

June 28, 1864

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS BY THE RETIRING PRESIDENT, HON. AMOS KENDALL.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: About eight or nine years ago, a man appeared in this city having in charge a number of deaf and dumb children whom he exhibited to the citizens, asking contributions to aid him in establishing an institution for the instruction of that class of unfortunates in the District of Columbia, including also the blind. He excited much sympathy among our citizens and succeeded in getting up a considerable school. Professing a desire to make it permanent, he solicited a number of citizens to act as trustees, and a board was formed composed of Rev. Byron Sunderland, D. D., James C. McGuire, D. A. Hall, W. H. Edes, Judson Mitchell, and myself. But the board was barely organized when it discovered that the objects of the individual in question had not been understood, and that he was unfit to be intrusted with the management of such an institution. The question for the consideration of the board was, whether they should abandon the enterprise, or proceed under the discouraging circumstances then existing. The tender of a house and lot adjoining the city limits, previously made, was repeated, and, actuated by sympathy for these children of misfortune, the board resolved to proceed, relying for support upon the liberality of their fellow-citizens and Congress.

In the mean time rumors of the ill-treatment of the pupils in the deaf and dumb school by their teacher reached the public authorities, and at the instance of the district attorney my name was used as their next friend in a legal process to test the truth of these rumors. They were proved to be true by abundant testimony, and the court directed such of them as belonged to the District of Columbia to be restored to their parents. There were among them, however, five deaf mutes who had been brought from the State of New York, having no parents, or none who seemed to care what became of them. These were bound to me as their guardian by the orphans' court, and formed the nucleus of our institution. And now I am most happy to present you with three of my wards, all well advanced in moral and intellectual culture, one of them the young lady whose beautiful composition on Florence Nightingale has been read in your hearing.

In January, 1857, the board petitioned Congress for an act of incorporation, which was readily granted, with provision for the payment out of the public treasury of one hundred and fifty dollars per annum for the tuition and support of indigent pupils belonging to the District. At a subsequent period Congress directed the admission of deaf mute children of persons in the military and naval service, and also provided for the payment of salaries and incidental expenses, so that the institution became very properly a public charity supported in the main by the government. An appropriation of \$9,000 was also made to enlarge a brick building which had been constructed for the use of the institution, so as better to accommodate the officers, teachers, and pupils.

Material aid has also been derived in the department of manual labor from a

transfer of the funds of "Washington's Manual Labor School and Male Orphan Asylum," originally organized by the agency of P. W. Gallaudet, the grandfather of our present superintendent, but never put in operation.

Our institution was fortunate enough soon to attract the attention of the government and people of the State of Maryland, and for several years past the legislature of that State has made provision for the education therein of a number of their mute children.

The example of the State was followed by the city of Baltimore, whose councils provided for the support of ten mutes from that city. So pleased were the members of those councils, on a late visit to the institution, with the progress made by their protégés, that on their return they voted to double the number and increase the compensation for their tuition and support.

Our present superintendent, E. M. Gallaudet, was appointed on the 30th day of May, 1857. His mother, the widow of the late Thomas H. Gallaudet, was, at the same time, appointed matron. Under their charge the progress of the institution, beginning with *five* pupils, has been as follows, viz:

Number of pupils July, 1858.....	17
Do. do. do. 1859.....	20
Do. do. do. 1860.....	30
Do. do. do. 1861.....	35
Do. do. do. 1862.....	38
Do. do. do. 1863.....	52
And now it is.....	58

During all this period there has not been a death from sickness among the pupils of the institution. This remarkable fact is undoubtedly attributable in a very high degree to the excellent care bestowed upon the children by the matron and her assistants.

But it is not so much the increase of numbers or the excellent health of the pupils of which we are proud, as their advancement in knowledge and in moral training. It would be difficult to find in any of the schools of the country the same number of children brought together promiscuously who have made in the same time the same advance in reading, writing, arithmetic, and composition, whose notions of moral right are more correct, or whose conduct is more exemplary.

Having advanced thus far in an enterprise undertaken with humble means, we now propose to take another step forward.

The deaf mutes are numerous enough in the United States to be considered a separate class in the community, having a language of their own. Most of the

States have established schools for their instruction in elementary knowledge: but in most if not all the States they are too few in number to justify the establishment of colleges for their instruction in the higher branches of knowledge. One college for the whole United States would probably be adequate for all those who will wish and have the means to acquire a more finished education. And where can such an institution be more fittingly located than in the District of Columbia? Congress has furnished us a foundation broad enough to build upon, and while we do not look to them for the support of students coming from the States, we have no doubt they will secure to the enterprise every appropriate aid and encouragement.

It is a great mistake to suppose that deaf mutes are in general inferior in capacity to children having all their senses in perfection. The inferiority is not in the want of capacity, but in the want of its development. We wish to supply that want, and that we have done it in a degree we hope we have satisfied you by this day's exhibition.

If the whole human family were destitute of the sense of hearing, they would yet be able to interchange ideas by signs. Indeed, the language of signs undoubtedly accompanied if it did not precede the language of sounds. Men are created, not with a God-given language, but with a God-given capacity to make signs and sounds, and by the use of these to form a language. No child comes into the world with a language: *that* is an *acquisition*, and the child always acquires the language of its parents or of those by whom it is surrounded. It has ideas before it has a language in which to communicate them to others. Its only language is signs or incoherent cries. We read that Adam named the beasts and birds. But how could he give them names without first pointing them out by other means? How could a particular name be fixed upon a particular animal among so many species without some sign indicating to what animal it should thereafter be applied? Names are but sounds or combinations of sounds. If a company of uneducated deaf mutes were, for the first time, brought into contact with an elephant, without knowing his name, they would soon devise some sign by which he should be represented among themselves. So, were it possible for a company of adults with their senses entire to be placed in a similar situation, they would probably point him out by a sign accompanied by some exclamation, and that exclamation might become the name of the animal. Thenceforward the perfect man would convey the idea of an elephant by sound, while the deaf mute could only do it by a sign. Hence they may be considered distinct races in language or in their means of interchanging ideas.

It is our function to teach, improve, and enlarge the sign language; make it co-extensive with the language of sound, and through its instrumentality open the minds of deaf mutes to the wonders of creation and the secrets of science and art. This will have been effected when every material word in the written language shall have its corresponding sign communicating the same idea. Then, while the English deaf mute will write in English and the French deaf mute in French, they will have among themselves a universal language of common signs, *into which may no Babel ever enter.*

To this great and good work we dedicate the future labors of this institution. Mr. Kendall then addressed the president elect as follows:

MY YOUNG AND ESTEEMED FRIEND: In accordance with my own wishes, and the unanimous decision of the members of the association at their recent meeting, I now relinquish to you the presidency of this institution. It is an honor richly due to you for the services you have rendered to the institution, not only within its walls, but in Baltimore, in Annapolis, in Congress, and in the country. To you more than to any other man is it indebted for its rapid progress, and for the high position it now holds in the estimation of the community. It is, therefore, fitting that you should be clothed with all appropriate authority needful to maintain discipline within the institution, and all practicable means of influence to protect its interests without. The members of the association have, in the history of the past, abundant grounds of confidence that under your prudent and skillful management it will not only realize their highest hopes, but secure to yourself a degree of gratitude and affection in the hearts of this class of unfortunates, and a reputation for disinterested usefulness, not inferior to those acquired by your honored father. And most happy shall I be if permitted to live to see this institution, under your judicious management, become one of the brightest jewels in the coronet of the republic, once more, by the mercy of God, united, peaceful, and free.

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