

Signe TOKSVIG (1948): *Emanuel Swedenborg: Scientist and Mystic*, Faber and Faber, London, 1948

Visionary experience is integral to human nature. It finds expression in both organised religion and individual revelation. Every culture carries its own stories and most cultures honour those whose life-worlds are capable of bridging other realities. Despite the attempts of both materialist scientism and political tyrannies to negate the reality of the supramundane, it continues to irrupt into the lives of many and carries its own revelatory power.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born into a powerful Lutheran household. His father had been Dean at the University of Upsala and went on to become Archbishop of Upsala. In his early adulthood, Emanuel Swedenborg managed to separate himself from his father's overbearing nature and his extreme and egotistical theologism.

Swedenborg was a very unusual man. He was an accomplished scholar of Latin, Greek and Hebrew texts. He was also a skilled mathematician who had mastered most of the sciences of his time including mineralogy, engineering and human physiology. Swedenborg occupied positions of great influence in the Swedish civil service. He had the ear of the king, and was regarded as a man of high ability. He was also a gifted visionary who, especially in his later years, inhabited multiple worlds.

The notion of soul was central to Swedenborg's thinking. He understood it to be the immaterial yet coherent force through which our material natures are animated. It is likely that as a young man, he was introduced to the ideas of Plotinus and of early Christian Neo-Platonist theologians and thinkers such as Origen and Dionysius. Little wonder then that the young William Blake was drawn to Swedenborg's ideas during the late 1700s.

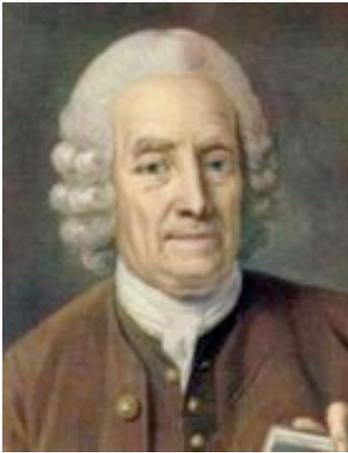
Signe Toksvig's study sensitively opens the life and experiences of Emanuel Swedenborg and reflects on the difficulties experienced by the man in his quest to reconcile his supramundane experiences with his deep knowledge of the natural world and its demands, and his efforts to transmit his personal insights to others.

Many of Swedenborg's later writings describe the worlds that he comfortably inhabited and offer interpretations of his experiences in those worlds. They are part of the many-coloured literature of mystical experience. Although his writings may provide a broad base for the construction of systematic theories of spiritual descent, they nevertheless remain a personal record.

The usefulness of Swedenborg's vision rests in its confirmation of both numinous and luminous realities that are universally described and part of the life-world of many throughout history. The details of Swedenborg's vision may offer a fruitful basis for individual exploration, but ultimately, in these matters, one is better served by attending diligently and reflecting carefully on one's own experiences.

The essential task is to discern the universal within the particular.

VDS, Belgrave
November 2003
Revised May 2010



Swedenborg's God is the God of a scientist. He is the essence not only of love but of wisdom, which is, or includes order. "God *is* Order," he has said. He knew nothing of Vedanta or Buddhist philosophy and Karma's inexorable law, but he stressed as fundamental that man is what he becomes through his deeds, and that those deeds trail their consequences with them, irrespective of "faith." pp 4-5

In middle age he began to discover that most unusual events were taking place in his mind. Today people would call them either psychic or psychotic, according to their own bent, but he was convinced by the startling character of the events that they were inspired. For him, at any rate, they were the most important of his life. p 6

When Emanuel was eight years of age, his mother died. She was in her thirtieth year. She had borne nine children, five boys and four girls. Albrecht, her first-born, died ten days after her. Eliezer died later.

Her husband paid tribute to her sweetness, gentleness, and kindness, and remarried within a year. p 24

"A good mind is more seriously angry when outraged than a poor one," because, Emanuel said, it does not get angry except for just cause. p 39

He had come from the little cathedral town of Upsala, inhabitants about five thousand, to London, whose half million brawled and stank over fifteen square miles. All continentals noticed the smell of London. p 43

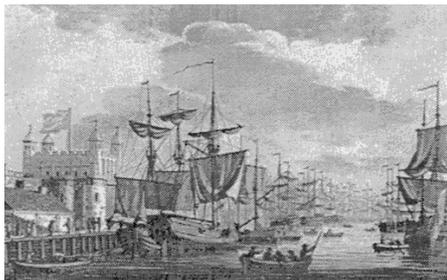
Besides learning a craft or two that first summer in London, he studied the language and haunted the bookstalls. "I read Newton daily." He went on an orgy of buying scientific instruments, "prisms, various kinds of quadrants, microscopes, artificial scales, a *camera obscura*," and he hoped to have enough left over to buy an "air pump," an instrument about which he was almost tenderly passionate. p 45

While the plague lasted Upsala University had been closed and the science professors had used the time to form a "*Collegium Curiosorum*," the first Swedish learned society. Part of the time they spent in discussing young Swedberg's letters to Benzelius. They wrote to their former student as if to an equal to get information about how things were done in England. Would he go to Flamsteed, the Astronomer Royal, examine his instruments and find out how they worked at night. Would he find out about the latest celestial globes and try to get the printed paper for them so they could be made up in Sweden. And what did quadrants cost, and were they made "with a screw, after Hooke's method." And much else. p 46

Professor Elfvius of Upsala wanted him to be sure to acquire the art of lens grinding, as well as to find out what the English learned really thought of Newton's theory of

gravitation. It seemed to the Swedish professor "unreasonable" that one planetary body should gravitate toward another - something that smacked of "pure abstraction" rather than physics. Many other tasks he confided to his ex-pupil, finishing with the postscript that he recommended to "Herr Swedberg's admirable curiosity" to search out all that he could be of service to science in Sweden. p 47

On January 16, 1712, he took coach for Oxford. He was there about six months. He talked with Edmund Halley here about finding the longitude at sea by means of the moon, but the stay does not seem to have been devoted entirely to scientific studies. p 48



About the end of 1712 he left England but he did not go straight to Paris. He stopped in the Netherlands for about five months, undoubtedly still concerned with longitude by the moon. He visited the splendid observatory at Leyden, and in that town he took lodgings with lens grinders (there were no better men at the craft in Europe), learning the trade and purchasing the necessary tools. It is hardly probable that he

remained so long in the Netherlands without looking into the works of that other lens grinder, Baruch Spinoza, who, like the Cambridge Platonists but in his own austere way, also saw the universe as one Substance, essentially divine, expressing facets of the same Energy in both matter and mind. p 55

It was in November 1716, that "Iron Head" [King Charles XII] and Emanuel Swedberg first met. The King, always avid for science, was charmed by the four published copies of *Daedalus*, nicely bound with a special dedication for him, while Emanuel was charmed by the King's interest in mechanics and his penetrating understanding of mathematics.

