

President Garfield's Connection

WITH THE

NATIONAL DEAF-MUTE COLLEGE,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

By EDWARD M. GALLAUDET, Ph. D., LL. D.,
PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE.

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PRESIDENT GARFIELD'S CONNECTION WITH THE DEAF-MUTE COLLEGE.

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IN the tragic event of last summer, which laid a burden of sorrow on the heart of the nation and called for the sympathy of the civilized world, the officers and students of the National Deaf-Mute College had special reasons for grief. The law incorporating the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb provides that the President of the United States, for the time being, shall *ex-officio* fill the office of Patron. In this capacity he presides at the public anniversaries, and affixes his signature to our collegiate diplomas.

Representing in these acts the Government, which has bestowed most generous benefactions on the Institution, the Patron, whoever he may be, is regarded with special interest and respect by all who here look up to him as their official head.

The decease of the President of the United States, under any circumstances, would consequently be an occasion of mourning at Kendall Green. But in the death of James A. Garfield this Institution loses a friend to whom much of its prosperity and progress is due, and whose open advocacy of its interests in Congress and elsewhere has gone far toward securing for it the position of permanence it now enjoys.

General Garfield's first visit to the Institution was made in the winter of 1865-'66, when the collegiate department had been in operation but a single year. Its students numbered no more than twelve. One of these was a senior pursuing a scientific course, four were freshmen, and the remainder formed a class of still lower grade. The College for Deaf-Mutes was looked

upon at that time as a mere experiment. In many quarters it was spoken of openly with derision. But General Garfield, himself a practical teacher, was warm in his endorsement of the undertaking, and his magnetic encouragement served to inspire both officers and student with a determination that the College *should succeed*.

Maintaining his interest in the progress of the College, General Garfield, in the spring of 1868, showed his confidence in its scholarship by requesting its earliest graduate, Mr. Melville Ballard, to make a translation from the French of an important pamphlet, "*Le Bilan de l'Empire*," in which some very unfavorable criticisms of the financial management of the Second Empire were given to the world.

Some months after the completion of the translation, Mr. Ballard received the following :

"DEAR SIR: Just before I was leaving Washington last summer, I received your very successful translation of '*Le Bilan de l'Empire*.' I should have acknowledged it at once but from the fact that I had to leave the city. My long delay in acknowledging your great kindness can only be accounted for by the recital of a series of accidents and *contretemps*, which I have not now time to recount.

"I take pleasure in forwarding to you a copy of Napoleon's Caesar (in French) as a slight testimonial of my appreciation of your scholarship and kindness in making the translation.

"With kindest regards, I am, very truly yours,

"J. A. GARFIELD."

This volume was handsomely bound, and Mr. Ballard's name had been stamped on the outside.

During the years 1868-'69, and '70, the progress of the Institution, especially the development of the collegiate department, encountered serious and persistent opposition in Congress. This hostility was so vigorously continued as to jeopardize, on one or two occasions, the very existence of the Institution. General Garfield never failed to give the weight of his influence in favor of continuing the aid of the Government, and on the 21st of June, 1870, when a very important appropriation was under consideration in the House, he made a speech earnestly advocating the liberal support of the Institution in its collegiate character, and urged the propriety of action on the part of Congress, in the following language :

“Nearly every State in the Union has its school for the deaf and dumb, where they are taken through the preliminaries of education, and are elevated from the condition of being irresponsible persons, which is the condition of the uneducated deaf and dumb, for in the eye of the common law they are not held responsible even for murder. They are not considered persons. But by the benevolent institutions of the United States and other countries which have paid attention to this matter, they have been lifted up into the full responsibility of citizenship and the full obligation to obey the laws. Now, here is an institution in the city of Washington that carries the education of the deaf and dumb to the highest point necessary to fit the students who go there to be the teachers of that class. We have here an institution which, according to the laws and regulations now governing it, we have ourselves a part in the work of controlling, which allows students coming from all the deaf and dumb institutions in the various States of the Union, after they have got in those institutions all the advancement they are capable of getting there, to come here and complete the course of study which will fit them to be teachers of the deaf and dumb. The result is that one institution here, as it were in the centre, supplies, or can supply, all the schools for the deaf and dumb in the United States with thoroughly educated teachers, fully qualified for the work; and I know of no single thing which this Congress can do that will have more beneficial results to the whole body of the people than to have one institution officially kept up to supply teachers for the various deaf and dumb institutions throughout the country.”

