

*Emanuel Swedenborg.**

THERE has never been less likelihood than at the present time of Swedenborgianism taking any firm or general hold of the English mind. The whole current of thought and belief in a matter-of-fact and unimaginative age is dead against the progress of the New Jerusalem ark. Superhuman efforts have indeed been made from the first to float the interminable volumes of the seer's revelations. In his own time they were printed at frightful cost, given away to the public, and forced in bundles upon the bishops. It was for no lack of zeal or liberality that the attempted revival of a few years ago came to no more fruitful result. The patient scholarship of Mr. Garth Wilkinson, the open purse of the Rev. Augustus Clissold, the shrewd sense and sterling integrity of soul that might be looked for in a daughter of Joseph Hume, were wasted upon a generation that was not worthy of them. A remnant might still, indeed, be found faithful. Some of us may have known a solitary confessor here or there brave the amazement or the contemptuous pity of a club or drawing-room gathering. It is even said that, by a recent elevation, these opinions have gained a representative upon the Equity bench. Yet the litigation which rent the little sect half a dozen years ago came nearer than anything else within our experience to a practical illustration of the infinite divisibility of matter. A last chance for it seemed to offer itself in an alliance with the spiritualist and table-rapping interest. Nor was it any unwillingness on the part of the rappers and mediums that stood in the way. Swedenborg himself was always a great card in the hands of the Homes, the Forsters, and the Marshalls, and in that of M. Allan Kardek. But the exclusiveness of the earlier theosophists barred the entrance into the Swedenborgian cave. The ghosts that visited the great apostle and the spirits that rapped in Hindmarsh's study knew nothing of the modern pretenders to spiritual sight. The fate of all too narrow aristocracies seemed thus to have fallen upon the short-lived revelation. The brief candle of Swedenborgianism had, to all appearance, well-nigh spluttered itself out.

In Mr. White's recent elaborate work upon the life and writings of Swedenborg we see one more earnest and painstaking effort at vindicating the claims of the philosopher and seer. It is the writer's design to raise the subject of his biography from the vulgar level of a ghost-seer, or a mere enthusiast mistaking the nightmares or morbid visions of his own brain for exterior and awful truths. No human brain, Mr. White argues, could possibly have given birth to such ideas. They must, therefore, have an independent basis of truth. *Credo quia impossibile est.* "It is idle to assert that he invented his spiritual world; such a power of creation does not belong to the human mind. He must have seen what he describes." Yet Mr. White proceeds to make certain distinctions between subjective and objective vision, which take off very much from the value of his general adhesion to the substantiality of Swedenborg's spirit world. From his remarks upon what the seer saw in the planets, he appears to have little sense of the difference between the phenomenal and the actual—no idea that physical truth is more than what a man troweth. "What he relates may be true or untrue. I have no means of judging." Physical science is not therefore to come in as a test of the prophet's accuracy. Nor does any amount of variance from fact of history detract from the seer's claims.

* 'Emanuel Swedenborg: his Life and Writings.' By William White. 2 vols. London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1867.

Wrong as he may be proved to be in matters where common-sense and human testimony can bring him to book, this is no reason with Mr. White for distrusting him where no such check upon his testimony exists. We are left in simple wonder at the courage of a writer who can face the public with so absolute a profession of faith in a witness of whom he suffers himself to speak, in one passage, with abatements like the following:

