

MY RELIGION

by Helen Keller

Copyright by Doubleday, Doran & Co.

If we 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.)

Isaac Newton, who was like minded with him in his pure, devout sentiments, was inspired to see the laws of attraction in the physical realm. Swedenborg perceived that love is the corresponding attractive law in the spiritual realm, and he testified that he beheld the radiating source of love actually as a sun, giving life to all souls and beauty to all creation. From his "Divine Love and Wisdom" I will quote one or two extracts to illustrate the facts and laws he calls inner realities:

"That there is any other sun than the sun of the natural world has hitherto been unknown. The reason is, that the spiritual of man has so far passed into his natural, that he does not know what the spiritual is, nor consequently that there is a spiritual world, in which are spirits and angels, other than and different from the natural world. Since the spiritual world has remained so deeply hidden from those who are in the natural world, therefore it has pleased the Lord to open the sight of my spirit, that I might see the things which are in the spiritual world, and afterward describe that world, which was done in the work on 'Heaven and Hell,' in one chapter of which the sun of the spiritual world has also been treated of. For it was seen by me, and it appeared of the same size as the sun of the natural world, and also fiery like, but with a redder glow. And it was made known to me that the universal angelic heaven is under that sun; and that the angels of the third heaven see it always, the angels of the second heaven very often, and the angels of the first or lowest heaven sometimes.

"Since love and fire correspond to each other, the angels cannot see love with their eyes, but instead of love that which corresponds to it. For angels have an internal and an external as well as men; their internal thinks and is wise and wills and loves, and their external feels, sees, speaks, and acts; and all their externals are correspondences of internals, but spiritual correspondences, and not natural. Divine Love also is felt as fire by spiritual beings; and therefore where fire is mentioned in the Word, it signifies love. The holy fire in the Israelitish Church had that significance; when it is customary in prayers to God, to ask that heavenly fire, that is, the Divine Love, may kindle the heart."

"Man in his thought has not penetrated deeper than to the interior or purer things of Nature; for which reason also many have placed the dwellings of angels and spirits in ether, and some in the stars; thus within Nature and not above or out of it; when yet angels and spirits are entirely above or out of Nature, and in their own world, which is under another sun. And because in that world spaces are appearances, therefore it cannot be said that they are in the ether or in the stars; for they are with man, conjoined to the affection and the thought of his spirit. For a man is a spirit; from that he thinks and wills; and therefore the spiritual world is where man is, and not at all removed from him. In a word, every man as to the interiors of his mind is in that world, in the midst of angels and spirits there; and he thinks from its light, and loves from its heat."

"As regards the sun from which the angels have light and heat, it appears above the lands on which the angels dwell, at an elevation of about forty-five degrees which is the middle altitude; and it also appears distant from the angels as the sun of the world from men. That sun appears always in that altitude and at that distance, nor does it move. Hence it is that the angels have not time divided into days and years, nor

any progression of the day from morning through mid-day to evening and into night; not any progression of the year from spring through summer to autumn and into winter; but there is perpetual light and perpetual spring."

Finally, in forming an idea of Swedenborg's place in the life thought of the world, we may recall the religious teachers of mankind. Buddha lived his gentle life which shone as an example before the peoples of the Orient. Confucius taught by precept. Mahomet carried his message of a new God with fire and sword through the lands given over to idolatry. Swedenborg strove to impart a sane, clear-eyed faith—rational truths that alone can protect religion from ignorance, brute force, and the cunning of those who would use it as a means of oppression. Those other leaders, earnest and sincere as they were, did not possess the science, the perception of human motives, and the militant truths which alone can prevent so-

ciety from forging fetters for the minds and bodies of men.

Martin Luther protested against the superstitious practices of the Dark Ages, and the Reformation began. Wesley broke down the formality of the English Church, and the enthusiastic service of his followers remain, and a noble exponent of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Newman, whose "Apologia" I read attentively years ago, laid bare great inconsistencies that ought to be faced squarely by all Protestants. Swedenborg brought to all sects in Christendom an abundance of new truths, he was the Herald of a new dispensation. It is worth while to note the comment of a Roman Catholic theologian, Professor Johann Joseph von Goerres in this connection:

"Throughout the voluminous works of Swedenborg, everything appears simple and uniform, especially as to the tone in which he writes, in which there is no effort at display in the imaginative powers, nothing overwrought, nothing fantastic. . . . In the cultivation of science, sincerity and simplicity of heart are necessary requirements to the attainment of durable success. We never observe that Swedenborg was subject to that pride by the influence of which so many great spirits have fallen; he always remained the same subdued and modest mind; and never, either by success or by any consideration, lost his mental equilibrium."

Whatever opinion may be formed of the nature or the value of Swedenborg's claims, it is obvious that his experience is a unique one. No other man, highly trained in all the sciences of his time, has ever asserted that he was in constant intercourse with another world for more than a quarter of a century, while possessing all his faculties intact. Partial, occasional, even frequent and habitual glimpses of the spirit realm are recorded in every age and everywhere. Moses had visions of God and life. Through him the sacred symbolism of the Jewish dispensation was given, and he understood the importance of leading his people out of slavery to a new civilization; but he did not sense the Divine Message couched in the Word for the human race. The Prophets, also, had visions and heard voices, but Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel were evidently unaware of the higher truths they were conveying to all nations symbolically; most of them say only the narrower historical meaning of the Message.

The Apostle Paul comprehended many truths of the Word spiritually, and his epistles are more illuminating than all those of the other Apostles put together. He was caught up into the third heaven, but could not tell what he saw. Indeed, he said he did not know whether he was in the body or out of it. These instances were, so to speak, reports of local events in a strange country, while Swedenborg was consciously admitted to that Strange Country, and prepared by long observation to make known the life and laws of heaven, the world of spirits and hell. The Apostle of Love, John, beheld in vision the future state of the Christian world and the glory of a new humanity. What he saw in symbol, Swedenborg saw in reality. He bore witness to the fulfillment of those prophetic pictures, and explained every scene, so that the Apocalypse is no longer a sealed book; it lies open, its seals broken and its message shining with the splendor of the Lord's second coming.

"An incredible claim!" I hear someone exclaim. Yet it seems to me less incredible than the claim that a native of Stratford, with scarcely any classical education and no advantages whatever, should have produced twenty-seven immortal plays. What Emanuel Swedenborg with his "vast indisputable cultivation" does claim is, that he was the divinely chosen and prepared interpreter of the parables and symbols and other mysteries of the Word, to disclose the influences of another world which we often "feel" so vividly, and gladden the deserts of life with new ideas of will, wisdom, power, and joy. That he declared, heralded the second coming of the Lord, a coming to man in a doctrine of right living and true thinking. If this seems incredible, it should be remembered that that is what most people say of anything out of the common.

In 1880, men knew that flying-machines could be equipped and rendered safe; but no one would listen to them because such a thing had never been done. So flying came slowly, and as the achievement of a small, faithful minority, laboring in an atmosphere

of ridicule. There are other funds of knowledge building up. We know, for instance, that it is possible to plan the economic systems in the world that we could all be much richer and freer and happier in producing comforts and pleasures than we are to-day. We know with at least an equal certainty that we can reorganize the whole educational system so that the bulk of mankind will grow up more happily prepared for creative service. We know that the international troubles of our time, the hostilities between peoples, the menace of war, are largely due to mental concepts which can be changed only by suggestion, persistence, training, and sheer devotion to humanity. Yet so-called educated people are incredulous of social, political, and spiritual developments they may live to see and share. The small group of believers who know must struggle on, bearing steadfast witness to their truth in schools, courts, workshops, offices, and legislatures; and what are they but messengers in their way of the Lord's second coming?

World events, too, seem to be full of this immense significance. Nations have become so dependent one upon another for the support of life that war is more than ever madness. External pressure is brought upon mankind to make them see the need of living in peace and brotherhood. About a century ago man found out the use of coal and steam for the manufacture of goods in great quantities, and for transportation by sea and rail. Soon followed the telegraph and the telephone and improved machines of every kind, and now come the radio and the ships that move through the air and under the sea. God has spread around the world three vast girders of coal and iron and electricity which have swept all the peoples into one great brotherhood of work!