The pending appropriation, which was for the completion of the main central building containing a chapel, lecture-room, refectories, kitchen, etc., was passed by a decided vote, and from that time to the present no serious opposition to the support and development of the Institution has arisen in either house of Congress.

On Sunday, the 29th of January, 1871, the building alluded to above was dedicated to its uses by the President of the United States, after appropriate public exercises. On this occasion General Garfield spoke as the representative of the lower house of Congress, closing his address as follows:

“Several gentlemen have spoken of this movement as a work of charity; in my judgment, it is a work of very enlightened selfishness on the part of Congress. Mr. President, to you is

confided the honor of presiding over the thirty-eight millions of men and women who compose the body of this great Republic. The source of all its greatness lies behind the material evidences of its prosperity, lies in the heads and hearts, the brain, the muscle, and the will of the people over whom you preside. Anything, therefore, that affects their welfare, their force, their efficiency, touches the very essence of the national life. It is well known that only that portion of the population between the ages of twenty and sixty is self-supporting. Of these thirty-eight millions, eighteen millions are outside those limits. In other words, eighteen millions of the population over whom you preside must be supported by the other twenty millions. From these twenty millions must be subtracted the infirm, and all those that for any reason are unable to support themselves. Now the students of this Institution represent more than twenty thousand of the population of the United States, most of whom, by the influence of institutions like this, have been lifted up from the lowest plane of intellectual life to the dignity and value of intelligent citizens. * * *

“One of the best things connected with their education is that they have a lively sense of gratitude to the Government for what it has done for them. These young men cannot fail to become good citizens. They cannot fail to be true to their country, when they remember what it has done for them. I say, therefore, it is enlightened selfishness rather than charity to take this class of our fellow-men, and make them capable of doing a great work for the country. I am happy to send this message to them to-day into their silence. * * *

“The House of Representatives has been proverbial for its economy in regard to expenses of this kind, but I am happy to say that from the beginning of this work the House has stood up nobly and generously to the support of this Institution. And what these students have to-day contributed, and what they are sure to do in the future, will be a most complete vindication of the wisdom of the House, the Senate, and the Executive, united in this great work.”

During the following year General Garfield spent part of a day in the College with a party of friends. One who was at that time a student writes of this visit, as follows :

“I do not recollect who any of the gentlemen accompanying him were, but General Garfield's personality and actions impressed themselves upon me with the utmost distinctness. The

classes were assembled at the black-boards, and a couple of hours were spent in an informal endeavor to ascertain, I suppose, the grade of our acquirements. In all this General Garfield led. He went about from rank to rank, questioning and allowing himself to be questioned. There was nothing of the cold examiner about him. He made us feel that he was no merely critical outsider, but a student with us and of us at heart. His blue eyes shone with a scholar's enthusiasm. Of one he asked the history and derivation of the word *dollar*; of myself a like sketch of the word *pariah*; to another he gave an algebraic problem; of still another he asked the nature and use of logarithms.

"Near the close he pointed to a copy of Hamon's Aurora, which represents the goddess standing tiptoe upon a broad leaf in mid-air and drinking from a morning-glory at dawn, and asked a student *why* the artist was justified in portraying a human form standing upon an unsupported leaf."

In the summer of 1872 a measure of great consequence to the Institution was pending before Congress. It was an application for \$70,000 to secure the whole of the fine domain known as Kendall Green as the permanent home of the Institution. This measure having been once unfavorably acted upon by the House Committee on Appropriations, of which General Garfield was then chairman, was approved when it came a second time before the Committee, in the shape of a Senate amendment to the sundry civil appropriation bill. And it is safe to say that the appropriation would not have been made but for the favorable attitude of General Garfield.

During the summer of 1874, and in the winter of 1874-'75, General Garfield being still chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, provision was made by Congress for commencing and continuing the construction of the main College building.