“Do you, then, accept all Swedenborg has to relate concerning the Spiritual World as true?” By no means; no more than I should accept the testimony of the most veracious traveller as to the United States, or Russia, or India. I should say he means well, but had I to go over the same ground I should certainly arrive at many different conclusions, and on some contradict him point-blank. The full force of my dissidence from Swedenborg is not, however, brought out by a comparison with travels in the United States, Russia, or India. In these lands are many stable phenomena, but observations taken in the Spiritual World are as observations taken in cloud-land, where the shapes are transitory; and worse than transitory—illusory, by reason of their subordination to the influence of the beholder. ‘I can see no Spirit,’ said Swedenborg, ‘of whom I cannot form an idea;’ and supposing his idea incorrect (as many chances against one it must have been), whom would he see? Out of the enormous population of the Spiritual World, some one who answered to his idea. Hence I have no confidence whatever that any Spirit he testifies he saw was the real person. He disliked David and he disliked Paul, and he saw a David and he saw a Paul to justify his dislike. The Moravians and the Quakers had disgusted him, and he found pictures to match his disgust in the Spiritual World. He fancied it would advance his Jerusalem in the favour of the great potentates of Europe if they learned that their predecessors were in heaven, and forthwith he reported Elizabeth of Russia, and Louis XIV of France, and George II of England, as among the Blessed. I do not accuse him of any conscious humbug in these stories; I only adduce them to prove that he was liable to see what he wished to see. Disregarding the authenticity of his portraits, we may accept them as accurate reflections of the painter’s own prejudices.”

Where we at liberty to euphemise upon the visions of Swedenborg, and to see in them simply allegorical or poetic representations of his own crotchets in the natural or spiritual world, there would be no harm in the admission that he merely saw by the interior light of sparks struck out of his own optic nerve. But both the apostle and his adherents, including Mr. White himself in his general argument, would repudiate such a tampering with the revelation. Either Swedenborg’s spiritual world was a real external world, or he sinks into the common herd of monomaniacs who see an external cause in their morbid impressions, and hear in their nightmares the accents of angels. If the planet Mercury never contained a man who “wore a garment of deep blue, fitted tightly to his body, without folds or frills,” or if there are not people in Mars who live on fruit and pulse, with garments made from the fibrous bark of trees, woven and stiffened with gum, or if there are no wild horses in Jupiter, then we must simply decline to see by Swedenborg’s eyes when he takes us into realms even more inaccessible to our own homely organs of sight.

Swedenborg lies altogether apart from the ordinary run of religious mystics. He has little in common with Jacob Boehmen, or Saint Martin, or Pascal or Madame Guyon. Of Boehmen, indeed, he professed entire ignorance. Nor had other writers much more share in shaping his peculiar tenets. In no respect is the force of Swedenborg’s inventive talent more characteristically shown than in his utter disregard of what had been said or done by other men. The most voluminous of writers, he is the most dead or indifferent to literature. We know from his own account that he had hardly a book beside the Bible. This habit of intellectual self-dependence was part of the legacy of character bequeathed him by his father, Jesper Svedberg. Mr. White’s pages contain some

amusing traits of Bishop Svedberg's self-sufficiency and meddlesome habits. In his shrewd sense, his stirring methods of business, and his practical way of getting on in the world, there is much that reminds us of Bishop Burnet. His begging letters are models. The King can refuse him nothing. At his importunity the patent of nobility was granted to his sons and sons-in-law by Queen Ulrika Eleonora in the year 1719. Emanuel's surname was thus changed from Svedberg to Swedenborg. Of the Bishop's family of nine all but one were, like himself and his wife, "Sunday children," in which circumstance he sees an augury of the godliness of his house. To judge from Swedenborg's recollections in his old age, his childhood was one of precocious piety. From his fourth to his tenth year his thoughts were constantly engrossed "in reflecting on God, on salvation, and on the spiritual affections of man." The things he revealed in his discourse so astonished his parents that they declared angels certainly spoke through his mouth. On matters of dogmatic faith—such as the Trinity, justification by faith, and imputed righteousness—he was strangely heterodox for a clergyman's son. It does not appear that Swedenborg carried his early pietism into his youth or early manhood. When he was at the university, and for many years afterwards, his ruling passion was for science. It was for this that he travelled repeatedly to Germany, Italy, Holland, and England, and sought the converse of Wolf, Flamstead, Halley, and Newton. His first works of importance were upon chemistry and geology, upon iron and the nature of fire, and upon the mechanical principles of building docks and shipping. The discovery of the longitude at sea was a favorite idea with him through life. The three folios of his great work, the '*Opera Philosophica et Mineralia*,' were published in 1734.

