

**LIFE OF  
EMANUEL  
SWEDENBORG**

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## PREFACE.

During the few past years many biographies of Swedenborg have been offered to the public. Dr. Tafel, of Tübingen, in 1839, collected into one volume the testimonies of Swedenborg's personal friends, his letters, and various documents relating to him which were scattered through many volumes. This "Book of Documents" was translated into English, and edited by the Rev. J. H. Smithson, of Manchester, in 1841; and was again reprinted in America and re-edited by Professor Bush, of New York, in 1847. From this "Book of Documents," all the biographies which have appeared, have been more or less indebted. Nathanael Hobart, of Boston, arranged these documents into a connected biographical form, interspersed with judicious remarks of his own, and published it as a "Life of Swedenborg." This "Life" has passed through three editions, and well deserves the success it has attained. In 1849, Elihu Rich published, in London, "A Biographical Sketch of Emanuel Swedenborg." The edition was exhausted in the course of a few months, and the work has not since been reprinted. In the same year, J. J. G. Wilkinson produced his "Emanuel Swedenborg: a Biography," a work which, alike for its artistic excellence as a biography, and the originality and poetic beauty of its thought, has, I believe, no equal in the English language. The comparative silence of our literary critics, in reference to this work, proves that any one who cares to appreciate what is best in the world, had better not be content to trust solely to *their* eyes. From the quotations I have made in the course of

the following narrative, the reader will be able to appreciate a few of the good things contained in this Biography by Wilkinson. In 1854, Edwin Paxton Hood published "Swedenborg: A Biography and an Exposition," a work which has been the means of introducing Swedenborg to a large circle hitherto almost ignorant of his existence. In the same year, Woodbury M. Fernald published, in Boston, Mass., "A Compendium of the Theological and Spiritual Writings of Swedenborg," to which an excellent life of the Author was prefixed, compiled in great part from previous biographies. In other forms, many sketches of the life of Swedenborg have been published. The Rev. O. P. Hiller gives an excellent little biography in his volume of "Gems from Swedenborg." Emerson tells the story of his life, in his own way, in "Representative Men;" and a Lecture by George Dawson, on Swedenborg, is now circulating, as a tract, by thousands throughout the land. All these things evidence a growing interest in the greatest teacher of modern times.

The present work does not enter into competition with anything that has before been written. It pretends to nothing but simplicity, and would be ranked as a hand-book, a guide, a directory. If it should lead any to form an acquaintance with the writings of "the most *unknown* man in the world," as Mr. Fernald calls Swedenborg, and I may add, the most abused man in the world, my end will be gained. I believe the day is not far distant when it will be the greatest reproach of these times that the works of Swedenborg lay in our midst, and only a few men cared for them. Happily this number is steadily increasing; and, by and by, we may expect a general acknowledgment of the

fact, that Swedenborg was, without exception, the most gifted and extraordinary man that has ever lived.

36 BLOOMSBURY STREET, LONDON.

**LIFE AND WRITINGS  
OF  
EMANUEL SWEDENBORG.**

# CHAPTER I.

*His Birth and Parentage—His first ideas of Religion, and his Scholastic Life.*

Authors are never wiser than when they trust to time for justice. The poor thinker, neglected by his age, unseen amid the glare of mere show and pageantry, need not fret himself. Time will roll on, the false and meretricious will sink into forgetfulness, while his true words will become accepted, and his thoughts the stars by which wise men guide their course across the dark ocean of life.

