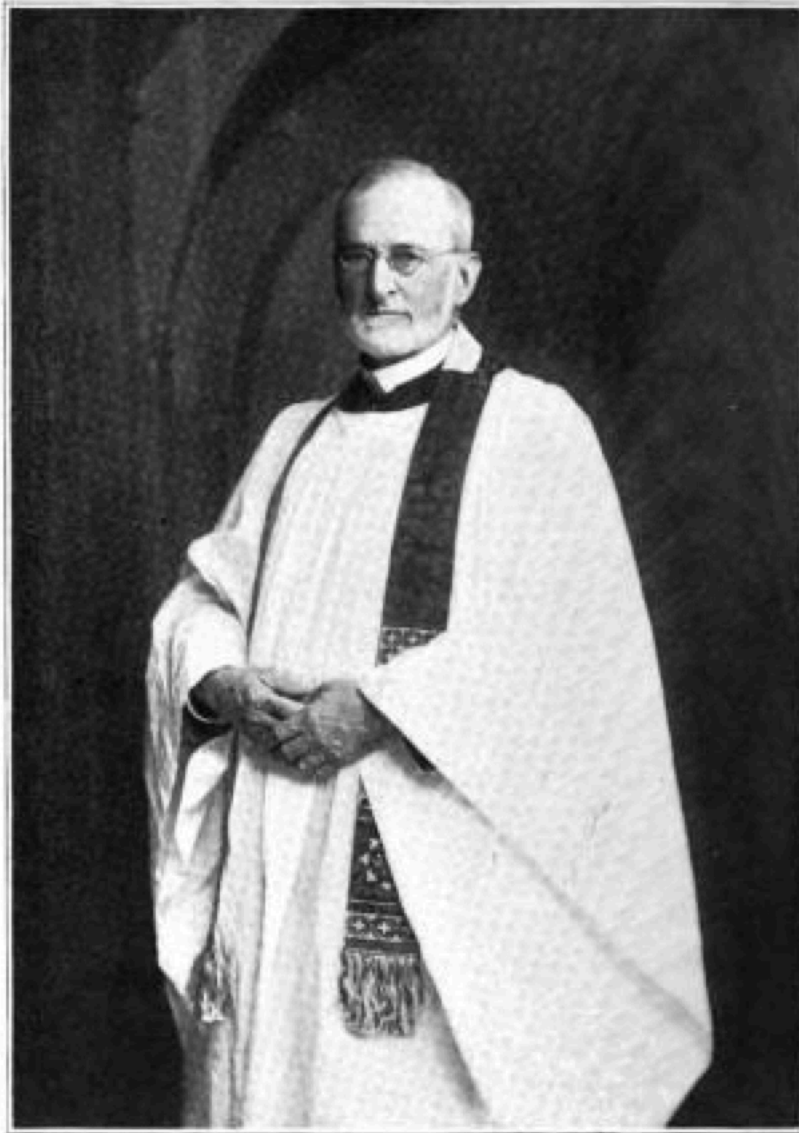


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*Your very sincerely,  
Thomas Gallaudet,*

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## THOMAS GALLAUDET.

PERHAPS no person not a teacher, living or dead, has exerted upon the deaf an influence so powerful, elevating, long-continued, and widely extended as has he whose household name is writ above.

His life and his death mark an era in the history of the deaf. This last sad event took place in New York city on the 27th of August last.

Providence has raised up for the deaf many benefactors. These lived and labored to lift the youthful deaf morally, intellectually, and industrially. It remained for Thomas Gallaudet to emphasize publicly among the deaf of all ages the incomparable claims of the spiritual life. This was a virgin field. It lay before him as untilled as the secular instruction of the deaf had lain before his father. He entered it solely upon his own and the divine inspiration. He labored in it for more than half a century with a singleness of aim an unselfishness of devotion, and a purity of winning personal example that gained for him the unfeigned respect and the loving affection of the deaf of this and of many other lands. For his sake and for the sake of humanity at large, such a career should be the subject of an

extended and appreciative biography. In the pages of this periodical it can only be briefly sketched.

Thomas Gallaudet was born at Hartford, June 3, 1822. This was five years after his father had founded the first permanent school for the deaf in America. He was the first fruits of that remarkable and beautiful marriage between Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Sophia Fowler. In him, as time went on, the laws of heredity were vindicated, for he united the mental power and kindly disposition of his father with the good sense, good looks, and abundant vitality that were his mother's prominent traits.