An appropriation for the completion of the College edifice was made in March, 1877, and the building was occupied the following winter.

On the public anniversary of 1878, held on the 1st day of May, General Garfield again represented the lower house of Congress, and spoke as follows:

"MR. PRESIDENT, AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: Your exercises have been already sufficient for all your desires, I am sure, and I will only detain you to say how much I am gratified to see the completion of this enterprise, which has been struggling up for

so many years, and has reached a point at last where I think almost anybody will rejoice at its further progress. I believe I said on this stage, nine years ago, that nothing impressed me more during the later days of the war, when I first came to this city, than seeing the great marble columns being set up on the east, west, north, and south fronts of yonder Capitol, while the sound of battle was echoing across the Potomac and shaking the very windows of the Executive Mansion. It was a touching exhibition of unshakable faith in the final triumph and permanency of the Union. While fighting with all their might to maintain its existence, the American people were quietly setting up these noble columns as symbols of their faith that there would forever be a great capital of a great nation here, beside the beautiful Potomac; and step by step, as the struggle went on and the restoration of the Union became certain, the determination seemed to be crystalized in the American mind that there should not be another rebellion like it; and as they had strengthened and adorned our marble Capitol, so also they set up new pillars of justice and freedom, the living temple of our liberties, to be its perpetual glory and support. By the same inspiration our work of education, national in its spirit, earnest and determined in its character, has been pursued during the last fifteen years more than in any other period, because our people saw that the safety of the nation required it.

“I am rejoiced to know that this Institution cherishes the ideas I have been trying to set forth. These afflicted young men were only recently regarded as an almost helpless and useless portion of our common humanity. The effort of their country to set them in a place where they should have an equal chance in the race of life is most worthy; and here, first, I believe, on the earth, certainly first in America, the deaf-mutes find an opportunity to enjoy college rights and privileges equal to those enjoyed by others who are not so afflicted. And that is great. It is the great glory of our republic that she has done it; and at a time when it cost something to do it.

“This Institution is one of the three that the United States supports. The one to educate her sons for the Navy, the other for the Army; both of these for the safety of the nation in time of war, and for her safeguard against war; and the third, this Institution, in which the Government reaches out its hand to make you the equal of all her other citizens not afflicted as you are. What is the meaning of all this? The lesson it teaches is

the increased value to Americans of training. That, in my judgment, is the best lesson of our century. We are coming to understand that, whether you want a man for war or for peace—for whatever purpose you need him—a trained man is better than an untrained man. However great your untrained man may be, he would be greater and more efficient if he had been trained. College training is not meant to give you facts, but to teach you how to handle facts when you enter the many-sided life of our country.

“People waste a great deal of time thinking whether they had better study Latin or Greek, or this or that science. I sum up all I have to say on the subject by calling attention to the remark of a distinguished French scholar; when asked if it were necessary to have a knowledge of the ancient languages, he said, ‘O, no; it is not necessary to know Latin, but it is necessary to have forgotten it.’ That is, either be a man who now knows it, or be one who has forgotten it, but save the training it gave.

“Thanking you, Mr. President, and ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention to this discursive talk, I bid you good day.”

The final visit of General Garfield to the College was on the occasion of our last Presentation exercises, in May of the present year. On that day it was a source of genuine pride and pleasure to all connected with the Institution that we were permitted to welcome a tried and valued friend of many years as our official *head*, for this implied his election by the free choice of his fellow-citizens to the highest office in their gift; and in this humble seat of learning there was further reason for rejoicing that the suffrages of the nation had so honored one whose devotion to letters had been life-long, who was a student and a teacher before he occupied the more elevated but not more ennobling positions of general, lawyer, legislator, and President.

One who was formerly a student in the College, and is now a member of the Faculty, writes of his appearance on that day, as follows:

“He came in half an hour late, being unavoidably detained, the Faculty and specially invited guests of course awaiting his arrival before proceeding to the platform. This circumstance lent a tinge of humility, when he did enter, to the habitual ease and dignity of his manner, and as he passed around the room, exchanging a grasp of the hand and a word with each whom he knew—erect, commanding, buoyant, frank—he seemed to me what indeed he was, the manliest of men. As such he remains,

and forever will remain, in my mind—an exemplar of those noblest characteristics of person, mind, and spirit to which the record of his life now forms an incitement; and as such I am sure he has impressed himself upon very many of my fellow-students.”