"But how can I accept such an audacious and peculiar claim, contrary to everything I have observed?" someone again demands. It is true that when we read the works of other authors we have accepted rules and canons of criticism to guide us; but in the case of Swedenborg we have almost none. From the very nature of such a case we can know little or nothing about the psychological states through which he passed, except what he himself reports. His own testimony must convince us, if anything can.

That is nothing new to my experience. Daily I place implicit faith in my friends with eyes and ears, and they tell me how often their senses deceive and lead them astray. Yet out of their evidence I gather countless precious truths with which I build my world, and my soul is enabled to picture the beauty of the sky and listen to the songs of the birds. All about me may be silence and darkness, yet within me, in the spirit, is music and brightness, and color flashes through all my thoughts. So out of Swedenborg's evidence from beyond earth's frontier I construct a world that shall measure up to the high claims of my spirit when I quit this wonderful but imprisoning house of clay.

Perhaps I may suggest another way of looking at Swedenborg's assertions that will be helpful. Science tells us of that strange, dark little chamber in the brain into which the sun and stars, the earth and ocean enter upon wings of light, and how from its mysterious abode the soul comes forth, and in twilight they commune together. Only He who made all things can gaze upon their unveiled glory. We could not behold their untimely splendor and live. That is why man is permitted to look at everything only as in a glass, darkly, and gaze only upon shadows in one small, dimly lighted chamber. Why should he speak of the "dim mysteries" of heaven so doubtfully when really he apprehends so little of earth and that only with veiled senses? Why cannot the soul with equal freedom go forth from its dwelling-place and, discarding the poor lenses of the body, peer through the telescopes of truth into the infinite reaches of immortality? At all events, this gives a key to Swedenborg's other-world records. He says it is the inner man who sees and perceives what goes on about him, and that from this interior source alone feeling and sensation have their life. But the illusion that all sense experience is outside of man is so common that the mind cannot get rid of it, except by practising concentration. I have not been especially bothered with this illusion because I am so constantly thrown upon my thoughts and imagination; but people prove it to me frequently when they express surprise that I can enjoy flowers and music and descriptions of lovely landscapes. It is so unbelievably hard to make them understand the simplest facts about the potency of touch and smell, how are they going to form a valid judgment of another's position when he not only sees and hears bodily, but also uses his spiritual faculties to an exceptional degree, and thus widens the narrow ring which encircles things sensible into an almost limitless horizon?

CHAPTER IV

The Bible is the record of man's efforts to find God and learn how to live in harmony with His laws. Theologians have always endeavored to grip in permanent form man's momentary impressions of God and the fleeting, changing aspects of his world. From this process have arisen many of the contradictions in the literal sense of the Bible, and misunderstandings of God's nature and His purpose. The Bible tells of man's halting beginning and gradual development, and the culminating perfection of the Christ-gospel. I conceive of this book as a spiritual "Iliad" covering many thousands of years, touching many nations—a splendid, variegated story, crossed at certain points by uninspired individual imaginings, dark periods of materialism, and illumined periods when the face of God shone upon the world, and there was light on field and sky and water, and in the minds of men. Out of the chaos of human experience an individual is now and then lifted to the peak of spiritual consciousness. As man develops, and his intelligence slowly unfolds, these individual peaks are more frequently seen; but they are never precisely alike. Each one is a light-bringer; but the light is so infinitely varied by the medium through which it is transmitted that it is sometimes difficult to perceive its Divine source.

Just as all things upon earth represent and image forth all the realities of another world, so the Bible is

one mighty representative of the whole spiritual life of humanity. The characters come and pass before us. The lawgivers, the kings, the prophets—through the pages they pass. Like a mountain stream, the generations pass in endless procession, now praying, now weeping, now filling the cities with the voice of rejoicing, now walking in the evil imaginings of their hearts and making unto themselves graves; now falling by the sword, mourning in captivity for the multitude of their transgressions, now bowing their heads to the will of Jehovah, now pouring imprecations upon their enemies, now building and marrying, now destroying, now singing songs of praise, now sacrificing, now comforting, now crucifying their Saviour.