From infancy, through childhood and youth, to young manhood, he was in daily companionship with the deaf. Their ways, their sports, all their interests were his own. More than that—far more—he came into perfect sympathy with and instinctive understanding of the deaf by every draught of milk he drew from the breasts of the loving mother that dandled him to rest, for she, too, was one of the children of silence. Whoever remembers these things will have the key to much of his history. Here, for example, he received the manifold impressions which his most mature experience only ripened into a firm conviction that, as a means of entering into hearty sympathy and mutual understanding with the deaf, as an agent by which effectively to warn, to comfort, and command among them, there was no medium equal to the language of signs.

Hartford was then, as now, a seat of culture. The lad's facilities for getting a preparatory education were excellent. He made such good use of them that he was able to enter Trinity College, in that town, at the early age of sixteen. Thence he graduated four years later, in 1842, with the Bachelor's degree.

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet was, as to money, a poor man. Each of his children as they grew, and some while still half-grown, were obliged to earn a livelihood. Thomas, directly

after leaving college, engaged in teaching. At this he served something less than two years in the neighboring towns of Glastonbury and Meriden.

It was, however, almost inevitable that with his character and equipment he should be drawn into the then expanding work of teaching the deaf. This came about in 1844. He became an instructor in the New York Institution, then located at Fiftieth street. For nearly fourteen years he continued to teach therein. Early in this period the intimacy of his association with the deaf was evidenced in the fullest manner by his marriage to one of the deaf-mute pupils, Elizabeth Budd, then in the same school where he taught.

Trinity College is conducted under Episcopalian auspices. Partly owing to this fact, partly to heredity and home influences, but more to his own innate character, the spirit of Thomas Gallaudet was early imbued with religious feeling. In him it was no mere sentiment. The foundation of his make-up was active benevolence. He lived ever in an atmosphere of benignity that constantly led him to little deeds of kindness, little acts of love. This is well shown by Edward Gallaudet's earliest recollection of his brother. He remembers one day standing on the curb when five years old and still in petticoats, listening with a crowd to an approaching band of music. It came, thrilling the child, and passed, followed by a long line of dark-robed figures among which the child presently saw with wonder his own "big brother." It was the graduating class of 1842 going to commencement. When the line had nearly gone by the child suddenly felt himself clasped from behind and the kindly face of the big brother bent above him whispering "Eddy, don't you want to march with the procession?" Eddy did. His child's heart swelled with pride when he put his little hand into his big brother's warm palm, and his short fat legs twinkled over the ground as they hastened to regain the place in the ranks from which the brother had

dropped and in which they swept grandly up to the church door. In this little, simple, natural act of unpremeditated thoughtfulness one can see Thomas Gallaudet, for these were the acts he was doing all the days of his long life.

Working full time day by day as a teacher of deaf children, his good soul was not content. His thoughts went forward with his pupils beyond the few and fleeting years of school along the dusty, thorny roads of life and up to the gates of heaven. In the city where he taught were many deaf people, aged, middle-aged, and in the flower of youth. Some were uneducated; others had been in the few schools then existing; but all alike were left to work out their own salvation, social, industrial, and spiritual. Over these his spirit yearned. He saw the young struggling unsustained in temptations, the aged unconsolated in infirmities, and he longed to befriend them all. He had hardly begun his work as a secular teacher before he began to go about doing good among these people after school hours, quite informally and quite without reward or the hope of reward except the satisfying of his own spirit. He did not preach; if he prayed it was in his closet; at first his efforts were only to strengthen the weak, encourage the weary, comfort the afflicted, and assist the industrious.

For three or four years he continued to do these deeds casually, among individuals. But as his acquaintance grew among the adult deaf and his self-imposed calls to friendly service increased, he realized that he could do more by some union and system. Another consideration, more potent still, came to him. He had met, here and there, deaf persons who did not belong to any of the classes named above. These were the fatally sick, the very aged—people no longer concerned with the affairs of earth, but pausing, fearful, friendless, troubled, before taking the inevitable step from the sunny shores of time into the cold, unfathomed seas of eternity. What could he do for these?

He was only a schoolmaster. To a nature like his the answer could not be long in coming. He would fit himself to serve these, too, the neediest of all—he would become a minister of Christ.

Here again he was influenced by his life in Trinity College. In taking up theological studies and church affiliations he chose the Episcopalian rather than the communion of his father. In June, 1850, he was examined and duly admitted to deacon's orders. That fall he first began organized work in the city by forming a Bible class, which he taught every Friday evening. For several weeks the number who came to him was only four or five. It soon grew, till the average was above thirty, and on several occasions rose above fifty. The first meetings were held in the vestry of St. Stephen's church, but the increase in numbers led to a removal to a large schoolroom in Bond street.

