

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

WNU Service

(Continued from last week.)

CHAPTER II

My impressions of my first contact with the writings of the great Swedish seer of the Eighteenth Century, which came about thirty years ago, will seem without meaning unless I go back to my first questionings about God. As a little child I naturally wanted to know who made everything in the world and I was told that Nature (they called it Mother Nature) had made earth and sky and water and all living creatures. This satisfied me for a time, and I was happy among the rosetrees of my mother's garden, or on the bank of a river, or out in the daisy-pranked fields, where my teacher told me true "Arabian Nights" tales about seeds and flowers. birds and insects and the fishes in the river. Like other children, I believed that every object I touched was alive and self-conscious, and I supposed we were all Mother Nature's children. But as I grew older, I began to reason about the parts of Nature I could touch. Obviously, I am using mature words and the ideas of later years to make intelligible the groping, half-formed, ever-shifting impressions of childhood. I noticed a difference between the way human beings did their work and the way the wonders of Nature were wrought. I saw that puppies, flowers, stones, babies, and thunder-storms were not just put together as my mother mixed her hot cakes. There was an order and sequence of things in field and wood that puzzled me, and at the same time there was a confusion in the elements which at times terrified me. The wanton destruction of the beautiful and the ugly, the useful and the obnoxious, the righteous and the wicked by earthquake or flood or tornado I could not understand. How could such a blind mass of irresponsible forces create an keep alive, always renewing what was destroyed, and keep up an unfailing succession of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, seedtime and harvest, day and night, tides and generations of men? Somehow I sensed that Nature was no more concerned with me or those I loved than with a twig or a fly, and this awoke in me something akin to resentment-"the fine inneuendo by which the Soul makes its enormous claim," and declares that it has a prerogative of control over the course of events and things.

Turning away from Nature, I inquired about God, and again I was baffled. Friends tried to tell me He was the Creator, and that He was everywhere, that He knew all the needs, joys, and sorrows of every human life, and nothing happened without His foreknowledge and providence. Some with a generous disposition said He was merciful to all, and caused His sun to shine on the just and the unjust alike. I was drawn irresistibly to such a glorious, lowable Being, and I longed really to understand something about Him. Then I met Phillips Brooks, and he helped me, with his simple soul-stirring words, to grasp the central truth that God is Love, and that His Love is the "Light of all men."

But I could not form any clear idea of the relation between this Divine Love and the material world. I lost myself many times in shadows and uncertainties, wandering back and forth between the Light which was so ineffably reassuring and the chaos and darkness of nature that seemed so real as not to be gainsaid. One day I was made radiantly happy and brought nearer to a sense of God when "I watched" an exquisite butterfly, just out of its cocoon, drying its wings in the sun, and afterward felt it fluttering over a bunch of trailing arbutus. Someone told me how the ancient Egyptians had looked upon the butterfly as an emblem of immortality. I was delighted. It seemed to me as it should be, that such beautiful forms of life should have in them a lesson about things still more lovely. Nevertheless, the same buzz-saw continued to worry me until one day a sudden flash of intuition reevaled an infinite wonder to

I had been sitting quietly in the library for half an hour. I turned to my teacher and said, "Such a strange thing has happened! I have been far away all this time, and I haven't left the room." "What do you mean, Helen?" she asked, surprised. "Why," I cried, "I have been in Athens." Scarcely were the words Scarcely were the words out of my mouth when a bright, amazing realization seemed to catch my mind and set it ablaze. I perceived the realness of my soul and its sheer independence of all conditions of place and body. It was clear to me that it was because I was a spirit that I had so vividly "seen" and felt a place thousands of miles away. Space was nothing to spirit! In that of God, Himself a Spirit everywhere at once, the Creator dwelling in all the universe simultaneously. The fact that my little soul could reach out over continents and seas to Greece, despite a blind, deaf, and stumbling body, sent another exulting emotion rushing over me. I had broken through my limitations and found in touch an eye. I could read the thoughts of wise men-thoughts which had for ages survived their mortal life, and could possess them as part of myself. If this were true. how much more could God, the uncircumscribed Spirit, cancel the harms of nature - accident, pain, destruction, and reach out to kis children. Deafness and blindness, then, were of no real account. They were to be relegated to the outer circle of my life. Of course I did not sense any such process with my child mind: but I did know that I, the real I, could leave the library and visit any place I wanted to, mentally, and I was happy. That was the little seed from which grew my interest ir spiritual subjects.

