

June 28, 1864

ADDRESS BY LAURENT CLERC, A. M.,

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MY DEAR FRIENDS : The president elect of your institution, Edward M. Gallaudet, has invited me to come and attend the inauguration of a "National College for the Deaf and Dumb" in Washington, the capital of the United States, to take place on Tuesday, June 28, 1864.

I have accepted the invitation with much pleasure, and here I stand before you to say that I feel a just pride in seeing that the American Asylum at Hartford, Connecticut, has been the means of doing so much good, and has produced so many evidences of intelligence and learning.

Our school at Hartford was the first of its kind ever established in America, not only through the exertions of the late Rev. Dr. Thomas H. Gallaudet, and your humble speaker, but also by the generous subscriptions and contributions of both ladies and gentlemen in Hartford and other towns of New England. It has broken that barrier which had separated for several centuries the deaf and dumb from those who hear and speak. It has repaired the wrongs of nature in enabling them to replace hearing by writing, and speech by signs. It has also enabled many among you to become the teachers of your unfortunate fellow-beings. It has enabled your kind Principal, and many gentlemen and ladies who hear and speak, to teach deaf and dumb persons in this and other schools which have since sprung up in several other portions of the United States.

Now, my dear friends, let me ask what is the object of the foundation of a college? It is for the purpose of receiving such graduates of the other institutions as wish to acquire more knowledge in natural science, astronomy, mathematics, geography, history, mental and moral philosophy, and belles-lettres.

Science is a most useful thing for us all. It is one of the first ornaments of man. There is no dress which embellishes the body more than science does the mind. Every decent man, and every real gentleman in particular, ought to apply himself, above all things, to the study of his native language, so as to express his ideas with ease and gracefulness. Let a man be never so learned, he will not give a high idea of himself or of his science if he speaks or writes a loose, vulgar language. The Romans, once the masters of the world, called the other nations, who did not know the language of Rome, barbarians; so, now that there are so many schools for the deaf and dumb in the United States, I will call *barbarians* those grown up deaf mutes who do not know how to read, write, and cipher.

Finally, a well educated man, a gentleman by example, ought to add to the knowledge of one or two languages, that of ancient and modern history and geography. The knowledge of history is extremely useful. It lays before our eyes the great picture of the generations that have preceded us, and in relating the

events which passed in their time we are taught to follow what is good and to avoid what is bad in our own time. It lays before us the precepts of the wise men of all ages, and acquaints us with their maxims. The crimes of the wicked are of no less use to us. Seldom does Divine justice let them remain unpunished. The fatal consequences that always attend them preserve us from the seduction of bad example, and we endeavor to become good as much through interest as inclination, because there is everything to lose in being wicked, and everything to gain in being good.

The degree of Master of Arts can be conferred on the deaf and dumb when they merit it; but, on account of their misfortune, they cannot become masters of music, and perhaps can never be entitled to receive the degree of Doctor in divinity, in physic, or in law.

In closing, let me express to you, my dear young friend, Mr. E.M. Gallaudet, president elect of this institution, the earnest hope that in the great work which is before you, you will be blessed and prospered, and receive for your efforts in behalf of the deaf and dumb such proofs of its benefits as will reward you for the glorious undertaking.

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