

Helen Cohn Schucman, Ph.D. - Autobiography



Helen Cohn Schucman, Ph.D. 1909-1981

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Autobiography

Foreword

In 1975 at the request of Kenneth Wapnick, Helen Schucman expanded and updated an autobiography of her remarkable life that she felt would offer a satisfactory but unpublished biographical account of herself. In it, and in a stylized way, Helen recounted selected events and periods, in particular how she came to scribe *A Course in Miracles* and the conflicting emotions she experienced during the process. Yet for personal reasons, being the very private and self-conscious person she was, Helen decided it would not add to this portrayal of herself by including more than she did.

Nevertheless, the events and selected periods of her life Helen did choose to write about, for the most part, reliably reflect her thoughts and feelings about some of the key moments and turning points she experienced. As a result, they provide ample biographical material for becoming better acquainted with her as an individual. Hence the appropriateness, in telling Helen's story, to include her autobiography as she originally penned it. For editorial purposes, however, subtitles as topic breaks have been inserted for clarity, while certain names and dates have been corrected to properly identify people, places, periods, and events that were initially and intentionally obscured.

Also, as will be seen, Helen's composition reads quite well, a good example of her own noteworthy writing ability, which, in turn, offers a moving subjective expression about the public, professional, and private aspects of her life as she elected to portray them. Even more so, a rich, relevant, more objective portrait unfolds about this extraordinary person and her life, for greater understanding of what was a decidedly strong and sometimes conflicted personality that initially seemed a very unlikely choice to scribe *A Course in Miracles*.

Autobiography Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to describe some of the more incredible events in my life. I cannot explain them because I do not understand them. When they began I knew nothing about mysticism, and cherished an uninformed but intense prejudice against the word and everything I thought it stood for. I have not recovered entirely from this prejudice even yet. The idea that I would one day turn out to be something of a mystic myself would have filled me with horror. To some extent it still does. It is the second part of this introduction that has direct bearing on some of these most unexpected events. The first part does, however, seem to lead up to them via a somewhat indirect route.

Part one, a sort of “introduction to the introduction,” traces my early interest in religion, of a kind natural enough in a child, through a long series of disappointments to a sense of resignation and defeat. The account is actually a paper written years ago as a requirement for a graduate course in psychology. The assignment was to describe a specific problem in our lives, and discuss how it had finally been solved. My paper is given below as it is written at the time. It describes my extensive and discouraging search for God, and is obviously written by someone who is interpreting the search from a psychological rather than religious point of view. That was the conceptual framework at which I had arrived at the time, and the level at which I fully expected to remain. The actual position I held on religion was summed up in a brief preface which I wrote to the paper itself:



*Helen at 2 years old
with her mother*

“This is the story of my search for God. It began when I was a little girl, and ended comparatively recently on a somewhat tentative note. Whether you think I resolved the problem at all depends very largely on how you look at it. You could certainly say that it was never resolved, since on the subject of God I came in the end to no conclusion. On the other hand, you might also say that the problem was not really a religious one from the very beginning, so that a solution in religious terms was not essential. Either way, I got over a long-standing preoccupation with religion, and that in itself is a solution of sorts.”

That, as it turned out, was not the real end to the story, as the second part of this introduction shows. Nor would there have been any way of predicting the later events from the earlier ones. The concluding episodes remain unbelievable even to me. I know only that they happened. I will attempt to describe them as they happened, but will not even try to explain them. That would clearly be impossible.

PART I

When I was a little girl I lived at one end of a big apartment with Miss Richardson, who was my governess. Everyone else lived at the other end. Miss Richardson and I slept in the same bedroom, and we also had our own sitting room and bath. When we went out we always came straight back to our own part of the apartment. I very rarely even saw the rest of it. I had a father at the other end of the house, but he was very busy and did not often come home before I was in bed. I also had a grown-up brother who was about fourteen when I was born. He was very busy, too, and did not seem to like little girls very much. A cook and a maid lived somewhere in the apartment, but I was not their problem. The household ran very smoothly. Miss Richardson brought our meals to our sitting room and we ate there together. Afterwards she took the dishes away and put them somewhere. Georgia, the maid, cleaned up our rooms in the morning while we were out in the park.

My mother was a quiet lady, who spoke softly and hoped people would like her. She had given up teaching after her marriage, setting up a neat and orderly way of life in the shelter of her home. She firmly believed she had married a wonderful man, and deferred all decisions to what she was sure was his better judgment. She was well over forty when I arrived. While she did not permit my arrival to disturb her even way of life, she had wanted me and loved me as best she could. She was actually quite pleased with me, having wanted a blue-eyed little girl, which I happened to be. I thought she was a wonderful lady, and tried to be as much like her as possible. I did not think I succeeded very well, though.

My mother was English and so was Miss Richardson; and I thought when they talked they sounded very much alike. I loved to listen to Miss Richardson. We were on friendly though somewhat formal terms. Miss Richardson was paid to take care of me, and she did so. She never told me very much about herself, but once she did say that she did not really like living in other people's homes; and just as soon as she had made enough money she was going back to England to buy a home of her own. I had hoped she would get to like living with me, but she never really did. We got along well, though, and never had any trouble.

Miss Richardson was officially finished with me when she had put me to bed in the evening. After that, she would go into our sitting room, closing the door behind her. The sitting room had another door that led out into a hall that went to the other end of the apartment. I pretended that Miss Richardson stayed in the sitting room and did not leave, but I knew it was not true. The maid and the cook slept in, so I was not alone. Miss Richardson was free to go out in the evening if she wanted to. I never got up to see if she was still in the sitting room, because I thought it would be a terrible thing if I opened the door and found that she had gone. Lots of times I did not fall asleep until she came back. I did not say anything to her, though, because I knew it was "after hours."



Helen at 3 years old

Childhood Secrets and Quests

Before Miss Richardson got into bed, she would kneel down and sort of whisper to herself for a while. I was a bit hesitant to ask her about this, but at length I got up enough courage to do so. Miss Richardson explained that she was a Catholic, and every night before she went to bed she said the rosary. I asked her what a rosary was and she showed me hers. It was made of pretty blue beads and I liked it. I thought it would probably be a good thing to have, and might even be a little magical. I asked Miss Richardson if I could have one too, but she said that it was only for Catholics. I suggested that perhaps my mother would buy one for me, but Miss Richardson thought it would be better not to mention it. She said it was a secret, so I promised not to say anything about it.

Miss Richardson and I had another secret. This one was where we went on Sunday mornings. Instead of going to the park as we generally did, we went way over to the other side of the city so that nobody would see us. Then we went to one of the most beautiful places I ever saw in my whole life. Miss Richardson told me it was a Catholic church. I was not allowed to go inside, because I was not a Catholic. I had to promise not to wander off, and stayed inside the hallway until Miss Richardson came out again. But I could see the flowers and the candles and the statues through the little space between the two large swinging doors that opened into the church. Sometimes I heard music, and a man's voice saying things I did not understand. There was a lovely smell, too, that reached me even in the hallway. Once I sneaked round to a little chapel on the side of the church. There was a statue of a lovely lady there, with light around her head and flowers and candles in the little garden in front of her. Everyone there had beads like Miss Richardson's rosary. I wanted to stay, but I was afraid Miss Richardson would not like it. But I made up my mind to be a Catholic when I grew up, so I could come and stay as long as I liked.

Miss Richardson had a friend who was a governess like herself, and who took care of another little girl about my own age. We used to play together while Miss Richardson and her friend sat on a bench and talked. The little girl, I discovered, was a Catholic. She had a rosary, and was very much surprised when I told her I did not have one and did not know what it was for. She explained, rather condescendingly, that it was a prayer to the Mother of God. I asked her about God, and she was really shocked at my ignorance. I knew almost nothing about him. She told me that God is our father, and we could ask him for things and he would give them to us. This sounded pretty wonderful to me, and I wondered why nobody had told me about all this before.

I asked the little girl where God was, because there were quite a few things I wanted. She said that all you had to do was close your eyes and you could see him. I closed my eyes, but I did not see anything. The little girl had no trouble understanding this. I was not a Catholic, so what could I expect? She suggested that I might try the Blessed Virgin, who was very kind and would listen to practically anyone. She told me that the Blessed Virgin wore a blue dress and a white veil, and I thought of the beautiful statue I had seen in Miss Richardson's church. I closed my eyes again and did a little better this time. I thought I caught a glimpse of a white veil. The little girl said that was very good for a beginner, and I should keep trying. After all, unless I did I would go to hell and burn forever and forever.

I was so excited about the white veil that I did not pay much attention to the little girl's last remark until I was in bed that night. Then I started to scream. Miss Richardson asked what was the matter, and I told her I was afraid of hell. I was going to burn forever unless I was a Catholic and got a rosary and went inside the church. Miss Richardson was really concerned, but

she did not know what to do. She thought for a while, and finally said I had better ask my parents about religion. She explained that people generally have the same religion as their parents have, and maybe they could tell me about things. She said I need not be afraid of hell, though, because she would pray for me. I thanked her very much, and made her promise not to forget. Then I decided to ask my parents about my religion right away. Miss Richardson did not try to stop me.

I crept down the long hall to the living room, where my father was sitting alone and reading a newspaper. I watched him from the doorway for quite a while before I went inside. Father looked up and seemed surprised.

“Is anything the matter?” he asked. “Isn’t Miss Richardson in?” I said she was.

“Oh,” said father. “Well, mother isn’t here, and I don’t think she’ll be back for a while.” He picked up his newspaper, and seemed to think that the conversation was over. But I hung around. I did not know him very well and was uncertain how to begin, but I had to find out about my religion. At last I began, a little suddenly.

“Father, what are you?” I asked.

“I don’t think I understand,” said my father, evidently puzzled. “Do you mean you want to know what I do?”

I said maybe that was it. My father said he was a chemist. I asked him to explain that, which he tried to do. I did not understand what he said, but I felt it was not the answer I wanted. So I asked him if he believed in God and had a religion. My father said that he did not believe in God and was not particularly interested in religion. I asked him if that meant I had no religion, either, but he said that people should decide about that for themselves. I asked what my mother had decided, and he told me that she had some sort of a religion, but I could see he did not think very much of it. He said he was not sure quite what her religion was at the moment, but he did not seem to be particularly interested in the subject. Nevertheless, I hung around a while longer. Finally, my father saw that I really had something on my mind. He put down his newspaper and asked me to sit down. We had a long talk about religion, perhaps the only real talk we ever had.

I began by telling my father that I wanted to be a Catholic on account of hell. My father said he did not believe in hell himself, and did not think I had to worry. It seems that you could even be religious and not believe in hell, which was a great relief to me. Father said he himself had been Jewish when he was a little boy, because his father was Jewish and although his mother was not she had not minded. I asked him if maybe that made me Jewish too. I still hoped I would turn out to be something after all. Father thought I should think about it for a while, but I wanted to be Jewish right away. I asked if you believed in God if you were Jewish, and he said you could if you wanted to. Then I asked if he knew any Jewish prayers. He thought for a while, and then remembered one he had learned when he was a little boy. It began, “Lord God of Israel,” and I was very much impressed. He said more of the prayer, but that was all I remembered.

I asked my father to tell me some more about my mother’s religion, but he said he could not keep up with it and had stopped trying. I said maybe she would decide to be Jewish too, but my father laughed and said it was not likely. But I had made up my mind about myself. I went back to our own rooms and told Miss Richardson that I had talked with my father and found out I was Jewish. Miss Richardson said nothing at all. That night, while she said her rosary, I said

“Lord God of Israel,” over and over to myself. I was very excited about being Jewish. I had suspected for a long time that there was something missing about me, and now that I was Jewish I was convinced everything would be all right. I did not mention my religion to my mother, though. Somehow I felt she might not like it.

Miss Richardson left about a year later. She had saved up enough money to buy her own home at last. She kissed me before she left, and said she would remember to pray for me. I thanked her and told her I would pray for her too, if she wanted a Jewish prayer. She said that would be all right, and promised to write me and send me pictures of England. She never did, but I prayed for her every night anyway for a long time, saying my Special Jewish Prayer. After Miss Richardson left, my mother decided that I did not need a special governess any more. I had been going to school for almost a year now, and my mother told me that she would take me there herself in the mornings, and a new lady would pick me up in the afternoons and take me to the park. The lady had dinner with me in the evening, and left right afterwards.



Helen at 6 years old

It was lonely at night without Miss Richardson. I used to lie in the dark and say my Special Prayer, but it did not help much. I thought it might turn out better, perhaps, if I learned the rest of it. Maybe it was too short or something. But somehow I did not like to ask my father about the rest of it. He might think I should have remembered it the first time, after he had gone to so much trouble to remember it for me. And then the Lord God of Israel let me down in a terrible way. I got afraid sleeping by myself at night, especially when my parents went out. I did not know the cook or the maid very well, and it would never have occurred to me to go and talk to my brother. So I found a way to make my mother stay home. I kept peeking into her room, and if I saw her begin to put on her hat and coat I got a terrible stomach ache. The first time this happened it was really true, and that is how I discovered that my mother would not go out if I was sick. So I began to have lots of stomach aches after that.

My mother took me to a doctor, who looked at me all over and said he did not see anything wrong. After a few more stomach aches my mother took me to another doctor. I did not make any connection between my stomach aches and the doctors. They did not ask me any questions, because my mother explained things to them. It was unfortunate that I always grabbed my right side during my “attacks,” and that my expressions of pain must have been pretty convincing. I even vomited on special occasions, and got all worked up and feverish, and then went cold all over afterwards. I also had a few stomach aches when my mother was not going out, just so as not to be too obvious. If I had not been so careful about such details I might still have my appendix. One day my mother took me to a special sort of doctor, who examined me for a long time and told us to come back again and he would examine me some more. Afterwards I heard him tell my mother that he could not find anything really wrong with me, but under the circumstances ... He finished the sentence out of my hearing.

A few days later, the lady who generally came in the afternoon arrived early in the morning and put on my hat and coat while my mother put on hers. I asked where we were all going, and my mother told me not to get excited or nervous. We were going to the hospital where the doctors would fix it so I would not have those awful stomach aches any more. I did not understand this at first, but when my mother explained some more I began to scream. In between screaming, I said

that I never really had any stomach aches, but she thought I just said that because I was scared of going to the hospital. She and the lady practically carried me into a cab, still screaming. At the hospital a man came out and helped them get me inside. Then they took me to a room and put me to bed, and a nurse gave me some medicine. A little while later I fell asleep.