I was not at that time especially enthusiastic about the Bible stories, except the story of the gentle Nazarene The accounts of creation and the driving out of Adam and Eve from Eden for eating a particular fruit, the Flood and all the wrath and vengeance of the Lord seemed to me very similar to the Greek and Roman myths I had read-and there were very few gods and goddesses I could

admire. I was disappointed not to find in the Bible that my good aunt held up to me as a Divine Book, a likeness of the Being whose face shone so benign, beautiful, and radiant in my heart. She told me tales out of the Apocalypse, and still I felt a void I could not explain. What could I see in a war between God and dragons and horned beasts? How could I associate the eternal torture of those cast into the lake of fire with the God whom Christ declared to be love? Why, I wondered, should one particular City of God be described with pavements of gold and walls of precious stones when heaven must be full of everything else just as magnificent-mountains, fields, oceans, and the sweet, fruitful earth, restful to feet? The touching story of Christ, comforting the sorrowful, healing the sick; giving new light to the blind and speech to mute lips stirred me to the depths; but how could I worship three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? Was that not the sort of false worship so terribly punished in Old Testament days?

Such were the bewildered, dissatisfied thoughts on the Bible which possessed my mind when there came into my life one of the friends I loved most, Mr. John Hitz, who had for a long period held the position at of Consul-General for Washington Switzerland in this country. Afterward he was superintendent of the Volta Bureau in Washington, which Dr. Bell founded with the Volta Prize money he received for inventing the telephone. This bureau was established for the purpose of collecting and distributing information about the deaf, and publishing a magazine in their behalf, The Annals of the Deaf, which is now called The Volta Review.

I met Mr. Hitz first in 1893, when I was about thirteen years old, and that was the beginning of an affectionate and beautiful friendship which I cherish among the dearest memories of my life. He was always deeply interested in all I did-my studies, my girlish joys and dreams, my struggle through college and my work for the blind. He was one of the few who fully appreciated my teacher and the peculiar significance of her work not only to me, but to all the world. His letters bore testimony to his affection for her and his understanding of what she was to me-a light in all dark places. He visited us often

in Boston and Cambridge, and every time my teacher and I stopped over in Washington on our way to or from my southern home, we had delightful trips with him.

After my teacher and I settled down in Wrentham, Mass., he spent six weeks with us every summer until the year before he died. He loved to take me out walking early in the morning while the dew lay upon grass and tree and the air was joyous with birdsongs. We wandered through still woods, fragrant meadows, past the picturesque stone walls of Wrentham, and always he brought me closer to the beauty and the deep meaning of Nature. As he talked, the great world shone for me in the glory of immortality. He stimulated in me the love of Nature that is so precious a part of the music in my silence and the light in my darkness. It is sweet as I write to recall the flowers and the laughing brooks and the shining, balmy moments of stillness in which we had joy together. Each day I beheld through his eyes a new and charming landscape, "wrapped in exquisite showers" of fancy and spiritual beauty. We would often pause that I might feel the swaying of the trees, the bending of the flowers, and the waving of the corn, and he would say, "the wind that puts all this life into Nature is a marvelous symbol of the spirit of God."

On my fourteenth birthday he presented me with a gold watch he had worn for more than thirty years, and I have never been separated from it since, except one time when it was sent to Switzerland for some parts that were worn out. Curiously enough, it was not made for the blind in the first place. It once belonged to a German ambassador who had it fixed new consciousness shone the Presence | so that he could keep important ap- | young girl who loves to read, I

pointments exactly. He was obliged to call upon a high dignitary of the Kaiser, and it was not etiquette to look at the watch, nor was it etiquette to stay too long. So the Ambassador went to a jeweler and gave him instructions about making the watch so that he could slip his hand into his pocket and "feel" the time. It has a crystal face, and a gold hand on the back, which is connected with the minute hand, and goes with it and stops with it. There are also gold points around the rim of the watch which indicate the hours. I wear it always against my heart, and it ticks for me as faithfully as my friend himself worked for me and loved me. He whose love it keeps ever before me has been gone nearly twenty years, but I have the sweet consciousness that each tick is bringing me nearer and nearer to him. Truly a treasure above price, linking time and eternity!

