

MY RELIGION

by 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.)

Swedenborg's works, especially the "Arcana Coelestia," confirm much of what Ingersoll and other critics of the Bible say about the untrustworthiness of its literal statements; but at the same time it is demonstrated that they are quite wrong in their conclusions about its value from a different point of view. I have had abundant opportunity to learn how defective the sense of the letter is in the light of modern science, how strange some of the stories are, and how often they lack outward harmony. Nevertheless, I have also observed that there is a meaning beneath the letter that cannot be read in word but only in symbol, and this meaning holds good throughout the parts where it occurs. There is a compelling example of it in Psalm 78:

"I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us." Then follows in the Psalm a summary of the experiences of the Israelites in Egypt, and their pilgrimage to Canaan. This record is true history; but here it is pronounced to be a parable which only the initiated can fully grasp. And what a deep parable it is! It describes perfectly our exodus from materialism and ignorance, and our slow, difficult progress toward the happier life, which the beautiful, fertile land of Canaan represents. I am giving this simply as an illustration of how Swedenborg always regards the Bible as a vehicle of Divine Truth.

It is of interest to recall that in the year 1753 Astruc made his famous discovery of two or more documents in the Pentateuch and at that very time Swedenborg was publishing, anonymously, in London, the "Arcana" explaining Genesis and Exodus. The latter did not believe that Scripture had anything to do with the physical creation or a literal deluge, or that the first eleven chapters of Genesis were about individuals named Adam and Noah. It was a very different phase of the subject which came to his attention. He was enabled by the study of Hebrew and by his mental illumination to see that the early chapters gave an account in an ancient parabolic style of the spiritual life of the race from the beginning down to the Jewish era. He pointed out that the first chapter contains the stages of evolution by which the mind of man, at first dark

and chaotic, was developed until it reached the Eden of simple truth and happiness. This age continued until self-interest asserted its power, and the innocence of childhood was gradually lost. At last wrong ideas flooded the world. Then a keen race of men, denoted by Noal, in the ark, began a new age. Intelligence grew rapidly, and the rod of conscience replaced the voice of the pure soul. The symbol was no longer a garden but a vineyard. Mankind grew up like an ambitious youth, building the great empires of the East whose records we are recovering year by year. The civilization of that period was extensive; but in time it declined. Polytheism and idolatry came into being. War and violence threatened to cover the face of the earth with ruins, and another dispensation had to be established. That was the beginning of the Jewish Church which kept monotheism alive until, in the fullness of time, Christianity dawned upon the world. The first Christian Church, or civilization, was essentially a continuation of the Mosaic one—full of the rough makeshifts and tallow candles and flickering torches of a faith fitted to a turbulent society. The sense-pictures and fair engravings of ritual and the sceptre of authority beheld, as it were, in the margin of the Word were superstitiously revered; but the Divine Meaning remained unread. So passed the perverse manhood of the world, and we continue to feel its passionate outbreaks and downfalls and unhappy moods. But now the arc light of a more enlightened faith shines upon humanity, and the creation of a new man goes on step by step; yea, the Sabbath of peace in all hearts and in the outer world shall yet come, and the reign of selfish, blind instincts shall vanish forever. Thus the Bible is portrayed as one vast glorious parable. All the way one may read in its lessons of life and its phases—its first innocence, its youthful waywardness, its saving conversion, and its incalculable possibilities of service and joy. It is a complete circle from paradise to paradise—"the circle of the earth upon which sitteth the Lord forever." The limited language and imperfect modes of thought of days long gone by are only the body of a heavenly message that declares God to be always with us, imparting new and higher gifts and capabilities.

The higher criticism of the Bible,

as Swedenborg indicates, does not take away a jot or tittle of its essential meaning, but corrects erroneous views of the early Jewish writers.

