

Three Days to See

By Helen Keller

What would you look at if you had just three days of sight? Helen Keller, blind and deaf from infancy, gives her answer in this remarkable essay.

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 early adult life. Darkness would make him more appreciative of sight, silence would teach him the joys of sound.

Now and then I have tested my seeing friends to discover what they see. Recently I asked a friend, who had just returned from a long walk in the woods, what she had observed. "Nothing in particular," she replied.

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. 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.

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. And I have imagined what I should most like to see if I were given the use of my eyes, say for just three days.

On the first day, I should want to see the people whose kindness and companionship have made my life worth living. 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.

For instance, can you describe accurately the faces of five different friends? As an experiment, I have questioned husbands about the colour of their wives' eyes, and often they express embarrassed confusion and admit that they do not know.

I should like to see the books which have been read to me, and which have revealed to me the deepest channels of human life. In the afternoon I should take a long walk in the woods and intoxicate my eyes on the beauties of the world of Nature. And I should pray for the glory of a colourful sunset. That night, I should not be able to sleep.

On my second day, I should like to see the pageant of man's progress, and I should go to the museums. I should try to probe into the soul of man through his art. The things I knew

through touch I should now see. The evening of my second day I should spend at a theatre or at the movies.

The following morning, I should again greet the dawn, anxious to discover new delights, new revelations of beauty. Today this third day, I shall spend in the workaday world, amid the haunts of men going about the business of life.

At midnight permanent night would close on me again. Only when darkness had again descended upon me should I realize how much I had left unseen.

I am sure that if you faced the fate of blindness you would use your eyes as never before. Everything you saw will become dear to you. Your eyes will touch and embrace every object that came within your range of vision. Then, at least, you would really see, and a new world of beauty would open itself before you.

I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you would be stricken blind. And the same method can be applied to the other senses. Hear the music of voices, the song of a bird, the mighty strains of an orchestra, as if you would be stricken deaf tomorrow. Touch each object as if tomorrow your tactile sense would fail. Smell the perfume of flowers, taste with relish each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never smell and taste again. Make the most of every sense; glory in all the facets of pleasure and beauty, which the world reveals to you through the several means of contact which nature provides. But of all the senses, I am sure that sight must be the most delightful.

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