

The Seeing See Little

by Helen Keller

At an early age, before she learned to speak, Helen Keller lost her sight and hearing. Through an ordeal of training, long hours of work, and unwavering dedication on the part of Mrs Anna Sullivan Macy, Helen learned to speak, read, and write.

Only the deaf appreciate hearing; only the blind realize the manifold blessings that lie in sight. Particularly does this observation apply to those who have lost sight and hearing in adult life. But those who have never suffered impairment of sight or hearing seldom make the fullest use of these blessed faculties. Their eyes and ears take in all sights and sounds hazily, without concentration, and with little appreciation. It is the same old story of not being grateful for what we have until we lose it, of not being conscious of health until we are ill.

I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during his or her early adult life. Darkness would make people more appreciative of sight; silence would teach them the joys of sound.

Now and then I have tested my seeing friends to discover what they see. Recently I was visited by a very good friend who had just returned from a long walk in the woods, and I asked her what she had observed. "Nothing in particular," she replied. I might have been incredulous had I not been accustomed to such responses, for long ago I became convinced that the seeing see little.

How was it possible, I asked myself, to walk for an hour through the woods and see nothing worthy of note? I who cannot see, find hundreds of things to interest me through mere touch. I feel the delicate symmetry of a leaf. I pass my hands lovingly about the smooth skin of a silver birch, or the rough, shaggy bark of a pine. In spring I touch the branches of trees hopefully in search of a bud, the first sign of awakening Nature after the winter's sleep. I feel the delightful, velvety texture of a flower, and discover its remarkable convolutions; and something of the miracle of Nature is revealed to me. Occasionally, if I am very fortunate, I place my hand gently on a small tree and feel the happy quiver of a bird in full song. I am delighted to have the cool waters of a brook rush through my open fingers. To me, a lush carpet of pine needles or spongy grass is more welcome than the most luxurious Persian rug.

At times my heart cries out with longing to see all these things. If I can get so much pleasure from mere touch, how much more beauty must be revealed by sight? Yet those who have eyes apparently see little. The panorama of colour and action that fills the world is taken for granted. It is human, perhaps, to appreciate little of that which we have and to long for that which we have not; but it is a great pity that in the world of light, the gift of sight is used only as a mere convenience rather than as a means of adding fullness to life.

I do not know what it is to see into the heart of a friend through that "window of the soul," the eye. I can only "see" through my fingertips the outline of a face. I can detect laughter, sorrow, and many other obvious emotions. I know my friends from the feel of their faces. But I cannot really picture their personalities by touch. I know their personalities, of course, through other means, through the thoughts they express to me, through whatever of their actions are revealed to me. But I am denied that deeper understanding of them that I am sure would come through sight of them, through watching their reactions to various expressed thoughts and circumstances, through noting the immediate and fleeting reactions of their eyes and countenance.

Friends who are near to me I know well, because through the months and years they reveal themselves to me in all their phases; but of casual friends I have only an incomplete impression, an impression gained from a handclasp, from spoken words that I take from their lips with my fingertips, or which they tap into the palm of my hand. How much easier, how much more satisfying it is for you who can see to grasp quickly the essential qualities of another person by watching the subtleties of expression, the quiver of a muscle, the flutter of a hand. But does it ever occur to you to use your sight to see into the inner nature of a friend or acquaintance? Do not most of you seeing people grasp casually the outward features of a face and let it go at that?

For instance, can you describe accurately the faces of five good friends? Some of you can, but many cannot. As an experiment, I have questioned husbands of long standing about the colour of their wives' eyes, and often they express embarrassed confusion and admit that they do not know. And, incidentally, it is a chronic complaint of wives that their husbands do not notice new dresses, new hats, and changes in household arrangements.

The eyes of seeing persons soon become accustomed to the routine of their surroundings, and they actually see only the startling and spectacular. But even in viewing the most spectacular sights, the eyes are lazy. Court records reveal every day how inaccurately "eyewitnesses" see. A given event will be "seen" in several different ways by as many witnesses. Some see more than others, but few see everything that is within the range of their vision.

Perhaps I can best illustrate by imagining what I should most like to see if I were given the use of my eyes, say, for just three days. And while I am imagining, suppose you, too, set your mind to work on the problem of how you would use your own eyes if you had only three more days to see. If, with the oncoming darkness of the third night you knew that the sun would never rise for you again, how would you spend those three precious, intervening days? What would you most want to let your gaze rest upon?

Write the word that goes with each clue below. The numbers in parentheses correspond to the paragraphs in the text.

1. You use this word to show your kind feeling because of a favour received. (1)
2. This word shows lack of belief; being doubting. (3)
3. It denotes a natural stream of water smaller than a river. (4)
4. This verb means to make something hidden known. (5)
5. The word means the line that shows the shape of an object. (6)
6. It is used to describe something that is more intimate, more private, or hidden. (8)
7. It is usually used when speaking about diseases that last a long time. (9)
8. It is the synonym of a long steady look. (11)

Identify the relationship between each pair of words by writing Synonym (s) or Antonym (a). Explain the words.

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| 1. faculty — capacity | 7. thrilling — unexciting |
| 2. hazily — dimly | 8. to reveal — to conceal |
| 3. worthy — meritorious | 9. immediate — remote |
| 4. texture — structure | 10. complaint — approbation |
| 5. occasionally — incidentally | 11. spectacular — striking |
| 6. luxurious — plain | 12. to imagine — to conceive |

Homophones are words that have the same pronunciation but a different origin, meaning and spelling. In the text, find homophones for the words which correspond to the definitions below. The numbers in parentheses correspond to the paragraphs in the text.

e.g. first person singular - I/eye

1. position or place (1)
2. of or belonging to us (4)
3. fine powder made from grain (4)
4. past of 'will' (4)
5. metal frame for holding coal (5)
6. under surface of a human foot (6)
7. female sheep (8)
8. the ability to see; vision (10)

Complete the following sentences with nouns formed from the words in parentheses.

1. She was at a _____ how to behave in the circumstances she was in. **(to lose)**
2. Will he ever regain his _____ ? **(conscious)**
3. Being abroad, he constantly felt a _____ for his home country. **(to long)**
4. The _____ of floods made them postpone their journey. **(to occur)**
5. They issued a _____ that their firm had been involved in the traffic of human beings. **(to deny)**
6. _____ will be the word that characterizes her best of all. **(simple)**
7. The landlady gave him _____ to move. **(to notice)**

In the following examples, choose the word which best suits the meaning of each of the sentences.

1. His witness is hardly _____ .
2. It turns to be a _____ affair, doesn't it?
3. _____ people are easily led astray.
4. They were denied _____ to the concert.
5. She applied for _____ to the university.
6. The _____ of a patient's condition is essential for a doctor.
7. Is the _____ of religious holidays of great importance in this country?
8. A sigh is an _____ of sadness or sorrow.
9. There was little _____ in her speech.
10. No one could explain the _____ of this scandalous matter on the late news.
11. In the _____ that they come, tell them to wait for me.
12. Her absence from school was an unpleasant _____ for her parents.