

Helen's Views on Friends

by Helen Keller *from The Story of My Life*

Helen Keller, born 1880, was stricken with a disease as a toddler and lost her hearing and sight. However, her family found a teacher who taught Helen to sign, read, and speak. Helen became a celebrity, and was very well educated. She wrote many books and became an activist for many causes. In this passage from her autobiography, Helen discusses the people she has known and met.

Would that I could enrich this sketch with the names of all those who have ministered to my happiness! Some of them would be found written in our literature and dear to the hearts of many, while others would be wholly unknown to most of my readers. But their influence, though it escapes fame, shall live immortal in the lives that have been sweetened and ennobled by it. Those are red-letter days in our lives when we meet people who thrill us like a fine poem, people whose handshake is brimful of unspoken sympathy, and whose sweet, rich natures impart to our eager, impatient spirits a wonderful restfulness which, in its essence, is divine. The perplexities, irritations and worries that have absorbed us pass like unpleasant dreams, and we wake to see with new eyes and hear with new ears the beauty and harmony of God's real world. The solemn nothings that fill our everyday life blossom suddenly into bright possibilities. In a word, while such friends are near us we feel that all is well. Perhaps we never saw them before, and they may never cross our life's path again; but the influence of their calm, mellow natures is a libation poured upon our discontent, and we feel its healing touch, as the ocean feels the mountain stream freshening its brine.

I have often been asked, "Do not people bore you?" I do not understand quite what that means. I suppose the calls of the stupid and curious, especially of newspaper reporters, are always inopportune. I also dislike people who try to talk down to my understanding. They are like people who when walking with you try to shorten their steps to suit yours; the hypocrisy in both cases is equally exasperating.

The hands of those I meet are dumbly eloquent to me. The touch of some hands is an impertinence. I have met people so empty of joy, that when I clasped their frosty finger tips, it seemed as if I were shaking hands with a northeast storm. Others there are whose hands have sunbeams in them, so that their grasp warms my heart. It may be only the clinging touch of a child's hand; but there is as much potential sunshine in it for me as there is in a loving glance for others. A hearty handshake or a friendly letter gives me genuine pleasure.

I have many far-off friends whom I have never seen. Indeed they are so many that I have often been unable to reply to their letters; but I wish to say here that I am always grateful for their kind words, however insufficiently I acknowledge them.

Questions

1. What people is Helen referring to here: "Some of them would be found written in our literature"?
2. What kind of people does Helen dislike?
3. What does *libation* mean here: "the influence of their calm, mellow natures is a libation poured upon our discontent"?
4. What kind of figurative language is "when I clasped their frosty finger tips, it seemed as if I were shaking hands with a northeast storm"?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. enrich
2. genuine
3. inopportune
4. dear
5. solemn
6. frosty

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "Would that I could **enrich** this sketch with the names of all those who have ministered to my happiness!"

- a. worsen b. decorate c. improve d. summarize

2) "A hearty handshake or a friendly letter gives me **genuine** pleasure."

- a. real b. big c. several d. unique

3) "I suppose the calls of the stupid and curious, especially of newspaper reporters, are always **inopportune**."

- a. timely b. welcome c. annoying d. inconvenient

4) "Some of them would be found written in our literature and **dear** to the hearts of many, while others would be wholly unknown to most of my readers."

- a. disconnected b. unimportant c. special d. hurtful

5) "The **solemn** nothings that fill our everyday life blossom suddenly into bright possibilities."

- a. busy b. sincere c. joyful d. unusual

6) "The touch of some hands is an impertinence. I have met people so empty of joy, that when I clasped their **frosty** finger tips."

a. warm b. cold c. pointy d. sweet