In this view, then, there is no conflict with the accumulating data of archaeology, geology, and the study of different documents. The Bible is lifted to a higher level than ever before, and is clothed with holiness. The old view was most unworthy of the Great God of all souls. He was supposed to have said nothing until Sinai. He had left no room for science to work without making trouble for faith. His instruction of the race had been through the narrow and exclusive ray of light to Moses. His providences were chiefly heartless neglects. All nations except Israel were under His ban, and millions must have been swept into the abyss. Then His "beloved Son" interceded, and offered Himself up as a sacrifice upon the Cross for an otherwise doomed race, then the "Father" was propitiated, and cancelled His sentence, but only for persons in whose behalf the "Son" spoke a good word! This old view was Swedenborg's arch enemy; for it was constantly taught in the schools, preached and proclaimed with the utmost zeal and eloquence. Its gigantic shadow lay on the baby's cradle, brooded over the prison and the death-bed, it had penetrated even the smallest acts and common sayings of every day. Skeptics and atheists naturally sprang up everywhere. Faith in the Lord and His Word seemed to demand the suppression of science and philosophy and the smothering of all generous sentiments.

But Swedenborg confronted this giant with a new view that brought fresh hope and appreciation of the Bible. The God he followed is the God of all nations and all times. Infinitely patient and unselfish, He has watched over the whole world. At first He led childlike man by the same law of spontaneous growth by which He forms a beautiful tree; then He taught him in the parables of garden, flood, vineyard, and tower, afterward in the books of Moses and the Prophets. As to geology and other sciences, pictures from them are used to symbolize the regeneration of man. There always have been laws of justice in every land; and the code of Hammurabi, who was Amraphel in Genesis, is well known. But the Decalogue was given at Sinai in a peculiar manner, so that it might figure the spiritual laws which wisdom and science were to reveal as the centuries passed. Only by having definite pictures of life stamped upon our memories can we learn to imagine more beautiful ones and make them living realities. Whenever the Jews turned aside from their trust for all men, they were rebuked pointedly with the example of many other peoples who did not have the Word in writing, but upon whose wise and noble minds the truth was inscribed as with letters of gold.

Swedenborg holds up many of the Gentiles of his day as examples of sincerity and well-doing which should put Christendom to shame, and let now it is they who are showing the most determined courage for the cause of brotherhood, while we devise more effective ways to kill one another in the next war. Truly, the Word of the Lords stands forever, though the old heaven and earth of literalism melt away.

If it is indicated in Swedenborg's teachings that evolution is the Divine method of creating, he also shows that it is not complete without previous "involution." Since God is Life itself or Soul, He cannot help putting a form of soul into everything that comes from His hand, and each soul takes hold of matter and shapes it into the image of something which God has thought. It is still true, as Plato taught, that something cannot be made out of nothing, and intelligence cannot be evolved out of matter because it lies in such a different plane of existence. Although man has been developed from a lower to a higher form, yet he has been immortal from the beginning. He did not, however, enjoy his higher capacities until he became conscious of the soul within him. It is also asserted that he has fallen from a childlike simplicity and innocence, while he has made tremendous material progress, and is returning by long, steep ways to the heights where is God, "the meeting place of all souls."

Swedenborg's revelations take from every grave its fear. Before he was raised up into heaven, the future life was, for most "Christians," full of terrors. It was a disputed question whether life or death brought greater opportunity—whether death was the end of life or the door to another existence. Now we are positive that the larger, nobler life is beyond the grave. The child dying in his mother's arms was an intolerable thought. Now we know of the sweet, unclouded childhood which awaits him, the bright abodes where angels will teach him to speak, think creative thoughts and do the work for which he is best fitted, where he will grow up in beauty and go forth to deeds and adventures mightier than were ever held upon earth. We know now that every faithful love which has been thwarted here has tenfold greater joy in store for it on the other side. Heaven and hell have become facts in our deeper consciousness about which there can be no dispute. We have an intuitive certainty of them—not a halting knowledge inferred from arguments or reasons which we can accept or reject as we choose. Only such face-to-face knowledge gives reality to things, since it springs from life, and Swedenborg's living testimony will shed a low but ever-increasing light upon the dark

"hinterland" of our soul experience, and reinforce our groping efforts with the dawning of immortal purpose.

