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Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, Congregationalist Postmillennialism and ‘Pantomimic Sign Language’

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Introduction

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet is renowned almost solely today as the father of American education for deaf people. Born in 1787, he was brought up in the Congregationalist churches of New England, a denomination dominated by postmillennialist ideas drawn from biblical prophecy and characterised by the belief that the present ‘troubled age’ would soon be replaced by a glorious thousand-year Church-led age—the millennium—before a final short period of human rebellion against God was ended by Christ’s return and a last judgment. Though theologically trained and ordained as a Congregationalist minister in 1814, Gallaudet never took charge of a church himself. Instead a peculiar combination of circumstances meant that in May 1815 he was commissioned to travel to Europe in order to find an educational system for deaf people suitable for use within the United States. On his return in June 1816, Gallaudet co-founded the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons (opened in April 1817 in Hartford). He led it as its first Principal until 1830, and also contributed to the development of American Sign Language (ASL). Gallaudet died in September 1851. In 1864, the US Congress authorised The Columbia Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind in Washington, DC, to award degrees to deaf graduates. Its Collegiate Department became the National Deaf-Mute College in 1865, then Gallaudet College in 1954, and finally Gallaudet University in 1986; these last two name-changes were made in honour of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (Armstrong 2014, 1–104). The first president of the National Deaf-Mute College was Edward Miner Gallaudet (1837–1917) and the founder and first Rector of America’s first deaf church, St Anne’s, New York, was Thomas Gallaudet (1822–1902), both sons of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (Nomeland and Nomeland 2012, 78–79). The extent of his legacy in terms of deaf education is obvious.

Not all of Gallaudet’s work on sign language related directly to deaf people, however. In an eight-hundred-word document entitled “A Reverie,” he wrote that a universally-understood sign language could soon come into existence, that it could potentially be adopted globally before the millennium began, and that it could form the common language of the millennium itself. Whatever point in time this new universal language was adopted, however, Gallaudet clearly believed that all people would then communicate by

signs rather than by speech. In his biography of his father, Edward Miner Gallaudet dated this text to circa 1814–1815 (‘about this period’), making his father about twenty-eight when it was written (1888, 45); it is the only source that we possess in which Gallaudet offered thoughts about a universal language in relation to the millennium. Unsurprisingly, given Congregationalist expectations about the Church’s dominance in the coming millennium, the work of contemporary American missionaries abroad was viewed as an essential activity, with the serious difficulties they were facing in acquiring local languages being of especial concern. This problematic issue would become a significant driver for Gallaudet’s later, more developed ideas about the usefulness of a universal language in the period before the dawning of the millennium.

The short length of “A Reverie” means that any satisfactory discussion of both Gallaudet’s idea of a universal sign language for the millennium and how it might have been received by his Congregationalist contemporaries can only be offered after preparatory work in three areas, forming the first part of this article: (i) a close reading of “A Reverie”; (ii) an examination of the contextual background of his millennial beliefs, including a discussion of some figures who were influential in Gallaudet’s formation, Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), Nathan Strong (1748–1816), and Leonard Woods (1774–1854), and of the source against which the majority of his readers would have understood his idea, ‘A Treatise on the Millennium,’ authored by Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803) and published in volume 2 of his *The System of Doctrines: Contained in Divine Revelation, Explained and Defended Showing their Consistence and Connection with Each Other* (1793); and (iii) a consideration of the pressures that the harsh realities of American missionary life abroad placed upon the Congregational churches of Gallaudet’s day. In the second part, we examine Gallaudet’s understanding of how and why a sign language might function as a universal language for missionaries before the arrival of the millennium. We will then draw out the implications of his proposed universal language for the millennium itself, before a brief conclusion draws the article to a close.

“A Reverie”

In his *The Life and Labors of the Rev. T. H. Gallaudet*, *LL. D*, Heman Humphrey reproduced Gallaudet’s “A Reverie,” set as three paragraphs (1857, 18–21). It refers back to his life as a boy and mentions the millennium, and hence was obviously written by a religiously minded adult. Its content appears to offer an adult’s account of a moment of childhood contemplation in which the necessity of a universal language becomes clear, but no resolution is provided.