I was kept pretty groggy all that day and night, so I could not think very much. I knew my mother was staying with me, and I liked that part. I even felt maybe it would be nice being in the hospital. But the next morning they came and got me. They put me on a table and took me away. I yelled and yelled, and they had to hold me down on the table. We went into some sort of a room which looked very frightening to me, and three men were waiting there. Two of them held me while the third put a mask over my face. I screamed “Lord God of Israel” over and over, while I scratched and screamed and bit. I tried not to breathe, but I could not hold out long. The three faces bending over me began to spin round and round until they turned into one big face that first turned yellow and then black, and then I fell asleep.

When I woke up I was back in my room feeling terrible. I had a real stomach ache for a few days, but after a while I began to feel a little better and even started to enjoy myself. My mother stayed with me, and even my father came to visit me. My mother told me that my brother would have come too, but he had gone to live in the country until we came back and it was too far for him to come into town for just a little while. My mother and I talked about all sorts of things while we were together in the hospital, and the evening before we left I asked her about her religion. I had decided not to be Jewish any more after what had happened. Probably there was no Lord God of Israel after all, and that was why my father had stopped believing in him. I never really believed in God again, although I tried very hard for a long time.

Meanwhile, I had a more practical problem on my hands. We were to go home the next morning and I would have to sleep alone again. The stomach ache solution had turned out very badly, and I was hardly going to try something of that sort again. My mother would be able to go out in the evenings whenever she wanted, which I knew from experience would be pretty often. I did not even have my Special Prayer any more, because now I knew it was not going to help in a real emergency. I could only hope that my mother would come up with something better before we left the hospital. My mother seemed glad enough to talk about religion, although she said she was still “searching.” But she did believe in God, except that she was not sure how yet. She told me all about her religions ever since she was a little girl. I was very much surprised to discover that she had once been mostly Jewish herself. She did not, however, seem to like Jews very much. She told me that her father was a rabbi in England, but had come from a very good family anyway. She had some relatives who were not Jewish, which also seemed to help.

Fortunately, my father was all right too. His father had won the Congressional medal of honor even though he was Jewish, and his mother had been a Lutheran. So, it seemed, I had nothing to worry about. My mother herself was now a Theosophist. She tried to explain this to me, but I did not get very far with it. She looked calm and happy as she told me about it, and a sort of glow came over her face. I tried hard to understand what she was saying, but it did not make much sense to me. And then, all of a sudden, my mother’s English accent began to annoy me, and a dreadful thought crossed my mind. My mother sounded just a little bit silly. The thought lasted only a moment before I hid it away. Then I asked my mother if she knew a prayer I could use. It turned out that she knew lots of prayers, and she said quite a number of them for me. Some of them were pretty and a few even sounded like singing, but none of them was really right.

At last my mother thought of a prayer she was sure I would like. It was simple and fairly short, and she said it over and over to me until I knew it by heart. Then she told me she was happy I was interested in religion, and urged me to ask God to help me. She was certain that if I did that, he would show me the way. It occurred to me that she was having trouble in finding the way herself, but I did not mention this aloud. After all, she was being very good to me. She said that when we got home she would come to my room every evening and say our prayer with me. I said I thought that would be very nice. She began to stop coming after a week or so, although she did come regularly for the first few days after we were back home again. I was not particularly sorry when she gave up coming entirely. I did not want to tell her so, but I never really believed her prayer was much good. I completely forgot it myself within a month.

A Miracle at Lourdes

I do not remember much about religion from then until I was about twelve. My parents had decided to spend the summer in Europe and take me with them. I was terribly excited about the trip, but I was uncomfortable about one thing. It would be funny to spend a whole summer with my father. I could never think of much to say to him, and he did not seem to have much to say to me. Sometimes I got so uneasy with him that my stomach felt sick. I told my mother about this as the time for the trip drew nearer, and she explained the real situation about my father to me. I tried very hard to believe what she said about him.



Lourdes, France

My mother explained that father really did love me, but that he was “different.” He did not show how he really felt, the way other fathers do. In fact, she said, he did not seem to notice her much either, and of course he loved her. That argument almost convinced me. I was sure he must love mother, at least. Probably I had been mistaken in thinking he did not like me just because he did not pay much attention to me. My mother said that was it. I had been mistaken. My father was a very wonderful man, and I should try to appreciate him more.

On the trip I saw that my mother was right. My father did not pay much attention to either of us. But this was not because he did not love us, of course. It was just that he was “different,” and I would try to appreciate him the way mother did. After all, he was a wonderful man and I was lucky to have him for a father. I worked hard all summer trying to appreciate him, but I did not seem to make much progress. I spoke to my mother about this, and she said she understood. It had taken her a while to realize that he was “different,” and it had even been a little difficult for her at first. She assured me, though, that when I had once realized how wonderful he really was, I would understand how silly I had been for not appreciating him. That, it seemed, was what had happened to her.

We spent the last few days of the summer of 1921 at Lourdes. I was deeply impressed by the grotto, and I loved the statue of the Blessed Virgin standing high on top of a large rock. There were piles of crutches and braces that people had left there because they had been healed

and did not need them any more. There were prayers and services and processions all day long, and in the evenings too. I was told that people came from all over the world to be blessed and healed, and to get the special water that came out of the side of the rock where the statue of the Blessed Virgin stood. I was blessed too, and bought a bottle with a gold cross on it so I could bring some of the water home with me. We stayed at a hotel near the shrine, and I could see the rock from the balcony of my bedroom. I went out to look at the rock every evening, and thought about the crutches and the braces and all the thousands and thousands of people who came here and believed. Could all of them be wrong?

I also remembered Miss Richardson and her rosary. Of all the places in the world, this was surely the best one to buy a rosary for myself and try it out. I had bought a little booklet about the rosary which told you how to say it. Suddenly one evening I was very anxious to get a rosary and say it right away. My mother had gone off somewhere, and my father was reading alone in their room. I told him I wanted to buy a rosary. He put his hand in his pocket and gave me some money without looking up. Much to my own surprise I asked him to come to the store with me. He said he was tired and wanted to read a while. Besides, the store was just across the street and it was still light out. There was no reason why I should not go by myself. For some reason, the conversation got out of hand from then on. I said a lot of very unexpected things which I could not understand at all afterwards.

First I said I could not speak French, so the man in the store would not understand what I wanted. My father looked up in surprise. He reminded me that I had been taking French lessons for some time and spoke it much better than he did. Then I said I did not understand French money, and needed help with it. My father said I could just ask the man in the store. He was sure I would not have any trouble. Everyone, he said, was accustomed to Americans. Then I said I just plain did not want to go by myself, and wanted him to go with me. I was getting pretty excited by that time. All of a sudden I got dreadfully angry, and began to scream in sheer rage.

My father just looked at me. He was not angry. He simply did not understand the whole thing. He said something must be the matter with me, and he thought the best thing to do was to go to my room so I could get over it. My mother would be back in a few minutes, and he would send her in to me so she could straighten things out. As I turned to go, he called me back because I had forgotten the money. He said I might still want the rosary when I felt better. I grabbed the money and ran out. In my room I sat down on the bed. I did not cry. I just sat there and did not feel anything. Mother came in a little later. She said that father had told her something was seemed to be wrong, but all he knew about it was that I had wanted to buy a rosary and he had given me the money, after which I had acted oddly.

I did not say anything. My mother said she did not think I was being very appreciative, after father had given us such a wonderful summer and had been so kind to us. I said it was not true that he was being nice to us. He was horrible and had always been horrible. I told mother she had just plain made up the part about his being "different," and I was not going to try to appreciate him any more. It was silly to pretend he was wonderful. He did not care about anybody, and there was no sense in saying that he did. My mother was really shocked. She said I did not realize the terrible things I was saying, and I should go and apologize to him for making such a fuss when he as being so considerate. I said I wouldn't. There was a very long silence. Then

mother repeated that I did not realize what I was saying, and this time I knew she was right. I began to cry, and mother took me in her arms and said lots of times people say bad things that they do not really mean. We would just forget all about it. Of course father really cared for us. It had all been a mistake.

I cried a lot more, and said I thought I must have been sick or something. That was it. I was sick and did not know what I was saying. By that time I actually felt sick, so my mother helped me to bed and I stayed there until the next day. None of us ever mentioned the episode again. In the morning father went somewhere for the day, and mother came with me to buy the rosary. I also bought a little medal of the Blessed Virgin, and we took them both to a priest to have them blessed. We stayed in the grotto for Mass and for a beautiful service afterwards. It was Saturday, and there were even more flowers and music and processions than usual. People were praying everywhere. It was all very, very beautiful. I asked my mother if she had ever been a Catholic, and she said she had not been. But you could see she was weakening.

That night in my room I stayed up in the dark with my rosary in my hand and my medal round my neck, and thought about God and Miss Richardson and the Blessed Virgin. Suddenly I had an idea. This was a wonderful place, and perhaps if I asked for a miracle for myself I would get it. And then I would believe in God and become a Catholic. I went out onto the balcony and looked over to the rock.

“Please, God,” I said, aloud, “I’m not a Catholic, but if all of this is true, would you send me a miracle so I can believe in you?”

I had already decided what the miracle should be. I would close my eyes and say three Hail Marys. If there was a meteor in the sky when I opened my eyes again, that would be my miracle. I did not really expect to find the meteor, but I closed my eyes and said three Hail Marys anyway. When I opened my eyes again the sky was full of shooting stars. I watched in stunned silence, and then whispered, “It’s my miracle. God really did send it. Look, oh look! It’s my miracle.”

I stood quite still until the stars had faded away and the sky was dark again. And then I remembered. Our guide had told us that this was the time for meteor showers in this part of the world, and they would be coming pretty often soon. It was not really a miracle at all. I had never seen a meteor shower before, and that was why I had not recognized it right away. Probably I had even picked on a meteor for my miracle because the guide had talked a lot about the showers only that afternoon, and I had thought at the time how much I would like to see one. You could hardly make much of a miracle out of that. You have to be pretty careful, or you can get fooled. Well, I know a meteor shower when I see one. I can’t be fooled so easily. Then I had another thought. Couldn’t it be a miracle that I thought of asking for a meteor just before a meteor shower was due? After all, I had no way of knowing one was coming just then. Maybe it was a real miracle after all. But I could not quite talk myself into it again. I had become deeply suspicious of the whole thing. I even got a little bit angry about it.

Perhaps, I said to myself, the water and the healings and the crutches were all like the meteor shower. People just thought they were miracles. It all could happen that way. You can get fooled so easily. I was about to settle it that way when another thought came that made me seriously uncomfortable. I had told God that if I saw a meteor when I opened my eyes it would be

my miracle. I had certainly seen a meteor. That much was fact. If there was a God, he might not like the way I was taking his miracle. I was not being appreciative. If God had taken the trouble to send a miracle especially for me, he might not take kindly to all this skepticism. And if there was a God, then there might also be a hell for people who did not appreciate him.

I had to argue my way out of the whole thing finally, although I remained somewhat uneasy about it. I persuaded myself that if God was going to bother sending me a miracle at all, he would surely have sense enough to make me believe in it. A miracle is something you have to believe in. I did not really believe in this one, so it could not have been a genuine miracle. Anyway, I decided, I did not have to make up my mind definitely about it right away. There was plenty of time for that. I would think it all over later. I was getting very tired, so I went inside and after a little while I fell asleep. I had a few uneasy dreams, but I did not remember that they were about when I woke the next day.

About a year after we returned from the trip, my brother got married and we moved to a smaller apartment. Georgia the maid came with us. She and I had been friends for some time, but we became much closer now. Georgia came from Alabama and did not have a family in New York, so she and I sort of stuck together. We used to talk things over quite often, but we did not get around to discussing religion for some time. But once she had mentioned the subject, I became very much interested in her religion and asked her to tell me all about it. Georgia was a Baptist. Her church officially believed in hell, she told me, but I gathered that her own personal God was quite friendly and did not go around scaring people with hell-fire and damnation. Apparently, he did not bother his children by making too many unreasonable demands on them, but he did not let them down and arranged it so that things always came out all right in the end. This sounded good enough to me. I was none too sure that everything would come out all right myself.

Georgia read the Bible every evening, and I began to come to her room so that we could read it together. It was a nice thing to do before going to bed. My mother had apparently stopped being a Theosophist, but she did not discuss her more recent religious ventures with me and I did not like to raise the question myself. I still wore my medal of the Blessed Virgin, but I had never been able to reach a definite conclusion about my miracle. I thought of it every once in a while, but I always held off taking a firm stand. Meanwhile, Georgia and I read the Bible in the evenings.

One Sunday, she asked me if I would like to go to church with her. Her church was way up town, and she told me all about it on the way up. I was very much excited. Georgia said that God would be waiting for us, and she was usually right. Before the service Georgia took me right up in front of the church and introduced me to the minister, who said "God Bless you" to me. Then Georgia and I sat down together, and waited for the Lord.

The people in Georgia's church sang songs that were very different from anything I had ever heard before. They sang them over and over, beginning softly and getting louder and louder each time. It got so beautiful you could burst into tears. A number of people did. But most of them became very happy, and began to clap their hands and stamp their feet to the music. Some of them even stood up in their seats or went out into the aisles and began to shout. I could tell they were feeling wonderful even though I could not understand most of the words they were shouting. I was not sure they were speaking English at all. It was obvious, though, that they were on friendly terms with God, and were quite accustomed to speaking to him openly and directly. At first I was quite surprised by all this. I had always addressed God formally, with respect and even

deference but hardly with intimacy. I did not know what to make of this very different approach initially, and even felt it might be a mistake. But soon my feet began to tap with the music. A little later I was clapping my hands, and still later I was singing right out loud just like everyone else.

Georgia was swaying back and forth with her eyes closed, but every once in a while she would look toward me and smile. I was feeling happy and very much at home. Then the minister gave us a wonderful talk. He told us all about God and Heaven and salvation. He said this world was not where we really belonged, and wonderful things were waiting for us. Some day, he said, we would all be with the Lord forever. All we needed was faith. Faith was the gift of God, and anyone who asked him for it would be given it. There was a “consecration collection” after the sermon, which Georgia explained to me. If you wanted something special, you consecrated three dimes to God and asked God for faith. After that we sang some more, and then everyone went outside to shake hands with the minister. When my turn came he asked me how I liked the service and I said it was just wonderful. He said I should come again and patted me on the shoulder.

