

*The Story of my Life.* By HELEN KELLER. *With her Letters (1887—1901) and a Supplementary Account of her Education, including Passages from the Reports and Letters of her Teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan.* By JOHN ALBERT MACY. Illustrated. New York: Doubleday, 1903. Crown octavo, pp. 441. Price 7s. 6d.

This book describes another great triumph of the teaching art achieved in the United States. The first of these was Laura Bridgman. It was Dr. Howe, of Boston, who conceived and carried out the task of teaching Laura, a child eight years old, who had lost her sight at the age of two years. Many accounts of this case have been published in books and periodicals, and there is a separate *Life of Laura Bridgman* by Lamson. Not so well known is Oliver Caswell, blind and deaf from infancy, who was also educated at the Perkins Institution for the Deaf and Dumb at Boston.

Helen Keller was born in Alabama in 1880. She lost her sight and hearing when eighteen months old. Before this she had been a forward child, could walk well and speak a little. The impressions of sight and sound seemed never to have been quite effaced; but she ceased to speak. As the effects of the illness passed away she could find her way about the house, used to fold clothes, and creep about looking for guinea-fowls' eggs in the long grass. She felt everything with her hands, and began to make signs. A shake of the head meant "No," and a nod "Yes." A pull meant "Come," and a push "Go." "Was it bread that I wanted?" she tells us. "Then I would imitate the acts of cutting the slices and buttering them." She even practised a few mischievous tricks, such as locking her mother in the pantry, and when no one understood what she wanted would get into fits of fury, scratching and kicking. At last her father took her to the Perkins Institution at Boston, when a special teacher was procured for her. At that time Helen was nearly seven years old. From this date we have two parallel narratives—Helen's account of her own recollections and the awakening of her intellect, and the teacher's descriptions of her methods and the progress of her pupil. They support and illustrate one another; but the teacher's account seems to be the most valuable. Helen Keller's own narrative bears marks of the polish of another hand. There are many passages indicating a writer who could both see and hear. Some of these may be merely the reproduction of phrases which she has taken from her reading, as when she speaks of the lustrous shell of the nautilus, which at night sails on the blue sea. It would not occur to a blind person that the sea is not blue at night. This explanation, however, does not hold good with all the passages. Helen's letters seem to be presented unchanged, and it is interesting to trace the gradual elaboration both of thought and style from the first rude efforts.

The conjunction was favourable of a most skilful teacher and a pupil naturally intelligent. Anne Sullivan evidently possesses an original mind and sound judgment, with unwearyed patience and a warm and loving heart. Her greatest difficulty in bringing the light of knowledge into the shrouded mind of her little pupil was to get her to apprehend that there were symbols for her sensations and thoughts by which she could

have communication with other persons. She failed to associate the signs for milk, confused between the liquid, the vessel which held it, and the act of drinking. "We went out," writes Miss Sullivan, "and I made Helen hold her mug under the spout while I pumped, and then, as the cold water gushed forth filling the mug, I spelled w-a-t-e-r in Helen's free hand. Helen thus describes the first apprehension of the symbol :— "I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten, a thrill of returning thought, and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that w-a-t-e-r meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free. There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away."

All the way back Helen was highly excited, and learned the name of every object she touched, so that in a few hours she had added thirty new words to her vocabulary. With this key the portals of knowledge were successively opened. She was taught finger signs, then to read embossed type, to write the braille characters and ordinary writing, and to use the typewriter ; finally by muscular adjustments to use her vocal apparatus, and to follow words by putting her hands on the mouth and throat of the speaker. Her devoted teacher went with her everywhere, and by finger alphabet kept her informed of everything around. She got lessons in plant and animal life, and in the events of the day and in the history of the world. Helen eagerly read such books as were in embossed type, and was taught German, French, Latin, and Greek. It should be borne in mind that this girl only knows words as combinations of letters or through the sense of muscular adjustments ; hence it seems that the enormous expenditure of mental energy required to teach her four foreign languages might have been much better utilised in conveying to her real knowledge. We do not, therefore, read with unlimited satisfaction about her passing the preliminary examination in Greek and Latin, German and French, for Radcliffe College, and think that she was wisely advised not to go on studying for a degree at Harvard University. But in this age it is difficult to resist the craze for examining and being examined, and Helen was spurred on by the desire to keep pace with other girls. She also passed in geometry and algebra, though for these studies she had little taste. These achievements show under what great difficulties the human mind can successfully work. It is pleasing to observe how much this girl so cruelly stricken by disease enjoyed life through the few avenues left. She delights in rowing, riding, tobogganing, bathing, and swimming. She feels the vibrations communicated by a musical instrument like the piano. The sense of smell, though of little use in conveying knowledge, affords her much pleasure ; she loves the odour of the pinewoods and the perfume of the flowers. Surrounded with sympathetic friends, she has been guarded from many of the cares and troubles of life, and only knows of the evils of the world by what reports are allowed to reach her. By long attention and practice and interpretation Helen is exquisitely sensitive to every agitation and thrill in her companions. Miss Sullivan tells us that when she was being examined by the aurist in Cincinnati "all present were astonished when she appeared not only to hear a whistle, but also an ordinary tone of

voice. She would turn her head, smile, and act as though she had heard what was said. I was then standing beside her, holding her hand. Thinking that she was receiving impressions from me, I put her hands upon the table and withdrew to the opposite side of the room. The aurists then tried their experiments with quite different results. Helen remained motionless through them all." As regards the question of a sixth sense which some people have ascribed to Helen Keller, Miss Sullivan observes, "The existence of a special sense is not evident to her or to any one that knows her. Miss Keller is distinctly not a singular proof of occult and mysterious theories, and any attempt to explain her in that way fails to reckon with her normality. She is no more mysterious and complex than any other person. All that she is, all that she has done, can be explained directly, except such things in every human being as never can be explained."

The editor, Mr. Macy, deserves much credit for the arrangement and treatment of the subject. The illustrations are tastefully designed and well executed. Altogether this is a work not only valuable to the psychologist, but likely to be very pleasing to the intelligent general reader.

WILLIAM W. IRELAND.

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### Part III.—Epitome of Current Literature.

#### I. Anthropology.

*Polydactylism and Epilepsy [Polydactylia ed epilessia]. (Arch. di psichiat., vol. xxiii, fasc. 6, 1902.) Lat.*

THE author describes two cases of polydactylism, one occurring in an adult epileptic, the other in a baby with hereditary taint of that neurosis.

The patient in the first case was a heredo-alcoholic, whose fits began in his twenty-sixth year after a heavy drinking bout. The accessory digit, consisting of two phalanges with a nail, was present on either hand, but not on the feet. It was articulated to the ulnar margin of the little finger. The same anomaly was said to have existed in the patient's father. The patient presented numerous stigmata of degeneration.

In the second case the supernumerary digit, which consisted of a single phalanx bearing a nail, was only present on the right hand; it was articulated to the radial side of the first phalanx of the thumb. No other physical anomalies were present; and no case of polydactylism was known to have occurred in the family. The only hereditary taint was epilepsy and mental debility in a maternal aunt.

In neither case were the patient's parents of near kin.

The author considers that his cases go to show a connection between polydactylism and epilepsy through a common origin in degeneration.

W. C. SULLIVAN.