

Emanuel Swedenborg. By HENRY MAUDSLEY, M.D. Lond.,
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IN July 1745 Swedenborg returned to Sweden, and soon afterwards resigned his assessorship, so that he might be at liberty to devote himself to the new function to which he imagined that he had been especially called. Accordingly, all scientific studies and pursuits he now abandoned entirely; all worldly honours and interests he counted worthless; he devoted himself to that sacred office "to which the Lord Himself has called me, who was graciously pleased to manifest Himself to me, His unworthy servant, in a personal appearance in the year 1743; to open in me a sight of the spiritual world, and to enable me to converse with spirits and angels. . . . Hence it has been permitted me to hear and see things in another life which are astonishing, and which have never come to the knowledge of any man, nor entered into his imagination. I have been there instructed concerning different kinds of spirits, and the state of souls after death—concerning Hell, or the lamentable state of the unfaithful—concerning Heaven, or the most happy state of the faithful, and particularly concerning the doctrine of faith, which is acknowledged throughout Heaven." He is well aware that many persons will affirm that such intercourse is impossible, and that it must be mere fancy and illusion on his part, but for all this he cares not, seeing that "he has seen, heard, and had sensible experience" of what he declares.

"I am aware that many who read these pages will believe that they are fictions of the imagination; but I solemnly declare they are not fictions, but were truly done and seen; and that I saw them, not in any state of the mind asleep, but in a state of perfect wakefulness."

And he goes on to declare, calmly and seriously, the fundamental purpose of his high mission—that through him the Lord Jesus Christ made His second advent for the institution of a new church described in the Revelations under the figure of the New Jerusalem.

It must be borne in mind, with regard to these wonderful voyages to the spiritual world, that Swedenborg did not look upon it as totally unlike, far away and distinct from, the natural world of which we have experience—as a country high up above the clouds, where people are continually

occupied in doing the reverse of what they had any pleasure in doing on earth, and indeed are altogether so changed in character, habits, and pursuits that, if they can affirm their identity, they must be very much astonished at themselves. On the contrary, he considered the spiritual world to be the life and cause of the natural world, which corresponded with it throughout.

“The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world collectively and in every part; for the natural world exists and subsists from the spiritual world, just as an effect does from its cause. . .

“Whenever I have been company with angels, the objects in Heaven appeared so exactly like those in the world, that I knew no other than that I was on earth. . . .

“There is so little difference between the life of the spirit and the life of the body that those who have died can hardly realise that a change has been made. . . .

“A man is equally a man after death, and a man so perfectly that he knows no other than that he is still on earth. He sees, hears, and speaks as on earth; he walks, runs, and sits as on earth; he eats and drinks as on earth; he sleeps and wakes as on earth; he enjoys sexual delights as on earth; in short, he is a man in general and every particular as on earth, whence it is plain that death is a continuation of life, and a mere transit to another plane of being.”

All things in Heaven, he says, appear to be in place and space exactly as in the world, but all changes of place are effected by the mind. When an angel or spirit desires to go from one place to another, the desire effects its own accomplishment, and he arrives sooner or later, according as he is eager or indifferent. “Approximations in the spiritual world arise from similitudes of mind, and removals from dissimilitudes; and thus spaces are merely signs of inner differences. . . . From this case alone the Hells are altogether separated from the Heavens.”

Now Swedenborg maintained that to him it was given, by the opening of his spiritual sight, to enter the spiritual world and to see what was going on there, while he was still in the natural world; and that so completely that the spirits “knew no other than that I was one of themselves. An experience like mine no one from creation has had.” It is not without interest, nor without significance, to observe what a superior position he assigns himself in the spiritual world; he is the seer in heaven as on earth; can see through the angels at a glance and teach them many things, while they

in vain attempt to contend with him in argument—are ignominiously worsted if they pretend to do so. The wonder is how any one can sincerely accept as revelation some of the absurdities and obscenities which he relates, how the nature of many of his spiritual discoveries can fail to destroy faith in his seership. On the theory of his madness, the exalted position which he serenely assumes, his assertion of a correspondence between the spiritual and the natural world, and the character of his revelations are quite consistent. He *lived and moved in the world, and saw it with his bodily eyes* as other persons see it; but his disordered intellect was continually occupied in spiritualistic reflections to which his disordered imagination gave shape; the morbid creations being projected outwards and then represented as events of the spiritual world. Formerly he had devoted his energies to scientific speculations, and had elaborated wonderful theories of nature; now that he had discarded all scientific pursuits, and confined himself entirely to the study and the mystical interpretation of the Scriptures, he framed a more wonderful theory of the spiritual world. His eyes were indeed opened to see what other people could not see, but the gift was nowise so singular as he imagined; every monomaniac being similarly gifted. What to him are space and time, the laws of nature, the hard-won experience of mankind, the social interests and obligations? He is above law, above criticism, above error—has a divine right to be always right!