Polhem lost no time, he struck while "Iron Head" was hot. In a memorial to the King, he recommended Emanuel Swedberg for the only position in the kingdom where his abilities might have full scope, as a member of the Board of Mines. First flattering the King on his own knowledge of the mechanical sciences, he next spoke of the little honor mechanics was held in, being considered as only "the art of a common workman" when yet "it demands much labor and brainwork." He wanted honor for the engineers. "At this time I know of no one who seems to have a greater bent for mechanics than Herr Emanuel Swedberg." pp 61-62

There were no vacancies when Polhem recommended Emanuel Swedberg but Charles XII appointed him an extraordinary assessor, the only one, an honor which had not been granted since 1684 - with the proviso that he was at least temporarily to remain Polhem's assistant. The King made inquiries about young Swedberg (he was then twenty-eight) but no doubt he chose him first and foremost because he saw and felt the energetic ability and unusual knowledge of the man. Charles recognized and appreciated able men. p 62

In the Netherlands and in Leipzig he had published several little books. They had received flattering reviews in important German scientific journals. One book was on his favourite subject of finding the longitude at sea, the others were on chemistry and physics with especial attention to mining matters and a sprinkle of philosophy. He had studied geology and mining, the latter in the Hartz Mountains, where he had made friends with a reigning prince and his brother. When he studied in England he sought out only scholars; now he probably realized the need of more worldly support if he were to impress the people at home. pp 65-66

Emanuel Swedenborg was appointed a full assessor of the Board of Mines, though even he had to begin with a smaller salary than was customary. That was July 15, 1724. (It was 1730 before he received the full salary.) p 66

Assessor Swedenborg, thirty-six, had already accomplished a good deal. He was living now independently at Stockholm instead of at rural Starbo which he had not long before envisaged as his only refuge. He had helped found the first Scientific Society in Sweden, of which the six numbers of his *Daedalus* had been the first journal; he had carried out large-scale engineering works; he had made himself thoroughly conversant with nearly all that there was to be acquainted with in astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geology and mining. He had published various scientific brochures or had the manuscripts discussed at the meetings of the Society. p 66

He neither needed nor wanted to marry for money, and, in eighteenth-century Stockholm, he did not have to marry for sex. His friend Robsahm has recorded that he had a mistress when he was young, whom he left because she was unfaithful to him, and to Tuxen he spoke of having had a mistress in Italy. In a diary, he wrote, no doubt exaggerating, that women were his chief passion. But even there he was careful not to cite names or incidents connected with real people. Very little is known directly about his emotional affairs. But it is known that, far from being a libertine, he grieved deeply over "wandering lust" and longed for a harmonious marriage with an intelligent woman. p 78

Swedenborg was well aware that he had parted from his father. Not only does he date the beginning of his spiritual enlightenment from 1710, the year in which he left his father's house to study science in England, but in 1748 he recorded a dream in which he says he told his father, who had appeared to him in the dream, that "a son need not recognize his father after he has become his own master." It was all right, he explained, to do so while the son was in the father's house, but when the son " . . . becomes his own master, so as to be able to guide himself from his own mind and know what to do, then the Lord is his father."

This seems to have been the only instance in which the Bishop had no reply to make, but then it was only a dream. pp 80-81

He might be living in Paris at its most decadent, or in Venice when it had become Europe's illicit pleasure ground, but he did not condemn pleasure as such. On this he was to give an opinion many years later, after his travels had been extended to still another world. "I have met with many in the spiritual world," he wrote, "who in the

natural world had lived like others, clothing themselves splendidly, faring sumptuously, trafficking for gain like others, attending dramatic performances, jesting about love affairs as if from lust, and other like things, and yet with some the angels accounted these as evils of sin, and with others accounted them not as evils; and these they declared innocent, but those guilty." The difference, as he said it was explained to him, was all in the intention. pp 91-92

No scholastic web would suffice Emanuel Swedenborg as proof of the soul's interaction with the body. He required demonstration, the kind you could point at with your finger. To find material for such proof was the object of his year and a half in Paris, at Dr Petit's school of anatomy, where he studied under Winslov, the Dane, who was probably the first to examine the organs of the body in the body, dissecting them under water. (Anatomists had hitherto taken the organs out.) For this he studied in Venice, where he wrote about the brain, near to Padua, where the brilliant Morgagni taught, much quoted by him. Italy had long been the foremost country for anatomy. p 95

Everything in created nature - so Swedenborg would have put it - is "mechanical" and subject to mechanical laws, and the difference between dead and living matter is that the living is purposefully governed by a soul.

Swedenborg's answer about "this earthy loan," the body, was: It is something which is fabricated by the soul for its own purposes. Once the body is made it has a certain reciprocal relationship with the soul, but the latter, besides being the manufacturer, is the maintainer and repairer of the body as long as the thing is repairable. p 104

His excursion into physiology was for the purpose of reducing the unknown. For him, as well as for some modern physicists, it was a decisive experience to study embryology, but as Swedenborg had not the faintest fear of trespassing on specialist domains he took the evidence he had obtained and stretched it cosmically. He was convinced that an immaterial force built up the material body; he was convinced in the only way he could have been - scientifically, given his honesty and love of truth for its own sake. p 110

A man like Swedenborg did not finish a book of such importance to him [*The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*] without intending to convey the gist of the matter at its end.