Mr. Hitz and I corresponded for many years. He learned the Braille system so that I could read myself his long and frequent letters. These letters are a record of spiritual kinship which it comforts me to read over when I long for the touch of his hand and the wise, inspiring words with which he encouraged me in my tasks. His first and last thought was to lessen the obstacles I encountered. He quickly perceived my hunger for books I could read on subjects that particularly interested me, and how limited were the embossed books within my reach. For eight years he devoted a part of each day to copying whatever he thought would give me pleasure-stories, biographies of great men, poetry, and studies of Nature. When, after reading "Heaven and Hell," I expressed a wish to know more of Swedenborg's writings, he laboriously compiled books of explanations and extracts to facilitate my reading. All this he accomplished in addition to his duties as superintendent of the Volta Bureau and his extensive correspondence! In his letters he often referred to "the quiet morning hours before breakfast" he spent transcribing for me, and his "joy of being in daily touch with his innigst geliebte Tochter Helena." Many friends have done wonderful things for me, but nothing like Mr. Hitz's untiring effort to share with me the inner sunshine and peace which filled his silent years. Each year I was drawn closer to him, and he wrote to me more constantly as the days passed. Then came a great sorrow-separation from the friend I loved best next to my teacher. I had been visiting my mother, and was on my way back to Wrentham. As usual, I stopped in Washington, and Mr. Hitz came to the train to meet me. He was full of joy as he embraced me, saying how impatiently he had awaited my coming. Then, as he was leading me from the train, he a sudden attack of heart trouble. and passed away. Just before the end he took my hand, and I still feel his pressure when I think of that dark time. I could not have borne the loss of such an intimate and tender friend if I had thought he was indeed dead. But his noble philosophy and certainty of the life to come braced me with an unwavering faith that we should meet again in a world happier and more beautiful than anything of my dreaming. With me remains always the helpful memory of his rare personality.

He was a man of lofty character. a man of rich spiritual gifts. His heart was pure and warm, full of childlike faith in the best he saw in his fellow-creatures, and he was always doing for other people something lovely and dear. In all his ways he kept the Commandment. "Love thy neighbor as thyself." At eighty years of age he had the heart of an evergreen, and his inexhaustible power of enjoyment lifted him far above the average of humanity. He remained young with the young. He was never old to me, and I was never deaf and blind to him. He spelled with difficulty on his fingers, and he was so hard of hearing I had often to repeat a sentence six times with my imperfect speech before he could understand me. But our love covered a multitude of difficulties, and our

intercourse was always worth every effort it cost us. As we talked thus, Mr. Hitz came to realize fully my hunger for literature I could read on subjects that especially interested me. He himself had grown deaf, and that enabled him to see the distorted angle of my thoughts with regard to the world of my senses. He told me that if I would only try to put myself in the place of those with sight and hearing and divine their impressions of things, they could unite their senses with mine more and more and thus wonderfully increase my enjoyment of the outer world. He showed me how I could find a key to their life, and give them a chance to explore my own with understanding. He put into my hands a copy of Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell" in raised letters. He said he knew I would not understand much of it at first, but it was fine exercise for my mind, and would satisfy me with a likeness of a God as lovable as the one in my heart. He told me always to remember that it is easier to see what is good than what is true in a difficult book. For, as Swedenborg put it, "Good is like a little flame which gives light, and causes man to see, perceive, and believe."

