

## MY RELIGION

Helen Keller

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If you can enjoy the sun and flowers and music where there is nothing except darkness and silence you have proved the Mystic Sense.-Helen Keller.

Helen Keller, whose absorbing story starts | lived during the most magnificent below, was born June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, the oldest child of Captain Arthur H. and Lucy Helen (Everett) Keller. Her mother belonged to the same family as Edward Everett Hale. When nearly two years old, Miss Keller suffered a serious illness, which resulted in the loss of her sight and hearing. The faculty of speech was not destroyed, however, and that has been developed through the years. When Helen Keller was seven years old, a large public became interested in the educational problem presented by her blin', deaf and dumb condition. In Miss Anne Sullivan, a graduate of the Perkins Institution, Boston, Mass., a teacher of rare genius was found, and for over forty years she has been teacher, guide and friend. An ever increasing public has been interested in the steadily developing education and creative genius of this "wonder woman," as Miss Keller has been called.

When Helen Keller entered Radcliffe College When Helen Keller entered Radcliffe College as a regular student, her courage almost startled those who realized her handicaps. Yet she took the full college course and graduated with distinction, no special concessions having been made to her in any way. Never since has she ceased her careful studies and her wide reading. Never since has she lessened, but rather increased, her writing and public address. Several literary works of distinction stand to her credit.

When Helen Keller conquered her dumb lips and learned with almost endless difficulty to speak plainly and in public, a larger audience marveled at her courage and ability. Thousands and thousands of Americans have heard her public addresses, only to be astonished at the near-miracle she had accomplished. But the more thoughtful wondered still more at the depth of her wisdom the beauty of her style and the force of her personality.

Today, at the age of forty-eight, Helen Keller is world-famed. What she says carries conviction. She is a recognized literary genius. She is a true philanthropist, giving herself and all she has to help others. She has become a poet and philosopher, with a message of both When Helen Keller conquered her dumb lips

poet and philosopher, with a message of both wisdom and comfort to an every-widening cir-

cle of readers and hearers. Asked the secret of her life, she has replied Asked the secret of her life, she has replied My Religion." She has made her "confession of faith" in a book of that title. "My Religion," is an effort to tell her many friends of the treasures she has found. In a letter of November 14, 1928, she wrote "I shall pray in my soul that a few others may gain light and peace from the message of him whose wision I have tried to portray."

PAUL SPERRY

CHAPTER I

Hans Anderser describes in one of his beautiful tales a garden where giant trees grew out of pots that were too small for them. Their roots were cruelly cramped; yet they lifted themselves up bravel; into the sunlight, flung abroad their glorious branches, showered their wealth of blossoms and refreshed weary mortals with their golden fruit. Into hospitable arms came all singing birds, and ever in their hearts was a song of renewal and joy. At last they burst the hard, cold shackles that confined them and spread out their mighty roots in the sweetness of liberty.

To my mind that strange garden symbolizes the Eighteenth Century out of which grew the Titan genius of Emanuel Sv. edenborg. Some call that century the Age of Reason, and characterize it as the coldest, most depressing time recorded in human history. It is true, progress was wonderful everywhere. There were great philosophers, and statesmen, and fearless investigators in science. Governments were better organized, the feudal system was held in check, and the public highways rendered more safe than they had ever been. The fiery passions of mediævalism were curbed by a severe decorum and the

iron sceptre of reason. But at that period, as in the Dark Ages before it, there was a sinister, oppressive atmosphere of sadness and sullen resignation. Able writers like Taine in his history of literature have noted how a bitter theology treated man as a despised child of sin and gave the world over to the wrath of God. Even the rentle angel, Charity, whom the saints of old had welcomed, was driven from man's side; faith alone was creatted, and not faith either, but a self-centred assumption that belief alone was necessary to salvation. All useful work seemed a vanity, all physical misfortunes were looked upon as punishments, and the darkest of all nights, ignorance and insensibility, lay upon the heart-

starved world. Such was the age out of whose harsh environment the genius of Swedenborg grew, and whose fettering dogmas he was destined to shatter, as the giant trees in the tale burst their bonds. When such a thinker is "let loose upon the world," it is of special interest to recall some of the historic events and personali-

ties centred round his own time. Swedenborg was born not long after the death of John Amos Comenius, the heroic champion who dealt the first effectual blow at the giant of scholasticism that had for so long a time stalked through the Old World. The year of Swedenborg's birth, 1688.