The first paragraph sets the scene. The second describes Gallaudet’s ‘delightful dream,’ a reflection on the ‘various causes, physical, intellectual, and moral, which had contributed to break the golden chain which once bound together the whole family of man.’ The ‘prime agent’ behind ‘all the discord and animosity,’ ‘the tumult and blood’ in the world is, he states, the ‘confusion of tongues’ arising from humanity’s ‘audacious attempt’ to build the Tower of Babel (Humphrey 1857, 19–20). In describing ‘difference of speech’ as the most ‘effectual barrier’ between ‘different persons and communities,’ Gallaudet offers metaphors and similes showing how language hinders communication: it is a kind of ‘Chinese wall’; it is like the old Egyptian secret of preserving the dead; it is the [flawed] optic glass; it is the [misconstrued] embassy between nations; it is

> *the pioneer which precedes all missionary efforts, and often it has rugged paths to clear and tremendous obstacles to remove, before the way can be made straight for the triumphal march of Christianity through the regions of superstition and sin. (Humphrey 1857, 20, emphasis his)*

In the final paragraph, Gallaudet asks a number of questions:

> *Before the millennium arrives, will one language prevail and swallow up the rest, or will mankind agree to form a universal language? Would not such a project be pregnant with incalculable advantages? How shall it be accomplished? What shall this universal language be? Is there already one, provided by Nature herself, easy of acquisition, universal in its application, and which demands neither types nor paper? Has such a language yet eluded the research of the profoundest philosophers, and is it left for some happy genius yet to find it? (Humphrey 1857, 20–21)*

Gallaudet awakes without answers, though his second question, about whether a universal language is 'pregnant with incalculable advantages,' is surely a rhetorical one. Three implications are clear, however: first, the millennium was approaching fast; second, a universal language could potentially be adopted globally before it arrived; and finally, the confusion of tongues wrought by Babel would be replaced with a common language in the millennium.

American Congregationalist Churches and the Millennium

Since little of Gallaudet's beliefs about the millennium can be discerned from his other writings, we must turn to his educational background and churchmanship to uncover more. He entered Yale College at the Hartford Grammar School in 1802, aged fifteen, and graduated top of his class in 1805. Following a spell working in law, ill health led to a two-year tutorial role at Yale College, then under its influential President Timothy Dwight, before a religious conversion led to his joining the First Congregational Church in Hartford, led by Dr Nathan Strong. In 1811, Gallaudet entered the recently opened Andover Theological Seminary, and was taught there by, among others, its professor of Christian Theology, Leonard Woods. The Seminary's ideology was an offshoot of the influential body of theology associated with New England's Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), especially as it had been developed by Edward's great friend, Samuel Hopkins; its credal statement was described pejoratively by certain Old School Presbyterian Calvinists as 'Hopkinsian' (Woods 1885, 134; cf. also Rowe 1933, 15–19). Gallaudet graduated and was ordained in 1814, but soon left on the commission to Europe already mentioned, never to lead a church (E. M. Gallaudet 1888, 45–56). The published sermons of Dwight, Strong, and Woods begin to provide us with an idea of how the millennium was understood in Gallaudet's day; we will turn to Hopkins for more in the next section.

Timothy Dwight had preached the sermon at the opening of Andover Theological Seminary in 1808; the millennium was central to his message:

> *The period, my Brethren, is hastening; the morning star will soon arise, which will usher in that illustrious day, destined to scatter the darkness of this melancholy world, and cover the earth with light and glory; the second birth-day of truth, righteousness, and salvation. Soon shall the Church awake, and put on strength. Soon shall she be clothed with beautiful garments.... The earth shall become one vast temple of Jehovah; and it's morning and evening incense shall be wafted to heaven by the whole family of Adam. (Dwight 1808, 26–27)*

Nathan Strong led the First Congregational Church from 1774 until his death in 1816. In a 1796 work entitled *The Doctrine of Eternal Misery Consistent with the Infinite Benevolence of God*, he incorporated the postmillennialist views prevalent among the Congregationalist churches that were increasingly being gripped by the revivalism of the early stages of the Second Great Awakening. His 'now' he termed 'the present dark state of things,' a context that provided Christians with 'a motive to use the more diligence in making [their] own calling and election sure' (Strong 1796, 191). But 'in a very short time,' he argued, things would change for the better:

> *In the days of the millennium there will be a great increase of light.... The evidence of the truth of the gospel will arise to the highest demonstration, and there will be the best advantages for obtaining salvation.... After the power of religion has prevailed for ages through the whole world, and the beauty of its spirit and order is shining in every place; to see infidelity and all its train of vices rising anew, in the face of such light and such benefits as men enjoy by means of religion, will be an astonishing evidence of the natural corruption of the human heart, of the baseness of a sinful temper, and of its just desert in the government of God.... Holy prophecy speaks of this great apostacy [sic], as immediately preceding the last judgement. (Strong 1796, 189–90)*

In a famous sermon delivered in Salem in 1812, Leonard Woods echoed the postmillennialist ideas of Dwight and Strong:

> *Even the civil revolutions and convulsions, and the desolating wars of the present day, need not dishearten. For they are not only suited to withdraw our affections from the perishable things of this world, and fix them on the immoveable kingdom of God; but are themselves presages of the church's prosperity. The Lord shook all nations just before the Desire of all nations came. He has arisen now to shake terribly the earth; and we expect the spiritual coming of Christ, and the millennial glory of the church, will soon follow. (Woods 1812, 24)*

The focus in each of these invocations of the millennium was on the Church's glorious dominance and on the ethical and spiritual nature of life in Christ's earthly kingdom. There is very little related to either human corporeality or modes of communication, however.

Samuel Hopkins and the Millennium

In 1793, Samuel Hopkins published two volumes under the title *The System of Doctrines: Contained in Divine Revelation, Explained and Defended. Showing their Consistence and Connection with Each Other*. In volume two, a separate one hundred-and-fifty-eight-page "Treatise on the Millennium" was included. The 'Treatise' developed ideas put forward by earlier postmillennialist theologians in service to what Joseph A. Conforti has described as a 'social utopia' (Conforti 1981, 167–74). Supported by twelve hundred pre-orders by sympathetic subscribers, *System of Doctrines* was 'standard reading' at Yale and Andover, and became what the liberal Calvinist William Bentley was to describe with regret in 1813 as 'the basis of the popular theology of New England' (Sweeney 2012, 144). In consequence, Hopkins's 'Treatise' provided the likely intellectual background for any contemporary of Gallaudet's who encountered his musings on a universal language and the millennium.

Two elements of Hopkins's description of the millennium are relevant. The first is his suggestion that:

> *in the Millennium, all will probably speak one language: So that one language shall be known and understood all over the world, when it shall be filled with inhabitants innumerable. (Hopkins 1793, 75)*

The background here is, unsurprisingly, also that of Babel and God's judgment on humanity for

> *the folly and rebellion of men was the occasion of their being confounded in speaking and understanding this one language, and the introduction of a variety of languages.... When men shall become universally pious, virtuous and benevolent, and be disposed to use such an advantageous and blessing as having one speech and language will be, for the glory of God and the general good, it will doubtless be restored to them again. This may easily and soon be done without a miracle, when mankind and the state of the world will be ripe for it. (Hopkins 1793, 75)*

Hopkins also notes the vast expenditure in time spent by those currently learning and teaching different languages that will be saved when the world's knowledge has all been written down in the one universal verbal language (Hopkins 1793, 76).

The second relevant element of Hopkins's description of the millennium is his discussion of Isaiah 35:5–6, a text understood as offering a prophecy about a future in which the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame leap, and the dumb sing. As is the case with postmillennialist theology generally, deafness and blindness are often understood by Hopkins to be metaphors for ignorance of God, of the scriptures, and of sin. In the Treatise, however, Isaiah 34 and 35 are described as 'a prophecy of the Millennium and of the day of battle which precedes it…Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped' (Hopkins 1793, 130). Despite his clearly stated view that no miracle would be required for a universal language to return and flourish, these afflictions are apparently to be removed somehow; their presence is not compatible with Christ's millennial reign. During the thousand-year reign, then, blind people will be

able to see, and deaf people will be able to hear. In Hopkins's vision, the deaf would have access to the universal spoken language *because they would be able to hear it*. The blind would be able to hear it with everyone else, of course, but in the millennium, they would also be able to see the world's knowledge written down and read it for themselves. Truly, Hopkins's one language would become a universal language.