In 1749 Swedenborg published the first volume of his “*Arcana Cælestia*,” the work being completed in eight quarto volumes, the last of which appeared in 1756. Most of this time he appears to have spent in London. It would be vain to attempt to give an adequate idea of the variety of subjects handled by him, and of the marvellous experiences which he records; it must suffice, from Mr. White’s numerous quotations, to select and present a few illustrations. The following are from the “*Spiritual Diary*.” The first of them indicates the disturbed nights which he often had:—

“When I was about to go to sleep, it was stated that certain spirits were conspiring to kill me; but because I was secure, I feared nothing, and fell asleep. About the middle of the night I awoke, and felt that I did not breathe from myself, but, as I believed, from Heaven. It was then plainly told me that the whole hosts of spirits had conspired to suffocate me, and as soon as they had made the attempt a heavenly respiration was opened in me and they were defeated.”

Another feature of his troubled state of mind seems to have been a kleptomaniacal tendency:—

“I observed that certain spirits often wished to excite me to steal things of small value, such as are met with in shops; and so great was their desire that they actually moved my hand. I ascertained that in the world these spirits had been tradespeople, who by various artifices defrauded their customers, and thought it allowable. Some had been celebrated merchants, at which I wondered. . . . When they were with me, as soon as I saw anything in shops, or any pieces of money, or the like, their cupidity became manifest to me; for thinking themselves to be me, they urged that I should stretch forth my hand to steal, quite contrary to my usual state and custom.”

Hallucinations of taste and smell were not wanting:

“It has sometimes, yea rather often, happened that what had tasted well has been changed in my mouth to what is nasty, or to another taste. Twice, if I mistake not, sugar tasted almost like salt. A liquid I drank had infused into it a salty taste expressed by the spirits from the juices of the body. . . . The taste of man is thus changed according to the phantasies of the spirits.”

The Spirits plot to make him commit suicide:—

“It was often observed, that when I was in the streets Evil Spirits wished to cast me under the wheels of carriages; the effort was in fact habitual to them. To-day I noticed particularly that they were in the constant endeavour to do so. I was enabled to perceive that Evil Spirits made the attempt, and that indeed such mischief is their life.

“There was a certain woman (Sara Hesselia) who inwardly cherished such an aversion to her parents that she meditated poisoning them. She took into her head that I was willing to marry her, and when she found out that she was mistaken, she was seized with such hatred that she thought of killing me, had it been possible. She died not long afterwards.

“Some time before the faculty of conversing with Spirits was opened in me, I was impelled to commit suicide with a knife. The impulse grew so strong that I was forced to hide the knife out of sight in my desk.

“I have now discovered that Sara Hesselia was the Spirit who excited the suicidal impulse as often as I saw the knife. From this it may appear that men may be unconsciously infested with Spirits, who hated them during their life on earth.”

It will be observed how Swedenborg, whose sense of right and wrong was clear and sharp, attributes to wicked Spirits

the evil impulses and feelings which sprang from his disorder. "It is given to me to know instantly," he says, "the character of Spirits, and not to believe that the feelings which they insinuate are my own, as people generally do, who credit themselves with whatever occurs in their minds." Truly, a saving faith, which evidently withheld him from the commission of many an overt act of insanity.

What he writes of the Quakers, of whom his spiritual experience had given him a very bad opinion, may be quoted here, in order to show the kind of filthy imaginings which some persons are content to accept as his spiritual revelations.

"When I awoke in the night, I felt in the hair of my head a multitude of very small snakes. It was perceived that Quaker Spirits had been plotting against me whilst I was asleep, but without effect. It was only by their phantasies that they were among my hair where I felt them.

"The secret worship of the Quakers sedulously concealed from the world was made manifest. It is a worship so wicked, execrable, and abominable, that were it known to Christians they would expel Quakers from society, and permit them to live only among beasts.

"They have a vile communion of wives. The women say they are possessed by the Devil, and that they can only be delivered if men filled with the Holy Ghost cohabit with them. Men and women sit round a table, and wait for the influx of the Spirit. . . . When a woman feels the Devil, she selects a man and retires with him, &c., &c.

"It was inquired whether the Quakers engaged in these obscene rites with their daughters and maidservants, and it was said that they did."

These atrocious and most absurd charges bear on their face the evidence of the sink in which they were engendered; they are the disgusting spawn of a diseased fancy dwelling with a pathological sympathy upon sexual obscenities after sexual power had been exhausted by excesses. There is really no excuse which can be offered for them but the sad excuse of a diseased mind. If his followers be possessed of some sure canon by which they are able to distinguish such iniquitous assertions from those which they deem unquestionable truths of the spiritual worlds, and to pronounce them errors or hallucinations, they should declare it; for they assuredly rest on the same evidence as all the seer's other spiritual revelations, and as do the revelations of the monomaniac—the *ipse dixit* of the narrator.