part of the reign of Louis XIV, and the memory of La Rochelle was still raw and bitter in the minds of all Protestants. He witnessed the astonishing expeditions of Charles the Mad of Sweden. He was a contemporary of Linnæus. During his last years, Rosseau in France preached his great doctrine of education according to nature, and Diderot developed his philosophy of senses and declared to the world that the blind could be taught. Perhaps no man was ever so precariously situated between traditions of a crumbling civilization and the sudden onrush of a new age toward which his forward-looking mind yearned. The more I consider his position, the less I can see how we are to account for him, except as a miracle, so little did he have in common with his church or the standards of his century. I have not been able to discover anything about the circumstances of his birth and early training which seems to explain the most independent movement ever started in the history of religious thought. Thousands of others have been born of devout parents and admirably educated just as he was, and they have not contributed a new thought or increased the happiness of mankind! But then, is not it ever thus with genius-an angel entertained by us unawares?

Swedenborg's home was in Stockholm, Sweden. His parents were earnest people. His father was a Lutheran bishop, a professor in the theological seminary and a man of spiritual insight. It is known that Martin Luther, in his monkish days, saw spirits and heard their voices, and many of his followers observed severe fasts and vigils so that they, too, might have glimpses of another world. It is said that the boy Emanuel had some such experiences. In later life he wrote to a friend: "From my fourth to my tenth year I was constantly engaged in thought upon God, salvation and the spiritual experiences of men; and several times I revealed things at which my father and mother wondered, saying that angels must be speaking through me." Though the father may have been sympathetic, his mother interposed with decision and told her husband he "must stop all such celestial excursions," and Emanuel did not see a light or hear a sound from the spiritual world until he was fifty-six years old. From all his religious writings it is clear that he had no use for that kind of experience for children or for unfit men and women. Of all men he was in a position to realize the danger of seeking visions, and he frequently warns his readers against this most harmful practice.

His childhood was as beautiful a beginning as could be desired for a marvelous life. He and his father were constant companions. They climbed the hills around Stockholm and explored the fjords, collecting mosses, flowers and brightly colored stones. When they returned, the child wrote long reports of their outdoor experiences. For he was a scholar from a child, and his mind always outran the limits of his body. But, unlike many precocious young people, he grew strong and healthy, and his noble, manly bearing was much commented upon.

He received the best education the age and his country afforded. He attended the University of Upsala, and it is said that his earliest productions display much poetical talent. But he devoted himself chiefly to mathematics and mechanics. He surprised his instructors by simplifying some most difficult processes in calculus, and often they could hardly follow his swift mind as it threaded the mazes of learning. They regarded him with awe, and the students spoke of him in low tones. It seems he was an unconscious mirror of strait-laced tenets and solemn ways amid which he was brought up. His face was described as stern, though not forbidding. He was rather statuesque, but very handsome and commanding in his personality. He was never known to unbend to the gayeties and sports of youth, he could not even in later life make love to the shy young girl who inspired the only passion he ever knew. He went to her father, the distinguished Polheim, instead of to her, and would have proved his love as if by means of charts and diagrams. The father was willing, and gave the young man a warrant for the girl returnable in three years, but the girl was so frightened that her brother finally persuaded Swedenborg to give her up. But his love for her he never sur-

rendered. He graduated from the University was the year of the fateful though of Upsala with honors, receiving the bloodless revolution in England. He degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

1709, when he was twenty-one years of age. Afterward he traveled in foreign countries, not for pleasure but to learn. Robsahm in his Memoirs says of Swedenborg, "Of foreign languages, in addition to the learned languages, he understood well French, English, Dutch, German, and Italian, for he had journeyed several

times in these countries." His father wished him to enter the diplomatic service, but he chose instead the paths of science. He was given letters of introduction to the sovereigns of Europe, but he calmly ignored them and sought out the most distinguished scholars of his day. Sometimes he would call unannounced-and ask for an interview! However, there was something about him which inspired their respect, and they never declined his request. His one desire, his mission, was to know, and he levied tribute upon every one who had new ideas or methods or processes to impart.