My personal intercourse with General Garfield on that day was of a character to be remembered with especial pleasure. As we led the procession of officials from the office to the chapel he grasped my arm with the remark: “It does me good to get out among these pleasant scenes, and away from the worry and work over there,” pointing towards the Executive Mansion. I replied, “It always does *us* good, Mr. President, to have you with us, but especially on an occasion like this;” and I added, “I have been hoping you might say a few words to our seniors to-day, if it would not prove a burden to you to do so.” He responded almost with eagerness, “Not in the least. I always enjoy speaking to young men, and it will be a pleasure to me to address your boys to-day.”*

After the exercises were over, as General Garfield, accompanied by his private secretary, Mr. J. Stanley Brown, was returning with me to the College buildings, I remarked that if he was not compelled to hasten back to the city, I should be glad to have him attend the reception that was about being held at my house. “I can stay a little longer, I think,” he said; adding, “and I should be sorry not to pay my respects to Mrs. Gallaudet to-day.” And so we walked across the green together, and he spent half an hour among our guests, bright and joyous as a care-free boy—meeting many old friends with that freedom and cordiality of manner which was peculiar to him.

On entering he remarked to Mrs. Gallaudet that this was the first social gathering of the sort he had attended since inauguration day. Little did we then dream that it would be the only such occasion he would enjoy while he was President.

Besides the visits of General Garfield to Kendall Green, which may be called official, many connected with the Institution remember with pleasure not a few others of a purely social nature.

One of our graduates recalls one of these incidents, in the following language:

* President Garfield's admirable address on that occasion was published in the last volume of the *Annals*, (July, 1881,) page 196.—ED. ANNALS.

“During the spring of 1872, General Garfield was one afternoon at President Gallaudet’s house at dinner. After the meal he seated himself upon the piazza and entered into conversation with some of us students in the most informal manner. We had been studying Bascom’s *Æsthetics*, and for some time the conversation turned upon the nude in Art. I can only recall that he elicited the views of each in the happiest manner, and gave his own, whether of assent or dissent, with delightful ease and geniality.”

The same graduate has also the following reminiscence :

“About two years afterwards I was turning over the books at a store in the city when he came in. He seemed fatigued, or very thoughtful. I took up a copy of Philip Gilbert Hamerton’s work on the Intellectual Life, then newly published, and asked him if he had read it. ‘O, yes,’ he replied, ‘with very great pleasure,’ and his tired air gave place to one of positive vivacity as he proceeded to comment upon those most interesting and suggestive pages.”

General Garfield in his visits to Kendall Green was often accompanied by members of his family. Usually, Mrs. Garfield came with him, sometimes some of his children, and on two occasions, at least, his venerable mother. His last visit with Mrs. Garfield was at a meeting of the Literary Society of Washington, held at my house on the evening of Feb. 21st, 1880, when he occupied the chair as President of the Society, and made interesting remarks on the subject under discussion.*

While General Garfield was chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations it often became necessary for me to call upon him, to explain the needs of the Institution, and to give him facts which he might use in advocating our appropriations before the Committee or the House. The friendly interest he manifested in our work on such occasions was most grateful and

* A very interesting meeting of this Society, in memory of its late President, was held Nov. 19, 1881, the fiftieth anniversary of his birth, at the residence of Dr. Gallaudet, Vice-President of the Society. Dr. Gallaudet gave a sketch of General Garfield’s connection with the Society; Mr. A. R. Spofford, Librarian of Congress, read a paper analyzing and describing his methods of reading, study, composition, and delivery; Col. Garriek Malley, of the Smithsonian Bureau of Ethnology, read a paper on his interest in science and his labors in Congress in behalf of the scientific work of the Government; several members spoke of his love for classical studies; and a touching poem was read by Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, author of “That Lass o’ Lowrie’s.”—ED. ANNALS.

encouraging. I remember particularly one of these interviews when I called at his house at about the hour he was in the habit of going to the Capitol, and asked if he would not like me to drive him thither in my buggy, allowing me to say some words on business on the way. As I gathered up the reins he noticed the horse, and remarked with a shade of sadness in his voice: "It has long been one of my ambitions to be able to keep a horse and carriage in Washington, but I don't see how I can ever do it." It was only when he became President that this very innocent ambition was gratified. At the conclusion of our ride General Garfield sprang from the buggy to the steps of the Capitol at a single bound, and, reaching back, shook my hand warmly, saying, "Good-bye; we will do the best we can in the Committee and in the House for your College."