Swedenborg's sublime self-sufficiency comes out strongly in his intercourse with the prophets, apostles, and other distinguished persons whom he meets in the spiritual world; he stands in no sort of awe or reverence of them, hardly shows them common respect. Why, indeed, should he, seeing that he declared himself to have a mission equal to, or higher than, that which any of them had fulfilled? Believing that it was through his instrumentality that the Lord Jesus Christ had made his second advent for the institution of the new church signified by the New Jerusalem in the Revelations, his coming was second only, if it was second, to the first advent. Whether he still had the notion which during his acute attack of insanity he expressed, that he was actually the Messiah, does not clearly appear; it is certain, however, that he believed the second coming to have taken place in his person, and the reign of the new church to have commenced. He had fulfilled what John had mystically foretold in the Revelations; and had been a witness of the last judgment which took place in the World of Spirits in the year 1757. Very characteristic of the placid monomania with which he was afflicted is the manner in which he speaks of those whose life and works placed them in a position of rivalry to him; his serene superiority enables him to discover at a glance the evil passions with which they have been possessed. Observe what he says of David and of Paul:—"David is possessed with the lust of being chief in Heaven. . . . Persuaded that he was a god he proclaimed himself one."

It was natural then that he should have no kind feeling to Swedenborg:—

"When I went to bed Evil Spirits formed a design to destroy me, and for this end took measures to call out Hell and every malicious Spirit. . . . They evoked David also, who appeared before me in a dense cloud."

Assuredly we have a right to wonder how those who accept Swedenborg's claim of a Divine mission contrive to reconcile these revelations of David's character with the character of the "man after God's own heart." It is impossible to accuse Swedenborg of conscious imposture; no impostor would have ventured on gravely making such incredible statements; it follows, therefore, either that David was an impostor, or that Swedenborg was mad. Vague and windy declamation will not obscure the issue; for if the matter be sincerely sounded,

it will appear that from the one or the other conclusion there is no escape. After all, the theory of insanity will be found the most acceptable explanation or excuse, seeing that if it be not admitted many holy men besides David must be deemed to have been nothing better than impostors. Here is what he says of Paul and his pretensions:—

“A certain Devil fancied himself the very Devil who deceived Adam and Eve. . . . It was given me to hear Paul speaking with him and saying he wished to be his companion, and that they would go together and make themselves gods.

“During my sleep I have been infested by adulterers, and this Devil and Paul have lent their aid to my infesters, and so stubbornly held me in an adulterous train of thought that I could scarcely release myself. . . . Hence Paul’s nefarious character was made known.

“Paul is among the worst of the Apostles, as has been made known to me by large experience. . . . Besides he connected himself with one of the worst Devils, who would fain rule all things, and pledged himself to obtain for him his end. It would be tedious for me to write all I know about Paul.”

We are not concerned here to vindicate Paul’s character, who certainly, though he called himself the least of the apostles, did not undervalue his importance; we are concerned only with the revelation which Swedenborg makes of his own sublime self-sufficiency in heaven as on earth. Luther hearing of his power while in the natural world to converse with those in the spiritual world, came with others to see him, and asked many questions; learning, however, that the church had come to an end and that a new church had commenced, he grew very indignant, but after a while his railing ceased, and he received the Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, and ridiculed his former tenets as in direct opposition to the Word. Calvin is in like manner refuted by Swedenborg, and rebuked in the following energetic words:—

“You talk impiously: begone you wicked spirit! You are in the Spiritual World, and do you not know that predestination implies that some are appointed for Heaven and some for Hell? Have you any other idea of God than as of a tyrant, who admits his favourites into his city, but condemns the rest to a slaughter-house? Be ashamed then, and blush for your doctrine!”

The extracts which have been made will be sufficient to exhibit the ridiculous side of Swedenborg’s revelations of his

intercourse with the spiritual world, and the insane extravagance of his pretensions; nevertheless, it would be a great mistake to suppose that all which he says in his *Arcana Celestia* is equally foolish; it cannot, indeed, be denied that there is much of a very different character. Take, for example, his account of character, which he asserts to be the only passport to heaven; it is unchangeable after death; wherever there is a man in whose heart benevolence rules, there is an angel, and wherever there is a man in whose heart selfishness rules, there is a devil, who will remain so for all eternity. "Ample experience enables me to testify that it is impossible to communicate heavenly life to those who have led an infernal life on earth."

"Some who believed that they could easily receive divine truths after death from the lips of angels, and therewith amend their habits, were subjected to the experiment. Some of them understood the truths they heard, and appeared to accept them; but presently, when left to themselves, they rejected, and even argued against, what they had learned. Others denied the truths as quickly as they were spoken.

. . . They are told for their instruction that Heaven is not denied to any one by the Lord, and that if they please they may go there and stay as long as they like. When, however, they make the attempt, they are seized at the threshold with such anguish that, in their torment, they cast themselves down headlong."