In a book, the making of which has continued from generation to generation, inconsistencies and confusion are inevitable. Yet it is the most important record of the gropings of the human spirit that mankind possesses. Swedenborg set himself the task of separating the dross from the gold, the Word of God from the words of men. He had a genius for interpreting the sacred symbolism of the Bible, similar to the genius of Joseph when he revealed the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams in the land of his captivity. The theologians of his time darkened counsel with many words without knowledge. While they were helpless before the curtains of the Shrine, Swedenborg drew them aside with subtle insight, and revealed the Holy of Holies in all its glory.

The Church had departed from the simple, direct, and inspiring story of how the Lord came upon earth clothed in visibility and dwelt as a man among men. For the marvelous reality, the clergy substituted fantasies that entangled them in metaphysical webs from which they could not extricate themselves. The beautiful truth of the Divine Humanity became distorted, dissociated, dissected beyond recognition, and our Lord Himself was lost in deadly dialectics. Swedenborg brought together the scattered and broken parts, gave them normal shape and meaning, and thus established a "new communion with God in Christ." Swedenborg was not a destroyer, but a divinely inspired interpreter. He was a prophet sent by God. His own message proclaims it more convincingly than any saying of his followers could.

There is no escaping his virile personality. As we read it, we are filled with recognition and delight. He did not make a new Bible, but he made the Bible all new! One who receives him gains a great spiritual possession.

The first and last thought of Swedenborg throughout his writings is to show that in the Bible, rightly read and interpreted, is to be found the truest and noblest conception of God possible. Most human minds are so constituted that there is in them a secret chamber where theological subjects are stored, and its centre is the idea of God. If this idea is false and cruel, all things which follow it by logical sequence partake of these qualities. For the highest is also the inmost, and it is the very essence of every belief and thought and institution derived from it. This essence, like a soul, forms everything it enters into an image of itself; and as it descends to the planes of daily life, it lays hold of the truths in the mind and infects them with its cruelty and error. Such was the idea of God in ancient India, where a highly intellectual class attempted to dictate the way of living on the principle that, to be like God, one must crush out all human affection, and duties and relations; and the moment one became utterly passionless, without thought or interest in anything external, one was godlike—absorbed in the Infinite, and ready for another world. This was an extreme case; but it illustrates the kind of beliefs that are hostile to humanity. By that I mean beliefs which set up fictitious excellences, encourage devotional feeling, and ceremonies which do not have for an object the good of mankind, and which are made substitutes for a righteous, useful life. Such beliefs darken all morality and make it an instrument of a supreme being worshipped indeed with adulation, but in truth repulsive to the good and the wise.

There is another spiritual danger against which Swedenborg often warns his readers—vagueness of thought about God. He says many times that humble folk think more wisely with all their blunders and superstitions about God, the soul and immortality, than many who have

great knowledge, but who look into creation and into their own minds and find them empty of divine truth. How thrillingly significant the words of Jeremiah come back to behold the groping disbeliever: "Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, who execute with loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

A wandering idea of an invisible God, Swedenborg declares, "is not determined to anything; for this reason it ceases and returns." The idea of God as a spirit, when a spirit is believed to be as ether or wind, is an empty ideal; but the idea of God as Man is a just idea; for God is Divine Love and Divine Wisdom, with every quality belonging to them, and the subject of these is man, and not ether or wind."

Again we read: "If anyone thinks of the Divine itself without the idea of Divine Man, he thinks vaguely,

and a vague idea is no idea at all; or he conceives an idea of the Divine from the visible universe without a boundary, or which ends in obscurity, which idea makes one with the idea of the worshippers of Nature; it also falls into Nature, and becomes no idea."