The first reference [of only four to the Bible in the book] is to the Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy, chapter 3, verses 1-10. Looking it up, one finds that Paul summarizes the vices of men living in the last "perilous times." Among other things such men are, the Apostle says, "without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good . . . ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Looking up the second reference, from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17, verses 18-20, one finds that it describes Paul's sermon to the Athenians about the Unknown God, at which some of the Athenians mocked, but among those "who clave unto him and believed" was one "Dionysius, the Areopagite."



The name Dionysius was taken by or affixed to a writer of mystical theology, who was probably a Syrian monk of the fifth century A.D. His writings were the chief Christian channel through which Neoplatonism flowed into Christianity. His religious philosophy, a modern scholar has said, "is in fact Neoplatonic philosophy slightly sprinkled with baptismal water from a Christian font." p 112

Swedenborg quotes St Augustine liberally, and Thomas Aquinas and other Neoplatonist church fathers; he quotes, of course, Plato, the father of them all, and he weaves in Aristotle (calling him often merely "the Philosopher," as was usual) whenever it suits him. It suits him well, because he uses him to support his saying that "the action of God," the law by which He acts, "is God himself." And he knew Spinoza.

Swedenborg did not invent a religion, any more than he invented the science of anatomy. p 113

The Hindu, Buddhist and Greek predecessors of Plotinus and his Christian and kabalistic successors saw the created world as having emanated as force or radiated as light from the unknowable, uncreated Source, called God or Law or Light, matter being the radiation farthest from the Divine Center.

Neoplatonism often spoke of this procession as a ladder reaching from God to the material world, but until Swedenborg had convinced himself that an immaterial force directing the development of an embryo could produce a material body he was probably not sure, as a physicist, that the ladder really rested on solid ground. He had identified this force with the soul, and he saw the soul as created by the divine light and capable of receiving it. p 113

Resolutely rationalist, he admitted that even the doctrine of degrees was not enough with which to understand the reciprocal action of soul and body. "A knowledge of anatomy, pathology and psychology, nay even of physics and of the auras of the world" was necessary, for unless we "mount from phenomena thus, we shall in every age have to build new systems, which in their turn will tumble to the ground . . ." p 115

The soul, and here he agreed with Neoplatonic philosophy, "is a faculty distinct from the intellectual mind, prior and superior to, and more universal and perfect than the latter." He again and again repeats that it is so high above the other faculties that it is "their order, truth, rule, law, science, art." Consciousness belongs to it, so does intuition (he quoted Locke to back him up). "And it flows into the intellectual mind much after the manner of light."

The first aura furnishes the material for the organism of the soul. "The next organ under the soul" is the intellectual mind, "whose office is to understand, to think and to will." It is developed from the material of the second aura. The third organ is the

animus, or the seat of sensuous desires and sensuous imagination. It belongs to the third aura.

The five external senses are in our material, airborne world. These, with the motor organs, "constitute the body, whose office it is to feel, to form looks and actions, to be disposed and to do what the higher lives determine, will and desire. Although there are this number of degrees, yet the animal system consists of nothing but the soul and the body, for the intermediate organisms are only determinations of the soul, of which as well as of the body they partake. Such now is the ladder, by which every operation and affection of the soul and body descend and ascend." p 116

"One thing is clear," he grimly admits, "there is in us an internal man that fights with the external; a manifest proof that as the mind may be in collision with the animus, so may the soul with the mind, and the essential life that comes from the spirit of God, with the soul." pp 118-119

He does not think it is for lack of mental equipment that intelligent men so often choose evil. The rational mind is well equipped, he contests. It can draw on the soul, which is "essential science and natural intelligence," and which itself is instructed by Infinite Wisdom. From below, the mind has the reports of the senses "which are so many masters to instruct us in the nature of the world . . . And that we may know all things that all men know, speech is given us; also the memory of the past, and perpetual experience; wonders too familiar and too closely environing us to allow us to wonder at them."

But to be able to choose the better side, more is needed than knowledge. p 119

Is it a bad thing then that the forces from below are so tangible and strong? No, Swedenborg says. "Victory is estimated according to the number and valor of the enemy . . ." He is thinking here in Neoplatonic terms. The reason for the soul's entanglement in matter is for the sake of experience gained in struggle, so that it may return ultimately to the Source bringing its share of "harmonic variety." The cause of what he calls "equilibration," or the mental weighing business, is that "nothing is acceptable or grateful that does not proceed from free choice - what is done from necessity has no merit."

And, though "high and divine things . . . do not come home to our mental consciousness at all by way of sensation," yet we can still be instructed by teachers, by sciences, "in some measure" by our power to reflect, "but principally from the Holy Scriptures." They provide "the code of rules for obtaining the end by the means." p 120

Swedenborg showed himself as caring more for the spirit of Jesus than for Christian dogma. At the end he gave it as his conviction (not as anything he had direct knowledge of) that the soul survives the death of the body, happily rid of all interference from the "non-intellectual spheres," living beyond time and almost free from space. Heaven would be a "society of souls" and the City of God on earth the seminary of it. "The most universal law of its citizens is that they love their neighbor

as themselves and God more than themselves. All other things are means, and are good in proportion as they lead directly to this end."

It was the creed of a calm scientist and of a good man. It was really summed up when he said, during the discourse on free will: "If then we strive to the utmost of our power to will and to be able, it follows as a matter of course that a higher power then breathes upon us, and raises our efforts to powers not human; and thereby brings us back into a state emulous of that liberty which we have lost." p 122

Physical passion, we can surmise from his diaries, had galled him, but he did not think of physical pleasure as immoral in itself. From his system it flowed naturally that the soul had not created the body to torment it. The delights of the world and of the sensual part of man served, he said, as "the fuel and incentive of bodily life." He condemned those persons as "somewhat beside themselves who aim not to moderate but altogether to exterminate the pleasures of the senses and the delights of the world as if they were so many deadly and pernicious poisons." pp 122-123

It would indeed hardly seem as if Swedenborg had any time to ponder on flashes of vision or strange dreams. But these come unbidden and make themselves at home. The hard-working mining expert, the physicist-philosopher, the anatomist, had for several years been conscious of a rill of secret life - perhaps the very spring of his present studies - at any rate a messenger from subliminal regions which was making itself more and more evident. p 125

