

THE CANADIAN EPWORTH ERA

A. C. CREWS, Editor.

WILLIAM BRIGGS, Publisher.

Vol. V.

TORONTO, MAY, 1903.

No. 5.

A Wonderful Story.

BY THE EDITOR.

A BOOK of more than ordinary interest has just come from the press, entitled, "The Story of my Life," by Miss Helen Keller, published in Canada by our own Book Room. Everybody has heard something of the girl who was both deaf and dumb, and blind, and yet succeeded in obtaining a college education, but the whole story is now presented in detail for the first time. A marvellous account it is, reading almost like a fairy tale. That one, who had no means of communication with the outer world but through her finger tips should be taught to read, write, and even speak, in three or four languages is wonderful indeed.

Helen Keller was born on June 27th, 1880, in Tuscumbia, Alabama. She was like other children until she was a year and a half old, when a serious illness deprived her of sight and hearing, and of course speech was not developed. She grew up to the age of seven, an impulsive, self-willed child, without any attempt being made to control her or to impart information.

It was a great event in Helen's life when Miss Annie Sullivan came from Boston to teach the little blind girl. Miss Sullivan gave her entire time and thought to her pupil, and lived with her for several years. The first task was to teach Helen to obey, and this was by no means easy, as the little lady had been accustomed to have very much her own way. She responded, however, to patient and decided discipline, and soon learned to love her teacher exceedingly well.

The first attempt at imparting information was by the use of objects. Miss Sullivan gave Helen a doll, and then spelled into her hand the word "d-o-l-l." When this had been done several times Helen imitated the letters and pointed to the doll, showing that she had some understanding of the lesson. The same process was repeated with a piece of cake and other objects. Going out to the pump together, Helen held her mug under the spout while her teacher pumped. As the cold water gushed forth, filling the mug, Miss Sullivan spelled "w-a-t-e-r" in Helen's free hand. A new light came into the child's face as she began to comprehend, and very soon she was asking the name of every object she touched. In a few hours she had added thirty new words to her vocabulary. Of course her progress was slow, and infinite patience and perseverance were needed by both teacher and scholar, but it was remarkable what was accomplished during the first year. Miss Sullivan talked into Helen's hand just as mothers talk into their baby's ear.

In 1890, Helen learned to speak simple words, and she can now converse very well with anyone by placing her fingers over their lips, thus interpreting what is said, and

articulating a reply. She is now able to read very fluently by means of the raised letters used by the blind; she can write very legibly, runs a typewriter and rides a tandem bicycle.

It was a great feat to gain an ordinary English education, with which most young people would have been satisfied, but Helen was determined to go to college and graduate. In 1896, she entered the Cambridge school for young ladies, to be prepared for Radcliffe College. Miss Sullivan went with her, attended all the classes and interpreted the instruction to her through the hand. Here Helen studied physics, algebra, geometry, astronomy, Latin and Greek, and obtained a good start in French and German. In English literature she read Shakespeare, Burke, and Macaulay, and the "Life of Samuel Johnson." In the preliminary examinations she passed in everything and took honors in German and Eng-

lish. The work presented many difficulties, and often the poor girl was almost completely discouraged. Very few of the books required in the various subjects were printed for the blind, and she had to have them spelled into her hand, so that she needed more time to prepare the lessons than other girls. In telling her own story she thus speaks of her difficulties:

There are days when the close attention I must give to details chafes my spirit, and the thought that I must spend hours reading a few chapters, while in the world without other girls are laughing and singing makes me rebellious, but I soon recover my buoyancy and laugh the discontent out of my heart. For after all, everyone who wishes to gain true knowledge must climb the hill difficulty alone, and since there is no royal road to the summit, I must zigzag it my own way. I slip back many times, I fall, I stand still, I run against the edge of hidden obstacles, I lose my temper and find it again and keep it better. I trudge on, I gain a little, I feel encouraged, I get more eager and climb higher and begin to see the widening horizon. Every struggle is a victory.

Photograph by Falk, 1895.

HELEN KELLER AND HER TEACHER, MISS SULLIVAN.

Copyright by Doubleday Page & Co.

Helen Keller took the full course at Radcliffe College, and passed the same examinations as the other students, with great credit to herself. One of the most interesting parts of her book is where she speaks of her favorite books. "Little Lord Fauntleroy" was her "first love," which she read and re-read many times. Then she took up "Greek Heroes," "La Fontaine's Fables," Hawthorne's "Wonder Book," "Bible Stories," Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare," "Child's History of England," by Dickens, "Robinson Crusoe," "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Little Women," etc. She d-dights in Homer's Iliad, and greatly admires Shakespeare, and "loves the Bible as she loves no other book." Next to poetry, she likes history, and tells us that she has read every historical work she could lay her hands on, "from a catalogue of dry facts and dryer dates to Green's impartial, picturesque history of the English people." In speaking of her love for books, she says: