

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.)

CHAPTER VI

Religion has been defined as the science of our relations to God and to our fellow men and what we owe to ourselves. Surely Christianity, rightly understood, is the Science of Love. When the Lord dwelt upon earth visible to mortals, He declared that on the two commandments, Love of God and Love of the Neighbor, "hang all the Law and the Prophets." Who could know the Scriptures, and all human thought for that matter, as profoundly as did the gentle Nazarene charged with His divine mission? He emphasized the divine necessity of love all through the Gospels. "God is Love, God is Love, God is Love!" was the invariable meaning of such phrases as these, "If ye love me, keep my commandments"; "This is my life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent"; "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (happiness and material blessings) shall be added unto you"; "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." He always visualized hatred as the opposite of God in every detail, great or small, and His teaching about hell was not as of punishment by God, but the inevitable law of evil recoiling upon those who cast themselves into hate and the burning lust and the cruel miseries of wounded pride and thwarted egotism. No matter from what angle He started, He came back to this fact, that He entrusted the reconstruction of the world, not to wealth or caste or power or learning, but to the better instincts of the race—to the nobler ideals and sentiments of the people—to love, which is the mover of the will and the dynamic force of action. He turned His words every conceivable way and did every possible work to convince the doubters that love—good or evil—is the life of their life, the fuel of their thoughts, the breath of their nostrils, their heaven or their destruction. There was no exception or modification whatever in His holy, awful, supreme Gospel of love.

Yet for two thousand years, so-called believers have repeated "God is love" without sensing the universe of truth contained in these three momentous words or feeling their stimulating power. As a matter of fact, ever since men began seriously to philosophize about life, there has been a sinister silence on this noblest of all subjects. In the history of love as a doctrine is a revelation of the tragedy of how God verily comes to seek His own, and His own know Him not. In the Fifth Century B. C., Empedocles, the Greek philosopher who held the atomic theory, took to himself the credit of being the first to understand the nature of love and to recognize its true place in human affairs. He was trying to find out the elements of which the world was composed, and by what processes it was held together. In his list of elements he named fire, water, earth, air, and then went on to say, "and love among them, their equal in length and breadth, her do thou fix in mental vision, nor sit with dazed eyes. She it is who is also thought to be implanted in the mortal members, making them think kindly thoughts and do friendly deeds. They call her Joy and Aphrodite. Her has no mortal yet observed among the elements of the world."

A century afterward, in the most brilliant period of philosophy in Greece, Plato's soul was kindled to generous indignation by Empedocles' words, and with a burst of eloquence he protested against the heartlessness of the wisdom of his age: "What a strange thing it is that whereas other gods have poems and hymns made in their honor, the great and glorious god Love has no eclogist! The wise have descanted in prose on the virtues of Hercules and other heroes, and have even made the utility of salt the theme of eloquent discourse, and only to think that there should have been an eager interest created about such things, and yet to this day no one has ever yet dared worthily to hymn Love's praises, so entirely has this great Deity been neglected." I think it was in his discourse on courage, "Lachesia," that he said that to injure anyone, even the most despised slave, was an affront to the holy bond which united gods and men and things in friendship. Then, except for the Voice of Divine Love speaking its message to the hate-dulled ears of men, more than twenty centuries passed with only here and there a mind brave enough to heed those heavily accented and attempt to translate them into the harsh speech of earth. St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, A Kempis (whose "Meditations" I have read with joy), Spinoza, Jacob Boehme, and some other mystics and Francis Bacon stood valiant-

ly on the outskirts of their time and gazed deeply into the vast, unknown sea of feeling which rolls forever beneath the darkness of words not understood. They had penetrating insight into the ways and works of love, love of others and self-love. It was Boehme who called the gnawing, burning appetites and desires of the selfish "the dark worm of hell"; of which the Scripture says, "their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