Now that I had been specially invited I went to church with Georgia as often as possible, and consecrated my three dimes for faith. In the church I prayed and sang with everybody else, but outside when I tried to talk to God I was never really sure anyone was there to listen. Something was missing. And finally one day I found out what it was. Georgia took me one Sunday to a baptism service. People in long white robes stood at the side of a marble pool in front of the church. The minister, who was now a great friend of mine, stood in the pool and laid each of the people gently back into the water. Afterwards, they walked out of the pool on the other side and joined the ranks of the redeemed. I was very much impressed. Before the ceremony the minister had said, “Those who are to be baptized today have come to fulfill the wishes of the Lord. He has told us that we must be baptized to be saved. Unless you are baptized you cannot be pure in heart, and unless you are pure in heart you cannot see God.” That’s it, I thought to myself. You have to be baptized before you can see God. I had not been baptized. That was what was missing.

That evening I talked to Georgia about baptism. She had been baptized in the South and said it was the most wonderful experience in her life. She said when you get baptized the Spirit of the Lord descends on you and works a miracle in your heart, and afterwards you have a big party. Baptism makes you a real child of God. After all, the Bible says you are supposed to be baptized. Georgia took the Bible and showed me the passage. That was what it said, all right. There was no doubt about it. I told Georgia I wanted to be baptized as soon as possible, and she suggested that I talk to her minister about it. He was very, very nice. He agreed that I should get baptized, but it seems there was a problem I had not foreseen. When a minister baptizes you, you are expected to join his church. As a child of God you become a member of God’s household. The minister would of course baptize me if I wanted him to, but he thought maybe I would be better off if I were baptized in a church that was, well – he hesitated a little, and then said – nearer my home. Perhaps I should go home and think it over.

I went home and thought it over. I had not realized that joining the church was part of being baptized, and I felt that one should at least believe in God first before taking a big step like that. I tried the minister of a Baptist church near where I lived, but he said much the same thing. He would be glad to baptize me and accept me as a church member. Those seemed to be the rules. At last I found a minister who held special services in a sort of large meeting house, and also had special baptism services there once a month. Georgia and I went to one of his meetings, and she explained to me that he was an Evangelist of the Lord, and had a special mission converting

people. After the service, which was a very exciting one, I went up and asked the minister about being baptized there. He asked me all about me and my religion, and also about my parents and theirs. He said he would baptize me, but he thought I should ask my parents about it first. Being baptized, he said, was a very serious step. It meant taking a definite stand on God, and he thought my parents might have strong convictions of their own on the matter. I said I did not think they would care, but he said you never can tell. He would not refuse to baptize me even if they did not like the idea, but he thought I should at least tell them about it. He felt that my father especially might take my baptism hard, being Jewish. I was to speak to my parents and then come to see him again.

I did not expect opposition from my mother and she did not offer any. She liked the idea and promised to buy me a pocketbook I had been wanting as a special present. I was much more worried about my father. It was hard to figure out how he felt about anything. Maybe the minister was right. Maybe my father had strong feelings about baptism. He might even get very angry. You could never tell about him. I hesitated quite a while before asking him, and when I finally went to talk to him I had a lot of trouble in starting. After shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other I got around to it at last.

“Father, I’ve decided to get baptized,” I blurted out. “How do you feel about it?”

Father said he thought I should get baptized if I wanted to. I waited for him to say more, but he obviously saw no need to do so. I felt there was more to say, though.

“You don’t care, do you, father?” I asked, anxiously. “I mean, you’re not angry or anything?”

“Me?” asked my father, obviously surprised. “Why should I be angry?”

I was still not satisfied. Somehow it did not seem right that I should get off so easily.

“You’re really sure you don’t care?” I asked.

My father assured me that he was quite sure he did not care. I suppose I should have been pleased. I had got what I wanted, and could not understand why I felt so unhappy. Father obviously had nothing more to say, and I left very quickly because I did not want him to notice that I had tears in my eyes. The next day I went back and told the minister that my parents did not object to my being baptized. There was to be a baptism ceremony the following Sunday, and I would be included. He told me I was to pray in the meantime and I said I would, or at least I would do the best I could. The minister said that was all that was necessary.

Georgia came to my baptism as my witness and my friend. She helped me get ready and put on my white robe. She was very excited, and kept telling me that I was going to have the most wonderful experience of my life. I hoped that she was right. After the ceremony I got dressed and went to the minister’s study to get my baptismal certificate, while Georgia put my wet things away in a bag we had brought with us. The minister wanted to be sure he got the name right, so he asked me to spell it out for him. My first name came out all right, but when I got to my last name I did a very peculiar thing. I was quite surprised when I did it, and afterwards I was too embarrassed to correct it. Instead of giving him my father’s last name I gave him my mother’s maiden name as mine. I turned scarlet, but it was done now and I let it go. The minister made out

the certificate and handed it to me. I hid it in my purse and ran back to Georgia. I was glad she had not heard me make that terrible mistake.

On the way home, Georgia said she thought we should have some sort of party so she treated me to ice cream and cake and bought me a box of candy afterwards. I enjoyed the party, but when we got home I began to feel quite bleak. It was not really different, now that I had been baptized, but I went on going to church with Georgia a while longer, just in case. Then I began to go up only once in a while, and finally just sent up my three dimes for Georgia to consecrate for me. There was no use. I did not have faith. Georgia said it was probably the work of the devil, and suggested that I pray anyway. She also promised to pray for me. God would not let me down, she was sure, now that I had been properly baptized. I was very fond of Georgia. She had been kind to me. I thanked her for her prayers and let it go at that.

Soon after that I ran into other problems. I had been fat for a long time now, but it did not bother me too much until boys became important. At parties boys teased me about being fat, and did not ask me to dance or phone for dates. I was pretty miserable and did what I always did when I was pretty miserable. I ate. The more I ate the fatter I got. I began to refuse all invitations, and came home right after school and stayed there. I had not found God, and it was beginning to look as though I was not wanted much on earth either.

My mother realized I was in trouble and really tried to help. She had found the most wonderful Christian Science practitioner who, she said, had shown her the light. After all, I had nothing to lose and might even come out a bit ahead. My mother gave me a book on Christian Science to read first. Unfortunately it did not make much impression on me one way or the other, and I went to the practitioner more in the spirit of hope than of faith. The practitioner gave me a lot of arguments with the glibness born of frequent repetition, but I could not help thinking that by her way of argument you could prove just about anything. I realized very soon that I was up against the same old problem. You have to believe first and then find proof for what you believe. There was no point in going through all that again.

But the world was still with me and I had to deal with it somehow. I decided to retire from social life and become an “intellectual.” Now I refused invitations because I preferred to stay home and read, and when invitations did not come I did not care because I had something better to do. Eventually I stopped eating too much and slimmed down, but I had got the idea that the world was an uncertain and treacherous place, and I was not eager to return to it. I did not, in fact, know very much about it. I had missed out on the early party and dating stages, and was not up on the popular plays and movies. I did not understand what the boys and girls of my own age were talking about, and as time went on it was harder and harder for me to communicate with them. I went on being an “intellectual.” I did not have much choice in the matter, really.



Helen at 16 years old

College and Marriage

By the time I entered college in 1931, an intellectual role was my chief source of comfort and protection. I majored in English, and told my mother I intended to become an English teacher as she had been. My mother was pleased with this idea, and so actually was I. It seemed to be a friendly thought. This was not, however, my secret intention. I had no doubt that some day I would be a great writer, probably an internationally famous novelist. I would live by myself and write. I would be different from other people, but distinctly better. In view of my secret goal, the intense difficulty I had in writing anything was particularly trying to me. Further, I was so sensitive about my writing that even when I finally succeeded in getting something down on paper, I was quite likely to hide it and refuse to hand it in. It was difficult to deny that this was not in keeping with my future career as I envisioned it. I somehow managed to work it into my role as both an intellectual and as a great writer-to-be, although I was never too comfortable about it. As an intellectual I was hypercritical, and as a future writer I was supersensitive. Some day these attributes would add to my eminence, even though they were rather hard to cope with at present.

Meanwhile I read a lot of philosophy as well as literature, and became happily involved in systems of thought, the laws of reasoning, and logic in particular. To the business of living I paid as little attention as possible. In my second year at college I met Louis, a boy who worked in the library. He was an “intellectual,” too, and we began by talking about books. We branched out into philosophy, in which he was also interested. He had not gone out with girls much, and was glad to be able to talk to one who did not make him uncomfortable. We began to see each other every day for lunch, and then every evening as well. A few months after we had met he asked me to marry him. It was the only proposal I had had. It was also the only one he had made. I talked the idea over with my parents, or at least my mother. My father said he barely knew the young man and could hardly have much of an opinion on the matter. My mother, although slightly tentative because the young man was Jewish, was nonetheless very enthusiastic about marriage. She asked me if I were sure he was really the right one, and I said I was, not really knowing what else to say. Then my mother kissed me and began to arrange for a party. And so, it seemed, I was engaged. I was married a few months afterwards in 1933. My husband is not religious, and largely to please his parents we arranged for a short ceremony to take place in a reformed rabbi’s office.

The Sunday before we were married, Georgia made a special consecration for us, and that time I really appreciated it. I was quite uneasy about the whole thing. I went for a thoughtful walk the afternoon before the ceremony, and what with one thing and another I stopped off at a Catholic church. I did not say any prayers, but I lit two candles, one for my future husband and one for me. It seemed like a good thing to do. The next day my father drove us over to the temple. I was much too nervous about the ceremony to want an elaborate affair, and asked the rabbi to make it as short as possible. It was over in less than ten minutes, and I have no idea what the rabbi said. My husband and I were both a little surprised to realize that we were married. After the ceremony we each went back to our parents’ homes to study. We were married in late May, during the week of final examinations.



Helen & her husband, Louis

Being married made little change in my life at first. I still had two years of college, which I wanted to finish. My husband graduated the year we were married and decided to go into the book business. We did not have anything to live on while he got started, so he moved in with us for the time being. The apartment was large, and there was plenty of room. Besides, I did not feel really married, and was very happy with the arrangement. My husband was busy with the book business, and I was busy with school. I expect I would have liked to continue it indefinitely, especially as my husband did not find it difficult. The household still ran smoothly, meals were on time, and he and my father played chess in the evenings. After my graduation in 1935, however, we were forced to take a place of our own quite suddenly. My mother became very ill, and the doctor suggested that she be relieved of all housekeeping pressures. My parents moved to a small apartment in a hotel which provided complete service, and my husband and I moved to a little place of our own nearby.

My parents no longer had any need of Georgia, but she had been with us so long that she was virtually a member of the family. Besides, the decision to give up the apartment had been very sudden, and there had been no chance for Georgia to look around. Times were bad, too, and few families were able to afford maids in those years. Georgia had never worked for any other family since she came up North from Alabama as a girl, and my parents felt a real obligation to her. They made a very generous arrangement for her and also for me. My husband and I could hardly afford a maid, but my parents agreed to continue to pay Georgia's salary and have her come to work for us. I was grateful for this decision, not only because I did not know how to cook. Georgia was a very old friend and it was nice to have her around.

My husband's bookstore was very far away from our apartment, and when we decided that I would work in the store, too, it was obvious that moving nearby was the sensible thing to do. We found an apartment a few blocks away from the bookstore, but I did not like it at all. It was a long way from where my parents lived, and I could not get over the feeling that I did not really belong there. I also began to help my husband in the bookstore, and I did not like that either. I tried to think of it as "our" store, but I could never quite manage it. About a year later I got very sick, and the doctor told me I would need an operation, which frightened me half to death. I had nightmares of being held down on a table and having a black mask held over my face. I woke up screaming almost every night. I held out in terror for several months, during which I merely got sicker and sicker. At last I went to talk it over with the doctor again. He assured me that the surgery did not amount to much, and that I would know nothing about it until it was over. He was also fairly certain I would be out again in a week or so. I was too sick to stall any longer, and arranged to go to the hospital the next day.

That evening I sat down by myself and tried to get organized. It would be much easier, I thought, if I believed God would take care of me. There was a chance, I supposed, that he existed after all. Certainly the fact that I did not believe in him had nothing to do with his existence one way or another. In any case, there could be no harm in attempting a reasonable compromise. I would put the operation in God's hands in case he existed, and if things turned out all right I might even be able to believe in him again. There was nothing to lose by trying. I said the Lord's prayer, put my operation in the hands of God, and went to the hospital the next day with my medal of the Blessed Virgin around my neck.

As it happened everything went wrong. I was unconscious for a long time, and did not get out of the hospital for over four months. One of the nurses who took care of me was Catholic

and very religious. She thought I was Catholic too, having seen the medal I was wearing. She told me that she had been praying for me every day, and had offered up a mass of thanksgiving when I finally regained consciousness. God had been very good to me, she said, and it was a real miracle I had pulled through. I did not see it that way myself. I was very angry about the whole thing, and stayed angry about it for years. If this was God's idea of making things turn out all right, I thought, he certainly had a nasty sense of humor. The nurse did not approve of my attitude, and said, rather stiffly, that she would continue to pray for me anyhow. God would make me see things properly. She did not think I appreciated all he had done for me.

That last remark had a certain familiar ring to it that made me even angrier. I told the nurse that I could not stop her from praying, of course, but added that I would appreciate her not asking God for another miracle until I was at least strong enough to cope with this one. I said that, all things considered, I was pretty lucky to have survived it. I was, in fact, very willing to wait quite a long time before the next one, and I suggested that she tell God there was no hurry. The nurse replied that it was obvious that I was in great need of prayers regardless of how I might feel about it, and that she would continue trying to help me in spite of my lack of appreciation for the miracle God had bestowed on me. I felt anything but grateful for her continued help, and told her so. What I really needed was to feel better and get out of the hospital, and it did not seem likely to me that prayers would help in this.

Throughout all the long days in the hospital I could hardly wait to get out; but when I finally went home I was not at all enthusiastic about it. Until I had gotten sick I had always cherished a vague idea that nothing really bad would happen to me. Now I felt that only bad things were likely to happen, and actual disaster seemed inevitable. I walked around on tiptoe, waiting for the axe to fall. I was unwilling now to take a chance on anyone or anything. I was convinced that nobody really cared much about me, a belief that neither my husband nor Georgia could shake. I felt abandoned by earth as well as Heaven. I was sick for a very long time, but eventually I was forced to recognize that I was better physically and had to declare a moratorium on being an invalid, a decision the doctor felt was long overdue. It was, however, one that left me in a very difficult situation. Being sick had given me something of a vacation from my problems, but the problems were still there and my being so angry did not help me resolve them.