His profound learning brought him into close association with Christopher Polheim, who seems to have enjoyed the entire confidence of Charles XII of Sweden. In this way Swedenborg was introduced to the King who in 1716 appointed him assayer in the Swedish College of Mines, that is, an official who gives advice as to the best methods of working mines and smelting ores. With this appointment Swedenborg entered upon a period of amazingly prodigious and diversified activity. Not only did he discharge the duties of his office faithfully and with wisdom, but he also pursued his studies in every department of science. As an independent thinker, he followed the urge of a powerful and original genius to discover, if possible, the deepest secrets of nature. He was as familiar with forge and quarry, workshop and shipyard, as he was with the stars and songs of birds in the morning. The flowers he found blooming in obscure nooks spoke to him secrets as marvelous as those of the majestic mountains he trod. His was a rare blending of the practical and the beautiful, mathematics and poetry, invention and literary power.

In 1718 he turned his mechanical skill to account at the siege of Frederickshall when he constructed machines by which to transport several large vessels a distance of fourteen miles overland, across hills and valleys. He worked on plans for a mechanical carriage, very complicated inside, for a flying carriage, and for a vessel to travel under the sea, thus foreshadowing the automobile, the aeroplane, and the submarine. He worked on plans for new machines for condensing and exhausting air by means of water. He tried to produce a universal musical instrument on which one quite unacquainted with music might execute all kinds of airs

that are marked on paper with notes,

and he contrived a way of ascertain-

ing the desires and affections of men by analysis. He devised an air gun capable of discharging a thousand bullets a minute! He had plans for drawbridges, and various other mechanical devices. In him was prefigured the wonderful system of interrelated sciences and arts to which we owe the extraordinary progress of modern times. He showed how the decimal system could be of practical use. He caught marvelous glimpses of knowledge and theories that would be developed a century and a half laterpalæontology, biology, mercurial magnetism; he outlined the atomic theory

and the nebular hypothesis years in advance of Laplace. Swedenborg was not blind to the great wealth and influence which these manifold attainments and abilities would bring within his reach. But he refused the cup of happiness lifted to his lips. The sorrows and oppression of mankind lay heavy upon his heart. Humbled, shamed in his soul, he beheld the cruelties of a theology that rained damnation upon myriads of human beings. Jonathen Edwards at the same time in New England preached hell-fire and fear, and countless babies that died without repentance were consigned to everlasting torment! We moderns cannot conceive how the ingenuity of evil was exerted to turn God's Word into a curse. Heaven was monstrous, hell unspeakable, and life one long misery. Swedenborg said to himself, "What is the use of all the knowledge I have gained when such a hideous shadow lies vast across the world?" He turned away from the splendors of fame and spent twenty-nine years one-third of his life-in comparative poverty, comforting the hurt souls of his fellow men with a humane, reasonable doctrine of faith and life.

Besides all his other labor, he wrote every spare hour he could crowd in, and he produced altogether some sixty books and pamphlets before the be ginning of his inquiries in the field of religion. Among the great works of this period were "The First Principles of Natural Things," "The Brain," "The Economy of the Animal Kingdom," and "Rational Psychology.

Speaking of those scientific productions, Emerson says: "It seems that he anticipated much of the science of the Nineteenth Century. His writings would be a sufficient library to a lonely and athletic student; and The Economy of the Animal Kingdom" is one of those books which, by the sustained dignity of thinking, is an honor to the human race. The 'Animal Kingdom' is a book of wonderful merits. It was written with the highest endto put science and the soul, long estranged from each other, at one

again. It was an anatomist's account of the human body in the highest style of poetry. Nothing can ex-ceed the bold and brilliant treatment of a subject usually so dry and repulsive."