When I began "Heaven and Hell" I was as little aware of the new joy coming into my life as I had been years before when I stood on the piazza steps awaiting my teacher. Impelled only by the curiosity of a

opened that big book, and lo, my fingers lighted upon a paragraph in the preface about a blind woman whose darkness was illumined with beautiful truths from Swedenborg's writings. She believed that they imparted a light to her mind which more than compensated her for the loss of earthly light. She never doubted that there was a spiritual body within the material one with perfect senses, and that after a few dark years the eyes within her eyes would open to a world infinitely more wonderful, complete, and satisfying than this. My heart gave a joyous bound. Here was a faith that emphasized what I felt so keenly-the separateness between soul and body, between a realm I could picture as a whole and the chaos of fragmentary things and irrational contingencies which my limited physical senses met at every turn. I let myself go, as healthy, happy youth will, and tried to puzzle out the long words and the weighty thoughts of the Swedish sage. Somehow I sensed the likeness of Him whom I loved as the One and Only. and I wanted to understand more. The words Love and Wisdom seemed to carees my fingers from paragraph to paragraph, and these two words released in me new forces to stimulate my somewhat indolent nature and urge me forward evermore. I came back to the book from time to time, picking up a line here and a line there, "precept upon precept," one glimpse then another of the Divine Word hidden under the clouds of literal statement. As I realized the meaning of what I read, my soul seemed to expand and gain confidence amid the difficulties which beset me. The descriptions of the other world bore me far, far over measureless regions bathed in superhuman beauty and strangeness, where angels' robes flash, where great lives and creative minds cast a splendor upon darkest circumstances, where events and mighty combats sweep by endlessly, where the night is lit to eternal day by the Smile of God. I glowed through and through as I sat in that atmosphere of the soul and watched men and women of Lobler mould pass in majestic procession. For the first time immortality put on intelligibility for me, and earth wore new curves of loveliness and significance. I was glad to discover that the City of God was not a stupid affair of glass streets and sapphire walls, but a systematic treasury of wise, helpful thoughts and noble influences. Gradually I came to see that I could use the Bible, which had so baffled me, as an instrument for digging out precious truths, just as I could use my hindered, halting body for the high behests of my spirit. I had been told by narrow people

that all who were not Christians would be punished, and naturally my soul revolted, since I knew of wonderful men who had lived and died for truth as they saw it in the pagan lands. But in "Heaven and Hell" I found that "Jesus" stands for Divine Good, Good wrought into deeds, and "Christ" Divine Truth, sending forth new thought, new life and joy into the minds of men; therefore no one who believes in God and lives right is ever condemned. So I grew to womanhood, and as unaccontably as Conrad found in English the language of his choice, I took more and more to the New Church doctrines as my religion. No one encouraged me in this choice, and I cannot explain it any more than anyone else. I can only say that the Word of God freed from the blots and stains of barbarous creeds has been at once the joy and good of my life, wonderfully linked with my growing appreciation of my teacher's work and my own responsibilities of service, hours of struggle and solitude, hours of deepest joy, harsh truths faced squarely and high dreams held dearer than the pleasant baits of ease and complaisance. Those truths have been to my faculties what light, color, and music are to the eye and ear. They have lifted my wistful longing for a fuller sense-life into a vivid consciousness of the complete being within me. Each day comes to me with both hands full of possibilities, and in its brief course I discern all the verities and realities of my existence, the bliss of growth, the glory of action, the spirit of beauty.

CHAPTER III

Do I hear someone say, "But is not deaf and blind Helen Keller liable to be imposed upon by those whose opinions or dogmas or political ideals are confined to a small minority?" Before considering Swedenborg's claims, which have astonished the world since they were made, I should like to lay before the reader the opinions of well-known writers who were conversant with his works, but who have had no affiliations with the church which treasures his religious teachings.

It will be remembered that Emerson chose Swedenborg as one of his "Representative Men." He says:

"This man, who appeared to his contemporaries a visionary and elixir of moonbeams, no doubt led the most real life of any man then in the world. . . . A colossal soul, he lies vast abroad on his times, uncomprehended by them, and requires a long focal distance to be seen." should be noted in passing that Emerson had no eye for Swedenborg's hell or mind for his Bible symbolism.

Thomas Carllyle was a canny Scot not likely to be led astray. This is his estimate of Swedenborg:

"A man of great and indisputable cultivation, strong, mathematical intellect, and the most pious, seraphic turn of mind; a man beautiful, lovtruths are confessed in his writings than in those of any other man. . . . One of the loftiest minds in the realm of mind. . . One of the spiritual suns that will shine brighter as the vears go on."