The most valuable portion of Mr. White's book is his analysis of these volumes. In his grasp of philosophical principles and his insight into the leading truths of physics, Swedenborg was clearly in advance of most men of his time. And in certain special departments, especially that of metallurgy, his practical knowledge has scarcely been surpassed in our own day. The chapters on the conversion of iron into steel were incorporated into the magnificent '*Description des Arts et Metiers*,' as having been spoken of both by Cramer and Dr. Percy as forming a landmark in the history of metallurgy. Mr. White is careful at the same time to discountenance the flights in which Mr. Emerson and other writers have indulged regarding the anticipation by Swedenborg of most of the leading discoveries of recent science. It was in his views of magnetism that he came nearest to the conceptions of our day. It was already clear to him that heat, light, and electricity, were but modifications of one element—the magnetic—which filled all space, and was the impelling principle resident in all cosmical bodies. The universe was a great magnet. In his '*Economy of the Animal Kingdom*,' published in 1714, Swedenborg prosecuted his researches into the nature of life and the soul, which led him into a general harmony with the doctrines of Wolf. No one has given so clear an account as Mr. White of the peculiar teaching of Swedenborg concerning the first substance, the auras, and the animal spirits or nerve force, with the latter of which he identified the soul. Swedenborg's language here comes close upon the spiritualist or animal-magnetist terminology of our day. His design, in common with our modern mediums, was to demonstrate to the senses the immortality of the soul. And it is easy to detect in his speculations upon this theme the germ of the fanciful doctrines concerning the world of spirits which have since made his name famous.

It was in his fifty-fifth year, A.D. 1743, that the spiritual world distinctly opened itself to Swedenborg. A new life then dawned upon him. It was in London that this change took place. A curious light has been lately thrown upon this crisis of his career. A '*Diary or Book of Dreams*,' written by Swedenborg in 1743-4, turned up in MS. at Stockholm in the year 1858. Its

genuineness was beyond doubt. A limited number of copies—some of its contents being of an obscene character, or only fit for the pages of a medical journal—were printed in the following year. We here get Swedenborg's own version of the memorable incident handed down by Wesley, on the authority of Brockmer, with whom Swedenborg lodged in Fetter Lane. After all that Mr. White has done to disparage the credit of Wesley, there can be no doubt that Swedenborg had at that time an attack of madness following upon acute dyspepsia. The "violent shudderings" and fits which he had ten or fifteen times, together with the visions which appeared to him of angels, serpents, big dogs, palaces, and women, were clearly nothing else than his own sense of what were to other eyes simple symptoms of ordinary mania. The well-known story which he told Robsahm of the hideous reptiles that crawled about the floor, and of the angel who said to him "Do not eat so much," is merely another reflection of what passed through the morbid brain in the crisis of fever or dyspepsia. It appears to Mr. White "only pert scientific ignorance" to put down Swedenborg's later rhapsodies through the space of seven-and-twenty years to the score of his being out of his mind in 1774. In his view it is but the "sickness of the eagle moulting." Not questioning but that the 'Book of Dreams,' or even the published spiritual 'Diary,' would have sufficed to shut up the writer nowadays in an asylum, Mr. White boldly pins his faith on the objective reality of the sights in the 'Arcana Celestia,' and has no doubt that the eagle winged an actual flight to heaven and hell. He is quite prepared to see his oracle "sharply tried," and his claims tested, not by debate "outside his writings," but by critical study of the statements themselves. Nothing, we admit, can be fairer. And we can promise those who have leisure and curiosity enough to take up the challenge and follow Mr. White through his elaborate and loving exposition of his master's occult lore, that they will meet with much that will enliven the tediousness of the journey. How far, however, they will be converted into seeing with Mr. White's eyes the glory of the seer's countenance, and fall down with him before the oracle, it is not for us to say.

