

## Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet letter to Horace Mann

Hartford, May 13th, 1844.

Hon. Horace Mann,

My Dear Sir,--I should have replied before this to your late very kind letter, but much bodily indisposition, and a pressure of numerous duties have prevented.

I am free to say that I deeply regret the very strong language which you use in your report, so interesting and admirable in most of its features, when you say that the schools for the deaf and dumb in Prussia, Saxony, and Holland, seem to you *decidedly superior* to anything in this country; because, in order to say this, as I think, understandingly, you ought to be thoroughly acquainted with the system of discipline and instruction pursued in our Asylum, and other American institutions, in its details and practical results; for how else can a fair comparison be made?

The teaching of the deaf-mutes to articulate and to understand what is said to them, is but *one part* of their education.

The development of the intellectual and moral faculties of deaf mutes; their intellectual and moral training; their government, by moral influence; the imparting to them moral, religious, and other knowledge; their participating, understandingly, in the social and public devotional exercises of the Institution; the furnishing of their minds with the ideas, the facts, and that amount of knowledge, which are necessary to prepare them to understand a vast number of the *words* which must be taught them; their becoming acquainted with our social and civil institutions; with arithmetic, grammar, geography, and history; with the history, simple doctrines, and the precepts of the Bible; with their duties to God, to their fellow-men, and themselves; and their acquiring a trade, or some means of gaining a livelihood; and especially their being taught to *write* the English language correctly, and to *read books intelligently*, (one of the highest solaces and means of constantly progressive self-culture, which deaf-mutes can enjoy,) all these are essential parts of their education.

They may have them without being able to articulate, and understand what is said to them, or some of them may be able to do the latter, and yet be deficient in the former.

In how many cases the two can be combined, and with what degree of success, is a point that needs the most careful examination.

The complete education of deaf-mutes, I am decided in saying, cannot be successfully carried on, especially during the early stages of their instruction, without the use of that very distinct, intelligible, copious, and beautiful language of *natural signs*, which nature has prompted them in their separate and insulated state, originally to invent, in its more simple elements, and which science and art have advanced to a high degree of perfection. Without this language of natural signs, the teacher can have, at first, no ready and adequate means of free communication with his pupils, (by this language, he has this free communication long, long before he can have it by words): he cannot get hold of their peculiarities of mind; cannot give them instructive illustrations, by practical examples, of the full meaning of very many words; cannot do much to expand their opening faculties; and cannot understand their difficulties, and *the questions* they may wish to propose to him, respecting these difficulties; a most essential part of the proper instruction of any child. How far the essential parts of a complete education, which I have above specified, must be retarded, sacrificed, or neglected, in the five, or even six years allowed by the Legislatures of the States, for the actual residence of the deaf and dumb at our public institutions, in order to go through with the long, laborious, and to them, certainly, in many cases, as experience has abundantly shown, very tedious and irksome process of learning to articulate, and to understand what is said to them; how far this process is successful, to the extent of which you so unhesitatingly speak, when as we know the whole subject has, more than once, undergone the severest scrutiny in Europe, by the most sagacious individuals, (philosophers, such as Degeraldo, and Dugald Steward, and accomplished teachers of the deaf and dumb among the number,) *who have come to very different results, with regard to the facts in the case, from yours*; and how far the English tongue may, as you suggest, present intrinsic difficulties in the matter--these are questions, when we come to the fair investigation of this complicated subject, and wish to balance all the advantages and disadvantages, to answer which demands

much practical experience and critical investigation of the whole ground covered.

If you come to Hartford, do let me know it, that I may once more have the pleasure of enjoying your society, and talking over with you, both deaf-mute and other matters of common interest.

Yours truly,

T.H. Gallaudet.

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Quoted in:

Heman, Humphrey. 1857. *The Life and Labors of the Rev. T.H. Gallaudet, LL.D.*, New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, pp. 209-212.

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