The Impact of Missionary Experiences on Gallaudet

Since the world would soon turn to Christ in the millennium, the task of the Congregationalist churches in their here and now was to preach the gospel to all nations; students at the fledgling Andover Theological Seminary would be at the forefront of the burgeoning American missionary movement. In 1810 six Andover students petitioned the Congregationalist churches' General Association of Massachusetts for support; the result was the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (de Jong, 1970, 222–27; Shenk 2010, 228–41). In 1910 a tablet was erected at the Seminary. Dedicated to the 248 missionaries it had sent out, the memorial lists seven of the first men to go: 1810 graduates Adoniram Judson, Samuel Newell, and Samuel Nott; 1811 graduate Gordon Hall; and 1812 graduates Samuel J. Mills, James Richards, and Luther Rice (Rowe 1933, 135). (The Woods' sermon quoted earlier was delivered at the 1812 commissioning of five of these men—Newell, Judson, Nott, Hall, and Rice—for missionary work in Asia.) Their individual fates illustrate the impact of the missionary experience upon Gallaudet and his fellow Congregationalists.

Henry K. Rowe's 1933 history of the Seminary described the institution's early, 'splendid' contribution as being:

> *the story of Andover men and their sacrifice. Repeatedly that service was the surrender of life itself, but as soon as one in the front line fell another was ready to step into his place.... More missionaries died than there were natives baptized. (Rowe 1933, 111, 117)*

Newell, Richards, and Hall were American Board missionaries. Newell's wife, Harriet, gave birth to a child, who died and was buried at sea. Harriet then died herself, aged nineteen, soon after they arrived in Mauritius in 1812 (Hill 1913, 38–39). Newell died of cholera in Bombay in 1821, as did Gordon Hall in India in 1826 (Hill 1913, 50–53 [Hall]; 63 [Newell]). James Richards died of a pulmonary condition, described in painful detail by the *Missionary Herald*, in Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka) in 1822 (Anon 1823, 241–47). Samuel J. Mills, whose missionary endeavours were limited to the Mississippi valley, died at sea in 1818 while returning from a West African trip made on behalf of the American Colonisation Society (Richards 1906, 224–25).

Even the experiences of those who did not die young must have weighed on Gallaudet's mind. Adoniram Judson arrived in Burma in 1813 and died in 1851, but spent the years in between learning Burmese, publishing a Burmese Bible in 1835, and producing a Burmese Grammar and a Burmese-English Dictionary, both published posthumously (Hill 1913, 23–25; cf. 96). Even when death did not intervene, language acquisition by missionaries was burdensome; Judson took ten years to gain eighteen converts.

Surely there was a better way of dealing with the languages problem, one which did not involve waiting for the millennium as Hopkins had assumed? Could a universal language be in use before that glorious day arrived?

‘Pantomimic Sign Language’ and the Missionary Endeavour

In 1805, a daughter was born to Hartford surgeon Dr Marion Cogswell. At age two, Alice was deafened by ‘spotted fever’ (either measles or a type of meningitis). Her father knew that deaf schools existed in Britain and France and, supported by friends including Nathan Strong, he decided to commission someone to go to Europe and find an educational system that could be adopted by the United States. Cogswell lived next to Gallaudet’s father and the young clergyman met the ten-year old Alice while visiting his parents:

> *He saw that she was a child of remarkable promise, if her intellect could any how be developed. As his father’s and her father’s gardens alone separated the two families, and he saw her every day, he became more and more interested in her, and succeeded, better than any one else, in conversing with her by manual signs, and teaching her the names of persons and things by simple sentences. (Humphrey 1857, 129)*

The methods he used were not signs, at least, not alone; teaching her the word ‘Hat’ involved placing his hat on the ground and three letters being scratched in the dirt (Fox 2008, 29; Alice had been taught to read and write English by Lydia Huntley Sigourney; Sayers and Gates 2008). Following his return from Europe, however, Gallaudet’s awareness of the versatility of signs grew, not least because of what occurred when the deaf Frenchman who had travelled to the United States with him, Laurent Clerc, first met Alice. In Clerc’s words:

> *when [Alice] made her appearance, I beheld a very interesting little girl. She had one of the most intelligent countenances I ever saw. We conversed by signs, and we understood each other very well, so true is it that the language of signs is universal, and as simple as nature. (Humphrey 1857, 75)*

In Gallaudet’s writings, references are often made to the cross-cultural capabilities of signs, usually as something demonstrated through experiments, most fully in his “Essay on the use of the language of signs” (reproduced in Humphrey 1857, 147–63). He began by noting that while principal of the newly opened Asylum in 1818, he had invited a ‘Chinese young man’ passing through Hartford to meet Laurent Clerc. Could the Frenchman ‘conduct an intelligible conversation with the foreigner by signs and gestures,’ while ignorant of the person’s language (Humphrey 1857, 147)?