But if, by reason of his "style, originality, and indiscreet disclosure," the "superficial public" are repelled from Swedenborg, the great teachers of mankind, Mr. White is convinced, will rise more and more into accord with the seer's philosophical and ethical system. In the union of utilitarianism with transcendentalism which begins to characterise our best literature, we are told that "we breathe a Swedenborgian air." In one of Coleridge's daring paradoxes, that "as a moralist Swedenborg is above all praise," Mr. White would have us see a literal truth. If this means that Swedenborg correctly reported the morality of the spiritual world, we are, of course, thrown back once more upon the credibility of his pretensions. It would doubtless be shocking and profane to question the purity of the ethical code of the heavenly world. But if we are to accept, with Mr. White, the goings-on before the seer's eyes as indubitable facts, we may realise to ourselves the feelings of a pious and orthodox Greek or Roman of old in face of the sad scandals of his Pantheon. Less scrupulous or more sceptical followers might find their advantage in following the extremely loose and comfortable precedents set by such august authority. In his treatise on 'Conjugal Love,' for instance, we are enlightened as to the relations between the sexes in the glorified or celestial Jerusalem. In some respects we may suspect our Mormon brethren to have taken a leaf here out of the Swedish revelation. In others we must acquit Joe Smith or Brigham Young of tenets or practices half so foul or cynical. In the Swedenborgian rule as to women we recognise the moral estimate of the Koran mixed up with the practical license of the Haymarket. Adultery, indeed, is condemned altogether—it is a synonym for hell. But to a "youth of strong passions, and unable to marry," the spirits would say, with Cato, *macte virtute*. "Promiscuous and inordinate fornication," though "venial, and capable of containing conjugal love as a

sword lies in a scabbard," is best set aside in favour of a mistress, "who must neither be a maiden nor a wife." The case of married men is provided for on the same lenient scale. "There are two kinds of concubinage, which differ exceedingly, as dirty linen from clean—the one conjointly with a wife, the other apart from a wife." To the first heaven is closed, and the sinner is sent by the angels among the polygamists. "But it is not at all the case with him who for good reasons divides himself from his wife and keeps a woman." These reasons are of three degrees—"legitimate, just, and truly excusatory." A legitimate license is the adultery of the wife. A just license is found in a scale of "vitiating states" of the body or mind. Among the former of these are "foul eruptions from the stomach," and among the latter "foolishness and idiocy, loss of memory, and the like." For really excusatory causes one need go no further than "gossiping about family secrets, quarrelsomeness, internal dissimilitude—whence comes antipathy, extreme impiety, or addiction to magic and witchcraft." But there is a kind of supplemental code in "a cessation of procreation on account of the wife's age," besides similar "causes which reason sees to be just, and which do not hurt the conscience." The New Jerusalem may well be an attractive place for a male devotee of a certain order. But what is woman's place in this celestial Agapemone? We fear that Swedenborg's spirit saw in women no souls, and the 'Arcana Celestia' certainly holds out no paradise for female adherents.

With these visions to back him, there need be no wonder when we find the great apostle exemplifying the celestial code in his own practice upon earth. For "conjugal love" he seems to have felt no vocation, but his repeated confessions show that he found an alternative in the saving clauses of the new code. In his youth, while in Italy, and we are not told how long afterwards, he acknowledged keeping a mistress. His private confessions, as evinced by the entries which we are permitted to see in his diary, sufficiently show that his celestial converse had done little to eradicate or keep in check the ordinary lusts of the flesh. Such minor weaknesses are admitted by his biographer, much as a sun-worshipper might pass by the existence of spots on the face of his idol. The gentle protest of Mr. White against the "heartlessness" and laxity of Swedenborg is even tempered by a tacit admiration of the seer's "outspokenness" as compared with the reticence of a later and more prudish generation.