It was years before it finally dawned on me that there was just a chance I might have been looking at things the wrong way. It had taken over twenty years for me even to suspect this possibility. Having conceded this much, I began to review my life thus far, and among other things I went over my long and erratic search for God. It was clear that I had gotten nowhere with that. Admittedly, the fault may have been mine. Perhaps, as the nurse had said in the hospital, I did not appreciate all that God had done for me. I had had trouble accepting a miracle once before, as I remembered. Nevertheless, I thought, people can only set up projects as best they can, and in my way I felt I had tried. There was no point in speculating about how the search might have turned out had I undertaken it differently. If God exists, which I very much doubted, he might someday bring up the question of religion himself. If he does not exist, well, then that's the way it is. For myself, the search was over.

A few more positive conclusions came from my period of reconsideration, though. It was true that I had not found the green pastures, but it occurred to me that I did have a home in spite of that. In fact, I was sitting in my home at that very moment. It was just that I somehow had not noticed it before. I was not living in it alone, either. My husband lived there with me. I had

got around to thinking about him at last. He might be quite nice, I decided. He was not God, of course, but that was probably just as well, all things considered. And he did seem like the sort of person you might work out a reasonably good relationship with. It would take a while, naturally, and might be quite difficult sometimes, but I might just as well get started on it. We have been married a long time now, and on the whole we like it that way.

When I turned away from the search for Heaven, I realized I had better start to search for a good way to spend the rest of my life on earth. This, I recognized, might be difficult, since I still knew very little about the world. But again, I might just as well get started. Georgia took care of our housekeeping, and we had no children to occupy my time. At first I tried the book business again. My husband is a first-rate book man, who had spent much of his earlier school years truanting from classes and happily reading in the public library. He had collected an excellent library, and was still more interested in buying and reading books than in selling them. Nevertheless we managed to struggle by, and finances were not too serious a problem. My father was generally willing to help us out if we really needed anything. But while the book business was clearly the right place for my husband, it was equally clearly the wrong place for me. I began to go there less and less frequently, and usually quarreled with my husband when I did. We just could not seem to get along together in business. I began to feel trapped in a bad situation, without a clear-cut idea of how to get out of it.

For a time it began to look as though my earthly search might end up as ineffectually as my search for Heaven. Yet despite my increasing depression, I had to recognize that I was singularly free to do whatever I wanted. My husband gave me active support and encouragement in planning for an independent career, and my father did not object to paying whatever expenses might be involved. The problem was that I could not seem to make up my mind about what I wanted to do. It was obvious that I was not going to be the great writer I had once envisioned. However, I continued to consider various other careers largely at the level of fantasy, without seriously considering the necessity of undertaking realistic training. I had been out of college for a while now, and was actually quite fearful of going back to school. The truth is that I had become intensely afraid of failure.

My husband showed exemplary patience during our long and frequent discussions about my potential career, but I was so uncertain that it took years before I could arrive at any sort of decision. Even after I had more or less decided to become a psychologist, my efforts were limited for a long time to endless discussions with my husband, writing for course catalogues, and talking about training possibilities with college advisors. Actually, I did not know what psychology was really about. I had only a vague sort of notion that it had some of the answers I needed. I finally made up my mind to overcome my fears and enter graduate school, but at the temporary cost of perspective on the undertaking. I went back to school in 1952 almost fiercely driven to get top grades. Having failed in the search for Heaven, I was grimly determined to succeed on earth.

My mother died while she was considering the possibilities of Unity, so she did not have time to come to any conclusions. I remember the words at her funeral service, “ ... And it has pleased Almighty God to call his daughter to her eternal rest ...” I hope it was that way with mother. After all, it would be only fair. My father died some years later. My brother and I had never got to know each other well, but we talked quite a bit after father’s funeral. To my surprise, my brother asked me what sort of a person I thought father really was. I told my brother that he had

been in business with father for a number of years and had seen him every day. Surely he was in a better position to know father than I was.

“You know, it’s a funny thing,” answered my brother, after a rather long silence, “I never really found out much about him. I thought maybe you would know.”

I merely shook my head. We were both silent for a time, and then agreed that it did not matter any more. As for me, it was not the first problem I had to give up unsolved, and it would probably not be the last. I was willing to let it go at that.

Of the Old Gods only Georgia remains. She is something of a miracle herself. Her hair is white, but otherwise she has changed very little. I have no idea how old she is, and she gave up counting the years a long time ago. She still goes to church regularly, and says a prayer for me every day. She insists that the Lord will reveal himself to me yet, and I always smile but do not answer. There is really nothing for me to say. I do like to think of Georgia praying for me, though, and I take out my medal of the Blessed Virgin and look at it every once in a while. I would hate to lose it, somehow. Beyond that, I do not think about religion very often any more.

PART II

As it turned out, the subject of religion was not a closed issue, and it was brought up again in a most unexpected way. Actually, the first episode in a long and startling series of events took place at a particularly unlikely time. I had shifted from agnosticism to angry atheism, having reached a point where the mere mention of religion irritated me. I was heavily armed with “scientific” weapons, prepared and even eager to do battle with ideas even remotely religiously toned. I was also angry at people. They seemed to have developed an exploitative tendency and lack of consideration the extent of which I had not previously suspected. I felt increasingly deprived, unappreciated and resentful, and had no idea that I was quite depressed and anxious. I firmly believed I had overcome superstition at last, and was finally looking at things realistically.

One cold winter evening in 1938, my husband and I went to visit some friends who lived some distance away. I hated public transportation and avoided it wherever possible. I was a secret cab-taker for years before I was married, but had generally left the cab a block or so from our building because my father strongly disapproved of taxis except in emergencies. Now I no longer saw any need for such apologetic behavior. I wanted to take a cab that evening, particularly as it was starting to snow. My husband reminded me, to my great annoyance, that the trip was long and the subway only a block away. Without expressing further objections I marched angrily to the subway, grimly determined to suffer. As we reached the subway platform a train was just pulling out, and we had to wait some twenty minutes for the next one. I grew angrier as the minutes passed. When the next train finally came it was packed, and we had to stand for quite a while before we got a seat over a very hot radiator. At each station a freezing gale blew in as the doors opened.

I grew increasingly sure I would come down with pneumonia, probably in both lungs. As an additional hazard, people were coughing and sneezing all around us, and I could almost

see the germs attacking. I became convinced that my husband's thoughtlessness would probably have a fatal outcome. His contented absorption in his newspaper did not help matters, either. Besides being dangerous, the whole situation struck me as thoroughly revolting. The train smelled of garlic and peanuts, and the people looked shabby and dirty. Across the aisle a child with hands streaked with chocolate patted his mother's face and left smudgy fingerprints on her cheek. Next to her, another mother was wiping off her coat where he baby had thrown up. A child a few seats down picked up some chewing gum from the floor and put it in his mouth. At the far end of the train a group of old men were arguing heatedly and perspiring freely. I closed my eyes in disgust, feeling sick to my stomach.

And then a stunning thing happened. It was as though a blinding light blazed up behind my eyes and filled my mind entirely. Without opening my eyes, I seemed to see a figure of myself walking directly into the light. She seemed to know exactly what she was doing. It was, in fact, as if the situation was completely familiar to her. For a moment she paused and knelt down, touching the ground with elbows, wrists and forehead in what looked like an Eastern expression of deep reverence. Then she got up, walked to the side, and knelt again, this time resting her head as if leaning against a giant knee. The outline of a huge arm seemed to reach around her and she disappeared. The light grew even brighter, and I felt the most indescribably intense love streaming from it to me. It was so powerful that I literally gasped and opened my eyes.

I saw the light an instant longer, during which I loved everyone on the train with that same incredible intensity. The the light faded and the old picture of dirt and ugliness returned. The contrast was truly shocking. It took me several minutes to regain a semblance of composure. Then I reached uncertainly for my husband's hand.

"I don't know how to explain this," I said in a shaky voice, "and it's very hard to describe. But, well ..." I hesitated a moment, and then went on breathlessly, "I saw a great light, and waves and waves of love came out of it, and when I opened my eyes I loved everybody. It's all gone now, and I don't understand what happened."

My husband, an omnivorous reader for years, had riffled through some material on mysticism on and off, finding the subject of some interest though hardly worthy of scientific investigation. He did not seem surprised, and merely patted my shoulder reassuringly.

"Don't worry," he said, soothingly, picking up his newspaper. "It's a very common mystical experience. Don't give it another thought."

I tried to follow his advice and partially succeeded. The episode did not fit into my conscious life, which remained unaffected by it for a very long time. Nevertheless, the experience sort of hung suspended in a little corner of my mind, although I did not give it any serious thought for years. It was even longer before anything of a similar nature occurred. Meanwhile, I continued with my studies with my atheism unshaken.

A New Career and Bill Thetford

I was lucky as a student and later as a beginning psychologist. All sorts of opportunities turned up unsought. Right after graduation, a grant proposal based on my doctoral dissertation

was submitted by the university and approved for funding. The project turned out well, and the head of the department offered me a teaching assignment and suggested that I submit additional proposals. This time my luck seemed to change. I had visions of heading up a large and growing research department, and was desperately eager that the proposals be approved. The day they were being considered I was beside myself, and went out for a walk because I literally could not sit still. To my own surprise I found myself in a Catholic church, and to my even greater surprise I lit a candle and said a prayer. Perhaps I felt I would give God another chance. I was not prepared, however, to give him any options as to outcome. I wanted those proposals funded and that was that. Before I finished making my request I knew what the outcome would be. The department I was in was the wrong place for me, and I was not to stay there. This was totally unacceptable to me, and I walked angrily out of the church. That evening I learned that the proposals had been turned down. The year was 1958.

After that I did nothing for several weeks, and became increasingly depressed. I was miserable without a job, but did nothing to find one. Actually, I had made excellent connections and was not likely to have to do more than call a friend or two. Eventually I recognized the unreasonableness of my position, and got down to calling. I had been working in a highly specialized area, and one in which people with training and experience were badly needed. The first person I called immediately gave me a list of promising leads. I was about to try to reach the first name my friend had suggested when he called back.

“Forget about the list I gave you,” he said, emphatically. “Do you know Bill Thetford?”

“Never heard of him,” I answered.

“You call him right now,” continued my friend. “He’s the director of the psychology program at Presbyterian hospital. Here’s his number. And when you get him, be sure and tell him I said he’s looking for you.”

I did not particularly want to work in a medical setting, and the little my friend had told me about the job was not very appealing. Nevertheless, in view of his sense of urgency, I did make Dr. Thetford my first call. When I walked into his office a few days later, I made the first of a series of silent remarks which I did not understand myself.

“And there he is,” I said to myself. “He’s the one I’m supposed to help.”

I was to make a somewhat similar remark considerably later, after Bill and I had gotten to know one another much better. It was another one of those odd, unrelated moments which somehow seemed to break into my consciousness without any connection to my ongoing life. For a brief interval I seemed to be somewhere else, saying as if in answer to a silent but urgent call, “Of course I’ll go, Father. He’s stuck and needs help. Besides, it will be only for such a little while!” The situation had something of the quality of a long-forgotten memory, and I was somehow aware of being in a very happy place. I had no idea to whom I was speaking, but I was sure that I was making some sort of definite commitment that I would not break. Nevertheless, the actual remark I made meant as little to me as did the previous one in Bill’s office at the time of our first meeting.

As Dr. Thetford described the job during that first interview, it was obvious that it did not amount to much. The position was associated with a large research project which called for a psy-

chologist on the team. The work was only tangentially related to my major interests and experience, and neither the salary nor the title was impressive. Afterwards, when I was asked by several friends why on earth I took the job, I advanced the same arguments I gave my husband when we talked it over after the interview. The hospital was a prestige institution; I could take off the time I needed for a consultancy I had been offered; and I had been told funds would be available for special projects I could initiate. In view of later events, however, it seems likely that I did not have much choice in the matter. That was where I was supposed to be.



Columbia Presbyterian Hospital

The job was ghastly at first. The hospital did not provide space for the project, and it became increasingly clear that the “upper echelon” regarded it more as a liability than an asset. When the project was finally housed in a nearby apartment, I settled down to the dulllest and most difficult situation of my professional life. The work was more than routine; it was actually oppressive. Besides, it was carried out in an atmosphere of suspicion and competitiveness to which I had not be previously exposed. As I got to know Bill better, I also learned there were serious difficulties in the psychology department itself, where funds as well as interpersonal harmony were depressingly lacking.

Like myself, Bill had arrived at the hospital somewhat to his own surprise. At a professional meeting he had run into a colleague whom he hardly knew, who had insisted that he come to the hospital to head up a newly-formed psychology department there. At the time, Bill had a position elsewhere that he liked well enough, and was not considering making a change. However, sufficient pressure was put on him to force him to say that he would think the matter over. Under continuing pressure he agreed to visit the hospital, since it was hard to refuse to do that much at least. Largely to end the matter, he said he would accept the position if he were given a prestigious title he did not think he could possibly get. Then he forgot about the whole thing. Some six months later he was installed in his new job, title and all.

When I reached the hospital about a year afterwards there was little doubt that Bill did need help. He looked haggard and badly needed someone to talk to. Gradually he told me about the many problems with which he had been confronted since coming to the hospital. There had been no real psychology department before he arrived. A number of psychologists were working independently throughout the hospital, some of whom had never even met. In fact, a major, though not previously specified part of Bill’s job had been to organize and administer a cohesive departmental unit. It was a hard assignment. When I arrived the newly established department was split into factions, and beset by political rivalries and bitter resentments. Besides the obvious hostilities there was also a curious apathy toward the department. Bill seemed to be the only person there who really cared about it. As he told me one day, “I would do anything for the department,” and it was evident that he meant it. That was the first note of real devotion I had heard since I came, and it called forth an immediate response. Bill and I entered into an agreement to work out the departmental problems together.

Our attempts were heart-breaking at first, although neither of us seriously thought of withdrawing our commitment. My initial efforts were spent in frantically writing up grant pro-

posals against deadlines, in a desperate attempt to bring in badly-needed funds. It was exhausting work for both Bill and me, and a dead end as well. We were given encouragement and promises of support, but nothing actually materialized. Besides repeated discouragements of this kind, there was another source of strain which we both found even more difficult to handle. Bill and I were an unlikely team, and in spite of our shared goal we grated on each others's already jangled nerves a good part of the time.

Bill is some thirteen years younger than I, and over a foot taller. He is quiet, soft-spoken, and inclined to be somewhat retiring. He had led a rather difficult life, and when I met him he was at a low point in his personal as well as professional situation. At the time he was quite vulnerable to anxiety, depressed, and rather passive. Nevertheless he retained a persistent spark of inherent optimism, and a covert belief that there was a real way out and he would somehow manage to find it. In contrast, I was anxious to the point of agitation, apt to be sharp-tongued, and worked with an intensity which Bill found positively alarming. I tried to maintain a facade of cheerfulness and certainty, but the pessimism and insecurity underneath was very close to the surface. We also handled interpersonal problems in very different ways. Bill was apt to withdraw when he perceived a situation as demanding or coercive, which he frequently did. He rarely attacked openly when he was angry or irritated, but was much more likely to become increasingly aloof and unresponsive. I, on the other hand, tended to become over-involved and then feel hopelessly trapped and resentful. My sense of being imposed on, which had been growing for years, had become quite sizable.