From these and similar experiments, it is rendered certain that no change in character is possible after death; to transform an evil life into a good life would be to destroy it altogether. Surely there is here a far higher sense of truth than there is in the vulgar fancy that in changing worlds there will be a change of character; that a man, in taking leave of this life, will take leave of his tastes, feelings, habits, and opinions, and undergo suddenly a revolution of nature equivalent to the destruction of his identity and the creation of a new being. If such a transformation were to take place, it is quite plain that the individual would not know himself more than the butterfly knows the caterpillar which it has been, and that no one else would know him: a grievous, and indeed incredible disappointment to those saintly beings who are looking forward with a calm and pious assurance to the great triumph which, when they are called up to take the highest seats in heaven, they will have over those who have not known their virtues on earth. What, in truth, is the heavenly reward of a virtuous life but the love of virtue and

the unhindered practice of virtuous acts? What the punishment of hell but the delight in vice, and the unrestrained indulgence of a vicious nature? Whatever his eternal future, each man on earth has Heaven or Hell in and around him, and will assuredly take one or the other with him wherever he goes, and not find it there. Accordingly, Swedenborg asserts that no one is punished in the world of spirits for deeds done on earth. An evil spirit is only punished for the crimes he then and there commits. "Nevertheless, there is no actual difference, whether it is said that the wicked are punished for their crimes on earth, or for the crimes they commit in the world of spirits; because every being preserves his character through death, and attempts to repeat the deeds done in the flesh."

He observed that the angels at once discovered a man's autobiography in his structure:—

"When a man's deeds are discovered after death, the angels, who are inquisitors, look into his face, and extend their examination over his whole body, beginning with the fingers of each hand. I was surprised at this, and the reason was thus explained to me—

"Every volition and thought of man is inscribed on his brain; for volition and thought have their beginnings in the brain, whence they are conveyed to the bodily members, wherein they terminate. Whatever, therefore, is in the mind is in the brain, and from the brain in the body, according to the order of its parts. Thus a man writes his life in his physique, and thus the angels discover his autobiography in his structure."

Is there not here the assertion of a great scientific truth, whether it be a truth of the spiritual world or not? The history of a man is his character, and his character is written in his organisation, and might be read there had we but senses acute enough to decipher the organic letters. There is not a thought of the mind, not a feeling of the heart, not an aspiration of the soul, not a passion which finds vent, not a deed which is done, that is not graven with an unfailing art in the structure of the body; its every organ and the constituent elements of each organ grow to the fashion of their exercise, and there is nothing covered that might not be revealed, nothing hid that might not be known. Is not this a high, solemn, and appalling thought? If there be a resurrection of the body, then the opening of the book at the day of judgment will be an un-

folding of the everlasting roll of its remembrance ; but if the body rise not again, still its life has not passed issueless, for every act has blended with and become a part of the energy of nature, increasing or diminishing the evil or good in it, and will never through all time have an end.

What Swedenborg says concerning the mode of life necessary in order to enter Heaven, deserves to be quoted as an indication of the practical spirit which he had inherited from his shrewd and rather worldly father. To live for Heaven, it is not at all necessary that a man cease to live outwardly as others do ; he may grow rich, keep a plentiful table, dwell in a fine house, wear splendid apparel, and enjoy the pleasures of the world and the flesh :—

“ It is quite allowable that a man should acquire and accumulate wealth, provided he employ no cunning or wicked artifice ; that he should eat and drink delicately, provided he do not make life consist in eating and drinking ; that he should dwell in magnificence according to his estate ; that he should converse as others do, frequent places of amusement, and busy himself in worldly affairs. There is no necessity for him to assume a devout aspect, a sad countenance, or to hang his head ; he may be glad and cheerful ; nor is he compelled to give to the poor, except so far as he is moved by affection. In one word, he may live outwardly as a man of the world, and such conduct will not hinder his admission to Heaven, if only he thinks interiorly in a becoming manner of God, and in business deals righteously with his neighbour.

“ From much conversation and experience among Angels, it has been given me to know most certainly that the rich enter Heaven as easily as the poor ; that no one is excluded from Heaven because he has lived in abundance, and that no one is admitted because he has been poor. Rich and poor alike have entered Heaven, and many who have been rich enjoy greater glory and happiness than those who have been poor. The poor do not go to Heaven on account of their poverty, but on account of their life ; for whether a man be rich or poor, he is what his life is, and if he live well he is received, and if he live ill he is rejected.”

