceded me, devoted much time and attention to the long-vexed question of “Relief Type.” For the last two or three years contending parties have revived old questions and the usual arguments, with some few additions by new advocates, and if anyone interested in the question will read the “Juries’ Report of the Exhibition of 1851” (pp. 311 and 413), the article on “Relief Type” in “Tomlinson’s Cyclopaedia of Useful Arts,” written in 1852 or ‘3, and a letter by myself in the “Social Sciences Review,” May, 1863, in reply to a critique on “Contributions to Social Pathology,” it will enable him to form a very fair opinion of how the case stood then, and of the amount of progress since made.

We have had, during the last month, arguments in favour of the system of my late friend Louis Braille, whose system was, I believe first clearly explained to this country in the above-named article in “Tomlinson’s Cyclopaedia”, rendered the more clear by accurate wood-cuts, and the Rev. Hugh Blair has defended *the now-called* Worcester, but some years since the Bristol system, when advocated by the Rev. W. Taylor, late principal of the York Institution, and the late Mr. Estlin, of Bristol, both sincere friends of the blind, although in two essential points I differ from them.

The Rev. B. G. Johns advocates, as usual, the Roman capital only, and from Mr. G. P. Davies, of Berlin, we have evidence in favour of Moon’s system. Others have remained silent, yet the director of St. John’s Wood School will continue to print, and will limit their pupils to books printed in Lucas’s short-hand signs, and the committee of the Indigent Blind Visiting Society will print in Frere’s Phonetic System, the kind of type they have hitherto insisted should be used exclusively in their reading classes; whilst the British and Foreign Bible Society, having given the preference to Moon’s system, produce the Scriptures in this type at a much reduced price, this being also the type used exclusively by the Home Teaching Society, and the one approved of and most generously circulated in the county of York by Sir C. Hugh Lowther, Bart., himself blind from early years.

Such is the present state of affairs, and if I have erred in any point it is because of the studied secrecy with which most transactions connected with the blind are concealed from those who desire only progress, straightforwardness, and that Christian sincerity which includes honour. Affairs being in the condition thus described, it is evident that each party will continue to collect money to print books in their own favourite system, and to insist on those *in their power reading such, and no other*. The question arises cannot the sincere but unbiased friends of the blind do anything towards clearing away these difficulties? My reply is—yes! And with every prospect of advancing the cause.

Blind readers should be divided into three classes:--

1. The young in schools, who must learn the system preferred and insisted on by their sighted directors or teachers, whilst they are most cruelly kept in ignorance of all the efforts that are being made for their welfare in the rest of the blind’s very limited section of the world’s intelligence and activity, with which, in after life, they will have to compete and to contend, to succeed or to suffer.

2nd. Those who attend reading classes, who, unless in many cases they can learn and confine themselves to the pet type of the directors, will be denied the threepence allowed at each meeting, to be divided between the necessitous blind and his or her equally necessitous guide.

3rd. Those blind, independent of school or class—voluntary readers, who desire books, and read them for their own pleasure and satisfaction. On the approval and anxiety of this third class to obtain and to possess books printed in relief type will the success of any particular system ultimately depend; and, therefore, to assist in the advancement of the cause, and in the more general diffusion of knowledge on this subject, by inducing the blind, in all parts of the country, to read, at the same time that it would afford their friends and patrons an opportunity of more accurate insight, the benevolent cannot confer a greater favour than by adding to parochial, town, or free libraries, one or more of the Gospels, or of the Psalms, in different types. This would give the librarian, or any unbiased friend the opportunity of observing which of the different types was preferred by the blind of that district when freed from compulsion or other inducements—the surest, if not the only, test to guide their friends which type to select in adding future volumes.

Such are the views I have held for years, and I was glad to see in your journal for January 29th last, page 120, in the letter of Mr. G. Palmer Davies, from Berlin, that the Minister of Worship, presiding over a conference on this question in the Prussian capital, attached so much importance to this third class. “We are not,” said he, “to determine the absolute value of the two opposing systems, nor to decide which of the two is to prevail in educational institutions for the instruction of the blind, but we are met together to discuss the question, whether Moon’s system be not much better adapted to the wants of those blind persons who live freely among their neighbours.”

By applying through the British and Foreign Bible Society, any book of the Old Testament, of the Gospels, or the Epistles, can be had separately, in any form of type, and on the most liberal terms—a mode of proceeding which, if adopted, by extending the inquiry over a larger field, would tend to free the cause, in a great degree from that clique and party influence which hitherto has been the real and only foe to more decided progress.

But this is not the only advantage sure to result from the general application to this one centre. The inventor of any new system would, to insure the success of the scheme by wide dissemination and general approval, be certain to select some part of the Scriptures, perhaps, as is generally the case, one of the Gospels, for his first volume. Such a book would easily find the opportunity of circulation through this society, a channel closed to other works, and it would naturally follow, that when a particular type was approved of, the inventor, or printer, would be applied to, to produce any other kind of work likely to repay or, at least, to encourage the publisher to continue the enterprise. Much more could I add of my views of preference for the continuous line in forming relief type rather than for the serrated line, or relief points, of a system of spelling at full length being first completed before any form of shorthand be attempted, and of the possibility of inventing an alphabet specially adapted to the sense of touch, utterly regardless of *sighted partiality for five-sensed routine*.

But I have already trespassed at great length—not longer, I trust, than the importance of the cause needs, and than yourself and readers will pardon.—I remain, your obedient servant,

John Bird,

Member of the College of Surgeons,

10 Beaumont-street, Weymouth-Street, W.

[End Transcription]