It is all very well to talk about the folly of other-worldliness, but men have tried living without it and ended in tragic failure. It is true, only a very few of us see the way out; but these words were dictated to Swedenborg: "Truths derived from good have all power." If we only let the Lord inspire us from His Divine Truth, the strength of Samson shall pass into us mentally, and we shall yet be able to lift the dead weight that shuts the vast majority of the race out from their splendid possibilities of development. It is significant that Emerson, who stood at a great distance from Swedenborg in many beliefs, saw the fundamental truth of his selfless attitude, and wrote: "The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself." Nothing but letting the Divine Life have its way through us will deliver the world.

This is the true significance of Swedenborg's message from "the hills whence cometh our help." It was not immortality he stressed, but the responsibilities it imposes upon us. He did not regard his extraordinary intercourse with angels as an end itself, but as a means of opening his understanding to a true interpretation of God's Word, and of making the knowledge thus acquired the common heritage of mankind.

So it must be understood that, while the possibility of communicating with departed spirits is conceded, we are never encouraged to cultivate it. When prophets, apostles, and seers are needed to wake the sleeping hearts of men, it is useful for them to be in conscious association with angels and devils because the Lord then supervises the work Himself, and prevents confusion. But as a rule, such intercourse exposes man to great danger, because he is so easily influenced by deceiving spirits who know his weaknesses, and use him for selfish purposes.

If, therefore, Swedenborg states that every human being is attended by at least two angels from heaven, and two bad spirits from hell, he also maintains that our peace of mind and orderliness of life depend upon our being unconscious of our invisible allies and enemies. As John Wesley rightly said, we have all we need to know in those revelations, and the rest is for us to follow the Lord alone, trusting to His protection and guidance.

The Lord Jesus Christ is named in the beginning and in the closing sentence of the Book of Revelation; He is the central figure of the book. He is the Jesus of the New Testament. "Revelation" is the sequel to the Gospels, which tell of the Lord's work upon earth. His crucifixion and His resurrection. The Apocalypse tells how He has continued His work in the night of His glorified Humanity—the supreme Example and Inspirer. In the Gospels He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"; and He often spoke of the comfort and enlightenment He would ever bring to men.

What has become of this promise:

Except for the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the wisdom to teach and the courage and joy which disciples felt for a short time, the Promise appears to have been quite forgotten.

But Swedenborg shows that "Revelation" takes up this Promise and prophesies its fulfillment. By symbols it pictures the nature of the risen Lord, the blessings which flow from His Presence, and tells explicitly what we must do to prepare our minds for Him. It gives fully the ideals of Christian life which shine like stars around this glorious Presence, and which are only faintly outlined by the Apostles; it exposes the cruel beliefs and evils of life which must be overcome before these ideals can become a part of ourselves. It shows the chief obstacles to true Christianity—faith without charity, and the greed for domination by means of rituals and superstitions and terror. The beasts arising out of the sea and the bottomless pit represent such mental monsters as predestination, intellectual bondage, and the idea of three gods, which has divided men's minds and rendered "one-pointed" conduct impossible, as the Hindoos would say. For such ideas destroy all power of spiritual concentration, breed unbalanced emotions, tear asunder the texture of ethics, and drive away philosophy which lives only in the Unity of God. The dragon of "Revelation" is every effort of unscrupulous men to reason away the Divinity of the Lord, and the necessity of keeping His commandments. Babylon is all pride and conceit that prevent the acknowledgment of Him and a life according to His Truth.

Many chapters of the Apocalypse are full of scenes of judgment in the world of spirits. Seals are opened, and trumpets sound, which means that the darkness and hypocrisy of a decadent church are uncovered. Through all the scenes moves the Lord in His Divine Humanity. The strength of His Love, the purity of His Wisdom and the zeal of His Providence are symbolized by the golden girdle about His breast, His head like snow, and His eyes like flames of fire and His face shining as the sun in all its glory. His voice like many waters is the spreading of new thoughts and higher beliefs into the systems of earth. He clearly tells herein why His Presence has been so little felt since the days when He walked upon the earth, beheld by

mortal eyes, and why there has been such small comfort from His Spirit. Dominion and oppression have robbed Him of us, as it were, and the Church in past ages has so narrowed education that man's thought has been long coming up to the degree of knowledge necessary for a new message from Him.