Elbert Hubbard says of the "First Principles of Natural Things" that Darwin seems to have read it with the most minute care. At any rate, Swedenborg divined something of evolution when he saw in a tiny lichen on a rock the beginning of a forest. He also waived the literal account of creation in the Bible as a contradiction of scientific facts. It should be added that he never in any of his religious writings changed his attitude toward Genesis. In fact, he ridiculed and tore down the time-honored shrine of literalism, and at the same time discovered in Scripture what he called a most ancient style of narrative that had nothing at all to do with the physical creation, but was a longforgotten parable of man's soul.

Besides mathematics, mechanics, and mining, Swedenborg shows in his works an intimate knowledge of chemistry, anatomy, geology, and a fondness for music. His philosophical subjects were almost equally varied and extensive. Yet he always had time "to render himself in all things useful to society." For many years he was a member of the Swedish Congress, and on account of his distinguished services to his country he was highly honored. Many distinctions were conferred upon him as time passed. In 1724 the Consistory of the University of Upsala invited him to accept a position as professor of pure mathematics; but he declined. He was admitted a member of several institutions of learning, in St. Petersburg, Upsala, and Stockholm. His portrait is in the hall of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Stockholm, as one of its distinguished members.

hanging near that of Linnæus. Swedenborg's life, in a word, seems to have been nothing but work, work, always work. He became financially independent, but this only spurred him on to accomplish more. All persons of high and low rank bore testimony to his noble character and selfless devotion. As he grew older, his kind ways endeared him to all his intimate friends, and the sternness which characterized his young manhood melted away. But real companionship he never knew. He had climbed too high on the ladder of thought even for his fellow-scientists to converse with him on some of the subjects with which he was familiar. They did not attempt to read his works, but preferred to recommend them. No one seemed able or willing to follow his giant strides into the upper realm of speculation. He was an eye among the blind, an ear among the deaf, a voice crying in the wilderness with a langua could not understand. Possibly my own partial isolation from the world of light and sound gives me this keen sense of his peculiar situation. But I cannot help thinking he was lonely with more than earthly loneliness, and the world seemed strange to him because he had already outgrown it. Perhaps no one had ever endured such a pressure of soul against the prison bars of flesh as he did, and there was no reassuring nearness of equal intelligences to lighten his burden. He had given his life to learn, and what could he do with his colossal treasure of knowledge? He was naturally glad when more of light, more opportunity was let into his difficult days; but I

question whether he ever felt quite at

home on earth after his "illumination."

In about the year 1744 a great change came to Swedenborg. This keen observer of natural facts and analyser of things of the mind was given from on high powers of observation of things spiritual; the senses of his spirit were quickened to recognize realities in the spiritual world. His contemporary, Robsahm, records a conversation in which he asked Swedenborg "where and how it was granted him to see and to hear what takes place in the world of spirits, in heaven, and in hell." The answer was that in the night one had come to him and said "that He was the Lord God, the Creator of the world, and the Redeemer, and that He had chosen me to explain to men the spiritual sense of the Scripture, and that He Himself would explain to me what I should write on this subject; that same night were opened to me, so that I became thoroughly convinced of their reality, the world of spirits, heaven and hell, and I recognized there many acquaintances of every condition in life. From that day I gave up the study of all worldly science, and labored in spiritual things, according as the Lord had commanded me to write. Afterward the Lord opened, daily very often, my eyes so that in the middle of the day I could see into the other world, and in a state of perfect wakefulness converse with angels and spirits." In September of 1766, Swedenborg wrote to C. F. Oetinger, "I can solemnly bear witness that the Lord Himself has appeared to me, and that He has sent me to do that which I am doing

the spiritual world and hear those who are there, and which privilege I have had now for twenty-two years." This privileged intercourse continued to the date of his death on March 29, 1772, while temporarily resident in London. In considering this phase of Swedenborg's experience, I feel that I am peculiarly able to grasp his meaning at least partially. For nearly six