He wrote, ". . . a flame of divers sizes and with a diversity of color and splendor has often been seen by me. Thus while I was writing a certain little work hardly a day passed by for several months in which a flame was not seen by me as vividly as the flame of a household hearth; at the time this was a sign of approbation, and this happened before spirits began to speak with me *viva voce*." p 127

It is known from a diary he began to keep in 1743 that he was far from happy. He had indeed formulated his religious beliefs, but he was now confronted by the struggle to live up to them. He was not mildly dejected now and then as every thinking human being must be at the gap between knowing and doing; it was more than that. Swedenborg was suffering. He suffered in proportion to the joy he had experienced when he perceived "the light" - an experience which, all mystics testify, makes a hypersensitive scrutiny of their own shortcomings inevitable, so that after the first glad recognition of feeling "saved" a period of dark doubt occurs. pp 131-132

Swedenborg did not doubt that there was a divine light which could flow into the soul from God and from the soul into the mind, but he was not sure about the receptacle. Putting his anguish into scholastic sawdust, he had written, "We cannot say with what power, according to what laws, and in what manner, the subject reflects, infracts, diminishes and intercepts these rays, opposes to them its own mists and beclouds itself; how again when these mists are dispersed it emerges into the light; how it warms with zeal; and, on the other hand, how it cools from want of it." p 132

A humble man, Swedenborg was very doubtful about his own purity, and now he had reached a point where his own reasoning did not satisfy him. He had had a glimpse of

what he thought of as divine approval, and he yearned for more, for enough so that he could put out of his head the suspicion that the blissful light had been the "weak fires" of the body or of the animus or even of the mind, pretending to be the light of life, as he wrote in the second part of the new book. pp 133-134

Had Swedenborg given up the attempt to try to find "the mechanism of the intercourse of the soul and the body" by means of "experience, geometry and reason"?

He had not. Everything he had written went to show that he felt he had essentially solved the problem, but in the draft of *The Five Senses* he did say to himself, as it were, that as he had written it he felt his theories could not be comprehended by others, and he himself noted that certain points were still obscure to him. p 146

Physically the soul was "the principle of active life in the body." Psychologically it organized the ideas the mind had acquired from sense reports. This took place in the cortex. Writing with the awe that nearly made him a poet at times, Swedenborg said: "There [in the cerebrum] the soul resides, clad in the noblest garment of organization, and sits to meet the ideas emerging thither and receives them as guests. This high and noble place is the innermost sensorium, and it is the boundary at which the ascent of the life of body ceases, and the boundary from which that of the soul, considered as a spiritual essence, begins." pp 146-147

All through the draft of *The Five Senses* runs a refrain that seems to have little to do with science - the love of God, reached as a result of the conquest of that which is "inferior and external" in man. Swedenborg here shows himself to be as God-intoxicated as ever Spinoza was, and, like Spinoza, he thought he could demonstrate the things of the spirit "geometrically." Not only true and false, but also good and evil, though he saw the two pairs of opposites as linked. For those assessments, however, sciences were not enough, he now stressed, they involved truths, "wisdom is what also involves goodnesses." p

147



Swedenborg had read Philo Judaeus, Origen, and others who had tried to make the Bible more divine by humanizing it, through symbolic interpretation, but the Latin translation which he was using at this time happened to be that of Sebastian Castellio. Castellio, one of the noblest of the Christian Neoplatonists, had also written books, and he had translated the *Theologia Germanica*, that gem of mysticism with which Swedenborg's beliefs have much in common. It cannot be proved that Swedenborg had read these books, and he could have read the same opinions in a dozen other books to which he had access, but it is interesting that Castilleo had written that "Divine revelations can be seen in a literal, pictorial, temporal way, or they can be read deeper . . . as eternal and spiritual realities." pp 150-151

After the middle of April, 1745, he had, he said, "conversed with those who are in heaven the same as with my familiars here on earth, and this almost continuously," for, he reckoned, about eight months, at the time he was writing this. During the

succeeding four years, Swedenborg made about twenty references or more to his admission into the spiritual world as having taken place in the middle of April, 1745.
p 153

Swedenborg needed to believe in the symbolic exegesis of the Bible and in divine authority for it, since that was the only way in which he could keep both the Bible and his reason. But what really shocked him into devoting himself to the "mission" of this interpretation was undoubtedly something that happened to him in April, 1745. It was his feeling that he had seen and spoken with "dead" acquaintances of his, "of all classes," in other words, with people he *knew*.
p154

He had been in and out of dreams and semi-dreams and visions which might have been traced by him to his own knowledge and wishes - he was subtle enough for that to have occurred to him, indeed he seems at times to have doubted everything, even the Delft vision. But the experience of being with his "dead" friends and acquaintances was nothing he had apparently been either wishing for or preparing for. There was not one word in his diary preceding this experience to show that he was at all interested in proving "survival" so as to be reunited with the loved and lost.
pp 154-155

In 1746, after a year's social experience with spirits, he noted privately that, "in company with other men, I spoke just as any other man, so that no one was able to distinguish me either from myself as I had been formerly, or from any other man; and, nevertheless, in the midst of company I sometimes spoke with spirits and with those who were around me; and perhaps they might have gathered something from this circumstance. However, I do not know whether anyone noticed anything from the fact that the internal senses were sometimes withdrawn from the external, though not in any such way that anyone could make a judgment from it; for at such times they could judge no other than that I was occupied with thoughts."
p 156

As far as social behavior went, his polite correctness was often praised by people who knew him, as well as by casual acquaintances.