A far more easy and practicable religion for everyday life than the religion which Swedenborg claimed to have carried forward to a new and higher development. It has been charged against the moral precepts of Christianity, as taught in the New Testament, that they concern themselves with suffering only, not with doing, inculcating passivity, but no-wise helping in the active work of life, and therefore, if carried out in practice, placing the good man entirely at the

mercy of the bad. They do not, it is said, constitute a complete code of doctrine sufficient for guidance and direction in the practical struggle of existence, but require to be supplemented by a series of maxims applicable to the development and formation of character under the duties and responsibilities of active life. Certainly it is not in the New Testament that men find the principles requisite for the successful conduct of life on the exchange, at the bar, in the senate, or in any other department of eager competition and strife. It would scarcely be correct to say that Swedenborg has furnished a practical code of morality deriving its life and power from the morality of the New Testament; but he has throughout his writings produced such a mass of sound criticism and instructive commentary as constitutes an important contribution to a practical system of Christian ethics. He is inconsistent, he contradicts himself, he puts forward strange and quite unacceptable doctrines; still his clear sincerity, and the marvellous powers which he frequently displays in his exposition of the Scriptures, call forth irresistibly a feeling of admiration, and almost constrain, not a belief in his spiritual pretensions, but an acquiescence in Emerson's description of him as a colossal soul, "one of the mastodons of literature." It would be impossible, by the quotations which we are able to make here, to give a faithful idea of his moral reflections and Scriptural commentaries; while reading some of them one cannot help looking back from time to time to his history, and to the character of some of his other writings, to be reminded of the madness of his pretensions. The extract which follows, dealing with the Scriptural maxim to love your neighbour as yourself, will serve to show the characteristically practical term which Swedenborg gives to it. It is not the individual who is to be loved, but the goodness and truth in him that are to be loved.

"Set before you three persons, or ten, whom you may be selecting for some domestic office, and what other criterion have you but the goodness and truth which are in them. Man is man from goodness and truth. Or, if you are selecting one or two to enter your service, do you not inquire into the will and intellect of each? The neighbour you can love will be the one you will choose on this occasion. A Man Devil may present the same appearance as a Man Angel. Benefiting the Man Angel for the sake of goodness and truth in him, and not benefiting the Man Devil, is charity; for charity consists in punishing the Man Devil if he does evil, and in rewarding the Man Angel.

“A man is a neighbour according to the kind and measure of his goodness. Whoever does not distinguish mankind by the test of goodness may be deceived in a thousand instances, and his charity confounded and annulled . . . It is commonly believed that a brother or a kinsman is more a neighbour than a stranger, and a fellow-countryman than a foreigner; but birth does not make one person more a neighbour than another, not even a father or a mother, nor education, nor kin, nor country. Every one is a neighbour according to his goodness, be he Greek or Gentile . . .

“Charity, that is really genuine, is prudent and wise. Other charity is spurious, because merely impulsive, gushing from the will without qualification in the light of the understanding.

When an evil-minded person takes the coat which belongs to another, it is no charity to give him a cloak also—the charity is to get him punished as expeditiously as possible; and the worst use to put great possessions to is to sell them in order to give to the poor, merely because they are poor. Such is the evolution to which the passive morality of Christianity comes in the church of the New Jerusalem; and it is not improbable that some of those conscientious men who sincerely accept Swedenborg as a prophet find no little comfort of mind in a code which, while deriving its inspiration from the morality of the New Testament, yet adapts it to the exigencies of daily life in a world where the wicked abound, and must be held in some kind of subjection. Prime Minister Höpken, who had known Swedenborg for two and forty years, and who averred that in all his experience he did not recollect a character of more uniform excellence—always contented, never fretful nor morose, said of his religion—

“I have sometimes told the King that if ever a new colony were formed, no better religion could be established there than that developed by Swedenborg from the Sacred Scriptures, and for these reasons:—

“I. This religion, in preference to, and in a higher degree than any other, must produce the most honest and industrious subjects; for it places, and places properly, *the worship of God in uses*.

“II. It causes *the least fear of death*; death being regarded merely as a transition from one state to another, from a worse to a better situation. Upon his principles, I look upon death as of hardly greater consequence than drinking a glass of water.”

One virtue of Swedenborg, which he shares with Bacon and Goethe, and which should be made mention of here, was that he detested, and gave vigorous expression to his detesta-

tion of, metaphysics, as barren and fallacious, transcending the sphere of thought, and by means of which theology had been drawn from its simplicity, and made artificial and corrupt. It was seldom that his practical instincts deserted him; he was certainly not, in any just sense of the word, a mystic.