From the scenes of Judgment He turns to gladden heaven and earth with His smile as the New Jerusalem descends—a new dispensation. We read, "The tabernacle of God is with men," and again, "I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." The Lord's own human nature is the "tabernacle of God with men," the Temple of His Presence.

Swedenborg interprets the measure of the Holy City—a full, generous measure, the measure of that perfect manhood attained by the Lord in the world. The waters flowing from the throne of God are abundant, refreshing truths from His Word for those who truly unite their lives with His. For the acknowledgment of the Divine Humanity of the Lord is the wisdom which opens the inexhaustible fountains of truth in Old Testament parables, psalms and prophecies, in the Gospels, and especially in this long-sealed book of "Revelation."

How divinely beautiful it all is when rightly understood! The picture of the seven candlesticks and in the midst of them one like unto the Son of Man stands as the frontispiece of this book, and, under the inspired touch of Swedenborg's mind, it grows brighter and richer until it culminates in the vision of the City with the river of life and the tree with leaves of healing for all nations, and the sunshine of the Lord's own Presence, never again to be hidden from His children.

Swedenborg's two books explaining the Apocalypse are a fulfillment of the age-long prophecy in the mind of him who sees "the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." For to "see" is to understand, "the clouds of heaven" are the letter of the Word, and "the Son of Man coming" is the Lord in the power and glory of the Spiritual Sense shining through the Letter. Above the Cross was placed the inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, foreshadowing as it were the time when the Lord would satisfy longing souls with His likeness, revealing the hidden meanings of the Hebrew Word, and the Greek New Testament in Green, and giving the Spiritual Sense in Latin. In this language Swedenborg wrote, translating, as the Lord taught him, the symbols of the Bible into principles of practical life for the use and happiness of mankind. He did not even put his name to many of his works. "Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ" was his pen name. He said, "It is not unknown to me that many will say that a man can never speak with spirits and angels while he lives in the body; and many that it is fantasy, others that I state such things to gain credit, others other things; but I do not hesitate on this account, for I have seen, have heard, have touched."

I have read with wonderment that students of psychic life like Sir Oliver Lodge have scarcely referred to Swedenborg's voluminous works dealing with the same subject. Sir Oliver Lodge has published a number of interviews with his "dead" son, Raymond, who told how the inhabitants of eternity do the work they like best and live in the company they like best, how they are fed and clothed. But the information thus conveyed is scanty and fragmentary. It was extracted by elaborate rappings, and in a manner not at all resembling Swedenborg's face-to-face conversations with angels and spirits, or his superhuman poise while he noted down a multitude of rational happenings and visible truths sparkling like diamonds. He saw memory ossified, he heard the complaints of bad spirits when they looked into heaven and saw thick darkness. He found that angels could not breathe in an atmosphere to which their thoughts had not raised them and he saw the delicious fruits of charity which nourish both body and mind!

When we think of all those who would rejoice to have colorful details of that Unseen World to which their loved ones have gone, the sacred responsibility of satisfying their doubtful hearts is obvious. They can rejoice to know that one hundred and seventy-five years ago there arose a trained scientist who, contrary to all his expectations and plans, and the wishes of his mother, found himself a seer, and gave to the world without any profit for himself twenty-seven stout octavo volumes crammed full of details of definite contacts with the spiritual universe! He stood right up to his claim, let his wealth go, lived simply, printed all his own works, distributed them in a humble yet dignified manner. He remained cool in temperament, weighing all he did and said. He never showed signs of being racked by passion or impulse or any excitement of a supernatural kind. He never forsook his inductive habits of thinking or denied any sensible truths or scorned the smallest joys of his fellow-men. No matter how absorbed he might be in his staggering mission, he responded to every demand for his assistance or sympathy in the practical needs of daily life. On his death-bed he was asked if all he had written was strictly true, or if he wished any parts to be excepted, and he replied with unfaltering warmth: "I have written nothing but the truth, as you will have it more confirmed hereafter all the days

of your life, provided you always keep close to the Lord, and faithfully serve Him alone, in shunning evils of all kinds as sins against Him, and diligently search His Word, which from beginning to end bears incontestable testimony to the truth of the doctrines I have delivered to the world."