Elbert Hubbard's comparison between Swedenborg and Shakespeare is of special interest, as he approaches the subject from an entirely different

mental angle: "They are Titans both. In the presence of such giants, small men seem to wither and blow away. Swedenborg was cast in heroic mould. and no man since history began ever compassed in himself so much physical science, and, with it all on his back, made such daring voyages into the clouds. The men who soar highest and know most about another world usually know little about this. No man of his time was so competent a scientist as Swedenborg, and no man before or since has mapped so minutely the Heavenly Kingdom.

"Shakespeare's feet were never really off the ground. His excursion in 'The Tempest' was only in a captured balloon. Ariel and Caliban he secured out of an old book of fables. "Shakespeare knew little about

physics; economics and sociology never trouble him; he had small Latin and less Greek; he never travelled, and the history of the rocks was to him a blank.

"Swedenborg anticipated Darwin in a dozen ways; he knew the classic languages and most of the modern: he traveled everywhere; he was a practical economist, and the best civi' engineer of his day."

Henry James said: "Emanuel Swedenborg had the sanest and most farreaching intellect this age has known," and Henry Ward Beecher was no less sweeping in his assertion, "No one can know the theology of the Nineteenth Century who har notread Swedenborg."

There are others who bear interesting witness to the impression left upon them by Swedenborg's teachings. Among them was Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose beauty of soul and exquisite poetry excited such admiration everywhere. "To my mind," she says, "the only light that har been cast on the other life is found in Swedenborg's philosophy. It explains much that was incomprehen-

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whom the Encyclopædia Britannica notes as one of the most remarkable poets and thinkers," pays this tribute to one who has been hastily called by some a madman:

"I can venture to assert, as a moralist, Swedenborg is above all praise; and that, as a naturalist, psychologist, and theologian, he has strong and varied claims on the gratitude and admiration of the professional and philosophical faculties. . . Thrice happy should we be if the learned teachers of to-day were gifted with a

like madness!" Such estimates by these distinguished men and women are helpful in forming some idea of the personality and commanding genius Swedenborg possessed. Any defect there may be in my own judgment of him is evidently not due to my physical limitations. Measured by those who are scholars themselves, and others who are esteemed for spiritual gifts, he is proclaimed to have had an amazingly well-trained intellect-trained, as Emerson observes, "to work with astronomic precision." If he had been an illiterate man, no matter how wonderful his experience, and how authentic his claims, he could not long have stood his ground before the pitiless battery of competent inquiry. But here is a scholar far ahead of his time, mastering the arts and sciences, writing atle and voluminous works on every wonder of Nature from the tiny lichen on the rocks to the most complex structure of the brain, always reserving a splendid balance on dizzy heights of learning where he must needs climb alone; and then with the same audacity, calmness, and composure, feeling his perilous way over the deeps and abysses of the spirit-world and revealing with fearless authority the delicate yet unbreakable links between mind and

Three of my dear friends have had something to say, and they would not have said it of a lunatic or an intolerant fanatic. I knew Dr. Edward Everett Hale longest, and I always marvelled at his freshness of interest in all things and the variety of subjects upon which he deeply pondered. It was he who passed this judgment:

matter, eternity and ime, God and

"Swedenborgianism has done the liberating work of the last century. The wave Swedenborg started last to this day. The statements of his religious works have revolutionized theology."

Like all who loved Bishop Brooks, I realize what weight and significance his public utterances carry with them. His opinion on this subject is surely deserving of consideration:

"I have the profoundest honour for the character and work of Emanuel Swedenborg. . . . I have from time to time gained much from his writings. It is impossible to say a little on so great a theme. Yes, in a true sense, we are all New Churchmen, with new light, new hopes, and new communion with God in Christ."

Whittier said, "There is one grano and beautiful idea underlying all his revelations about the future life."