But only when Swedenborg arose out of the cold age of reason called the Eighteenth Century, did love as a doctrine again shine forth as the center and life, the beauty and the preserver of all things. With the Bible for his authority, he developed this doctrine to some extent in his "Arcana Coelestia" and more completely and systematically in his "Divine Love and Wisdom." He interpreted the whole world of human experience in terms of love—states of love—the activities, powers, and functions of love, the constructive, preventive, and courage-stirring dictates of love. Moreover, the seer discovered that love in the eminent sense is identical with the Divine itself, "that the Lord flows into the spirits of angels and men," that the material universe is God's Love wrought into forms suitable to the uses of life, and that the Word of God, rightly understood, reveals the fulness and the wonder of His Love toward all the children of men. Thus at last a faint ray, traveling through infinity from the Divine Soul, reached the mind of deaf, blind humanity, and lo, the second coming of the Lord was at hand.

Swedenborg's teachings about life can best be understood if we carefully differentiate between life and existence. The Lord bestows existence upon each of us for the express purpose of imparting life to us. His infinite Love impels Him to be a Creator, since love must have objects to which it can give its wealth of good-will and beneficence. In the Love which is the life of the Lord, we find the origin of creation. His infinite want cannot be satisfied with anything less than the existence of beings who can be finite recipients of His own happiness. At the same time such beings must have freedom and that rationality which accompanies true freedom. That is, His gift of life to men must be received voluntarily and thoughtfully by them if it is to be their own. That is why human beings pass through two distinct experiences—the birth into existence and the birth into life.

When we are born of the flesh, we are utterly helpless and dependent, while in the spiritual birth we are active, and in a sense creators. We have nothing to do with our birth into existence; for we must exist before we can make anything of ourselves. On the other hand, our birth into life is a matter of choice, we have a very direct share in it; for no real spiritual life can be thrust upon us against our will.

This is the meaning of the Lord's constant, loving invitation through His Word to all of us, to come unto Him and choose life, and be ever on our guard against the evils which would rob us of the chosen life. Only by exercising our powers of thought and keeping our hearts always warm and pure do we become truly alive. But this beautiful work of re-creation cometh not by observation, it is wrought in the quiet depths of the soul. For, as the Lord says, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but thou canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the spirit."

Therefore we should not think of conversion as the acceptance of a particular creed, but as a change of heart. It is the soul turning away from the ignoble instincts which tempt us to feel, think, speak, and act for mere self-interest and the good opinion of the world, and finding joy in the unselfish love of God and a life of usefulness to others above all things. Our choice of life is this delight—this sweet expansion of mind and heart without which no worth-while achievement is possible.

But we are not born again all of a sudden, as some people seem to think. It is a change which comes over us as we hope and aspire and persevere in the way of the Divine Commandments. For a long time we resolve like angels, but drop back into the old, matter-of-fact way of life, and do just what we did before, like mortals. We are already on the road to success, however, when we see that because we have always done something, and because everybody does it, and because our grandfathers did it, are not good reasons why we should do it. There is no plane of experience where, if we want to, we can not enlarge our lives by caring about people outside ourselves, and seeking highest, most helpful ideas of Him who is the "Way, the Truth, and the Life." When once we make up our minds to do this, and set out fearlessly, all outward circumstances and limitations give way before us. We take up our cross daily with a stronger heart and a fairer prospect of life and happiness.

Swedenborg's own mind expanded slowly to the higher light, and with deep suffering. The theological systems of his day were little more than controversies, and so full of long-drawn-out hair-splitting that they seemed like caverns in which one would easily get lost and never find one's way out again. Swedenborg had to define important keywords such as truth, soul, will, state, faith, and give new meanings to many other words so that he might translate more lan-

guage. For his doctrine of love he had to find a special vocabulary; indeed, it almost seemed as if he were himself learning a different language. He was baffled by habits of thought which any man accustomed to depend largely on his eyes would require great courage to break, so firmly are they entrenched in the sense. It was one thing for him to perceive as through a glass, darkly, the spiritual forces that sustain life, and quite another thing for him to trace them clearly back to their beautiful origin in the Heart of Love and communicate them to an age of cold reason, disputing creeds and skeptical inquiry. Trying to "think the thoughts of God after Him," as Kepler said, was a superhuman task. The only way I know to give any idea of what Swedenborg was up against is to suggest the tremendous obstacles a blind man encounters when he wishes to help others handicapped like himself. He must spend his life trying more or less successfully to make the seer understand the particular needs of the sightless, and the right method to repair their broken lives with friendship, work, and happiness. It is amazing what profound ignorance prevails even among fairly well-informed persons regarding the blind, their feelings and desires and capabilities. The seeing are apt to conclude that the world of the blind—is especially the deaf-blind person—is quite unlike the sunlit, blooming world they know, that his feelings and sensations are essentially different from their own, and that his mental consciousness is fundamentally affected by his infirmities. They blunder still further, and imagine that he is shut out from all beauty of color, music, and shape. They need to be told over and over innumerable times that the elements of beauty, order, form, and proportion, are tangible for the blind, and that beauty and rhythm are the result of a spiritual law deeper than sense. Yet how many people with eyes do take this truth to heart? How many of them take the trouble to ascertain for themselves the fact that the deaf-blind inherit their brain from a seeing and hearing race fitted for five senses, and the spirit fills the silent darkness with its own sunshine and harmony?

Now Swedenborg had a multitude of similar difficulties in conveying his impressions as a seer to the matter-clogged, mirage-filled senses of his generation. Who knows—perhaps the limitations of the blind who have eyes and the deaf who have ears may yet be a means of carrying God's messages down into the darkest places of man's ignorance and insensibility. Without wishing to be the least bit presumptuous, I hope I may have some skill to use helpfully my experience of life in the dark, as Swedenborg used the experiences of two worlds which he said were granted him to elucidate the hidden meanings of the Old and the New Testaments. It is a peculiar happiness to me to bear record of the potency of God's Love and its creature, man's love, which stand between me and utter isolation, and make my misfortune a medium of help and good-will to others. It is an ever-new sorrow to me to realize the tragedy of Swedenborg's opening words in the "Divine Love and Wisdom": "Man knows that there is such a thing as love; but he does not know what love is. . . . And because one is unable, when he reflects upon it, to form to himself any idea of thought about it, he says either that it is not anything, or that it is merely something flowing in from sight, hearing, touch, or intercourse with others, and thus affecting him. He is wholly unaware that love is very life; not only the common life of his whole body, and the common life of all his thoughts, but also the life of all their particulars. This a man of discernment can perceive when it is said; if you remove the affection which is from love, can you think anything or do anything? Do not thought, speech, and action grow cold in the measure in which the affection which is from love grows cold? And do they not grow warm in the measure in which this affection grows warm? But this a man of discernment perceives only by observing that such is the case, and not from any knowledge that love is the life of man."

The trouble is, people mistake the utterances, smiles, glances, and gentle deeds of love for love itself. It is just as if I should make the mistake of supposing that the brain thinks from its own power, or the body acts of its own accord, or the voice and tongue cause their own vibrations, or my hand recognizes anything independently of me, when really all these parts of the body are acted upon by the will and mind. Or as if I might place my hand on a beautiful lily and inhale its fragrance, and insist that the senses of touch and smell were in the flower, when in reality the skin by which I feel produces these sensations. That is the kind of appearances that should be guarded against when love, life, and mental activities are discussed. The common idea of love is that it is something outside of man—an entity floating about—a vague sentiment—one of the abstractions that cannot be talked about, because it cannot be distinctly thought about. But Swedenborg teaches that love is not an abstraction without cause, subject, or form. It does not float through the soul or come into being at the touch or sight of an object. It is the inmost essence of man out of which his spiritual organism is formed, and what we perceive as love is only a sign of that substance. Love actually keeps his faculties alive, as the atmosphere gives the senses of touch, smell, taste, sight,

and hearing their sentient life.