During the winter of 1872-'3, when I was spending some months in Europe, I wrote General Garfield, expressing the hope that he would have an especial care over the interests of our Institution in Congress during my absence. His reply was as follows:

"WASHINGTON, D. C., *Jan. 16, 1873.*

"PRESIDENT E. M. GALLAUDET,

Château de Belle Rive, Geneva, Switzerland:

"MY DEAR SIR: Yours of December 28th is just received. It comes to me in the midst of oppressive burdens and at a time when the congressional mind is a prey to unhappy strife and suspicion.* When contrasting our work and surroundings here with your delightful stopping-place in the city of Calvin, it is difficult for me not to be guilty of the sin of envy.

"I do most heartily congratulate Mrs. Gallaudet and yourself that you are away from the heavy cares of your work in the College, and are permitted to enjoy the blessed peace and quiet which your tour in Europe is giving you. The breath of the Alps is health itself. And I hope and believe you will come back to us in due time, with several years added to your life.

"The most of my appropriation bills are already reported to the House, and four have been passed. The Army and Miscellaneous have not yet been taken up. I hope there will be no difficulty when we come to the appropriation for your noble College.

* It will be remembered that it was in the session of 1872-'3 the Credit Mobilier scandal came to light, in connection with which unsuccessful efforts were made to blacken General Garfield's fair fame.

“Mrs. Garfield joins me in kindest regards to Mrs. Gallaudet and yourself.

“Very truly yours,

“J. A. GARFIELD.”

During the winter of 1874-'5, General Garfield being still chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, I observed, on two or three occasions when we met, an apparent coldness and lack of interest in our Institution on his part, which disturbed me not a little. I feared I had, inadvertently, done or said something to incur his displeasure, or that some unfriendly tongue had been seeking to alienate him from the College. I did not wait long before addressing him a note, asking if either of the fears above mentioned had any foundation in fact. The following prompt response was, as will readily be believed, most gratifying:

“HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

“WASHINGTON, D. C., *February 2, 1875.*

“E. M. GALLAUDET, Esq.,

“*President, etc.:*

“MY DEAR SIR: Yours of the 1st instant is received. On reading it I was surprised, and at first a little hurt, that you should suspect me of losing my interest in your Institution or my friendship for you. But on reflection I can see that, jaded and worn and worried as I am by the thousand loads, little and big, that are laid upon my shoulders, it is not remarkable that I should appear less genial and less cordial than was my wont when my burden was lighter. It is loss of vitality, not loss of friendship, and I trust you will pardon any seeming coldness, for it has been seeming only, and I was not aware of it.

“Anxious to do the best I can for your Institution, and still more anxious to retain a friendship which has been so pleasant to me,

“I am, as ever, your friend,

“J. A. GARFIELD.”

When the history of General Garfield's connection with the College for Deaf-Mutes is held in review, covering, as it does, a period of fifteen years, and dating back to its very infancy, presenting a record of unflinching interest and active effort in its behalf—effort in positions where assistance of the most important and material character was given, and interest with the expression of which even the heavy cares of the Presidency of

the Nation did not interfere—it will not be thought inappropriate, I believe, that an effort should be made to secure the erection, on the premises of the College, of some enduring structure or memorial, that shall tell coming generations what our martyred President did for the deaf-mutes of his country. That such an effort is already inaugurated is a source of great satisfaction to those who have felt the magnetism of Garfield's personal presence. That it will be pressed to successful and honorable completion, by the co-operation of all who are directly or indirectly interested in the work of the College, there is no reason to doubt.

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