Are we to take, as a further test of the high morality claimed for Swedenborg, his monstrous and unscrupulous attack upon the Quakers? What are we to think either of the love of truth, the sense of responsibility or the simple decency of a man (whom we are forbidden to hold insane) who can deliberately charge upon that community the foul and unnatural practices which were attributed to the Christians of the first centuries by their heathen persecutors, and which were subsequently, with perhaps an equal amount of truth, laid by the orthodox to the score of the Gnostic heretics? "It was inquired whether the Quakers indulged in these obscene rites with their daughters and maid-servants, and it was said that they did." It was said to him "by an angelic interpreter that Quaker spirits wander about in thick forests like swine, and this because of their avarice and nastiness." We shall of course be told that Swedenborg merely reported what met his ear in the land of spirits, and that he is in consequence not to be held responsible for the libel. It is upon the spirits then, we conclude, that the responsibility is to rest. This will of course be satisfactory enough to those with whom the spirit world is an objective reality, and the report of the seer an authentic message. But what resource is there for the outside public, who have the disadvantage of not being mediums, and with whom the objectivity of the spirit voices is the very point to be made good? Are they to follow the precedent of the dispassionate judge of former times and order the ghost into court? If they are estopped from trying the

messenger, what, at least, are they to do but make trial of the spirits themselves by such partial lights as they possess in respect to matters of fact, and the laws both of the physical and the moral universe? Taking the utterances of their messenger with the implicit confidence which disciples like Mr. White would have us repose in him, we are thus thrown upon what we are told is a higher moral and spiritual sphere than our own for evidence of what we know to be a revolting and scandalous falsehood touching the sphere of our own senses. What appeared in the eyes of Swedenborg himself, and, it may be, still appears in those of his biographer and similar privileged adherents, to be an angel of light, must, to eyes not accustomed to the same ethereal medium, stand out in the unmistakable character of the father of lies. It is somewhat odd to find ourselves in the position of arguing, even with a semblance of gravity, upon such preposterous notions as these. But the oddity is due to the still more curious paradox of men with the intelligence and culture of Mr. White being found to stand sponsors for such claims. If the outpourings of Swedenborg are to be taken as evidences of fact, we may reasonably hope to utilize the ravings of our asylums. If we want to know what the sun is made of, whether the moon is inhabited, or what is going on in the recesses of heaven or hell, we have but to keep up a class of Pythias of either sex, well grounded in physics or theosophy, with a good deal of what Mr. Emerson calls the "oversoul," an inordinate stock of self-confidence, and a high state of indigestion. There need be neither a problem in cosmical science nor a mystery in theology waiting its solution, had we only a supply of men qualified for service in Church or State by the natural gifts of a quick and teeming brain—developed enormously in the regions of wonder, imagination, and self-esteem—untiring animal energy, and a disordered liver.—*The Saturday Review*, May 11th.

*Dr. Forbes Winslow on Light.**

Books could be named which prove that the results of strictly scientific inquiry possess an interest little inferior to the romance of life, by showing how the elements of energy and unity, of antagonism and harmony, may be observed in the material forms and forces without us in a mysterious intricacy almost as interesting as that play of human motive and action traced by the hand of the poet, novelist, or historian. Yet it is unnecessary that every work on a scientific subject should be strictly scientific in aim or even in method and detail; it is nevertheless necessary that every work of avowedly popular purpose should evince in its author that tone and habit of thought which will guide him to a consistent, if not a complete, view of the character and relations of his subject. Now, Dr. Winslow's book on *Light* is interesting as an example of what a work on the subject ought not to be. The first chapter, on the Solar Beam, is mainly derived from works on physical geography and botany; and it treats on the general influence of the sun on the distribution of plants and animals. Such discussions, or rather statistics, are very well in their proper place, but here they are beside the question. Physicists have shown, for instance, that light and heat are only different forms of one and the same physical agency, though they specially affect different senses and organic modes; and when we regard the sun as the centre of gravitating and magnetic influence, and of the heat, light, and chemical power which we are accustomed to distinguish in its emitted influence, it may fairly be asked why "Light" should be selected as the

* 'Light: its Influence on Life and Health.' By Forbes Winslow, M.D. London: Longmans and Co., 1867.