But he might have suffered from a subtler unbalance. His continued intellectual interests after 1745 (he wrote his clearest book at the age of eighty-two) would not prove to a psychoanalyst that his visions and his ideas were not the result of unresolved complexes. But from that point of view Luther, George Fox, John Wesley himself, and many other of mankind's religious teachers, both in the East and the West, would be considered unbalanced. They had "visions" and heard voices ordering them to do this or that, which they usually obeyed. As has been said before, it comes down to whether it is believed that such "projected" religious experience is always due to a neurosis.
p 158

Nowadays certainly a man who claimed to communicate with spirits *and* to have received a divine commission to reinterpret the Bible might legitimately be committed for observation if that served any useful purpose. But, hard as it is to remember with the often so amazingly modern Swedenborg, he did live and these things did take place over two hundred years ago, when the mental climate was different. p 159

On March 4, 1748, he noted that for thirty-three months he had been able to talk with "them," yet had also been able to be "like another man in the society of men," but, "when however I intensely adhered to worldly things in thought, as when I had care concerning necessary expenses, about which I this day wrote a letter, so that my mind was for some time detained therewith, I fell as it were into a corporeal state, so that spirits could not converse with me . . . whence I am able to know that spirits cannot speak with a man who is much devoted to worldly and corporeal cares; for bodily concerns draw down the ideas of the mind and immerse them in corporeal things."

p 167



In Sweden right into the eighteenth century people were brought into court for witchcraft, if they showed "psychic" or even unusual mental powers, and sometimes condemned to death. Late in the seventeenth century, in Swedenborg's own lifetime, the witchcraft hysteria in the country took on terrific proportions, and while most of it was "superheated imagination" it was also mentioned at a trial that some of the "possessed" could describe things that were going on in a different

part of the city of Stockholm at the same time. It was of course all ascribed to the Devil, and sentences of decapitation and burning at the stake were frequent.

p 189

An interesting detail from Tuxen's testimony [Major-General Tuxen, a Dane who knew him well] is that the Queen asked Swedenborg, "Can you, then, speak with every one deceased or only with certain persons?" Swedenborg answered, "I cannot converse with all, but with such as I have known in this world; with all royal and princely persons, with all renowned heroes, or great and learned men, whom I have known either personally or from their actions or writings; consequently of all of whom I could form an idea; for it may be supposed that a person whom I never knew or of whom I could form no idea I neither could nor would wish to speak with."

pp 192-193

Swedenborg had read most of the Church fathers, among them Origen. In Origen's Alexandria of the third century enough of the skeptical spirit of Greece was still alive to make an educated Christian work hard at reinterpreting the Bible. Origen concluded - and he was not the first or the only one of that time to do so - that Scripture had three kinds of sense, one moral, one historical, and one spiritual, corresponding fairly well to Swedenborg's divisions.

p 203

There can be no doubt that it was through so-called "automatic" writing that Swedenborg obtained the bulk of his Bible commentaries, and much that to us seems inconsistent with his real self.

Automatic writing, it has been explained is one of the forms in which alleged spirit communication comes to those individuals who are known as sensitives or mediums, capable of such dissociation.

p 205

He explicitly says of the ten pages which he has just written: "These words . . . were said to me verbally and almost enunciated, and this by infants who were then with me

and who also spake by my mouth and moreover directed my very hand." That is clear enough, yet there is much more supporting evidence.

In this form of automatic writing, he hears the words with his "inner ear," seeming to get either a few words or a sentence at a time from a dictation that appears to him to come from an external source (elsewhere he speaks of getting the text only "piecemeal"), but he passed into other, more advanced kinds of dissociation.

"Nay I have written entire pages, and the spirits did not dictate the words, but absolutely guided my hand, so that it was they who were doing the writing." p 206

His idea of religion and of God was again the same in 1740 as it had been in the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom* and as it continued to his death, becoming more and more dominant and purified. "Love therefore is the very essence of man," he wrote in 1746, "for man is man from understanding, and the understanding is from love. That which is holy is love, for to love God above all things, and the neighbor as oneself is a holy thing, inasmuch as holiness then comes from God Messiah."

The gist of Swedenborg's belief then and later was that the essence of divine life, therefore of all life, was love. Men, whether in or out of the material body, were mere dead forms unless animated by love. They might appear alive if animated by selfishness, but they were in a state of spiritual death. pp 208-209

Now in automatic scripts the handwriting is likely not only to vary from the subject's normal writing, but also to vary in accordance with the different "spirits" who claim they are moving the hand or dictating the topics. . . .

Such proved to be the case. A good deal of the *furor theologicus* script is in an angular, slashing, obscure style, rather typical of certain automatic scripts. . . .

The Librarian having generously given permission for several photostats to be made from the manuscripts, it seemed interesting to the writer to find out if a professional handwriting expert would detect any significant difference in the pages from which the samples are here given. Accordingly she marked one A and the other B, and submitted them to an expert, merely asking for an opinion on the enclosed specimens, naturally giving no information as to what or whose they were, nor even who was sending them.

The expert, an Oxford B.Sc., and an associate member of the British Psychological Society, discovered such marked differences that she reported they were by different writers of opposite character. The author of the script which has been characterized here as "automatic" (Illustration A) was said to be the type of man "who is liable to project his own inner problem into the outer world, and fight it out visibly," also the type "who may agitate with great intolerance for the cause of tolerance, or with great ruthlessness for the cause of kindness and love. His humbleness is deep-seated, but the impatience of his temperament makes him act as a fanatic." Quite suitable for the *furor theologicus*!

The writer of the script here called "normal" (Illustration B) was said to be the kind of man who "seeks to give expression to his visionary and intuitive experiences. He tries to be precise and rational for he wishes to bring into harmony rational thinking and irrational feeling." The expert further mentioned this man's fine sensibility, remarkable integrity of character, tender soul and warm heart, and also "a certain inner vanity," which, "he shares with most of those who consciously and conscientiously strive after perfection."

However one may feel about judging psychology by means of handwriting (though the above is fairly striking in its insight, considering that the expert had no means of knowing who was in question) the fact remains that the two specimens were held to be so different as to be thought by different men. pp 211-213

In the so-called *Spiritual Diary*, mainly kept during 1747 and 1748, he often has five or six entries for the same day, each of them dated and paragraphed separately. On examining the manuscript it is found that these entries often vary startlingly in the handwriting, as they do in the topics. p 214

In later years one of his London landladies and both his servants in Stockholm testified that Swedenborg would sometimes go to bed for three or four days and ask only for a basin of water to be placed by his bed, giving orders he was on no account to be disturbed. And, according to his friend Robsahm, they said he came out of these seclusions hale and hearty. p 222

We do not know everything read by Swedenborg. In regard to the interpretations in the *Arcana* we know that many of the ideas are the same as those of Neoplatonist-influenced writers whom he might have read, but it is certain that he accepted them as "revelations" because they too came to him when he was more or less entranced, as we now should say. (He was to call it "a suspension of bodily sensations" during which man could receive "angelic wisdom" "by influx from above into the spiritual parts of his mind.")