During the first years of our joint professional undertaking Bill and I worked hard, but there was little progress. On the contrary, set-backs crowded in on us from the most unexpected directions. Political divisiveness continued and interpersonal friction increased, if anything. Funds were cut still further and staff turnover was enormous. Along the way Bill and I had become consultants to a research project at a nearby medical center, where we spent an hour a week. We hated it. The various disciplines working on the project quarreled constantly and became increasingly angry and competitive. Our weekly meetings there were hardly a relief from our own all-too-similar professional setting. Meanwhile the relationship between Bill and me deteriorated steadily. While we had grown interdependent we had also developed considerable anger towards each other, and our genuine attempts to cooperate were offset by our growing resentments. We began to get much less work done, while experiencing far greater fatigue.



Bill & Helen in 1960

The Turning Point and A Series of Visions

Every evening I went over a long list of grievances at home, and I have no doubt that Bill did much the same thing. It became more and more evident that the best thing for me to do was to leave. However, Bill and I seemed to be trapped in a relationship which, though we hated it in many ways, could not be escaped. That change came most unexpectedly. It began one afternoon, before Bill and I were to leave for a weekly research meeting. He had something on his mind, that

much was apparent, but he found it hard to discuss. In fact, he tried unsuccessfully several times to begin. Finally he took a deep breath, grew slightly red-faced, and delivered a speech. It was hard for him, he told me later, because the words sounded trite and sentimental even as he said them. Nor was he anticipating a particularly favorable response from me. Nevertheless, he was merely saying what he felt had to be said. He had been thinking things over, and had concluded we were using the wrong approach. Our attitudes had become so negative that we could not work anything out. He had therefore decided to look at things differently.

Bill proposed, quite specifically, to try out a new approach that day at the research meeting. He was not going to get angry and was determined not to attack. He was going to look for a constructive side in what the people there said and did, and was not going to focus on mistakes and point up errors. He was going to cooperate rather than compete. It was time to take a new direction. We had obviously been headed the wrong way. It was a long speech for Bill, and he spoke with unaccustomed emphasis as he delivered it. When it was over he waited for my response in obvious discomfort. Whatever reaction he may have expected, it was not the one he got. I jumped up, told Bill with genuine conviction that he was right, and said I would try the new approach with him.



Helen

Neither of us did very well at the meeting that afternoon, although we both tried. Nor can I truthfully say we have been wholly successful even yet. I can say, however, that we have not been wholly unsuccessful either. Many unexpected things have happened since. At the factual level, the whole climate of the department gradually changed. Bill worked particularly hard on the departmental problems, determined to turn hostilities into friendships. This took considerable effort on his part at first, but he did succeed eventually. Tensions lessened and antagonisms dropped away. The wrong people left, though on friendly terms, and the right ones came along almost immediately. A secure and interesting position opened up for me. Although our efforts were inconsistent and often half-hearted, there is little doubt that they showed results. The department became smooth-functioning, relaxed and efficient.

Meanwhile I felt impelled to pick up earlier friendships which had been broken off for one reason or another. In some cases this was very difficult, especially when the break-up had been angry and I had felt unfairly treated in the course of it. In one case I hesitated for over a year. Yet I vaguely recognized that these reparative steps were part of a mandatory preparation period. As the departmental situation improved, Bill turned his attention to straightening out his social relationships too. We both felt this was crucial. For the most part we did well with these attempts. We had much greater difficulty with our own relationship. We tried to be charitable and understanding with each other, since we had embarked on a new approach which obviously had to extend to ourselves. Nevertheless, while we did make some improvements, we still experienced outbreaks of antagonism toward each other, sometimes for reasons later recognized as trivial and sometimes for no apparent cause at all. We both realized that this was a serious roadblock to cooperation, and one which we would have to overcome.

It was while we were seriously trying to straighten things out between us that another kind of experience began. Perhaps these events will seem more plausible if they are introduced

by the mention of a characteristic so much a part of my own experience it did not occur to me for years that it might not be universal. Ever since I can remember I would often see very clear mental pictures when I closed my eyes. The pictures could be anything: a woman with a dog, trees in the rain, a store window filled with shoes, a birthday cake with lighted candles, a flight of stairs down the side of a cliff. Sometimes I would recognize a part of a picture as related to things I had actually seen, but even in those cases there were details which had not been there. Most of the pictures did not seem to be associated with anything.

While the mental pictures were particularly sharp just before I fell asleep, I found I could become aware of them even when my eyes were open, and at virtually any time. They did not interrupt or even disturb my overt activities in any way. It was merely as if there was a constant mental activity going on in the background which could be brought more to the foreground if I chose to notice it. For years the mental pictures had been motionless and usually in black and white, appearing much like a series of unrelated “stills.” As the “adventure in cooperation” continued, however, the pictures began to take on color and motion, and soon afterwards appeared in meaningful sequences. So, too, did my dreams, which often continued with a theme begun before I fell asleep.

Bill and I made our joint decision to change our attitudes in June 1965. Between then and mid-October, when the writing of the “course” began, three more or less distinct sequential lines of fantasy and dream images reached my startled awareness. They continued well into the writing phase, and overlapped one another to some extent. For the sake of whatever clarity I can hope for, however, I will describe them separately. I have no idea if they were symbolic representations, much like dream imagery, or if they were somehow related to actual events. I watched them as if I were looking at a motion picture, and felt myself more as an audience than a participator even while I was looking at a figure which I knew to be myself.

The Series of Visions

First Vision Series

The first of the three series was introduced by a picture of an unrecognized female figure, heavily draped and kneeling with bowed head, heavy chains twisted around her wrists and ankles. Next to her a fire rose high above her head, coming from a large metal brazier standing near her on a low tripod. She seemed to be some sort of priestess, and the fire appeared to be associated with an ancient religious rite. This figure recurred almost daily for several weeks, though each time with noticeable changes. The chains began to drop away and she began to raise her head. Very slowly she finally stood up, with only a short, unconnected length of chain still tied to her left wrist. The fire blazed with unaccustomed brightness as she rose. I was quite unprepared for the intensity of my emotional reactions to her, and did not understand them at all.

When the priestess figure first raised her eyes and looked at me I was terribly afraid. I was sure her expression would be full of anger and her eyes filled with condemnation and disdain. I kept my head turned away the next few times she appeared, but finally I made up my mind to look straight at her face. When I did I burst into tears. Her face was gentle and full of compassion, and her eyes were beyond description. The best word I could find in describing her to Bill was “innocent.” She had never seen what I was afraid she would find in me. She knew of nothing

that warranted condemnation. I loved her so much that I literally fell on my knees in front of her. Then I tried unsuccessfully to unite with her as she stood facing me, either by slipping over to her side or drawing her to mine.

My next reactions were even stranger. I was suddenly swept away by a sense of joy so intense I could hardly breathe. Aloud I asked, "Does this mean I can have my function back?" The answer, silent but perfectly clear, was, "Of course!" I would not have believed it was possible to experience such happiness as that answer called forth in me, and for a little while I kept repeating, "How wonderful! Oh, how wonderful!" There seemed to be no doubt that there was a part of me I did not know, but which understood exactly what all this really meant. It was a strangely split awareness, of a kind I was to become much more familiar with later.

Second Vision Series

The second series of pictures, which like the first reached me sometimes in short glimpses rather like daydreams and sometimes in sleeping dreams, included Bill as well as myself. We turned up in various relationships, but the actual chronology was quite confused. Situations which seemed to be very old often came after almost contemporary ones. In the first picture of this series I saw myself in a boat, rowing frantically but not getting anywhere. Looking about, I identified the place as Venice and the boat as a gondola. Nearby was a tall thin man, quite reminiscent of Bill, leaning against a striped wooden post protruding from the water. His arms were folded across his chest, and he was watching me with mock seriousness. I grew more and more sure it was Bill, dressed as a gondolier but with gleaming sequins scattered across the costume. He neither moved nor spoke. Then I noticed that the gondola was tied to a wharf with a heavy rope. It was a silly situation; I had been working hard at the impossible. Bill did not offer help, but his smile was not unkind.

The next few events in this series are quite vague. Bill turned up once as a bull fighter in a spectacular costume, gold from head to foot. There was a dim impression of an arena in the background, but that was most unclear. His next appearance was as a witch doctor, with feathers around his ankles and wrists and dressed in a straw skirt and an imposing headdress of bright feathers and gleaming jewels. I wore a simple homespun dress. We were both black, and were in a clearing in a thick jungle. I seemed to have come to Bill for help, and he was responding to my appeal with a weird dance, accompanied by loud cries in a language I did not understand. At first I felt comforted. Then I became afraid and begged him to stop. He did not seem to hear me through the sound of the banging of crude wooden instruments he was holding and the increasingly loud beating of drums in the background. I crept away terrified, holding my hands over my ears in a frantic effort to shut out the sounds. I did not look back.

The next episode involving Bill and myself seemed like a story within a story. One theme in various phases extended for quite a while before reaching its grim conclusion. I was a priestess in what looked like an Egyptian temple, although I have an idea that it might be even older. Huge stone statues were vaguely outlined along the sides and back of the building, but I could not make them out clearly because the interior was so dimly lit. Even in the half light, however, I could tell that the temple was very large and extremely imposing. The altar, the only brightly-lighted part of the building, was particularly splendid. A blazing light shone down on it from a source I could not identify. Magnificent jewels glowed all around it, and its smooth, polished stone surfaces

reflected the light like mirrors. As the high priestess I was very elaborately dressed, and wearing a heavily inlaid crown from which the large center stone was missing.

In the opening episode of the series I was standing at the altar leaning over Bill, who was lying on the floor almost naked. The shaft of a spear was in my hands, with the point resting on Bill's forehead between his eyes. Then came an extended series of flash-backs of what had led up to this opening scene. There had been a slave uprising. I was about to kill Bill, the leader of the revolt, who had managed to steal the large center ruby from the priestess' crown. It was not an ordinary ruby. It gave its wearer magical powers. The thief had to be killed if these powers were to return to the priestess, whose religion was power and enslavement. To revolt against her was to ask for death.

What happened next was entirely out of character. I was aware of feelings of intense rage and vindictiveness as I prepared to force the point of the spear between Bill's eyes. He did not seem particularly frightened. He merely looked up at me and waited. I braced myself, ready to bring the spear down. Entirely unexpectedly I hesitated just an instant, and knew it was all over for me. Bill would live and I would die. As I threw the spear down my death was certain. The final episode in the series found me standing alone on the top step of a wide stairway before an enormous bolted door. I was outside the temple. My crown and my golden gown were gone. I was wearing a loose white dress, smudged at the sides and torn at the neck. Before me was nothing but desert. The wind blew hot sand against my face, and I could see whitened bones scattered about in the distance. Mine would soon be among them. I cursed myself bitterly for allowing this to happen. Anger literally shook me as I walked slowly down the stairway, with thirst already biting at my throat and the smell of death in the wind.

The emotional effect of this last episode was intense and long-lasting. I still felt the anger after the images faded, and it later blazed into open fury as I told Bill the story the next day, particularly when I spoke of the theft of the ruby. It was as if it were happening all over again. A picture of the ruby, beautiful and blazing red, rose before my eyes, and for a brief period the scene became reality for me. Again I berated myself for dying for a rebellious slave who was nothing but a common thief. I could barely contain my fury at Bill, who was understandably upset. So was I. The intensity of my anger was quite surprising to both of us. It was a while before the next episodes in the series appeared. It was almost as though I had to recover a little before going on. Fortunately, the next installment was different, although it, too, did not turn out too well for me.

Bill, a Franciscan monk dressed in a brown robe and sandals, was walking up and down an arched monastery corridor bordering on a small, well-kept green lawn, reading a book. There was a lovely fountain in the middle, with birds bathing in the basin and rows of bright flowers around its base and scattered in patches over the grass. The time was uncertain, but the monastery seemed to be in Spain. I was walking slowly down the corridor toward Bill, dressed all in black. My face was heavily veiled, my eyes were cast down, and my hands were clasped as if in prayer. When I reached Bill I knelt as a penitent, and humbly asked him for forgiveness. He did not look up. Anger took hold of me, and I rose and accused him of being heartless. He did not seem to hear me, merely continuing serenely to read. His eyes never moved from the book. I backed away in angry but helpless frustration. The picture faded out slowly and inconclusively.

The next scene, in order of appearance, seemed to be so ancient that it appeared as if it was taking place at the very beginning of time. I was a priestess again, but this time of a very

different kind. This priestess was, in fact, much like the one with the innocent eyes I had watched emerging from heavy chains into freedom. She was hidden from the world in a small white marble temple set in a broad and very green valley. I was not sure that her body was entirely solid. Actually what was seen was little more than an outline of a small, slender woman dressed in white, who never came further into the world than the doorway of the little room which contained a plain wooden altar. A small flame burned on it, sending up a steady column of white smoke. The priestess stayed close to the altar, sitting on a low wooden stool and praying with closed eyes for those who came to her for help.

Sometimes I saw only the valley outside the temple. At times there seemed to be no one there, but at other times there was a huge column of people marching together very joyously. The column seemed to extend endlessly in both directions, and I could somehow feel the deep sense of freedom and unity each individual was experiencing as he marched ahead to certain victory. I was not sure what the exact role of the priestess was in helping them all, but I was somehow convinced that her prayers made a vital contribution. I was also sure that people came to her for help from all over; some in fact from very far away. They did not, however, speak to her directly. They knelt on the ledge that ran around a low wall which separated the inner and outer parts of the temple, and stated their needs to a man who seemed to be serving as a sort of intermediary between the priestess and the world. He remained in a large, enclosed space that separated the priestess from those who came for help. The man conveyed their needs to her.



Bill & Helen in Egypt

I did not see the man's face for some time, and it took me even longer to recognize him as Bill. He played a crucial role in enabling the priestess to fulfill her function. When people told him what they needed, he went to the door of her room and merely told her that there had been a request for help. He said only that a brother had come for healing, and then he asked for help on behalf of the brother. The priestess never asked for anyone's name, nor for the details of his request. She prayed for everyone in the same way, sitting very quietly beside the flame on the altar. It never occurred to her that help would not be granted. She never really left God's side, and she remained peacefully certain of His presence there in the room with her. I was sure she was myself, and yet I was not sure. What was certain was that I watched her with great love.