In June, 1851, he was ordained a priest. He had for some time felt a growing conviction that he ought to gather the deaf about him in pastoral relations and establish for them a church. He consulted the rectors of all the Episcopal churches in the city and they all warmly consented. Accordingly he began holding the regular services of the church on the first Sunday of October, 1852, just half a century ago. The society took the name of St. Ann's Church for Deaf-Mutes. It was incorporated in 1853. For the first five years its meetings were held in the chapel of the University of the City of New York, and for two years thereafter in the audience room of the New York Historical Society. The young minister, however, very early, that is in March, 1852, called a public meeting at the University and put before it the need of giving the new church a habitation and a home of its own. This he did with rare modesty. "Really," he said to the meeting, "when I look back upon what has been accomplished it seems as if I had done nothing of myself, being only an instrument in the hand of

Providence." His presentment of the case was as clear as it was modest, for it won the support of business men of national reputation, like Prosper M. Wetmore and James Watson Webb. It ought to be added that he drew to his side also, either as active assistants or warm sympathizers, deaf men of the first order, like Gamage, Carlin, Benedict, and Trist. Messrs. Wetmore and Webb were, respectively, mover and seconder of resolutions declaring sympathy and promising support for the new church.

Let it never be forgotten that during all these years Thomas Gallaudet was working double tides. He taught full time in the New York Institution while giving his evenings and Sundays to these entirely voluntary services among the deaf at large. This he continued to do until 1858. In the fall of that year he resigned his teachership and thereafter, almost to the day of his death, consecrated all his time to spiritual and benevolent work. From the school he carried with him not only the love and esteem of pupils, officers, and teachers alike, but their active support to his generous endeavors. Under the direction of Dr. Harvey P. Peet the school gave a public exhibition from which over \$700 was netted to aid the movement. With this as a nucleus the young minister, assisted by a committee appointed at the above-mentioned meeting, soon raised nearly \$20,000. With this sum as a partial payment a fine church edifice and adjoining rectory were bought in West Eighteenth street, near Fifth avenue. Services were first held here in August, 1859. It continued to be the home of St. Ann's Church for Deaf-Mutes during the thirty-three years ensuing.

The organization and scheme of this church, no less than his efforts in carrying it on, reflect very great credit upon Thomas Gallaudet. They testify to his breadth of view and practical good sense as clearly as to his generous spirit. First of all, it was to be a free church to which all respectful

persons should be equally welcome. Next, it was to be a united church, bringing the deaf and the hearing into loving and close association in one parish ; each Sabbath one service was conducted for the deaf; the other two services, addressed primarily to the hearing, being interpreted to the deaf in the sign-language. Lastly, it was to be a working church; it aimed not simply to preach the word, but to live the word; it established literary societies, evening classes, and courses of lectures in the endeavor to keep up and promote intellectual life among the deaf; guilds and other agencies to assist them in obtaining employment; committees to look after its poor, and a Sunday-school to bring up the children in the nurture and love of the Lord.

The variety and continuity of the calls upon Thomas Gallaudet in these years were strongly impressed upon the writer by an incident within his own early experience, almost the first memory that he has of the man. In 1872, being then a Senior in the College for Deaf-Mutes in Washington, and visiting in New York, he was asked to tea at the rectory. Dr. Gallaudet was then a strong man in the full tide of his career. With his lovely wife and a large family of growing children, it was a merry company that chatted around the cheerful board. In the midst of the meal a visitor was announced and the rector went out with an excuse. The writer's seat was such that he could not see the visitor pass the door, but the children opposite him could. One of them said: "It is an old lady. She is deaf and dumb. She was very sick last winter, but is better now. When she was sick, papa used to go and see her. Since she got well she likes to come here and see him—just to talk; she doesn't want anything." The writer nodded in appreciation, but thought no more of it at the time. By and by the rector came back, but had hardly taken up his teacup before the very same round of incidents was repeated. This time the children said: "It's a young man. He is deaf and dumb



too; he works in the city, but he doesn't like his work and wants to change. He comes to talk with papa about it." Soon after the tea was over and the writer took his leave. He remembers wondering as he went how many times the bell continued to peal forth those calls that night, and whether the good man met them all with the same calmness and cheerfulness.

No sooner was his church in full working order than he sought how to carry the aid and comfort of religion to the deaf beyond his parish, throughout the State and nation. In 1872, chiefly by his suggestion and impulse, the Church Mission to Deaf-Mutes at large was incorporated. Missionaries were sent forth. Good men, both deaf and hearing, in and out of the Episcopal denomination, took up the work far and wide. To-day, as a result, there are fully organized churches for the deaf in many centers of population, and there is scarcely any section of the country not reached by their ministrations.