When the three-fold nature of the human being, spirit, intellect, and body, is rightly understood, it will be found that all forms he perceives pass into imagination, and his soul endows them with life and meaning. Man and the universe are pictured in the Divine Mind. God created man in His own Image and Likeness, and in His turn man sends forth into his mind and body the world thought-forms stamped with his whole individuality. It is known how the artist sees beautiful pictures in his mind before he paints them. Similarly, the spirit projects ideas into thought-images, or symbols; that is the universal and the only true language. If one could convey his joy or faith or his mental picture of a sunrise to another in visible form, how much more satisfactory that would be than the many words and phrases of ordinary language! I have cried when I touched and embossed Chinese symbol which represents happiness, and no amount of description would have produced such an effect upon me. It was a picture of a man with his mouth close to a rice field. How forcibly it brought home the fact that the Chinese are utterly dependent upon the rice they grow, and that when their fields are flooded, and the crops destroyed, starvation for millions of human beings is inevitable. Many ideas crowded into one symbol gain a power which words tend to neutralize. The French say that "words are employed to conceal ideas." Ruskin has an eloquent passage in "Sesame and Lilies," where he speaks of words as masks which draw the mind away from real issues to external things.

Now the Bible is largely written in this universal language. Of course Christians knew this before Swedenborg's day. They were familiar with the "dark sayings" and "parables"; but to them as to most of us a great many chapters, and the "Apocalypse" especially, were utterly unintelligible.

"Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour," describes exactly the hidden truths of the Word. Israel did not know Him, except in the cloud and the pillar of fire and through the rod of His Power. When He caused Himself to be seen as Man upon earth, He was called an ally of the prince of devils! Even His own disciples mistook His purpose, and disputed among themselves as to who should be greatest in His Kingdom. They misinterpreted His Work of Love as a plan of conquest and personal glory. Over all His ways there is a covering! His very revelation is veiled in clouds. The Word which professes to show Him to us, clothes Him in the limitations of finite human nature, and we gain the most contradictory impressions of His attributes. He is infinite and eternal, and yet our human passions and ignorance are ascribed to Him. He says, "Fury is not in me," "I am not angry, you provoke yourselves unto anger," and yet He pours the fierceness of His wrath upon the earth. He is presented as a God who "doth not repent," and He does repent. He gives to each man according to his own works, and yet He visits the sins of the fathers upon the children. There is a long series of such apparent contradictions, and it is natural that many people cannot see any order underlying such a chaos of irreconcilable ideas. If we believe in a God at all worthy of love, we cannot think of Him as angry, capricious, or changeable. It seems as though these conceptions must have been part of the barbarism of the times when the Bible was written.

Swedenborg develops a philosophy of Divine revelation which is reasonable. He points out that, as in science, every revelation of new ideas from God must be suited to the states and the capacities of those who receive them. He undertakes to show that the literal statement of the Scriptures is an adaptation of Divine Truth to the minds of people who are very simple or sensuous or perverse. He demonstrates that there is a spiritual sense within the literal, suited to the higher intelligence of the angels who also read God's Truth and think with us, although they are invisible. In this superior sense is the fullness of Divine Truth. What would a friend care about what I said to him if he took my words literally? Would I not appear to him insane if he thought I meant to say that the sun rises and sets, or the earth is flat, or that I do not live in the dark? It is the meaning my friend listens to, not the words or the appearance which they convey.

That process is very similar to the one Swedenborg employs in finding out the deeper meanings of the Word. God appears small and undivine if a dull, perhaps bad man reads that He is angry with the wicked every day; but a man of sense and heart sees that it is only an appearance, and that we put off on Him our own anger with each other and the punishment we have brought upon ourselves. There is also the anger of the just which subsides in a moment, and is understood as love that chasteneth. But God is incapable even of sternness and He tells His people this over and over again. As we penetrate into His Divine Word, putting aside one covering after another, we find a Word truer and truer to His nature. He did not create man and then betray and reject him from Eden. He does not teach laws and break them and impute guilt to His creature. He

warns, but does not cast anyone into hell or forsake him. It is man who constrains Him to express commandments in language that can be apprehended, and acted upon. Swedenborg was unconsciously feeling His Presence when he wrote these lines:

O my sons, too dutiful
Toward gods not of me,
Was I not enough beautiful?
Was it hard to be free?
For behold, I am with you, am in you and of you:
Look forth now and see.