I may illustrate the distinction between love and its tokens, for which it is so often mistaken. For, unless we have a vivid sense of love's reality, we cannot reach it and change or deepen or purify it, so that our affections may be higher, and our joy increased. We simply go round and round in a vicious circle trying to change our tendencies, reconstruct ourselves and others, while love weeps at being left out—or if it be evil, it scoffs at us and hugs itself complacently. From my own struggle with imperfect speech I have this example of a wrong, roundabout, indirect method of making over what is marred. It would be absurd to attempt to improve my voice by operating on the sounds it emits as they float through the air. No, I must practise on my vocal organs, and that is of no use either until I improve my inner, or mental, concepts of speech. Voice is not essentially physical, it is thought making itself audible. It is literally shaped, tinted, and modulated by the mind. My supreme effort in practising is to get true images of sounds and words as it were in my internal ear, since my bodily ear is closed, and the nearer I approach the right use of mind as a speech instrument the better I shall be understood by others. This seems a far cry from voice to love; but the principle is exactly the same. Life, with all its emotions, likes, dislikes, and interests, flows, is moulded, colored, and ultimately its vicissitudes are controlled, by the inmost love of man. He should strive to form the true mental concept of love as an active, creating, and dictating power if he wishes to acquire nobler feelings, finer ideals, and satisfy his so pathetic yearning for happiness.

Love should not be viewed as a detached effect of the soul or an organ or a faculty or a function. It involves the whole body of conscious thought, intention, purpose, endeavor, motives, and impulses, often suppressed, but always latent, ready at any moment to embody itself in act. It takes on face, hands, and feet through the faculties and organs; it works and talks, and will not be checked by an external circumstance, when once it would move toward an objective.

A very real regeneration comes with the change which begins in a man when he becomes conscious of his spiritual faculties. Such a change takes place not only after periods of bereavement and sorrow, but often after experiences of which he alone may be aware. There comes a day when his eyes are cleared, and he sees himself, his present environment, and the future in their true relations. The scales of selfishness fall away, and he looks at his own life soberly.

It is amazing how prodigiously men have written and talked about regeneration, and yet how little they have said to the purpose. Self-culture has been loudly and boastfully proclaimed as sufficient for all our ideals of perfection. But if we listen to the best men and women everywhere, they will answer with a decided negative. Some of them have amassed vast treasures of knowledge, and they will say that science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all—the apathy of human beings. It is pointed out, and Swedenborg says the same thing, that man, unshooled in love and pity, is worse than a beast. He is a hornless, tailless animal; he does not eat grass; but he wantonly destroys with his reckless power of thought. He invents more and more horrible weapons to kill and mar his brother man in war; he mutilates helpless animals for the changing sport of fashion; and he has a passion for fault-finding and scandal which rises beyond his control. Many other evils are no doubt traceable to his ignorance, but certainly not these pernicious tendencies. His deliverance is not going to be through self-culture unaided by right desires.

There is another large group of well-meaning people who hold that man can be reformed largely by a change of environment; and there is enough truth in this to render it plausible and attractive. But it is over-emphasized and often wrongly applied. It is not environment that alters a human being, but forces within him. The blind, the deaf, the prisoner for conscience' sake, the poorest men with sound ideals, have all proved that they can shape life nearer to their desires, no matter what the outward circumstance.

Because there is a good deal of the child in us, we grow impatient easily and say to ourselves, "Oh, if we could stand in the lot of our more fortunate neighbors, we could live better, happier, and more useful lives." How often we hear a young man say, "If I had the opportunity of my boss's son, I could achieve great success." "If I didn't have to associate with such vulgar folk, I could become morally strong," says another, and a third laments, "If I only had the money of my wealthy friend, I should gladly do my part in the uplift of the world."

Now I am as much up in arms against needless poverty and degradation as anyone else, but, at the same time, I believe human experience teaches that if we cannot succeed in our present position, we could not succeed in any other. Unless, like the lily, we can rise pure and strong above sordid surroundings, we would probably be moral weaklings in any situation. Unless we can help the world where we are, we could not help it if we were somewhere else. The most important question is not the sort of environment we have, but the kind of thoughts we

think every day, the kind of ideals we are following, in a word, the kind of men and women we really are. The Arab proverb is admirably true: "That is thy world wherein thou findest thyself."