It was the lot of Emanuel Swedenborg to be cast on a shallow, sceptical, and perverse age. Living a life of the utmost purity, and teaching truths which we esteem it our great felicity to know, he had but poor thanks so far as fame and disciples went. But the dawn of his day of justice is approaching. His name, which in past times has too often been used to point a sarcasm at whatever is visionary and transcendental, has of late years been slowly rising into estimation. Here and there, one eminent man after another has spoken some brave words in honor and admiration of the great Swede. Slowly, but surely, his writings are claiming attention; his disciples, though still few, are quietly earnest and enthusiastic, and ever and anon there is seen in the newspaper or periodical, the name of Swedenborg mentioned with respect, if not with reverence. Considerable curiosity exists in large circles to know more of him, of what he did, what were his doctrines, and the nature



and number of his books. To satisfy, in some measure, these queries and if possible to incite a desire for an intimate personal acquaintance with the writings of Swedenborg, is the purpose of the present work.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born at Stockholm, on the 29th Jan., 1688. The year is a memorable one, as being that in which outraged England drove the faithless Stuarts from the throne. His father's name was Jesper Swedberg, and his mother's, Sarah Behm; both descended from families of worth and usefulness in Sweden. His father, at the time of his birth, was chaplain to a regiment of cavalry. After passing through several offices, one of which was a professorship of theology in the University of Upsal, Jesper Swedberg was, in the year 1719, elevated to the bishoprick of Skara in West Gothland. His character stood high in Sweden. Simple, patriotic, and honest, he was, without being brilliant, a learned and industrious man. He wrote much, and published occasionally, as the following extract from his diary proves: "I can scarcely believe that anybody in Sweden has written so much as I have done; since, I think, ten carts could scarcely carry away what I have written and printed at my own expense, and yet there is much, yea nearly as much, not printed." Of the professions of his sons, he wisely remarks; "I have kept my sons to that profession to which God has given them inclination and liking: I have not brought up one to the clerical office, although many parents do this inconsiderately, and in a manner not justifiable, by which the Christian Church and the clerical order suffer not a little, and are brought into contempt." Writing in his diary forty years after Emanuel's birth, he says: "Emanuel, my son's name, signifies 'God with us,' a name which should constantly remind

him of the nearness of God, and of that interior, holy, and mysterious connection, in which, through faith, we stand with our good and gracious God. And blessed be the Lord's name! God has, to this hour, been with him; and may God be further with him, until he is eternally united with Him in his kingdom."

Of Swedenborg's childhood we have little record. In a letter which, late in life, he addressed to Dr. Beyer, he remarks; "With regard to what passed in the earliest part of my life, about which you wish to be informed: from my fourth to my tenth year, my thoughts were constantly engrossed by reflections on God, on salvation, and on the spiritual affections of man. I often revealed things in my discourse which filled my parents with astonishment, and made them declare at times, that certainly the angels spoke through my mouth. From my sixth to my twelfth year, it was my greatest delight to converse with the clergy concerning faith; to whom I often observed, that charity or love is the life of faith; and that this vivifying charity or love is no other than the love of one's neighbor; that God vouchsafes this faith to every one; but that it is adopted by those only who practise that charity. I knew of no other faith or belief at that time, than that God is the Creator and Preserver of Nature; that He endues men with understanding, good inclinations, and other gifts derived from these. I knew nothing at that time of the systematic or dogmatic kind of faith, that God the Father imputes the righteousness or merits of the Son to whomsoever, and at whatever time, He wills, even to the impenitent. And had I heard of such a faith, it would have been then, as now, perfectly unintelligible to me."

This confession very vividly shadows forth the future man. We see how earnestly his sound, practical mind perceived and clung to the real and substantial in theology. His experience of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, finds parallels in the lives and experience of many eminent men. It was not until after many years' preaching, that the fact of the existence of such a doctrine was presented to the mind of Dr. Chalmers, to whom also it was quite unintelligible; yet, overcome by the sphere of learning and prestige with which the doctrine was environed, Chalmers yielded assent to it, and fancied, as thousands do, he believed what by no possibility he could ever understand. Swedenborg was too single-eyed in his pursuit of truth to be led aside by authority, however imposing; and often, in the following narrative, we shall have to observe with what independence, yet with what humility and simplicity, he recorded the truths which it was his mission to reveal.