It is clear from the handwriting of the first draft of the *Arcana* that he was not in a normal state when writing most of the work. Although it varies from the violent script to the almost normal, it is certainly written under stress. p 232-233

"Heaven" consists of innumerable varieties of selflessness, as "hell" consists of the opposite. There is no personal "Devil." No schematic presentation of Swedenborg's ideas, however, is fair to him. What charms and astonishes the reader is the wealth of vivid detail "from experience" with which the stark generalities bloom. These are in all his books, though most frequent in the diaries, but none can be rightly appreciated unless his fundamental conceptions are studied with whatever light one can bring to them. p 241

Corresponding to the encyclopedic range of his interests and knowledge, Swedenborg felt conscious of almost the entire hierarchy of discarnate beings. At the beginning especially, he studied the ways in which they affected his life in the world. He was evidently not a little preoccupied by whether a spirit could enter into and possess or obsess a man's body, and one catches glimpses of his crisis period in London in 1745.

Among the gossip collected by his enemy Mathesius in later years from a former landlord was some to the effect that Swedenborg had once run out into the street in his shirt, had been delirious and spoken strange things about angels, had spent an undue length of time washing his feet, and in general behaved very queerly. pp 246-247

Of so-called "physical phenomena," that is, the alleged influence of mind or of "spirits" on actual material things, Swedenborg has not much to say, but he does make references to them. In a diary entry he says that the inhabitants of the world of spirits have "peculiar skill in these things" which have an "effect on material and corporeal objects." He calls them "magical arts" and says they could easily "induce the minds of men to believe they were miracles."

From his personal experience he mentions that "spirits have produced on my body effects entirely perceptible to sense . . . have scattered disagreeable and sweet odors often enough," and "they have maltreated my body with grievous pain . . . have most manifestly induced cold and heat, and cold more frequently; have as it were driven along blasts of wind; I have felt the wind plainly, yea so as to cause the flame of the candle to flicker," and papers too have been moved, he says. p 248

Other semi-physical "mediumistic" phenomena mentioned by him are for instance that he sometimes felt lifted up by spirits when passing over steep places (levitation). He tells furthermore that sometimes when he looked in a mirror and at the same time spoke with spirits his actual physical face would be changed so as to resemble the faces of those he spoke with. "Nevertheless my face remained, but the changes seemed to belong to theirs . . ." This happened several times, he says, "sometimes to their indignation, sometimes to their delight. They perfectly recognized themselves." p 248

As he had a correct idea of how the "learned" would regard these studies, he did not bother much with what is now called "evidential" material. He noted his own mental and physical states when he seemed to himself to be in communication with the other world, and he considered its chief features and in what it differed from our world. He gave especial care to the study of time and space, a great deal to memory and "speech," and some to "spheres" or "auras"; and if he had not unflinchingly insisted that he was making these observations on another plane than ours, their keenness and suggestiveness would have attained recognition even here. p 249

Innumerable times Swedenborg stressed that his physical body stayed in the one spot and only his mind roamed, and this not in our space but through "changes of state." When he went on those odd excursions which he termed visits to the spirit realms of other planets, he maintained that it took two days for all the necessary changes of state to occur in him. p 254

Swedenborg asserts that in the first bewildered period following the death-shock, spirits do not always know even who they are, as when he mentions a spirit who first recognized himself from seeing his own image in Swedenborg's mind. In another case, "A certain one whom I had not previously known, and who seemed to have but recently died, was with me today, and when it was permitted to inquire whence he

came he was led by my memory through various cities which he did not know, but when he was conducted through his own city then he recognized the streets and everything connected; and if I had known the situation of the houses I could also have found the house where he had lived."

He concluded that the reason spirits were not "allowed," generally speaking, to remember more details from their earth life was that the Lord meant them to lead a more "interior" life now, but he often sorrowfully mentions that spirits do not at all relish this wise provision or even realise it. pp 256-257

Spirits were especially prone to the life of unbalanced opinions, being without the common-sense checks of the physical world; and Swedenborg often complains of their self-confidence and arrogance, no matter how mistaken they were. He says they did not know whether the things they picked from his memory were true or not, but believed them equally and often supposed them to be from their own superb memories. pp 259-260

When Swedenborg spoke of "spirits" he usually meant the ordinary run of what he called "middle-character" deceased, neither good nor bad, hardly changed from their uninstructed life on earth, and hardly as yet aware of their change of condition. Most of them could not grasp what he persisted in trying to tell them, that though they had apparently lost their "corporeal memory" they now had access to another and better mental apparatus.

For if they really learned to make use of their interior memory and their inmost memory they would be able to think "much more subtly and distinctly," since the interior memory was part of the faculty of rational understanding, and the inmost memory enabled one to judge of what was "true and good." p 261

Among themselves, he said, the more developed spirits who knew what was what did not of course try to spell thought out into words, and Swedenborg despaired of expressing the rapidity of this mode of communication. The thought of man, he said, is infinitely quicker than his attempt to put it into speech or writing; the speech of spirits infinitely quicker than that of man; and the angels can think infinitely more quickly than spirits, seeing all the branching implications of an idea in all its complexity at one and the same time. p 265

Many notes in Swedenborg's diaries are concerned with ways of communicating in the other world. These notes are not always consistent. It is not as if he had sat down and been "inspired" to write a systematic account that always fitted in with his own previous ideas. In this case, as in the case of most of his descriptions in that strange realm, it is more as if a traveler in a foreign country had listened to many of the inhabitants and put down some of what each had told him, contradictory though it might sometimes be, interpreting it in the light of his own preoccupations where he had no other light. p 266

The innermost angels can tell a person's whole life from the sound of his voice in a few words, since in it they hear his ruling passion and hence know the details of his

life. Yes, Swedenborg said, they can even tell all about a person from a single sigh, "because a sigh is a thought of the heart." p 267

As among men so among spirits there were spheres tranquil and pleasant, others disturbing and depressing. Each soul, so to speak, carried its own climate with it favourable or unfavourable to those near it. Worst of all Swedenborg found those spirits in the nearness of whose spheres it was almost impossible even for him to believe in the good and true; under whose influence in fact evil seemed good and false seemed true; spheres they had carried with them from their life on earth. But he was not undefended. Once, he says, when he was surrounded by such spirits, "an angel came, and I saw that the spirits could not endure his presence; for as he came nearer, they fell back more and more." They could not "endure the sphere of mutual love." p 270

As he had inherited the garden from another owner, he of course did not always know what was going to come up in it, and he noted that "by the currant bush there were old roses, marsh mallows and gilliflowers of a curious kind," and elsewhere there were other flowers and vegetables, not on his program, such as African roses and velvet roses and beside them lilies, rose-mallows and sunflowers.