Swedenborg has all these different theories in mind when he makes it clear that human beings cannot be regenerated suddenly without doing terrible violence to their minds and their self-esteem. They must advance step by step, accustoming their inner eyes to a keener light before they can endure the dazzle of new truths, and they cannot be turned toward a good life except by their delight. For it is these delights that keep them free and at last give them power to choose. Co-operation with the Lord and confidence in His unwavering help, learning to understand more truths in the Word and living according to them and doing good for its own sake—these are the only wholesome ways for mortals to rise out of their old selves and rebuild their world. They are greatly to be pitied if they wish to steal the merits of Christ or demand heaven as a "reward." It is much nobler for them to look into their own hearts and drive out the dragon of selfishness; this repentance they can accomplish quickly, but they must grow slowly and as cheerfully as possible, or they will never acquire any abiding strength of character. In fact, they will never stop regenerating in this life or the next, since they will forever find more to love, more to know, more to achieve.

CHAPTER VII

Swedenborg's sayings about delight and happiness seem as numberless as the flowers and leaves of a fruit tree in full bloom; and that is not surprising when he declares that the life of man is in the delight of what he loves. There is no interest where the heart is cold, and where there is no interest, there is no delight. Human happiness is composed of countless small joys, just as time is made up of minutes and seconds; but few people with all their senses stop to think of this, and still fewer sit down to count their blessings. If they did, they would be kept so busy that the next harsh call to duty would seem music to their enchanted ears.

I do not refer to hedonism, which is seeking happiness as an end, and not usefulness. So I hope my words will not seem light to any earnest person when I speak of the universe as a table spread by Divine beneficence with a feast to the soul. Every faculty of the mind and every appetite of the body have their delights, which are the means of renewal and up-building. Every single power in man's nature, physical and mental, should have a chance to choose and appropriate to itself what is congenial and satisfying. It is not necessary, as is very often supposed, to give up natural pleasures before we can gain spiritual ones. On the contrary, we enjoy them more exquisitely as we rise in the inner life. How wonderful is a bunch of grapes sent by a dear friend—its rounded beauty and color and its delicious fragrance, with love, imagination, and poetry over and above! How rich and varied we find flowers in fragrant delights that quicken the brain and open our heart-blossoms! How endlessly the changes of sky and water and earth charm us and keep before us a lovely mirror of the higher world upon which our faith and our dreams are centered!

This world is so full of care and sorrow that it is a gracious debt we owe to one another to discover the bright crystals of delight hidden in sombre circumstances and irksome tasks. Swedenborg, whose labors were a giant's, saw inexhaustible stores of joy in the midst of exacting routine. Out of his heart and out of heaven's heart he wrote in the "True Christian Religion":

"The joys of love, which are also the joys of charity, cause what is good to be called good; and the charms of wisdom, which are also the charms of faith, cause what is true to be called true; for joys and charms of various kinds make their life, and without life from these, goods and truths are like inanimate things, and are also unfruitful."

"The love whose joy is essentially good is like the heat of the sun, fructifying, vivifying, and operating on a fertile soil, on fruit trees and fields of corn, and where it operates there is produced, as it were, a paradise, a garden of Jehovah, and a land of Canaan; and the charm of its truth is as the light of the sun in the time of spring, and as light flowing into a crystal vessel in which are beautiful flowers, from which as they open breathes forth a fragrant perfume."

As selfishness and complaint prevent and cloud the mind, so love with its joy clears and sharpens the vision. It gives the delicacy of perception to see wonders in what before seemed dull and trivial. It replenishes the springs of inspiration, and its joy sends a new river of life like blood through the matter-clogged faculties. There is a growing sentiment among thoughtful people that delight is essential to growth and self-improvement and the acquisition of nobler instincts. What induces a child to learn but his delight in knowing? Do not the pleasures of taste enable the body to assimilate food? What mind that thinks at all does not choose the ideas which please it and let all others go unheeded? What does a man do with his secret inner will but fix it upon some Eldorado which allures him, and wait until he can realize his dream? What is it but dreaming the delight that leads the brave and adventurous on to fresh