Thus much as to the revelation which Swedenborg makes of himself in his writings. It will be interesting, before concluding, to ascertain the sort of impression which he produced on those who had personal intercourse with him. Unfortunately the principal information which we have on this point comes from those who have been specially interested in giving it, and whose testimony is not free from the bias of their belief in his pretensions. Stories in confirmation of his miraculous powers are related as wonderful and true, while stories discrediting them are put down as false and spiteful. The vulgar notion that a madman must be incoherent, or dangerous, or furious, prepared those who had read his extraordinary revelations to find something strange in his behaviour, and when they were introduced to a calm and courteous old gentleman, who conversed sensibly on all ordinary subjects and related his extraordinary spiritual experiences with a quiet and assured confidence, they were naturally surprised, and found it hard to believe that his stories had not some real foundation. How little warranted by facts such a conclusion was, an hour's experience in a lunatic asylum would have proved to them. Then again, it is not likely that any one, not particularly interested in him, would be at the pains to put on record their experience of him. Mrs. Cottle is constantly publishing extraordinary interpretations of Scripture, and distributing them far and wide, as Swedenborg distributed his books, to bishops, deans, clergy, universities, and persons of eminence in different countries; but no one thinks it worth while to enter upon a formal refutation of Mrs. Cottle, or to record for the benefit of generations to come their opinion of her lunacy. What is self-evident needs no demonstration. When we do happen to get the evidence of disinterested witnesses, who had had opportunities of lengthened observation, it proves that the suspicion of madness was excited by his singular behaviour. On one of his voyages from Sweden to England, when he had kept his berth almost the whole time, and had been often heard speaking as if in conversation, the steward and cabin boy informed the captain that their passenger was out of his mind.

“Out of his mind or not,” said the captain, “as long as he is quiet I have no power over him. He is always reasonable with me, and I have the best of weather when he is aboard.” Those that go down to the sea in ships are not free from superstition, and Swedenborg’s presence on board seems to have been thought lucky, as associated with a quick passage. At one time he appears to have run some danger of being sent to a lunatic asylum, his nephew Bishop Filenius and some of the clergy having entertained the idea on account of the offence which his heretical doctrines were to the established religion. Happily the design, if it were ever seriously entertained, came to naught: it would have been a great pity had it been carried into effect. Neither science nor philosophy has yet apprehended all things that are in heaven and earth, and it is always well, therefore, to examine without prejudice, rather than to suppress with hasty violence, any novel opinions, however strange and incredible they may seem. The history of the progress of knowledge is a history of the incredible becoming credible, of the strange being found true.

For a short time, in 1761, Swedenborg took an active part, as a member of the House of Nobles, in the deliberation of the Swedish diet. He evinced great interest in the questions which were discussed, spoke with credit to himself, and was listened to with respect; but soon perceiving, as he thought, that envy, hatred, and self-seeking prevailed among the members, he became dissatisfied, and ceased to attend. Instead of living and labouring among men, helping by patient endurance and wise insight to guide and lead them in the right way—being in the world, if not of it, he retired to his meditations and visions, where he had matters all his own way. Thus he abandoned a life of action, whereby the just balance of the faculties is maintained, and went willingly the way of his madness.

When in Sweden he lived in a small house, which he had built himself in one of the suburbs of Stockholm, his servants being a gardener and his wife, who lived in the house. He gave very little trouble, his diet being very simple; he made his own coffee, which he drank freely day and night, and his dinner was usually a small loaf broken into boiled milk. He slept between blankets, not liking sheets, and, as he informed the Rev. A. Ferelius, “never washed his face or hands, and never brushed his clothes, for no dirt nor dust would stick to

him." His bodily health was usually good ; sometimes, however, he suffered from severe toothache, which he attributed to hypocritical spirits, who beset him. On one occasion Paul was the wicked spirit that thus troubled him. A most wicked adulterer was with him some days, and produced pains in the toes of his left foot, loins, and breast. Devils tried to enter his brain and kill him, but the Lord saved him. So it was with other pains, which ceased when the evil spirits which induced them were routed. He paid little regard to day and night, sometimes sleeping through the one and working through the other, and he would occasionally lie in bed entranced for days together. He was often heard talking aloud in the night, and when asked what had been the matter, would answer that evil spirits had blasphemed, and that he was speaking against them zealously.

" Sometimes he would weep bitterly, and cry, with a loud voice, ' Lord, help me ! O ! Lord, my God, forsake me not ! ' When seen in these states, he appeared as sick. When delivered from them he would say, ' God be eternally praised ! All suffering has passed away. Be comforted, my friends ; nothing happens to me which the Lord does not permit. '

" After one of these trials, he went to bed and did not rise for several days. His servants grew uneasy ; perhaps he had died of fright ; and they debated whether they should not summon his relatives, and force open the door. At length the gardener climbed to the window, and, to his great relief, saw his master turn in bed. Next day he rang the bell. The wife went to the room, and related how anxious they had been, to which he cheerfully replied he had been very well, and had wanted for nothing."