Who ever realizes the abuse that is piled up to the heavens daily and hurled upon this more than beautiful, all-enduring Deity! He does not really hide Himself; but the determined evil speech of selfishness hides Him.

I have said all this because we need to have a very clear, unclouded idea of God's nature if we are to read the symbols of His Word connectedly. According to this theory, the spiritual sense deals with the soul exclusively—its needs and trials, its changes and renewals, not of times, places, and persons. When we read of mountains, rivers, lambs and doves, thunders and lightnings, golden cities and precious stones and trees of life with healing leaves, we may know they are exact symbols of the spiritual principles that lie back of them. Affections and ideas are signified, and their uses to the soul are similar to the uses of their natural representatives to the body. This rule of interpretation was employed by Swedenborg for twenty-seven years, and he did not have to change or correct one Scriptural statement given in his first published work. He gives the same spiritual equivalent for the same natural object throughout the Bible, and the meanings fit wherever they are applied. I know, I have tried this key, and it fits. This is what Swedenborg calls the law of correspondences—analogs between the forms of nature and those of spirit. The Bible may be called the Poem of the World as well as God's finite utterance to man.

(Continued next week.)

COMMUTING SERVICE FROM PITTSBURGH TO WASHINGTON

Aerial boundaries of cities are being expanded but Pittsburgh is about to attempt a new record—commuting service between western Pennsylvania and the nation's capital.

"I'm sorry, Congressman, but I have an engagement for luncheon in Pittsburgh in three hours and I have to hurry," one member of the national house may say to another and dash off to make the appointment. Colonel Harry C. Fry, backer of the new project, believes that five to seven round trips a day can be made by a place between Pittsburgh and Washington.

Captain Jack Morris inaugurates the trial service with a Stinson-Douglas triplane. Bettis field at Pittsburgh, and Hoover field at Washington, were the two terminals established. Between these terminals the rugged Allegheny Mountains known to fliers as one of the most treacherous stretches of flying country in the world.

Nevertheless, the Pittsburgh backers of the plan believe a regular commuting service can be established on a permanent basis, despite the Alleghenies. A national slogan may live in Pittsburgh, if he desires to fly back and forth to his desk in Washington.

Bent on adding the final touch Colonel Fry said that a barber would be carried in the plane, so that late commuters would be able to get a shave during the trip, and that manicurist also may be added to the service of the aerial express.

A number of men prominent in Washington and western Pennsylvania, have been invited to try the new service in its experimental stage. United States Senator David Reed, of Pennsylvania, has been asked to make a trip, as have other notables.

Radio station KDKA has offered installation of broadcasting service in the plane, so that the busy flier between there and Washington may keep in constant touch with their offices, if they need communication more frequently than two hours, estimated flying time.

DOG LAUNDRY IN BEAUTY PARLO

"Here's your dog back from the laundry all nice and clean!"

M. J. O'Rourke runs a beauty parlor and laundry in New York for cats and dogs—even a few canaries accommodated once in a while.

It's the dogs though who furnish most of the business.

There are many stylish owners of stylish canines who not only send their pets for a bath once a week but also have them come in once a month or so for a manicure.

Trimming and polishing the nails or dog's feet keeps O'Rourke and his assistants busy in one part of the beauty parlor.

Cats also get manicured. Men women bring in their kittens to have their claws dulled so that they can not scratch so easily. Sometime canaries get manicured but that is infrequent.

"It's the dogs that need most attention," said O'Rourke. "And rest they like it. You'd be surprised the results that come from thorough bathing and cleaning."

"Steam baths are popular with bow-wows. Many of them don't like so much of the manicure sciss however. You've got to watch and often muzzle the dogs when they are done."

"Some of them don't like to be beautified at all. They resent it. But most of them get used to it and become peevish if their own forget to bring them around and then."

—Subscribe for the Watchman.