The next episode was again a dramatic contrast. Bill and I were now both slaves in what seemed to be mid-19th Century America. We were married, but I was quite contemptuous of him. He was older than I, much darker in skin coloring, and very religious in what seemed to me to be a very simple-minded way. I saw no justification for the childlike trust he had in God. He had a similarly naive trust in me, and for this I knew there was no reason. The actual story is vague, but I gathered that certain definite things were happening. I was beautiful, almost white in appearance, and completely amoral. White men took to liking me, and I traded favors readily enough. Somehow I made a deal whereby I gained my liberty, but in some way at Bill's expense. I did not hide my plans from him. In fact, I took pleasure in telling him all about them. He did not condemn me, nor make an attempt to interfere. I turned my back on him and flounced out. But I remembered the sadness in his eyes.

The series ended on a note of final achievement and even glory. I was standing in a room that seemed to be on the top floor of a church building. Bill, seated at a large, old-fashioned

church organ, was playing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" with his face lit with joy. We had finally reached our goal. I was standing in front of a simple brown wooden altar, on which two words were written one underneath the other. I cannot imagine a less appropriate word pair. The top word was "Elohim," which I did not recognize at the time, and only later discovered is one of the Hebrew names for God. The other word "Evoe" I did identify as the cry of the Greek Bacchantes in celebrating the rites of Bacchus. As I watched, a streak of lightening from the back of the church struck the altar and obliterated the second word entirely. Only "Elohim" remained, written in bright gold letters. The Hallelujah Chorus rose to a crescendo, and a figure outlined in brilliant light which I recognized immediately as Jesus stepped from behind the altar and came toward me. I started to kneel in front of him, but he came around to my side and knelt at the altar with me. Bill rose and knelt at his other side. And then a Voice, with which I was to become increasingly familiar, said in silent but perfectly clear words, "That altar is within you." The emotional impact of the conclusion was so powerful that I burst into tears.

Third Vision Series

The third series of pictures, which occurred to me in the same way as the others, lasted longer and fell into a definite progression. Throughout this series a male figure of uncertain identity turned up apparently to help out from time to time. Generally I did not recognize him at all. At times I thought he might be Bill. At other times I vaguely suspected he might be Jesus. This series began much as had the previous one, and at a somewhat less obvious level as the first one had as well. Wandering along the shore of a lake, I came upon a deserted boat laying on its side. It was held down by thick ropes attached to a heavy anchor sunk deep into the mud that also covered part of the boat itself. The boat had obviously been abandoned years ago.

I knew I could not possibly release the boat without help, but I nevertheless felt impelled to try. I tugged futilely at the ropes, which were so heavy I could barely lift them. Besides, the mud was slippery and I kept falling. I called out for help but there was no one within earshot. The place was utterly deserted. It was a frustrating situation. I somehow realized the importance of freeing the boat, but I was also aware of my complete inability to do so. And then the answer came to me. I had been going about it wrong.

"Of course," I said to myself. "Inside the boat is a very powerful receiving and sending set. It hasn't been used for a long time, but it still works. And that's the only way I'll get help."

At this point the first episode was over.

Several unclear things happened next. A man turned up from somewhere, and together we managed to drag the anchor out of the mud, set the boat up straight, and finally get it into the water. Then it began to move, though the anchor still dragged a little at first. The boat gained momentum after a while, however, and seemed to be embarking on a very definite course. I had no idea where it was going, but apparently I did not need to know. It seems that the man, who I noticed suddenly was with me, did know, And that was sufficient.

After the boat had gone on a way the water got choppy, and I was beginning to get afraid. Fortunately, the man turned up in the next episode dressed for the occasion; in a yellow slicker, helmet and boots. I was steering uncertainly when he arrived. He took the wheel from me.

"You go over there and sit down," he said in a firm but not unfriendly tone. It's going to

be heavy weather for a while. I'll get you through this, and then you can steer again."

I sat down on a bench on the side of the deck, but I was still a little uneasy.

"Maybe we should call for more help," I suggested, timidly. "I think there's a very good receiving and sending set inside this boat. Maybe we should use that."

"You just keep away from that now," said the man, quickly and still more firmly. "You're not ready. You'd merely get into trouble. When you're ready to use it I'll tell you. Meanwhile don't worry. We'll make it."

I watched, reassured, as he very adroitly brought the boat through a very narrow passage with a storm raging all around us. Big waves rose over the prow of the boat, and rain poured down from a black sky. Oddly enough, I did not even get wet. Gradually the boat emerged into quiet waters and I found the steering wheel again in my own hands.

The man turned up next lounging against the side of the boat, comfortably dressed in shorts and an open-necked summer shirt. The weather was warm and sunny, the water smooth and the boat easy to steer. We were standing at the wheel and chatting. I noticed he wore a gold chain around his neck, with an unfamiliar gold symbol hanging from it. I thought it might perhaps be a Hebrew letter. Then I remembered something.

"I have one like that," I said, looking at the symbol. "In fact, I'm wearing it right now."

"Indeed I know that," replied the man, smiling.

"The only thing is," I added, "Mine goes the other way."

"I know that, too," said the man, still smiling. "As a matter of fact this one happens to be yours, too. I'll keep it for you a while longer, but I promise to give it to you when you can use it."

The two symbols, mirror images of each other, were so clear in my mind that I copied them down afterwards. Some time later I ran across a friend who was a Hebrew scholar, and I asked him if he recognized them. He was puzzled at first, and then said, "Of course! The symbol of the miracle of the reversal." He had to explain to me what he meant. When Moses came down from the mountain where he had talked with God, he carried a scroll on which God's words were written. The miracle was that the words could be read correctly from either side of the scroll, which was obviously not possible by ordinary means. My reactions to this information were curiously mixed. On the one hand I was delighted and also impressed. On the other hand I was afraid. I still found it difficult to believe that dreams and fantasies were more than unrealistic attempts at wish-fulfillment, and I was strangely able to dismiss much of what I had already seen and heard. This, however, was difficult to pass by quite so casually.



Dr. William Thetford & Dr. Helen Schucman

Perhaps it was my discomfort that held the series up for some time. When the next episode took place it arrived in the form of a dream. In the usual dream fashion, the boat had turned into a car. I was crossing a bridge in very heavy traffic. I wanted to make a right turn, but I was in the wrong lane and another car was blocking my way. Both of us were crowded in, with cars in front and behind. The whole situation seemed to be one large traffic jam. There seemed to be no way I could make the turn, even though it was essential that I do so. "If I try to turn I'll crash into that car next to me," I thought, "and if he turns right I won't have time to follow before the gap will close and I'll be jammed in again." I kept trying to think up ways to make the turn, but all of them were inadequate and some disastrous. And then the solution came to me.

"We'll both make it together," I thought, happily. "It won't be any trouble at all."

And so I made the turn along with the man in the car next to me. It was very easy. "It's funny I never thought of that before," I said to myself as the picture faded.

The next time I found myself back in the boat, still aware of having taken a right turn. The boat was moving slowly but easily along a very straight little canal. There was just enough breeze to help the boat along. The sides of the canal were lined with lovely old trees and green lawns edged with banks of flowers. "I wonder if there's buried treasure here," I thought to myself, dreamily. "I shouldn't be surprised if there were." Then I noticed a long pole with a large hook on the end, lying on the bottom of the board. "Just the thing," I thought, dropping the hook into the water, and reaching the pole down as far as I could. The hook caught something heavy, and I raised it with difficulty. It was an ancient treasure chest, the wood worn from the water and the bottom covered with seaweed. I managed to get it into the boat and opened it excitedly.

I was bitterly disappointed. I had expected jewels or coins, but there was nothing in the chest but a large black book. The binding was like the "spring binders" used for temporarily holding manuscripts or papers together. On the spine one word was written in gold. The word was "Aesculapius." The world was familiar but I could not remember what it meant. I saw the same book once more, a few nights later. This time there was a string of pearls around it. Neither Bill nor I had any idea what the book stood for until much later, when we put the original copy of *"A Course in Miracles"* in black thesis binders for safekeeping.



Helen

PART III

Bill was very much interested in these picture series, so I gave him a running account of the episodes as they occurred. On the other hand they seemed to make my husband quite anxious, so I did not make a point of telling him about them. As for myself, I was so conflicted about the situation that I tried not to think about it at all. Bill's reactions, however, were most unexpected. Neither he nor I was interested in or knowledgeable about psychic phenomena, and the seriousness with which Bill took my mental images genuinely surprised me. It was obvious that he thought they meant something. I was by no means so sure. The storylines were consistent, certainly, and even rather well-organized on the whole. Nevertheless, I believed, or perhaps more

accurately hoped, that they were essentially imaginative. On any other basis I would have been intensely frightened.

A while after the third series ended, Bill ran across a book on Edgar Cayce, written by his son Hugh Lynn Cayce. When Bill told me a bit about it, I immediately classified it as “kooky,” and refused to read it. I was still firmly opposed to taking such strange things seriously, even though my position might seem somewhat inconsistent. I did not see it that way myself. Things were happening to me that were hard to explain, and that was all. It did not justify assuming any weird sort of extrasensory basis. The idea of reincarnation was particularly repugnant to me. I regarded it as nonsensical and “spooky.” It was odd that just about then my own picture images changed to what seemed to be “flashbacks” of myself at various times and in different places. When I described these pictures to Bill I emphasized that I regarded them as strictly symbolic; the usual dream symbolism with which any clinical psychologist is hardly unfamiliar. And this, of course, may well have been so.



Helen & Louis

Much as I had done before, I watched these pictures as a spectator, though with little doubt the figures represented myself. In one of the earlier scenes I saw a thin, frail girl in an opulent French drawing-room. The time seemed to be around the middle of the 18th Century. The girl, dressed in white, was playing a musical instrument resembling a harpsichord in a gathering of magnificently-dressed ladies and gentlemen, apparently guests at a lavish social event. The girl was eighteen at most, and obviously ill. “She’s too fragile,” I said to myself. “She won’t live another year. She can’t do anything but fade

away. It’s a mistake. She’s never going to make it.” A splendidly-dressed butler stepped out and closed the drawing-room door. The girl disappeared. Shortly afterwards there was a very vague picture of a girl, slightly older than the first, lying on the straw-covered floor of an airless room in prison. Her arms were bound tightly together and her feet were chained to the floor. The time seemed to be somewhere around the 12th or 13th Century, and I had an idea that the girl was executed in the end.

Several subsequent pictures showed the image of a nun, apparently in different countries and at various dates. The clearest of these pictures was of an elderly, arthritic, and disappointed nun, worn thin and ill by a life of severe austerities, and emotionally warped and sterile. She was walking down the side aisle of a very large and beautiful church, strikingly reminiscent of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. The aisle was dim, and the candle the nun held helped only a little. As she walked she ran her hand along the grey stone wall beside her, as if searching for a door or perhaps more literally a way out. She did not find it. The grim lines of her face deepened as I watched. “She does not know,” I thought. “She’s trying, but she does not know.” I was repelled by her harsh expression, but I felt a deep sympathy for her lost cause.

In striking contrast to the grim figure was another which recurred at intervals and still crosses my mind every once in a while. This one was the only image that kept returning in completely unchanged form. It was a picture of a young girl who resembled me in many ways,

although she could not have been more than sixteen years old at most. Her head was slightly thrown back in happy laughter, and her arms were outstretched as if in universal welcome. She seemed to be wholly joyous literally incapable of experiencing grief or pain. She was standing on a lawn of bright young grass, but in her extraordinary happiness her bare feet hardly seemed to touch the ground at all. She was dressed in a light, loose dress which was not reminiscent of any particular time or place. There was, in fact, nothing suggesting the past about her, nor did she seem likely to be concerned about the future. I do not think she even regarded time as we do.

Bill's interest in psychic phenomena grew as he read more material on Cayce. I respected Bill's opinion even though I thought he was way off on this one. I did, however, ask him for a book on the subject, and he picked out a biography of Cayce written by his son. I read it with some distaste, although with a determination to remain objective. There was little doubt that it was interesting, although I was still repelled by what I regarded as its "spooky" and more incredible aspects. I was also aware that it made me very anxious. Bill took a much broader view of the Cayce phenomena than I did, and was not overly concerned with the details as such. What he considered both important and impressive was the evidence which suggested that minds can reach each other by extrasensory means. He also reminded me that some rather unusual things had happened to me lately, and that I could hardly account for them in the usual way. That much, at least, was true. Following this limited concession, further events took place which I was indeed hard put to explain.



Helen

also gave him a very detailed description of a friend's house where he stayed for a week-end, even to the colors of the walls and furniture. Later, when he went on vacation quite far away, I sent him a mental image of a gold pin he should bring me. He handed me the pin on his return. There was little doubt that it was the one I had asked for.

My reactions to episodes of this kind were curiously mixed. I was actually becoming rather proud of the acquisition of such dramatic abilities, and I even caught brief glimpses of fantasies of power and prestige crossing the back of my mind. At the same time, I went to great lengths to explain the episodes away because they aroused considerable fear. For a while, the idea of psychic powers gained simultaneously in attraction and fear for me, and I began to have nightmares the content of which I could not remember. As the list of surprising events grew, I could not get over a sense of evil and even witchcraft that I somehow associated with them. Yet

pride kept pace with anxiety, and though I felt an increasing sense of danger I also experienced a concomitant feeling of self-inflation.

While I was still in the “magic” phase, an event took place which involved a strange mixture of fact and fantasy, and which also seemed to point to a definite future direction. The episode included a number of levels, beginning with evident magical overtones, continuing to more apparent religious imagery, and concluding on a simple, real-life note. The hospital wanted to send Bill and myself to the Mayo Clinic to study their evaluation procedures. The evening before we left a picture crossed my mind that was so sharp I felt impelled to describe it in writing. It was a picture of a church, the details of which stood out with startling clarity. I was uncertain of its denomination at first, but finally settled on Lutheran. I seemed to be looking down on it from above, at an angle at which I might be seeing it from a low-flying plane. The picture was so sharp that I abandoned caution entirely, and told Bill I was sure we would see the building when we landed in Rochester, Minnesota the next day.

I was disappointed and angry when we saw nothing of the sort. In an attempt to restore my self-esteem, I said I was sure we would find that church somewhere in town. It was late when we arrived, we were tired, and we had an early appointment the next morning. We went to our rooms for a short nap, planning to meet for dinner. I could not sleep. I had to find that church. It had become outrageously important to me. Bill was tired, but he understood. He suggested that we take a cab after dinner and try to find my church. I picked out several names from the church directory, but they did not turn out to be right. Then I described my church to the driver, and asked him if he knew of one reasonably like it. He did not sound hopeful, although we tried a few more at his suggestion. At length Bill wisely suggested that we forget the whole thing. It was getting very late. Back at the hotel, Bill spoke to me very firmly.