He was accessible and affable to visitors, women excepted,* and talked freely concerning his intercourse with the spiritual world, speaking with such an air of gravity and sincerity as prevented any unbecoming display of incredulity. Nevertheless, he exhibited considerable shrewdness in evading attempts on the part of believers to obtain a positive test of his wonderful powers. A certain student of Upsal, Nicolas Collin, who, having read his books with admiration, visited him, requested as a great favour that he would procure him an interview with his brother who had died a few months before. Swedenborg en-

* He would see no lady alone, asserting that " women are artful and might pretend that I sought their closer acquaintance. ' Evidently he had not failed to profit by the mistress-keeping experience of his younger days.

quired what his motives were for desiring such a communication. "I confessed I had none besides gratifying brotherly affection, and an ardent wish to explore a scene so sublime and interesting to a serious mind. He replied that my motives were good, but not sufficient; that if any important spiritual or temporal concern of mine had been the case, he would then have solicited permission from the Angels, who regulate those matters." Lavater, who wrote to him from Zurich with great respect and sincerity, putting four definite questions which he was eager to have answered, was not more successful. Swedenborg did not reply to the letter; and a second, similarly earnest and pressing, letter which Lavater sent was also left unanswered, notwithstanding the profound expression of reverence and the urgent entreaty which it contained. To a Minister of State who applied to him for information concerning a certain young Prince who had disappeared, without any one knowing what had become of him, he replied, that the Prince was in a society of the Spiritual World to which he could not readily gain admission; that the Angels had no knowledge of his state; and that the matter was not of sufficient importance to warrant an application to the Lord about it. Profusely liberal in his revelations when there was no opportunity of checking his stories, he evaded such direct questions as would have brought his pretensions to the test of experiment. *It is, as it ever has been, a circumstance incidental to manifestations of the supernatural that they fail to take place just when, in order to confound the sceptical, they ought to take place, and that they are needlessly abundant in the presence of those who are so full of faith that they do not require to be convinced in order to testify of them.* No wonder then that so many persons who find it nowise contrary to the order of nature to believe in the existence of fanatics, madmen, and impostors, claiming supernatural powers and witnessing to supernatural stories, do find it altogether contrary to their experience of the order of nature to believe in supernatural events.

About the beginning of August, 1771, Swedenborg visited England for the last time. He took possession of the lodgings in Cold Bath Fields, which he had occupied on a former occasion, at the house of one Richard Shearsmith, a wig-maker. There, on Christmas Eve, he had a stroke of apoplexy which deprived him of the power of speech and produced paralysis of one side. From this attack he rallied for a time, recovering his speech, but on the 29th of March, 1772, he

gently expired, having, it is said, predicted on what day he should die. "He was as pleased," said the servant, "as I should have been if I was going to have a holiday, or going to some merry-making."

Thus passed over to the silent majority one the story of whose life, notwithstanding the eccentricities which it exposes, cannot fail to excite a kindly interest. There would be no advantage, but on the contrary a certainty of misinterpretation, in attempting to make a summary estimate of his character; this is best exhibited in the history of his life. The truth assuredly lies in the mean between the opposing views taken of him. On the one hand, there are those who see in him an inspired seer, and stubbornly refuse to see any insanity; on the other hand, there are those who see only the insanity, and dismiss him with pity or contempt. There is truth in both these extreme opinions, error in both of them. That Swedenborg did, as he asserted, enter the spiritual world, and have daily intercourse with angels there, and see and hear the things which he declared that he saw and heard, is an opinion which it would be a humiliation and shame to discuss seriously in this century, unless some reason can be given for supposing that all the delusions of insanity are broken glimpses of a higher region of existence than our sound senses can take cognizance of. In that case, however, it might still be open to dispute whether Swedenborg's heaven discovers any higher scenes and events, or a more exalted order of beings, than the world in which we live; for it seems truly rather a vulgar and a commonplace invention, such as any person of ordinary ingenuity giving the rein to his fancy, and untroubled by any doubt of himself, might easily imagine. Certainly there is nothing in his revelations which by its inherent power and grandeur intimates even, much less testifies to, a superhuman insight; nothing which is inconsistent or incompatible with the wild imaginations of a person the balance of whose faculties has been lost. Like the painter's picture of a lion beneath which it was necessary to write—"This is a lion," Swedenborg's representation of the spiritual world needs a like inscription in order to be known. Looking simply to the intellectual power displayed in its manufacture, we are bound to acknowledge that it cannot be compared for a moment with that which is exhibited in a drama of Shakespeare, or even with that which we may recognise in a superior novel. Compare the visions of Swedenborg, who had so many times been in

heaven, with the visions of Dante, 'the man who had seen hell,' do they not show by the side of these like the wild, dreary and incoherent flights of a dreaming or a delirious imagination? How immeasurably below the true and noble creations of a great imagination, rightly cultivated, working calmly under the restraints of law, and revealing its insight and strength in its repose and self-control. Consider the ridiculous height to which Swedenborg exalts himself: he is as much superior to the inhabitants of heaven as he is to the dwellers upon earth, for while possessing, as a natural man, all the privileges of spiritual insight which the angels have, and easily surpassing them in spiritual knowledge, he can in a moment become invisible to them, by returning to his natural self. That he has found disciples who devoutly accept to the uttermost these pretensions proves that it is impossible to be too bold in speculating on the credulity of mankind.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that among the many absurd things he has written there are also many words of wisdom, fruitful veins of original thought, and passages profoundly suggestive even to the best of minds. Because a man's mind is unsound, all which he says is not therefore folly. It is a vulgar and mischievous error, springing from the grossest ignorance of insanity, to suppose that a person who speaks rationally and behaves with propriety cannot be mad, as it is also to suppose madmen necessarily incapable of rational, intellectual exertion; athwart the murky atmosphere of madness lightning flashes of the deepest insight occasionally shoot, and the light of genius is sometimes only the light of a falling star. The recognition of Swedenborg's hallucinations and delusions, and the rejection of the cardinal doctrines of his later years, on the ground of insanity, by no means warrant the rejection of all that he has developed from his false premises or engrafted on them. Moreover, though he was insane, he was capable of taking care of himself sufficiently well, and of managing his affairs with prudence.