years I had no concepts whatever of

now, and that for this purpose He has

opened the interiors of my mind,

which are those of my spirit, so that

I may see those things which are in

nature or mind or death or God. I literally thought with my body. Without a single exception my memories of that time are tactual. For thirty years I have examined and reexamined that phase of my development in the light of new theories, and I am convinced of the correctness of what I am saying. I know I was impelled like an animal to seek food and warmth. I remember crying, but not the grief that caused the tears; I kicked, and because I recall it physically, I know I was angry. I imitated those about me when I made signs for things I wanted to eat, or helped to find eggs in my mother's farmyard. But there is not one spark of emotion or rational thought in these distinct yet corporal memories. I was like an unconscious clod of earth. Then, suddenly, I knew not how or where or when, my brain felt the impact of another mind, and I awoke to language, to knowledge, to love, to the usual concepts of nature, of good and evil! I was actually lifted from nothingness to human life two planes as irreconcilable as Swedenborg's earth experience and his contacts with a realm beyond the cognizance of our physical senses! Since I did not receive even the lowest concepts in those empty years from myself or from nature, I took upon them as a revelation, even if only from a finite mind. Swedenborg looked upon his highest concepts as a revelation from the Infinite Mind. In fact, from his own words, it is clear he did not regard his conscious presence in the spiritual world as an end, but as a means of developing the other half of his understanding which as a rule is dormant in us, and seeing more comprehensively different kinds of concepts of good and evil, of spirit and matter, and translating the Word into principles instead of mere words and phrases. He did not say he was the only person who had had that kind of vision. Far from it. What he did say was, he lived twenty-nine years in full consciousness of the real world where all men live at the same time they inhabit the earth. He believed it was his mission to search out and interpret the "spiritual sense," or sacred symbolism, of the Scriptures, and that his experiences in the other world were to help him to understand truly the Word of God, and convey the most wonderful and beneficent truths to mankind. Therefore Swedenborg devoted himself with all his former energy and courage to the investigation of the facts and laws of the soul realm. He took up the study of Hebrew, so that he might read the Old Testament in the original language and gain a first-hand knowledge of the religious forms and

powers to the release of the world! In 1747, Swedenborg asked and obtained leave of Frederic, then King of Sweden, to retire from the office of assessor, so that he might not be disturbed in his new work. A higher degree of rank was offered him, but he refused, fearing that it might be an occasion of inspiring him with pride. Thus he withdrew quietly from the splendors of a notable society and the honors that had crowned him to the seclusion of his little library, where he produced twentyseven books, the sole object of which was to make Christianity a living reality upon earth.

times. It is evident that for many

years he had endeavored to grasp the

meaning of countless obscure pass-

felt baffled! Many things had troubled

him, tradition and the almost uncon-

querable habit of sectarian interpre-

tation, the coldness of an age that

literature ably and brilliantly advo-

cating tenets that were never dreamed

of by any prophet or Apostle, and

finally the obsessing illusions of the

senses. But at last the light broke

upon his mind-the Truth made him

free-and he gave all his magnificent

Whatever may be the opinions of those who read Swedenborg's religious books, one cannot but be impressed by his unique personality. He did everything gently and deliberate-There was nothing of excitement ly. or elation about him. The farther he traveled in the spiritual realm, the more humble and composed he became. He refused to appeal to the weakness or credulity of the ignorant. He did not attempt to make any proselytes; nor did he wish to have his name connected with the New Church which he said the Lord was about to establish in the world. He felt that his message was for posterity rather than for his generation; and as his works—the result of long, hard years of labor-left the press in large Latin folios, he distributed them free among the universities and the clergy of Europe. Walt Whitman says that "we convince by our presences," and that is powerfully true of the Swedish seer as he worked at his colossal task. He fully realized the incredulity and hostility with which many of his statements would be viewed, and he could have rendered them more attractive by omitting or softening down unpleasant truths in a charming and entertaining manner. Yet he never flinched or turned aside from his high trust. When he passed out of the body which had become so painfully inadequate to his soaring mind, a degree of obloquy fell upon his illustrious name; and for a time one of the noblest champions true Christianity has ever known was nearly forgotten. The only reward he ever knew in his growing isolation upon earth was the consciousness that he was giving his full measure of devotion to the welfare and happiness of all men.