As an organism, the Home for aged and infirm deaf people was one of the first fruits of the Mission, as the Mission was of the Church. In effect, however, it was only the carrying out in a systematic way of the beneficent acts in which Thomas Gallaudet had engaged before he entered the ministry. The mission workers found, as he had, some deaf people helpless because of age and poverty, mere wrecks driven upon the shoals of life, and with no harbor of refuge save the poorhouse. Some of these were worthy men and women, educated; having known better days, and fallen to their present pass through no fault of their own. Should these be sent "over the hill to the poorhouse," there to have the chilling isolation of such a place accentuated and deepened by their deafness? Thomas Gallaudet thought not and willed not. Accordingly he set to work, aided by the Mission workers, to build a home that should brighten their last days on earth. Their efforts were successful. For several years such a refuge

was carried on in a modest way in New York city, until in 1885 the Gallaudet Home for Aged and Infirm Deaf-Mutes was opened on the beautiful banks of the Hudson near Poughkeepsie. Here, ever since, poor souls spent in the battle of life have had its close made sweet by freedom from care, by rest, by duties suited to their strength, by the contemplation of nature in one of its noblest aspects, most of all by communion with good people, resident and visitant, able to converse with them freely—all which has been to them a foretaste of heaven itself. This movement, like all the others inaugurated by Thomas Gallaudet, has spread; several such homes have been established in various localities and others are in process of establishment.

There remained one more enterprise to tax his strength in his old age. Events made it necessary to sell the church property in Eighteenth street. This was done in 1892, and the handsome sum of nearly \$200,000 was realized. For the next few years the deaf met in the church of St. John the Divine until, in 1896, a union of St. Ann's and St. Matthew's was formed, the joint parish being pledged to support St. Ann's Church for Deaf-Mutes for all time. The new St. Ann's, in 148th street, near Amsterdam avenue, was dedicated in December, 1898. Here Thomas Gallaudet, in season and out of season, continued to minister to the deaf until increasing feebleness compelled him to stop.

As his strength failed he tried to restore it by ocean voyages. Arrived on the other side, however, he invariably began some kindly work among the deaf. He became almost as well known to the educated among the deaf of Great Britain and France as to those in America. This was practicable by the sign-language, so independent of differences of dactylogy and dialect. Here was another reason why he never ceased to maintain the value of the sign-language with fervor. He admitted the educational

value of finger-spelling, but for audiences he held its tedium wearisome. He saw clearly the practical value of understanding speech by vision, but its manifold limitations and uncertainties could not, with him, take the place of the sign-language by which alone he got what he sought—a free, warm, facile, heart-to-heart intercourse with the deaf who were the objects of his love and labor.

And still as the years went on his strength failed and failed. He felt this sorely. He loved his people and loved his work among them, and would have been glad to keep it up. But it could not be. No special malady assailed him. Only he felt more and more the increasing pressure of the heavy hand of time, till at last his outworn body yielded and his spirit passed over into the silent land.

It was an august company that gathered about his bier. More than thirty clergymen and several hundred deaf people were there, although it was in the height of the heated term. Bishop Potter delivered a eulogy, the simplicity and strength of which show how well he knew and loved his fellow laborer. He said in the course of it, "I never parted with Dr. Gallaudet without carrying with me a sense of that singular sweetness, that transparency, purity, and rare grace and charm which distinguished him. He could not entertain a bitter feeling for any of his fellow men. His philosophy was a singular one of broadened vision and of large views."

The loving hands of relatives and friends bore his body to Hartford and laid it by the side of his father's. This was fitting. It is a comfort, since death must be, to think of them lying side by side. Like father, like son. True apostles of unselfishness and devotion were they both. Beyond this, some qualities were noticeable in the son and contributed not a little to the uniform success of his large endeavors. He had great social talent; an inexhaustible fund of kindly humor; and financial ability of a

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high order. Without an exception, he managed well all funds committed to his care, and this won for him the confidence of rich and poor alike.

When a man like this dies, we mourn. Well we may. The world seems lonelier. Indeed it is. We feel that we shall not look upon his like again. We may not. But let us turn from sad reflections and rather rejoice that it has been our lot to know these many years, to walk by the side, and be kindled by the spirit and be led by the shining example of Thomas Gallaudet.

AMOS G. DRAPER,

*Professor in Gallaudet College, Washington, D. C.*