Another way to appreciate Swedenoorg, the man, is to compare him with other great world leaders. There is a story out of ancient times that a king left his council chamber weary and disheartened. He called for Iliff able, and tragical to me. . . . More | the artist and commanded: "Paint me

a true man's picture, gracious and wise, endowed with the strength of heroes and the beauty of womanhood. It shall hang in my inmost chamber, and when I retire thither, it shall fill my soul with grandeur and warm it. with sacred fire." The picture was painted and hung in the palace hall. The king gazed on it with rapt delight, until suddenly he discerned a strange meaning that puzzled him. The form was that of his most graceful courtier, perfect in every line! The bearing was that of a humbleattendant who filled the cup for him; the brow was that of a priest in holy vision: the eve was that of the wandering minstrel who charmed his tired spirit with song. The smile was that of his wife, so sweet and constant. Thus was the picture graced with all their charms, and they also were glorified in a new light. So the picture of Swedenborg seems to gather unto itself gleams of nobility from the lives of many great men, and they also gain a new significance from the comparison. In science, literature, and philosophy there are those who stand like heralds on mountaintops proclaiming a new day, of which they catch the first rays. There are patriots who deliver their country from a cruel yoke or lead the people to a truer freedom. There are those who search the treasuries of earth and discover new stores of light and heat; there are those who reveal countless stars and distant planets, and still others who sail many seas and findnot a Northwest Passage, but an America. Finally, in religion thereare leaders w'o teach millions by example or precept, who destroy idolatry or who amaken the temple or church from superstitions and hypocrisy; and again others, like Wesley, who pour love into the coldness of an unspiritual age.

So one impressive figure after another appears on the screen of imagination when we contemplate Swedenborg. There is Michael Angelo whosaw an angel in the stone and "carved it with many a sharp incision until he caught the vision." But Swedenborg's inner eyes were opened to behold living angels, and out of the literal truths of the Word of God, which are its stones, he carved heavenly messages of love and help from God

to His children. Another touch is given to the picture when we think of Beethoven, Mozart, and Wagner, pouring into the world harmonies that lifted men's hearts to heaven, while Swedenborg perceived the divine harmony in the universe, and, as he said, actually heard sweetest music sung by angelic

multitudes. From our childhood we have been familiar with the characters of Napoleon, Wellington, Washington, and Grant, and the fearful battles they took part in. But it was Swedenborg's lot to witness war between the forces of good and evil in the spiritual world; and, armed with the weapons of heaven—the new doctrines of the Word-and the sword of earth-the truths of Nature—he is the greatest champion of genuine Christianity in

twenty centuries. Alexander I of Russia set the serfs free, and Lincoln abolished Negro slavery in the United States. Over the temple of religion Swedenborg; saw written, "Now it is permitted to enter intellectually into the mysteries of faith," and he gave mankind a spiritual philosophy which liberated their minds and overthrew the power of ecclesiastical despotism.

What Agassiz did in zoology and palceontology, Karl Marx in economics and Darwin in evolution. Swedenborg did in religion. With massive arguments and thundering anathemas he sent a continent's literature of pessimism, condemnation, and insincerity crashing down into the abyss. Aristotle, Plato, Francis Bacon,

and Kant were philosophers of brilliant genius who sought long and patiently for the Causes of all things. Not only has our seer been justly called "the Swedish Aristotle," but he has declared that he was permitted to enter conscicusly into the very World of Causes and live in its Light for twenty-nine years.

Columbus's undaunted faith was realized in the discovery of a new! continent, and Cortez "stood on a peak in Darien" with the Pacific immense upon his vision. Now we have before us an explorer who travelled through the "undiscovered country," heard its language with his ears, conversed with its inhabitants, and described to our world, "from things heard and seen," its life and climate and civilization. For example, in his "Heaven and Hell" he wrote:

"When a man's acts are disclosed to him after eath, the angels to whom is given the office of searching look into his face and the search is extended through the whole body, beginning from the fingers of each hand, and thus proceeding through the whole. Because I wondered as to the reason of this, it was made known to me, namely, that as all things of the thought and will are inscribed on the brain, for their beginnings are there, so also they are inscribed on the whole body; since all the things of thought will extend thither from their beginnings, and there terminate. as in their ultimates. . . . From these things it may be evident what is meant by the book of man's life, spoken of in the Word, namely this, that all things, both what he has thought and what he has done, are insribed on the whole man, and appear as if read in a book when they are called forth from the memory, and as if presented to sight when the spirit is viewed in the light of heaven."

(Continued next week.)