There are some lines by John Drinkwater in his "Lincoln" which always bring Swedenborg vividly before me:

Lonely is the man who understands. Lonely is vision that leads a map away

From the pasture-lands, From the furrows of corn and brown loads of hay To the mountain-side,

To the high places where contemplation brings All his adventurings Among the sowers and the tillers in

the wide Valleys to one fused experience, That shall control The course of his soul, And give his hand Courage and continence.

Yes, with matchless constancy the seer possessed his soul in loneliness

and vision! A hundred and fifty-five years have passed since Swedenborg's death, and slowly his achievements have been winning recognition. The antagonism which his doctrines once aroused has changed to an attitude of tolerance and inquiry. Many intelligent people have advocated his teachings in the centres of civilization and carried them to nooks and corners of the world undreamed of by most of us. His message has traveled like light, side by side with the new science, thenew freedom, and the new society, which are struggling to realize themselves in the life of mankind. I keepcoming across instances of handicapped or disappointed lives which have been enriched and brightened by that Great Message. I, too, have my humble testimony, and I shall be most happy if through a word of mine even one individual gains a sweeter sense of God's presence or a keener zest. for mastering the difficulties of outward environment.

As I wander through the dark, encountering difficulties, I am aware of encouraging voices that murmur from the spirit realm. I sense a holy passion pouring down from the springs of Infinity. I thrill to music that beats with the pulses of God. Bound to suns and planets by invisible cords, I feel the flame of eternity in my soul. Here, in the midst of the everyday air, I sense the rush of ethereal rains. I am conscious of the splendor that binds all things of earth toall things of heaven-immured by silence and darkness, I possess the light which shall give me vision as thousandfold when death sets me-

(Continued next week.)

free.

parables and "mysteries" of ancient | CROSS COUNTRY AIR SLEEPER IN ONE DAY TRIPS.

Herbert Hoover, Jr., son of the the Word, and had constantly president, launching a career for himself as Raido Engineer of the Western Air Express, recent visitor in Chicago, predicted that within the next year a 24-hour sleeper transcontinental air service would be inleft out of Christianity its very heart augurated. of love, the witchcraft of a church

Young Hoover said he believed telephone facilities for communication between planes and ground stations would be completed by that time enabling business men to make connections with their offices. He said such a service would aid pilots in learning of weather conditions ahead and would avert many air problems now experienced by pilots.

Plans are already being designed for night flights with all the comforts of present day Pullman cars, he said. These planes are to be adequate for from 20 to 40 passengers and are contemplated for service between middlewestern points such as Chicago to Kansas City and the West.

The present air-1ail service must be speeded up to keep pace with the growing interest and patronage of transcontinental passenegrs, he declared.

"The time is not far distant when a 24-hour service between New York and Los Angeles, with passenegrs comfortably enjoying a good night's sleep while the plane covers the distance between Kansas City and Los Angeles and other coastal cities, will be a regular thing in my opinion," he

said. The development of telephone communications between planes and land stations is progressing so rapidly that it won't be long before passengers can keep in constant touch with their friends and business associates while making trans-continental

flights. Young Hoover was in Chicago with Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker, famous world war ace, now representing the Fokker-General Motors Com-Rickenbacker also was expany. tremely optimistic regarding the future possibilities of aviation.

3,568 KILLED AT GRADE CROSSINGS IN PAST YEAR.

During the past year, a report from the Interstate Commerce Commission indicates, 33 innocent bystanders were injured by stones picked up from the tracks and thrown by moving trains.

Within the same period of time 33 train men were likewise injured by stones thrown at moving trains by small boys and others.

One hundred and sixty-seven conductors and brakemen were injured in 1928 by freak cooking accidentsbroken dishes, glass, burning, etc.

Total casualties in 1928 were 92,-

070. Grade-crossing accidents account for 2,568 killed and 6,666 injured. Only 85 passengers on trains were

killed in 1928. In 1918, as many as 471 passengers were killed. Total number of persons killed was 6,022, excluding suicides. Total number of passengers injured was 3,463, as compared to 7,316 hurt in 1918. Of train employes, 70,246 were in-

injured in 1928 and 1,328 were killed.