“Your church isn’t here,” he said, “and you’re acting very strangely about it. What’s all the desperation about. Go to sleep and forget this foolishness. We have a rough day coming up. See you in the morning.”

When I met Bill the next morning we were both red-eyed and tired. We had barely slept. We got through our tightly-scheduled day somehow, and toward evening drove wearily out to the airport. Bill went to look at a newsstand while I sat down and closed my eyes. I was too tired to look at anything. I was just dozing off ...

“And here’s your church,” said Bill, holding a picture in a guidebook in front of me.

“Oh, yes, that’s it!” I said, eagerly. “Where is it?”

“Nowhere, answered Bill. “Here. Read about it yourself.”

The church was indeed nowhere now. It had once occupied the site of the Mayo Clinic, but was torn down when the hospital was built.

“So that’s why I was looking down on it when I saw it,” I told Bill. “It was because it’s in the past. It had nothing to do with airplanes.”

And then a chill went over me and I did not want to talk about the church anymore.

We had to change planes late that night on the way home, and waited almost an hour in a cold almost-deserted airport. Huddled against a wall was a young woman obviously traveling by herself. I could feel waves and waves of misery going through her. I mentioned her to Bill, who was against my talking to her. We were both exhausted, and he did not feel up to getting involved with strangers at that point. Besides, I might well be simply imagining her distress. She did not give any outward signs of anything but sleepiness. I could not, however, escape from the strong feelings of pain I was receiving from her. Finally I told Bill I could not help myself, and went to talk to her.

Her name was Charlotte, and she said she was scared stiff. She had never flown before. Would I sit with her and hold her hand? I took her over to Bill, and suggested that we put her in between us so she would have a friend on both sides. Bill was courteous but unhappy. It had been a difficult trip and he would have preferred a peaceful trip home. Charlotte shook as the plane took off, but I held her hand and she calmed down quickly. She wanted to talk. She had done remarkably little planning, having no idea where she would stay in New York, where she was headed. She was, however, not worried. She had several hundred dollars with her. She was a Lutheran, and she was sure all she had to do was find a Lutheran church in New York and they would take care of her there. Bill and I exchanged glances. The message was not hard to grasp. "And this," I seemed to hear, "is really my church."

Bill may have objected to getting involved with Charlotte, but he certainly rallied now. He phoned a hotel for women in New York when we landed, and got her a room. We brought her there in a cab and deposited her at the front door, giving her our names and phone numbers. There was no trouble in keeping in touch with her. Bill kept meeting her unexpectedly during the day, and she generally turned up at my house in the evening. She stayed in New York for just over a week and then decided to go back home. We arranged for her return passage, and I telephoned her long distance the next day. She had arrived safely and was glad to be back, but she hoped to come back to New York for a visit some day. Everyone had been so nice to her, and she was glad to find out that all the bad things people say about big cities are not true. Charlotte and I have corresponded for years. I am very grateful to her. It may well be that my "magic" phase began to end in the plain fact of Charlotte.

Clarity and Preparation

It was getting toward autumn and it had been a wearing summer. Bill had retained his interest in Cayce, and suggested that we might take a few days off, go down to Virginia Beach to the Association for Research and Enlightenment, and look over the evidence there. The idea did not appeal to me. That sort of thing still frightened me and I did not want it to be true. It was bad enough that I did not understand what was happening to me. I particularly did not want any exacerbation of my unfortunate "magical" efforts, which I was by now more than willing to abandon. Nevertheless, the idea of a short vacation sounded good, and my husband, knowing I was tired, encouraged me to go. It was a perfect time of the year for the trip, and he thought it would do me some good. He and Bill had become friends, and although he felt Bill was developing some rather strange interests, my husband knew he would take care of me. I set out for Virginia Beach with some misgivings, but looking forward to the rest.

As it turned out the trip was anything but restful for me. The people at the Association for Research and Enlightenment, then only a small group devoted to making the Cayce material available to the public, were intelligent, sincere and obviously sane. Nor was the massive documentation something one could easily brush aside. I was impressed but very uneasy. As Bill's interest deepened my own anxiety grew. Bill read further on the subject that afternoon, and he also bought some books to take home. I riffled through a volume and put it down abruptly, in sufficient discomfort to border on panic. I was glad when the trip was over. Back home I glanced at several of the books Bill had bought, but I could not read them. To me they merely seemed to sound the "magic" note again.



Helen

My own "magic" phase ended abruptly with a particularly clear picture episode in which I knew I had made an irrevocable choice. I saw myself entering a cave cut into a rock formation on a bleak, wind-swept seacoast. All I found in the cave was a large and very old parchment scroll. Its ends were attached to heavy gold-tipped poles, and the scroll was wrapped around them so that they met in the middle of the scroll and were tied tightly together. With some difficulty I managed to untie the ends and open the scroll just enough to reveal the center panel, on which two words were written: "God is." Then I unrolled the scroll all the way. As I did so, tiny letters began to appear on both sides of the panel. The silent Voice which I had "heard" before explained the situation mentally to me:

"If you look at the left side you will be able to read the past," said the Voice. "If you look at the right side you will be able to read the future."

The little letters on the sides of the panel were becoming clearer, but I hesitated only a moment before rolling up the scroll sufficiently to conceal everything except the center panel.

"I'm not interested in reading the past or the future," I said with finality. "I'll just stop with this."

The Voice sounded both reassured and reassuring.

"You made it that time," it said. "Thank you."

And that, it seemed, was that.

Several times afterward I felt something like the subway experience of years before, although with much less intensity. These occurrences generally took place in a crowd of people, and I would feel a brief but powerful affinity for them. One summer evening, for example, my husband and I were walking along a crowded boardwalk, and a deep sense of emotional closeness to everyone there swept over me, along with a certain recognition that we were all going on the same journey to a common goal. There were also other kinds of emotional experiences. One took place when Bill, my husband and I were at the theater together. Sitting in the dark, I was aware of a strong inner light that began in the chest area and grew increasingly intense and encompassing until it seemed to radiate throughout the theater and include everyone there. My awareness of the light, which lasted for some ten minutes, was accompanied by a deep sense of peace and joy. I could hardly believe, for a time, that no one else was aware of it.

A somewhat similar incident occurred some time later, when Bill and I were attending a meeting in Southern France. Before falling asleep one evening, a sense of unbelievable strength and joy rose up in me, again beginning in the region of the chest and rising up into my head and out into my arms. For a few minutes I felt as if I could easily reach out and touch the whole world. Later, this happy experience had a fearful counterpart in the form of a startlingly clear sensation of horror that I felt one night on our way home. I was tired, and was lying down for a brief rest before getting ready for bed. Most unexpectedly I was seized by a murderous rage so intense that I jumped up from the bed literally shaking. These two experiences were so diametrically opposed to each other that they almost seemed to represent Heaven and hell. Nor was this shocking contrast entirely unfamiliar. The “good” priestess whose only function was to help and the “evil” priestess with her spear raised to kill had presented a somewhat similar contrast.

Only once do I remember actually asking for an experience to come and cheer me up, because I was feeling a bit low. The answer came in the form of a picture of a plant nursery. I could see neat rows of very young plants, all carefully labeled and obviously well cared for. Next to the plants stood a large watering can. The picture meant nothing to me, and I found it vaguely irritating.

“And much good that is,” I grumbled. “What’s so helpful about it?”

“Look where it’s growing,” said the silent Voice which, by now, was no longer entirely unexpected.

“But what does it mean?” I asked, still indignant.

“Look - where - it’s - growing,” repeated the Voice, slowly and very distinctly.

“Oh, all right,” I answered, still a trifle sulkily. Then I looked at the picture more carefully. The plant nursery was completely surrounded by a bleak, lifeless desert. Only the little area in which the plants were growing was moist and green.

“And now that it’s fully started,” said the Voice, “you will go on watering it, won’t you?”

Almost overcome, I promised I would try.

There were also some brief periods during which shifts in time-awareness took place. Perhaps the most compelling of these happened one evening while I was brushing my hair, deciding I needed a haircut, and feeling anything but inspired. Then I saw my life represented by a golden line stretching infinitely backward and infinitely forward. There was a minuscule dip in the line which I recognized as standing for my present life. It was laughably tiny and barely noticeable. I clasped my hands in real delight.

“What can it possibly matter what happens in this little eye-blink of time?” I asked myself in happy amazement. “It seems so long and important while you’re in it, but in less than an instant it’s as if it never happened.” I was certain of this for several minutes, during which it seemed as if a great weight had been lifted from my mind.

All these things happened within a period of no more than a few months.

A Course in Miracles

One day during that same summer, I told Bill I was about to do something very unexpected. I had no idea what it was, but I knew it was going to happen soon. At Bill's urging I had been keeping a sort of diary since our visit to Virginia Beach. Now Bill suggested that if I wrote down whatever occurred to me in connection with the "unexpected something," I might find out what it was. Nothing much came of my attempts at first, and I was on the point of giving them up. Then one evening while recording some of my thoughts, the Voice, by now more or less familiar to me, began to give me definite instructions.

"This is *A Course in Miracles*," said the Voice. "Please take notes."

Although the Voice itself no longer surprised me, I was not prepared for what it said. However, I did take down the first page or so of the "course" before I became really frightened. I put down my pencil and called Bill.

"Is it the same Voice you've heard before?" he asked.

"I think so," I answered, "but now it's using very specific words and seems to want to go on for some time. I stopped because I got afraid. I'm sure there was more, if I had continued." "How do the words come?" asked Bill.

"It's hard to describe," I answered. "It can't be a hallucination, really, because the Voice does not come from outside. It's all internal. There's no actual sound, and the words come mentally but very clearly. It's a kind of an inner dictation, you might say."

"Do you know what you're writing?" asked Bill. "Would you describe it as an automatic process?"

"Oh, no," I said. "It's not automatic at all. I'm perfectly aware of what I'm doing. It's not at all out of my control."

"Try and write some more and see what happens," Bill suggested.

"I'd rather not," I said. "Frankly, I find it quite upsetting."

I soon found I did not have much option in the matter. I was given a sort of mental "explanation," though, in the form of a series of related thoughts that crossed my mind in rapid succession and made a reasonably coherent whole. According to this "information" the world situation was worsening to an alarming degree. People all over the world were being called on to help, and were making their individual contributions as part of an overall, prearranged plan. I had apparently agreed to take down *A Course in Miracles* as it would be given me. The Voice was fulfilling its part in the agreement, as I would fulfill mine. I would be using abilities I had developed very long ago, and which I was



Helen's notebooks

not really ready to use again. Because of the acute emergency, however, the usual slow, evolutionary process was being bypassed in what might be described as a “celestial speed-up.” I could sense the urgency that lay behind this “explanation,” whatever I might think about its content. The feeling was conveyed to me that time was running out.

I was not satisfied. Even in the unlikely event that the “explanation” was true, I did not regard myself as a good candidate for the “scribal” role. I stated my opposition silently but strongly.

“Why me?” I asked. “I’m not even religious. I don’t understand the things that have been happening to me and I don’t even like them. Besides, they make me nervous. I’m just about as poor a choice as you could make.”

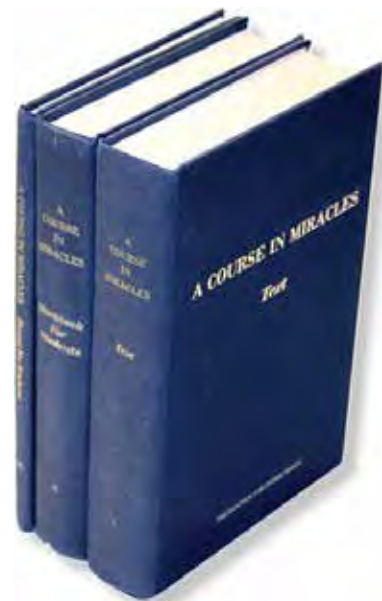
“On the contrary,” I was assured. “You are an excellent choice, and for a very simple reason. You will do it.”

I had no answer to this, and retired in defeat. The Voice was right. I knew I would do it. And so the writing of *A Course in Miracles* began.

I would feel the writing coming on almost daily, and sometimes several times a day. The timing never conflicted with work or social activities, starting at some time when I was reasonably free to write without interference. I wrote in a shorthand notebook that I soon began to carry with me, just in case. I could and very often did refuse to cooperate, at least initially. But I soon learned I would have no peace until I did. Even so, I maintained my “right to refuse” throughout. Sometimes I refused to write for over a month, during which I merely became increasingly depressed. There was never anything automatic about the writing. It always required my full conscious cooperation.

Evenings turned out to be a favored time for “dictation,” especially for additional “assignments.” I objected bitterly to this and often went to bed defiantly without writing anything, but I could not sleep. Eventually, I got up in some disgust and wrote as directed. Sometimes I was so tired that I went back to bed and fell asleep after taking down only a few paragraphs. However, I would be impelled to continue with the section before breakfast the next morning, perhaps finishing it on my way to work or at odd moments between work pressures during the day. I never knew when I started a sentence how it would end, and the ideas came so quickly that I had trouble keeping up with them, even though I used a rapid combination of shorthand symbols and abbreviations I had developed during years of taking class notes and recording therapy sessions.

The writing was highly interruptible. At the office I could lay the notebook down to answer the telephone, talk to a patient, supervise a junior staff member, or attend to one of our numerous emergencies, and return to the writing without even checking back to see where I left off. At home I could talk to my husband, chat with a friend, or take a nap, going back to the notebook afterwards without disturbing the flow of words in the slightest. It did not matter whether I had stopped at the end of a paragraph or in the



*The first edition of
A Course in Miracles*

middle of a sentence. It was as if the Voice merely waited until I came back and then started in again. I wrote with equal ease at home, in the office, on a park bench, or in a taxi, bus or subway. The presence of other people did not interfere at all. When the time for writing came, external circumstances appeared to be irrelevant.

At the beginning particularly I was tempted to change a word here and there, in what I thought was the interest of consistency. Usually the urge to change it back to the original was so strong that I did so fairly soon. In fact, the matter was apt to disturb me until I did. Further, it quickly became apparent that the words were not chosen at random. Sometimes what seemed to be inconsistent at the time was to be explained later, and the original wording was necessary for the sake of subsequent clarity. At other times specifically worded ideas were referred to later in contexts of which I was not yet aware, so that changes I might be tempted to make would reduce the consistency of the thoughts rather than enhance it.