discoveries and the increase of man's natural resources? Why does the scientist often endure mental travail and repulsive tasks, if not for the delights he feels in understanding new truths or rendering a new service to others? A wise teacher or friend or true reformer does not attempt to drag a wrong-doer into the right way by force. He skillfully combines discipline with pleasant influences that may soften the stubborn will and charm the sullen mind into right thinking. Anyone who, out of goodness of his heart, speaks a helpful word, gives a cheering smile, or smooths over a rough place in another's path, knows that the delight he feels is so intimate a part of himself that he lives by it. The joy of surmounting obstacles which once seemed unremovable, and pushing the frontier of accomplishment further—what joy is there like unto it? If those who seek happiness would only stop one little minute and think, they would see that the delights they really experience are as countless as the grasses at their feet or the dewdrops sparkling upon the morning flowers.

Yet how few persons I meet realize this wealth of joy! It is a marvel and a sorrow to me to observe how far afield they go in pursuit of happiness. They look for it in the strangest of places. They visit kings and queens and bow to them; they seek happiness in travel and excitement; they dig for it into the depths of the earth, thinking that it lies in hidden treasure. Many others rob themselves of joy by superstitiously fettering their intellect for the sake of religion or convention or party policy. Most pitifully are they blinded, deafened, and starved when all the time there is within them a world of sweet wealth ready to bless their hearts and minds. It is God's good gift to them out of His Happiness, and they know it not.

To help a man to find himself is often to surprise him with new-found joy. For delight serves as a means of self-knowledge. Swedenborg says, if a man will examine his own delights, he will often realize that he is self-centered because most of his energies are directed to shaping his own life or acquiring knowledge for his private ends; but it turns out that his more enduring joys are born of an unselfish purpose to serve others and create new life in the world. These selfless delights will whisper approval to him, and he will rise thrice a man because he is conscious of new powers and new self insights. Only when you trace the footsteps of your spirit to the home of its delights shall you behold your own form and face and read your fate in the Book of Life.

(Continued next week.)

OVER THE ALPS GOES THE BELL TEL.

Transatlantic telephone messages are now crossing the Alps for the first time.

The hours of service will be the same as it is for other overseas points, or, from 6:30 A. M. to 10:00 P. M. eastern daylight savings time.

Calls from America to Milan, Italy, are routed through New York City to one of the Bell system radio transmitting stations across the Atlantic to a receiving station in Britain then by wire to London. From London telephone wires carry the calls to a submarine cable under the English channel.

From the channel telephone wires carry the calls across France and Switzerland. From then on the messages travel over a circuit of approximately 4400 miles.

Milan has nearly 60,000 telephones and a population of approximately 830,000.

This extension puts the American telephone user in communication with 21 foreign countries.

With the recent opening of the new short wave radio transmitting station at Lawrenceville, New Jersey, the Atlantic is now bridged with three telephone circuits, two short-wave and one long wave.

It is planned to add three short-wave circuits later in the year.

The rate of telephone conversation between Bellefonte and Milan is \$51.00 for the first three minutes and \$17.00 for each additional minute.

ALL MAIMED VETERANS PREPARING TO ORGANIZE

Thousands of Canadian, American and other allied soldiers who lost arms or legs on the battlefields of France, have begun, through representatives at the Veterans of Foreign Wars' annual convention at St. Paul, Minn., movements toward formation of an international "amputation" club.

Robert Burns of Winnipeg, who lost his right arm in the World War and who is the head of a Canadian "Ampy" Club of more than 1,000 members, declared that such an organization "might prevent the world from forgetting us."

"We want every Canadian, American, English, French and other allied soldier who lost an arm, leg or eye 'over there' to unite under the banner," Burns said, "and join in the fight now so we won't be forgotten."

The delegates and visitors to the veterans' third annual convention continued discussions on national issues, discussed nominees for elections, and prepared to name the 1930 convention city.

H. N. Duff, Lansing, Mich., present senior vice commander, and Admiral Robert E. Coontz, Washington, were mentioned for the national commander's post. Baltimore, Buffalo and St. Petersburg were among the cities which are seeking next year's convention.

Sprinkle a little flour on potatoes before frying, to give them a golden brown.