Perhaps it was fortunate for the prophet of the Church of the New Jerusalem that he lived in Sweden, and in the last century; for had he lived at the present day in England it is very doubtful whether he would have been left in undisturbed possession of his freedom and his property. There might, indeed, have been no small danger of the extinction of his prophetic mission in a lunatic asylum. Whether the world would have suffered loss or gained anything by the violent suppression of his doctrines are questions concerning which

conjectures must be futile; but our conviction unquestionably is that it would have suffered loss. In truth, no one has yet sufficiently considered how much originality and individuality are systematically suppressed in lunatic asylums, and how hard it would have gone with some of the most distinguished reformers of past generations if their lots had been cast in these days when there are scattered over the land so many overgrown and overcrowded asylums. Can any one, after reading the *Journal of George Fox*, believe that he would not, had he lived now, have found his way into a lunatic asylum. Thus would Quakerism have been blasted in its germ, and the world robbed of all the benefit which it has reaped from that form of religious belief. Of autobiographies, one of the most interesting is the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, but the perusal of it cannot fail to convince a candid reader that Benvenuto Cellini, had he lived now, would have been shut up in a lunatic asylum long before he had produced his finest works of art. Had not Comte been removed from Esquirol's asylum when there seemed no prospect of his recovery, and taken home to the care of his wife, it may be deemed certain that the world would never have had the system of the positive philosophy. The power of stepping out of the beaten track of thought, of bursting by a happy inspiration through the bonds of habit and originating a new line of reflection, is most rare, and should be welcomed and profited by, in spite of its oftentimes becoming extravagant, and sometimes degenerating into the vagaries of insanity. The individuals who manifest these impulses of development may not see their true relations, and may carry them to a ridiculous extreme; but they are still perhaps the unconscious organs of a new birth of thought, which shall plant itself and become largely fruitful in the minds of others possessed of a larger philosophic capacity, but not perhaps capable of the originating inspiration; for the men who perceive and co-ordinate the tendencies of development are not commonly the men who originate them. The originality is truly an inspiration, coming we know not whence, and the very opposite in action to that power of habit which enthrals the mental life of the majority of mankind. There are antagonistic forces at work in the determination of the orbit of human thought as there are in the determination of the orbit of the planets—a centrifugal or revolutionary force giving the expansive impulse of new ideas, and a centripetal or conservative force manifest in the restraining influence of habit; the resultant of their opposing actions being the determination of the orbit of the evolution of mind. Is it

not then beyond measure sad to think that precious germs of originality may be blighted by the practice, too prevalent in this era, of treating as insanity any marked deviation from the common standard of thought or action. Nature, we know, shows a most lavish and reckless waste of life, of fifty seeds often bringing not even one to bear, but herein does not set an example which it is man's duty or interest to follow; for the purpose or *nisus* of his being is to improve upon nature, to carry it through human nature to a higher evolution. In accomplishing patiently and faithfully this function he must work by a far other method than that which self-inspired seers into self-created spiritual worlds adopt; but while rejecting their method he may still gratefully gather the good fruits of their lives, and profit by the instruction which is to be obtained from the study of even the most erratic orbits. Now, as ever, and for ever, it is true that the wrath, the folly, the madness of men are made to praise Him whom sun and moon, fire and heat, winter and summer, mountains and hills, seas and floods, the fowls of the air, the whales and all that move in the waters, the green things of the earth, and the holy and humble men of heart bless, praise, and magnify for ever, but whom systems of theology and the prophets thereof have so often dishonoured.

OCCASIONAL NOTES OF THE QUARTER.

The County Lunatic Asylums under the County Administration Bill, 1869.

THE "County Administration Bill," introduced into the House of Commons by the Home Office last Session, is certain to be brought forward again next year, and will, doubtless, in some shape, become law. It is self-evident that after the recent large extensions of the suffrage, the more limited demand for a share in the control of the county expenditure can no longer be refused to the great body of the ratepayers, and theoretical Liberalism must admit the claims of the middle class, as represented by the Boards of Guardians, to a voice in the deliberations of the Quarter Sessions,—that County Parliament still held by the landed interest as their exclusive right and inheritance.