> *When the conversation began, the stranger appeared to be bewildered with amazement at the novel kind of language that was addressed to him. Soon, however, he became deeply interested in the very expressive and significant manner which M. Clerc used to make himself understood; and,*

> *before one hour had expired, a very quick and lively interchange of thought took place between these so lately entire strangers to each other. The Chinese himself began to catch the spirit of his new deaf and dumb acquaintance, and to employ the language of the countenance and gestures, with considerable effect, to make himself understood. (Humphrey 1857, 148)*

Other experiments with members of different Native American tribes, South Sea Islanders (Humphrey 1857, 148–50), and with uneducated deaf people (Humphrey 1857, 172–73), all could be summarised with a single Gallaudet statement, expressed in a letter to a Dr Chalmers, dated 20 September, 1820: 'I talked to them by mere signs. I was understood on all common subjects' (reproduced in Humphrey 1857, 97).

Gallaudet informed Chalmers in regard to missionary endeavours and language that:

> *if the Christian missionary, who goes to a people, who have only an oral language, of which he is quite ignorant, were acquainted with the language of signs and gestures, he would, in my apprehension, have a medium of intercourse with them, almost at once, on all common topics, which would soon grow into a more distinct and copious language, and thus lay the foundation for the speedy and correct acquisition of the language of the country. (Humphrey 1857, 98)*

By 'noticing [by eye, how] the successive objects, actions, emotions, operations of the mind and heart; occasions and circumstances to which, singly or collectively, the words of the [native] language [were] applied,' these could be 'faithfully depicted by pantomimic representation of them by signs and gestures addressed to the eye…' (Humphrey 1857, 98). Unlike the arbitrary link between words spelled on the 'fingers, spoken, written, or printed,' these signs would be 'picture-like copies' either of the characteristics of external objects or of the external expressions of internal emotions (Humphrey 1857, 192).

Significantly, Gallaudet also concluded that it was:

> *quite practicable to convey, by the countenance, signs, and gestures, the import, not only of all the terms employed to denote the various objects of nature and art, and the multifarious business and concerns of common life, but also those relating to the process of abstraction and generalization, to the passions and emotions of the heart, and to the powers and faculties of the understanding; or, in other words, that the language of the countenance, signs, and gestures, is an accurate, significant, and copious medium of thought. (Humphrey 1857, 151)*

In missionary endeavours, then, Gallaudet believed that pantomimic signs and gestures would provide a bridge towards gaining a knowledge of local languages complex enough to express the deepest theological truths. But what of the millennium? Could a language based on pantomimic signs replace the languages of Babel altogether and suffice for the depth of communication that might be expected in the glorious age to come? Could it become a truly universal language?

Gallaudet's 'Universal Language' and the Millennium

In a sermon delivered at the opening of the Connecticut Asylum in 1817, Gallaudet took as his text a scripture very familiar to any audience interested in deaf people, Isaiah 35:5–6:

> *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart [sic], and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. (T. H. Gallaudet 1817, 4)*

The coming millennium dominated his interpretation, permeating his message to potential benefactors to the Asylum. Though Isaiah's predictions may, he said, 'more directly refer to the miracles of Jesus,' 'by whose miraculous energy the ears of the deaf were opened, and the tongue of the dumb loosened,' Gallaudet argued that 'they equally allude to the universal diffusion of the Gospel in these latter ages of the church, and to its happy influence upon the hearts of all mankind'; the Asylum 'forms one link in that golden chain of universal good-will, which will eventually embrace and bind together the whole family of man' (T. H. Gallaudet 1817, 4–5). He continued:

> *The spirit of Christian benevolence is the only one which will change completely the aspect of human affairs. It has already begun to knit together the affections, not only of towns and villages, but of numerous sects throughout the world, and seems to be preparing to embrace within its influence even states and kingdoms. On its hallowed ground a respite is given to political and religious warfare; men lay down the weapons of contention, and cherish, for a season at least, the divine temper of peace on earth, and good-will toward men. Every charitable effort, conducted upon Christian principles, and with a dependence on the supreme Head of the Church, forms a part of the great system of doing good, and looks forward to that delightful day, when the earth shall be filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (T. H. Gallaudet 1817, 11–12, emphasis his)*

Two questions arise when considering the relationship between Gallaudet's 'delightful day' and his almost contemporaneous 'dream' about a universal language. First, could his language of 'pantomimic signs and gestures' replace the world's languages altogether instead of simply providing a bridge to their acquisition, the focus of his later work? Put differently, would humanity be in a position to abandon its 'Babel' languages in favour of a universal sign language before or at the inception of the millennium? According to "A Reverie," Gallaudet clearly thought so. But, second, what then of those who could not see signs and gestures, the blind portion of humanity to whom a visual language would be as inaccessible as spoken languages were commonly thought to be for deaf people?