It may have been during the discovery of and communion with these frail messengers from other people and times that he became aware, so he said, of spirits in the garden who greatly resisted the idea of a new owner who introduced changes; but he pacified them, and introduced "singular Dutch figures of animals cut in box-tree" [topiary] and little garden pavilions like some he had seen in his travels. In the middle there was one copied from an English model; another had curious mirror effects, another was a voliere for birds with wide netting, and at the end of the garden he finally built himself a summerhouse, containing his library, where he liked to work, being apparently like every other man who gets a house of his own, anxious to have a little house still more his own.

Near this was a "labyrinth," or, as his friend Robsahm wrote, "a maze of boards, entirely for the amusement of the good people that would come and visit him in his garden, and especially for their children; and there he would receive them with a cheerful countenance and enjoy their delight at his contrivances." p 272

Swedenborg was no recluse - but neither was he merely an amiable and sociable man of independent means, secretly devoted to "occult" studies, and publicly devoted to pottering in his garden. He kept the same keen eye on the doings of the Swedish legislature that he had done before he seemed to himself to have crossed the boundaries of the physical world. In his code, attention to civic duties ranked high, and, as Robsahm says, "in acting with a party he was never a party-man, but loved truth and honesty in all he did." pp 272-273

"One absolute monarch," he wrote, "is liable to do more mischief in one year than a clique or combination of many at a session of the Diet could accomplish in a hundred years. . . . Corrupt practices in free governments are like small ripples, compared with large waves in absolute monarchies." In the latter, he said, "favorites and the favorites of favorites, yea the unlimited monarch himself, are corrupted by men who study and

appeal to their passions . . ." He threw in a timely reminder about Baron Gortz and Charles XII.

He admitted faults in representative governments; still there was freedom. p 274

He had seen during his tenure of office men with petty souls and big voices who even while they claimed to be working for the common good were in reality working for their own profit, power or renown. So to every action he applied one test: What is the end the man has in view? Did he desire the welfare of others for the sake of the common good, or was it for the sake of himself? p 275

Incidentally, Swedenborg saw evil spirits as serving the above useful purpose: by their smelling a man's evil inclinations, reinforcing them and dragging them to the surface, the man would know that he had such inclinations and could do something about them. And, if he had once really seen himself as he was he would not be left to himself. "The Lord will cause the man not only to see the evil but not to will it and finally to detest it." p 276

Swedenborg saw those who gave up the world as often burning with a desire for "merit" which defeated itself, for, he said, in heaven it was impossible for the self-torturers to be with the angels, who do what they do out of joy. Lest, therefore, the ascetic "sphere" should disturb the heavenly harmony, such grim candidates for sainthood were put off in a department by themselves.

In human society Swedenborg did not want either the individual or society to dominate; he sought interdependence, not slavery. The "general good" he saw as having its origin in the useful work of individuals, and this work he saw as being nourished and continued from the established fund of general good - a beneficent circle. He had no use for drones. But "he who performs uses for himself alone is also useless though not called so." p 277

Perhaps it was because of the opportunities for hypocrisy offered by official Christianity that Swedenborg was so distrustful of it. He often said that heathens may live better lives than Christians. Certain Chinese spirits showed distrust when he mentioned Christ to them, because they knew that Christians were worse than they, but he said they liked to hear about the Lord. The Church of the Lord, according to Swedenborg, is with all who admit divinity and live in love of their neighbor, and it is wherever people live in charity, according to their religion.

Swedenborg said that those heathens or others who had worshiped human beings or images in the world were for some time let believe that they encounter those deities in heaven, and in this way were gradually weaned from their fancies. p 280

In Swedenborg's view love of self was to do good only for one's own sake, or for one's children and grandchildren who really, he said, are part of the man himself and called his own.

Imagine a community, Swedenborg said, of such as love only themselves and others only as they seem part of them, and you will see that their love is only as that among

robbers, who kiss and call each other friends as long as they act in common, but who wish to slay and destroy the others if they protest their dominion. They laugh at everything which is divine.

Of such is hell. The worst are the deceitful egoists, he said, since deceit presses deeply into thought and purpose and poisons them and disturbs all spiritual life. But with many the evil in their souls has been so wrapped up in outer honesty and decency that they hardly know themselves what devils they are. It takes death to reveal them to themselves.



Eternal slander, quarreling, hate, and unfriendliness fill the horrid little towns of hell, or rather in the hells, since each inhabitant in a sense creates his own, but enough are like-minded to have similar districts. In the milder departments are huts that sometimes are arranged as if in streets; from those huts come the noise of brawls and fights. Some are like ruined cities after fire. Others are full of dirty

brothels where lust feeds itself forever joylessly. There are also dark forests, sandy deserts, scraggy cliffs, black mines and caves. There seems to be fire, both smoky and flaming, but it is not such as can be left by the inhabitants, Swedenborg says. It is correspondence with their self-love.

pp 282-283

As early as in 1748, Swedenborg, the one-time student of astronomy, sought "permission" from the Lord to know "what kind of men they are who live in other planets." He first made the acquaintance of the spirits from "Jupiter." Many entries in his diary, in his abnormal handwriting, are taken up by his descriptions of the appearance, customs, habits, etc. of the spirits from the different planets, as he claimed he observed them on his different visits. He makes it clear he did not believe he flitted bodily around the universe; his body stayed in his bed, he said, while his spirit went through several "changes of state" which enabled him to "travel" into the kind of state in which he could communicate with spirits not of earth, who nevertheless "corresponded" to various universal ideas and feelings.