CHAPTER V

Guided by the light of the Divine Word, Swedenborg saw the Oneness of God in Essence and Person, and Jesus Christ as God in the humanity which he assumed on earth, and the Holy Spirit the Infinite Power for creating and maintaining goodness and happiness. This Truth is the centre of all sound Christian teaching, and unless one perceives it clearly, the Scriptures cannot be rationally explained. So one can joyously cherish the One God without denying but rather infinitely exalting Jesus Christ—that beautiful Personality toward whom millions of hearts have yearned during the ages.

For all must love the human form, In heathen, Turk, or Jew: Where mercy, love, and pity dwell There God is dwelling too.

The joy inspired by such a concept of the Lord is like the sun with its three-fold glory of warmth, light, and activity. It is like the satisfaction with which one beholds the happy balance of soul, mind, and body in a beautiful human being, or the perfect sequence of seed sprouting into blossom, and the blossom yielding luscious fruit. How sane and easy and capable of fitting into the nature of all things such a concept is! Yet what prodigious effort it cost Swedenborg to plant it so that it could grow and flourish! He uprooted vast encumbrances of argument and conjecture on the Trinity and justification by faith alone, just as Francis Bacon substituted direct observation of Nature for the scholastic method of deductive reasoning. They both obeyed the call of everlasting Truth, committed themselves to the difficulties and the solitude of a new era, and upheld their opinions against the hostility of public opinion with the hope that they might provide for coming generations a guidance more faithful and secure. They both found that "the doctrines which find most favor with the populace are either contentious and pugnacious, or specious and empty, so that no doubt the greatest wits have been very vain for reputation's sake to bow to the judgment of the time and the multitude."

Swedenborg could also have said with Bacon, "The degenerate kind of learning did reign chiefly amongst the schoolmen, who, having sharp and strong wits and abundance of leisure, did, out of no great quantity of matter, and infinite agitation of wit, spin up to us those laborious webs of learning which are extant in their books."

The new thoughts about the Unity of God which Swedenborg offered to replace the old are precious because they give one the insight to distinguish between the real Deity and the repelling appearances with which the anthropomorphic attributes with which passion-driven men have invested Him. The following extracts from his "True Christian Religion" show how he strove to supplant those unchristian concepts with a nobler faith:

"God is omnipotent, because He has all power from Himself, and all others have power from Him. His power and His will are one, and because He wills nothing but what is good, therefore He can do nothing but what is good. In the spiritual world, no one can do anything contrary to His will; this they derive there from God whose power and will are one. God also is good itself; therefore, while He does good, He is in Himself and cannot go out of Himself. From this it is manifest that His omnipotence proceeds and operates within the sphere of the extension of good, which is infinite.

"It may be evident how delirious they are who think, still more they who believe, and yet more they who teach, that God can condemn anyone, curse anyone, cast anyone into hell, predestine the soul of anyone to eternal death, avenge injuries, be angry or punish. He cannot even turn away His face from man and look at him with a hard countenance."

"It is a prevailing opinion at this day, that the omnipotence of God is like the absolute power of a king in the world who can at his pleasure do whatever he wills, absolve and condemn whom he pleases, make the guilty innocent, declare the faithless faithful, exalt the unworthy and undeserving above the worthy and deserving; nay, that he can under whatever pretext deprive his subjects of their goods, and sentence them to death; with other such things. From this absurd opinion, faith, and doctrine concerning the Divine omnipotence, as many falsities, fallacies, and chimeras have flowed into the church as there are subjects, divisions, and derivations of faith therein; and as many more may yet flow in as pitchers might be filled with water from a large lake, or as serpents that creep out of their holes and bask in the sunshine in the desert of Arabia. What need is there of more than two words, omnipotence and faith; and then to spread before the people conjectures, fables, and trifles, as many as occur to the senses of the body? For reason is banished from them both; and when reason is banished, in what does the thought of man excel the reason of a bird that flies over his head?"