The idea of the deaf gaining their hearing and the blind gaining their sight as part of current missionary activity was not unknown in Gallaudet's day. In Leonard Wood's sermon in Salem, for example, he asked the missionaries being commissioned a pertinent question:

> *Do you then begin to cast your eye over the world, and ask; How can those benighted places be illuminated? How can those depraved wretches be converted? How can the deaf hear, and the dumb sing?—My friends, this is the very design of the gospel. These are the very effects which it is fitted to produce. (Woods 1812, 21, emphasis his)*

Since his claim was not accompanied by a significant emphasis on healing among those same missionaries, however, what the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy was understood to mean was left quite ambiguous, floating somewhere between the metaphorical and the literal.

There was also a reluctance among Gallaudet's Congregationalist colleagues to see the miraculous as having a role in the bringing about of the millennium. In Timothy Dwight's sermon at Andover, for example, we find that:

> *In effectuating this mighty change, this universal renovation, no miracles will be employed, but miracles of grace. The grace of God, the true alchemic stone, which transmutes the heart of rock into gold, will every where [sic] accompany the ordinances of the Gospel, and the Evangelical ministrations of men. (Dwight 1808, 27)*

Samuel Hopkins himself had concluded that the universal spoken language would soon be introduced 'without a miracle, when mankind and the state of the world will be ripe for it' (Hopkins 1793, 75). But while it would be the decisions and actions of human beings that would usher in the millennium, Hopkins's view on the fulfilment of prophecy in Isaiah 35 in relation to the millennium suggested that the healing of blind people and deaf people would also be a feature of human experience in the coming age. Perhaps Wood and Dwight would also have agreed.

That Gallaudet's ideas about universal language and the millennium as expressed in "A Reverie" tend toward answering our first question, could one be adopted before the coming age dawned, rather than our second, what of the healing of deaf people and blind people, is perhaps unsurprising if miraculous events were generally viewed with caution in the Congregationalist churches. His proposal could be expected to be unformed and preliminary, without any of the hard questions being dealt with. But how, then, would anyone who read his brief 'reverie' have understood it?

Most likely stepping in to fill Gallaudet's silence would have been Samuel Hopkins and his popular *System of Doctrines*. Someone familiar with his *Treatise on the Millennium* could not help but equate Gallaudet's pantomimic sign language with Hopkins's spoken universal language and could not help but understand that language as indicative of a humanity healed of deafness and blindness, both metaphorical and literal, in the millennium. The potential difficulty of a blind portion of humanity being unable to access Gallaudet's visual universal sign language would easily have been set aside if Isaiah 35:5–6 was viewed as having been fulfilled as the millennium began. This time it would not be deaf people who benefited from their miraculous healing, of course, as they would have when they gained access to Hopkins's universal spoken language. Instead, it would be blind people who would miraculously gain access to Gallaudet's universal pantomimic sign language.

Conclusion

One question is left unanswered: How would Gallaudet's universal pantomimic sign language have related to the written record of knowledge mentioned by Hopkins? Going far beyond the data and entering far into the realm of speculation, it might be presumed that a verbal language, either derived from sign language or perhaps especially amenable to it, would have quickly come to dominate the written recording of knowledge in the millennium. This need for this kind of speculation does, however, demonstrate the gaps that existed between the fragmentary thoughts of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet on a universal sign language and the millennium and the logical implications of those thoughts. That he never reasoned it out should not surprise us. Of his contemporaries, only Samuel Hopkins came close to providing a detailed description of the millennium in regard to a universal language and the healing of blind people and deaf people, and even he left us with significant questions. The millennium was undoubtedly a powerful symbol for the Congregationalists of the period, but like so many apocalyptic symbols down the years, its power was wholly unrelated to its systematic exposition.

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