The writing continued over years, and although the acute terror I felt at the beginning gradually lessened over time I never really got used to it. Yet despite periods of open rebellion, it never seriously occurred to me to give it up even though the whole thing struck me as a major and often infuriating interference. There were, however, a few rare times when I felt curiously transported as I wrote. On these occasions the words seemed almost to sing, and I felt a deep sense of trust and even privilege. I noticed afterwards that these sections turned out to be the more poetic ones. But these were brief but happy periods of respite. For the most part I was bleakly unbelieving, suspicious and afraid. Yet distressing as the writing generally was, reading the material to Bill afterwards was infinitely more so. We had agreed that I would read my notes to him at the end of the day, and he would type them. I hated to hear what I had written. I was sure it would be incoherent, foolish and meaningless. On the other hand, I was likely to be unexpectedly and deeply moved and suddenly burst into tears.



Helen

Bill was extremely supportive during the earlier transcriptions in particular, which were hard on both of us. I could hardly read the notes aloud at all. I began to stutter severely, a problem I have had neither before nor since. I also suffered acute coughing attacks or went on prolonged yawning jags, so that it was impossible for me to speak for a while. Sometimes I lost my voice entirely. The situation was as difficult for Bill as for me. He recognized my need for his constant encouragement, but he had to deal with his own uncertainties as well as my virtually constant panic states. Yet it no more occurred to Bill to just let the whole thing drop than it seriously occurred to me. In many ways we seemed to be fulfilling a joint assignment. We were both faced with wildly contradictory feelings, but we shared a sense of the importance of continuing.

As for me, I could neither account for nor reconcile my obviously inconsistent attitudes. On the one hand I still regarded myself as officially an agnostic, resented the material I was taking down, and was strongly impelled to attack it and prove it wrong. On the other hand I spent considerable time in taking it down and later in dictating it to Bill, so that it was apparent that I also took it quite seriously. I actually came to refer to it as my life's work, even though I remained unconvinced about its authenticity and very jittery about it. As Bill pointed out, I must believe in it if only because I argued with it so much. While this was true, it did not help me. I was in the

impossible position of not believing in my own life's work. The situation was clearly ridiculous as well as painful.

There is little doubt that the acute conflict I experienced was largely if not entirely internal. External circumstances were surprisingly favorable. The writing was apparently timed so as to cause minimal disruption, and in spite of his own conflicts Bill offered me consistent positive reactions and remarkably sustained support. In addition, my husband's attitudes were unexpectedly very helpful. He could hardly fail to notice my frequent periods of writing, and he was entitled to an explanation of some sort. With considerable misgiving I decided to tell him the truth. Happily, he was more than tolerant. He was actively encouraging. It was evident that the content disturbed him, and I stopped showing the material to him after a while. Yet he was actually enthusiastic about my writing it, and did not seem to find the process itself anxiety producing. I was glad of that. I did not take it so calmly myself.

Where did the writing come from? It made obvious use of my educational background, interests and experience, but that was in matters of style rather than content. Certainly the subject matter itself was the last thing I would have expected to write about. The "text" as it is given is unchanged except for the omission of some of the more personal material which was included only at the beginning. Chapter headings and subdivisions have been added later, but the arrangement of the material, which seemed to fall naturally into these divisions, has not been altered. The "workbook," which was dictated in the form of daily "lessons," is presented as I took it down. But where did the writing come from?

I have subsequently found out that many of the concepts and even some of the actual terms in the writing are found in both Eastern and Western mystical thought, but I knew nothing of them at the time. Nor did I understand the calm but impressive authority with which the Voice dictated. It is largely because of the strangely compelling nature of this authority that I have referred to the Voice with a capital "V." I do not understand the real authorship of the writing, but the particular combination of certainty, wisdom, gentleness, clarity and patience that characterized the Voice made that form of reference seem perfectly appropriate.

At several points in the writing the Voice itself speaks in no uncertain terms about the Author. My own reactions to these references, which literally stunned me at the time, have decreased in intensity and are now at the level of mere indecision. I do not understand the events that led up to the writing. I do not understand the process and I certainly do not understand the authorship. It would be pointless for me to attempt an explanation.



Naturally Expanded Conclusion

Archives End Note:

It is interesting that in her autobiography Helen Schucman did not include a summary of the Course and its meaning, which she impeccably knew and understood, seemingly leaving the impression that she lacked such knowledge as its Scribe. But as her co-Scribe William Thetford often acknowledged to others, “Helen knew the Course perfectly.” Equally, Kenneth Wapnick, who worked closely with Helen in preparing the Course manuscript for publication, states in his “Recollections of Helen”: “I don’t think I ever met anyone quite like her in my life ... she had an incredibly holy side ... (and) she knew the Course from the inside out, as a matter of inherent wisdom.” Adding, “Hence, nobody knew it better than she did.”

It therefore seems fitting to include here, as an adjunct to the conclusion of her autobiography, portions of a summary about the Course Helen wrote in 1977 in response to the many requests for a brief introduction to A Course in Miracles, which appears as the Preface to the Course in the Text. The first two parts – How It Came, What It Is – Helen wrote herself; the final part – What It Says – she scribed through the process of inner dictation. The synonymous parts “What It Is” and “What It Says” are presented here as a naturally expanded conclusion to Helen’s autobiography in the spirit of acknowledging her perfect knowledge and understanding of A Course in Miracles as its Scribe.

What It Is

As its title implies, the *Course* is arranged throughout as a teaching device. It consists of three books: the Text, the Workbook for Students, and the Manual for Teachers. The order in which students choose to use the books, and the ways in which they study them, depend on their particular needs and preferences.

The curriculum the *Course* proposes is carefully conceived and is explained, step by step, at both the theoretical and practical levels. It emphasizes application rather than theory, and experience rather than theology. It specifically states that “a universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary.”(C-In.2:5) Although Christian in statement, the *Course* deals with universal spiritual themes. It emphasizes that it is but one version of the universal curriculum. There are many others, this one differing from them only in form. They all lead to God in the end.

The Text is largely theoretical, and sets forth the concepts on which the *Course*’s thought system is based. Its ideas contain the foundation for the Workbook’s lessons. Without the practical application the Workbook provides, the Text would remain largely a series of abstractions which would hardly suffice to bring about the thought reversal at which the *Course* aims.

The Workbook includes 365 lessons, one for each day of the year. It is not necessary, however, to do the lessons at that tempo, and one might want to remain with a particularly appealing lesson for more than one day. The instructions urge only that not more than one lesson a day should be attempted. The practical nature of the Workbook is underscored by the introduc-

tion to its lessons, which emphasizes experience through application rather than a prior commitment to a spiritual goal:

Some of the ideas the workbook presents you will find hard to believe, and others may seem to be quite startling. This does not matter. You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do. You are not asked to judge them at all. You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true.

Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy. But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required (W.pI.In.8-9).

Finally, the Manual for Teachers, which is written in question and answer form, provides answers to some of the more likely questions a student might ask. It also includes a clarification of a number of the terms the *Course* uses, explaining them within the theoretical framework of the Text.

The *Course* makes no claim to finality, nor are the Workbook lessons intended to bring the student's learning to completion. At the end, the reader is left in the hands of his or her own Internal Teacher, Who will direct all subsequent learning as He sees fit. While the *Course* is comprehensive in scope, truth cannot be limited to any finite form, as is clearly recognized in the statement at the end of the Workbook:

This *Course* is a beginning, not an end ... No more specific lessons are assigned, for there is no more need of them. Henceforth, hear but the Voice for God.... He will direct your efforts, telling you exactly what to do, how to direct your mind, and when to come to Him in silence, asking for His sure direction and His certain Word (W.Ep.1:1; 3:1-3).

What It Says

Nothing real can be threatened

Nothing unreal exists.

Herein lies the peace of God.

This is how *A Course in Miracles* begins. It makes a fundamental distinction between the real and the unreal; between knowledge and perception. Knowledge is truth, under one law, the law of love or God. Truth is unalterable, eternal and unambiguous. It can be unrecognized, but it cannot be changed. It applies to everything that God created, and only what He created is real. It is beyond learning because it is beyond time and process. It has no opposite; no beginning and no end. It merely is.

The world of perception, on the other hand, is the world of time, of change, of beginnings and endings. It is based on interpretation, not on facts. It is the world of birth and death, founded on the belief in scarcity, loss, separation and death. It is learned rather than given, selective in its perceptual emphases, unstable in its functioning, and inaccurate in its interpretations.

From knowledge and perception respectively, two distinct thought systems arise which are opposite in every respect. In the realm of knowledge no thoughts exist apart from God, because God and His Creation share one Will. The world of perception, however, is made by the belief in opposites and separate wills, in perpetual conflict with each other and with God. What perception sees and hears appears to be real because it permits into awareness only what conforms to the wishes of the perceiver. This leads to a world of illusions, a world which needs constant defense precisely because it is not real.

When you have been caught in the world of perception you are caught in a dream. You cannot escape without help, because everything your senses show merely witnesses to the reality of the dream. God has provided the Answer, the only Way out, the true Helper. It is the function of His Voice, His Holy Spirit, to mediate between the two worlds. He can do this because, while on the one hand He knows the truth, on the other He also recognizes our illusions, but without believing in them. It is the Holy Spirit's goal to help us escape from the dream world by teaching us how to reverse our thinking and unlearn our mistakes. Forgiveness is the Holy Spirit's great learning aid in bringing this thought reversal about. However, the *Course* has its own definition of what forgiveness really is just as it defines the world in its own way.

The world we see merely reflects our own internal frame of reference – the dominant ideas, wishes and emotions in our minds. “Projection makes perception” (T-21.In.1:1). We look inside first, decide the kind of world we want to see and then project that world outside, making it the truth *as we see it*. We make it true by our interpretations of what it is we are seeing. If we are using perception to justify our own mistakes – our anger, our impulses to attack, our lack of love in whatever form it may take – we will see a world of evil, destruction, malice, envy and despair. All this we must learn to forgive, not because we are being “good” and “charitable,” but because what we are seeing is not true. We have distorted the world by our twisted defenses, and are therefore seeing what is not there. As we learn to recognize our perceptual errors, we also learn to look past them or “forgive.” At the same time we are forgiving ourselves, looking past our distorted self-concepts to the Self That God created in us and as us.

Sin is defined as “lack of love” (T-1.IV.1:11). Since love is all there is, sin in the sight of the Holy Spirit is a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished. Our sense of inadequacy, weakness and incompleteness comes from the strong investment in the “scarcity principle” that governs the whole world of illusions. From that point of view, we seek in others what we feel is wanting in ourselves. We “love” another in order to get something for ourselves. That, in fact, is what passes for love in the dream world. There can be no greater mistake than that, for love is incapable of asking for anything.

Only minds can really join, and whom God has joined no man can put asunder (Preface p.xii). It is, however, only at the level of Christ Mind that true union is possible, and has, in fact, never been lost. The “little I” seeks to enhance itself by external approval, external possessions and external “love.” The Self That God created needs nothing. It is forever complete, safe, loved and loving. It seeks to share rather than to get; to extend rather than project. It has no needs and wants to join with others out of their mutual awareness of abundance.

The special relationships of the world are destructive, selfish and childishly egocentric. Yet, if given to the Holy Spirit, these relationships can become the holiest things on earth – miracles that point the way to the return to Heaven. The world uses its special relationships as a final weapon of exclusion and a demonstration of separateness. The Holy Spirit transforms them into perfect lessons in forgiveness and in awakening from the dream. Each one is an opportunity to let perceptions be healed and errors corrected. Each one is another chance to forgive oneself by forgiving the other. And each one becomes still another invitation to the Holy Spirit and to the remembrance of God.

Perception is a function of the body, and therefore represents a limit on awareness. Perception sees through the body’s eyes and hears through the body’s ears. It evokes the limited responses which the body makes. The body appears to be largely self-motivated and independent, yet it actually responds only to the intentions of the mind. If the mind wants to use it for attack in any form, it becomes prey to sickness, age and decay. If the mind accepts the Holy Spirit’s purpose for it instead, it becomes a useful way of communicating with others, invulnerable as long as it is needed, and to be gently laid by when its use is over. Of itself it is neutral, as is everything in the world of perception. Whether it is used for the goals of the ego or the Holy Spirit depends entirely on what the mind wants.

The opposite of seeing through the body’s eyes is the vision of Christ, which reflects strength rather than weakness, unity rather than separation, and love rather than fear. The opposite of hearing through the body’s ears is communication through the Voice for God, the Holy Spirit, which abides in each of us. His Voice seems distant and difficult to hear because the ego, which speaks for the little, separated self, seems to be much louder. This is actually reversed. The Holy Spirit speaks with unmistakable clarity and overwhelming appeal. No one who does not choose to identify with the body could possibly be deaf to His messages of release and hope, nor could he fail to accept joyously the vision of Christ in glad exchange for his miserable picture of himself.

Christ’s vision is the Holy Spirit’s gift, God’s alternative to the illusion of separation and to the belief in the reality of sin, guilt and death. It is the one correction for all errors of perception; the reconciliation of the seeming opposites on which this world is based. Its kindly light shows all things from another point of view, reflecting the thought system that arises from

knowledge and making return to God not only possible but inevitable. What was regarded as injustices done to one by someone else now becomes a call for help and for union. Sin, sickness and attack are seen as misperceptions calling for remedy through gentleness and love. Defenses are laid down because where there is no attack there is no need for them. Our brothers' needs become our own, because they are taking the journey with us as we go to God. Without us they would lose their way. Without them we could never find our own.

Forgiveness is unknown in Heaven, where the need for it would be inconceivable. However, in this world, forgiveness is a necessary correction for all the mistakes that we have made. To offer forgiveness is the only way for us to have it, for it reflects the law of Heaven that giving and receiving are the same. Heaven is the natural state of all the Sons of God as He created them. Such is their reality forever. It has not changed because it has been forgotten.

Forgiveness is the means by which we will remember. Through forgiveness the thinking of the world is reversed. The forgiven world becomes the gate of Heaven, because by its mercy we can at last forgive ourselves. Holding no one prisoner to guilt, we become free. Acknowledging Christ in all our brothers, we recognize His Presence in ourselves. Forgetting all our misperceptions, and with nothing from the past to hold us back, we can remember God. Beyond this, learning cannot go. When we are ready, God Himself will take the final step in our return to Him.

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To read more about Dr. Helen Schucman see [*Absence From Felicity*](#) by Dr. Kenneth Wapnick.