Such teachings lift one up to a mountain summit where the atmosphere is clear of hatred, and one can perceive that the nature of the Divine Being is Love and Wisdom and Use, and that He never changes in His attitude toward anyone at any time. It is shown that all men cannot be made better because some are incapable of desiring self-improvement. Some people never find God. Those who think constantly of them selves never see visions. Their soul drown in the materiality that rises about them like a flood and sweeps them beyond their level. They see nothing but others who are struggling in the dark waters like themselves. They are indifferent to saving themselves or helping anyone else. But all through Swedenborg's book shines an image of the Eternal Love which embraces every human being and seeks to restrain him from sinking into deeper sin. It is explained why the Lord is called "deaf and blind" in Isaiah—that He is a though He does not see the sins of men; for He does not chastise or break His children, but gently bend and turns them to good as far as the will yield to His influence and cooperate with Him.

Another doctrine, revolutionary in those days, is that there is no such thing as predestination to hell, that all are born for heaven, as the seed is born to become a flower and the little thrush in the nest is intended to become a song-bird, if the laws of life are obeyed. In other words, all have been redeemed, and all can be regenerated, and it is a man's own fault if he lives and thinks himself out of heaven. But he does go there every time he thinks a noble thought and he stays when it has become his happiness to serve others.

Some have said that Darwin made a laughing-stock of heaven and hell but they are made no laughing-stock in Swedenborg's writings, and the never should be from anyone else point of view, so long as men are capable of sinning and feeling remorse. We are taught there is no hell of the medieval kind; but there is a mental hell into which people go who are self-confirmed lovers of evil and who willfully deny God in their heart. They do not fall into literal fire, and as they punish themselves more than enough, God takes away from them even the anguish of conscience. That is why they are never forced to put themselves into state of heavenly feeling—they would not be suffocated and robbed of the pleasures they have. But they "burn" with selfish instincts and love of dominion. They see as they think like owls and bats. They debate and litigate and fight; they practise less arts of magic and "faking" than most labor hard for air and food, as some of them seem always begrudging wood and moving grass because on earth they worked so furiously for rewards. Misers hug to the hearts imaginary money-bags. Sirens try painfully to beautify their pitiful forms and enjoy their images reflected in the dull lights of a chafed coal fire. Each gang of crooks strive to outwit all the rest, and the fiercest of rivalry shines luridly on the marred faces. Those who have tentaciously to their cruel, stupid opinions, talk hour after hour to the own idiotic kind and to dumb spirit. When they are weary of their futile efforts, all the geni, gnomes, and chancers, and robbers take hands a dance, like the crazy fantasies of fevered dream.

But these unfortunate beings are not left useless or despised by the Lord. He brings them into external order, and as far as they can be by their affections, He induces them for the sake of self to be of service to others. They enable man to the evil he is to avoid as well as to good he is to choose. They keep all the fires of ambition in him when he does not care about ideals or the public welfare, but desires rather false honor. They sharpen some mirror for unpleasant truths which the children of light must surely learn if they are to help guard humanity against brute force and every form of oppression whether it be by one or by many. Even the worst of the devils escape the sense of attraction to feel toward Him they would find, especially as He alone has divine grace of always being near them, and tender with their follies. Let anyone who would rage against his fellow men as fools and evil-doers beware, even though they may cleave prove everything they say to be just. Truly, as Balzac asserted, "Swedenborg has absolved God from the reproach attached to Him in the emanation of tender souls, for the pity of revenge to punish the of the moment—a system of injustice and cruelty."

(Continued next week.)

NEW \$5 BILL IS TURNED YELLOW BY LAUNDRY SO

Washing powder and water have caused one of the new five dollar bills to change its original green shade of gold but no concern is by treasury officials as a result.

The bill was presented at a Beumont, Texas bank, and its alteration in color caused officials to believe first that it was counterfeit. Treasury representative visited the bank to inspect the currency.

Henry Herrick Bond, assistant secretary of the treasury, said today the investigation indicated money had been sent to a laundress in a shirt and had been washed thoroughly with a solution used for cleaning clothes.

"We don't expect much of the money to be subjected to that treatment," Bond said.