pp 293-294

Very early in his other-world experiences Swedenborg had mentioned that spirits told him the world was in such a bad way, both here and yonder, that some sort of housecleaning, so to speak, was due. It was hinted that this would take place in the world of spirits, the in-between place, because too many evil spirits had banded together and were upsetting not only their own but *our* world, and it seemed as if the time had come when there was no more "charity." Therefore Swedenborg, putting this together with his interpretations of the Apocalypse, believed that the time had come not when the visible world would be destroyed but when the "constructs," so to speak, of evil spirits in the other world would be thrown down.

pp 294-295

In the later diaries names of actual personages appear. The one who appears more frequently was the King whom he had met in his youth, the man who had had his fate in his hands, King Charles XII. In the 1730s, Swedenborg had written a public

appreciation of the King's keen mind, his encouragement of and love for science - from which no one would guess how Swedenborg saw the King in the other world!

Pithily commenting on the King's nature, as it seemed revealed, Swedenborg said that Charles "made royalty consist in obstinacy even to death," and that the spirits who aided him in such an attitude were from another universe, "for such obstinacy does not exist within the limits of this planet." Charles, he said, had been "pitiless and cruel, caring nothing for human life." And though he had lost his country believing this to be for its glory, "he ought to be considered insane."

Swedenborg acknowledged Charles's ability to take in a hundred things at a single glance, and to draw correct deductions, "in relation to his end which was dominion"; he acknowledged that Charles thought himself a good man, but, after about a year in the other world, he was stripped of his self-deceit and appeared as he really was - a devil.

pp 296-297

Swedenborg used the new freedom to come out openly against what now seemed to him the wicked doctrine of the vicarious atonement and the bewildering, faith-choking doctrine of the Trinity. He also attacked the Lutheran doctrine, as he saw it, of "faith" as sufficient for salvation. (If he called the Roman Catholics "Babylon" for what he considered their lust of dominion over men's souls, he called the Protestants "Philistia" for their "faith without works" and general self-righteousness, as well as other striking names.)

p 302

In 1763 and 1764 his new theological works, the Four Doctrines, appeared in Amsterdam, but in the same years he published two books of "angelic wisdom" (meaning that "angels" had dictated them to him), one called *The Divine Providence* and another *Divine Love and Wisdom*. These two are perhaps the most beautiful of his works.

p 303

In a charming passage, he describes how once, when he was "in the spirit" and yet now and then concerned with worldly matters, he was asked by a teacher-spirit what it meant that he kept appearing and disappearing from their sight, was he really of their world? Swedenborg explained that he was of both worlds. Since to him man's real self was his spiritual self, he believed that when man was in such deep abstract thought that his soul was unaware of the body, or when he was asleep, his spiritual self, or soul, might become visible in the spirit world. Such thinkers are sometimes seen there, he asserted, deep in thought, visible to the inhabitants, but not aware of them, except in cases such as Swedenborg's, amphibious as he was. In this way too, he had seen, he said, and even conversed, with people still alive, whose spirit was set free in sleep.

p 319

In a series of deeply etched pictures from hell, he gave his report on the fate of those who sinned even more grievously against love. Those whose lust it had been to deflower maidens, among whom there were many of the rich and noble, he said he had seen in hell where they inquired after virgins and were shown harlots who assumed a florid beauty, but who turned into monstrous shapes when the bargain was clinched. Nevertheless the Casanovas had to remain with them. Among themselves, Swedenborg said, these men might indeed still look like men, but to the eye of others who were

allowed to see them "instead of their former agreeable and courteous expression of countenance they appear like apes with faces stern and bestial, walking with their bodies bent forward, and they emit a disagreeable smell. They loathe females, and turn away from those they see, for they have no desire for them." p 322

Another time, while Swedenborg was pondering on the love of dominion grounded in self-love, he saw "a devil ascending from hell, with a square cap on his head, let down over his forehead even to his eyes; his face was full of pimples as of a burning fever, his eyes fierce and fiery, his breast swelling immensely; from his mouth he belched smoke like a furnace, his loins seemed all in a blaze, instead of feet he had bony ankles without flesh, and from his body exhaled a stinking and filthy heat."

On seeing this personage, Swedenborg admits that he was alarmed, crying to him, "Approach no nearer; tell me, whence are you?"

He replied in a hoarse tone of voice, "I am from below, where I am with two hundred in the most super-eminent of all societies. We are all emperors of emperors, kings of kings, dukes of dukes and princes of princes . . . we sit on thrones of thrones and dispatch mandates through the whole world and beyond it."

Swedenborg suggested that he was insane, to which the devil replied, "How can you say so when we absolutely seem to ourselves, and also are acknowledged by each other, to have such distinction?" p 232

Christopher Springer was one of those unofficial and adventurous diplomats for his country which our own time was also to see. He took part, successfully, in the most secret negotiations between England, Russia, Sweden, and Prussia, and there was no doubt in *his* mind as to Swedenborg's clairvoyant power.

"All that he has told me of my deceased friends," he said, "and enemies and of the secrets I had with them is almost past belief. He even explained to me in what manner peace was concluded between Sweden and the King of Prussia; and he praised my conduct on that occasion. He even specified the three high personages whose services I made use of at that time, which was nevertheless a profound secret between us." pp 348-349

Swedenborg enjoyed "a sound mind, memory and understanding to the last hour of his life," so Elizabeth Reynolds and Richard Shearsmith reported, swearing it before the Mayor of London at the Guildhall, on November 24, 1775, because tongues had wagged, saying that Swedenborg had retracted everything just before he died. . . .

By his bedside, the document said, were Mrs Shearsmith (who died soon after) and Elizabeth. The wife of the barber, and the maid: two simple East End Londoners, of those people whom he had described as the best of the Christians.

About five o'clock of that Sunday, Swedenborg asked the two women what time it was. They told him, and he thanked them, saying it was good. "In about ten minutes after, he heaved a gentle sigh and expired in the most tranquil manner." p 362