This excellent son of good Bishop Swedberg received the best education that the times and his country could afford. In his twenty-second year, at the University of Upsal, he took his degree of Doctor in philosophy. The dissertation which he wrote for his degree was afterwards published. It consisted of a selection of sentences from Seneca, Publius Syrus Mimus, and other Latin writers, enriched by comments of his own, and notes illustrating the obscurities of the Latin text. This work was so highly thought of, as to occasion a poetic eulogy, written in Greek, to be inscribed to its author. Swedenborg dedicated this, his first literary production, to his father, in a prelude full of veneration and love. Its length alone prevents our gratifying the reader with the perusal of this beautiful tribute of filial

affection. Among his many virtues, it should not be accounted the least, that Swedenborg was a loving, dutiful son.

The same year he published, in a work of his father's, a Latin version of the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, which proved, in a high degree, his mastery of the Latin language.

In 1710, was finished the strictly scholastic period of Swedenborg's life. He had now reached manhood, and must live as a man among men. His youth manifests less precocity than solid and regular development of mind. The record of his life at this time, evidences a common-sense appreciation of life and its duties, an honest love of virtue, and a desire to be useful in his day and generation. The sequel will show that his day of life was not unworthy of its dawn.

## CHAPTER II.

*Travels—Becomes Author—Is crossed in Love.*

Having completed his university education, Swedenborg entered on his travels. In his journal, he thus briefly describes a four years' absence from Sweden.

“In the year 1710 I set out for Gottenburg, that I might be conveyed, by ship, thence to London. On the voyage, my life was in danger four times: first on some shoals, toward which we were driven by a storm, until we were within a quarter of a mile from the raging breakers, and we thought we should all perish. Afterwards we narrowly escaped some Danish pirates under French colors; and the next evening we were fired into from a British ship, which mistook us for the same pirates, but without much damage. Lastly, in London itself, I was exposed to a more serious danger. While we were entering the harbor, some of our countrymen came to us in a boat, and persuaded me to go with them into the city. Now it was known in London that an epidemic was raging in Sweden, and therefore all who arrived from Sweden were forbidden to leave their ships for six weeks, or forty days; so I, having transgressed this law, was very near being hanged, and was only freed under the condition that, if any one attempted the same thing again, he should not escape the gallows.

“At London and Oxford I tarried about a year. Then I went to Holland and saw its chief cities. At Utrecht I tarried a long time, while Congress was sitting and ambassadors were gathering

there from nearly all the courts of Europe. Thence I went into France, and passed through Brussels and Valenciennes to Paris. Here and at Versailles I spent a year. At the end of this time I hastened, by public coach, to Hamburg, and thence to Pomerania and Greifswalde, where I remained some time, while Charles the Twelfth was coming from Bender to Stralsund. When the siege began, I departed in a small vessel, together with a lady named Feif, and by Divine Providence was restored to my own country after more than four years' absence."

While traveling he was not idle; for we find that in 1715, while at Greifswalde, he published an oration on the return of Charles XII. from Turkey, and a small volume of Latin prose fables. On his return to Sweden, he issued, at Skara, a little book of poems, written for the most part during his journeyings. These have been republished at various times; but, as poems, much cannot be said of them. Wilkinson, in his "Biography of Swedenborg," remarks: "These poems display fancy, but a controlled imagination. If we may convey to the English reader such a notion of Latin verses, they remind one of the Pope school, in which there is generally some theme, or moral, governing the flights of the Muse." Indeed, it was well that Swedenborg was but slightly endowed with the poetic faculty. Much of his future mission lay in fields which require the coolest and calmest of minds to describe; the sight and contemplation of which, would have sent a Shaksperian or Byronic temperament into extatic frenzies.

Swedenborg, himself the son of a bishop, was connected with high and influential families in Sweden. One of his sisters was

married to Eric Benzelius, afterwards Archbishop of Upsal; and another to Lars Benzelstierna, governor of a province. Other members of the family held high and responsible offices in the kingdom. A young man thus situated would find little difficulty in settling for life in a sphere of usefulness adapted to all his tastes. While on his travels on the Continent he wrote letters to Eric Benzelius, detailing every novelty in mathematics, astronomy, and mechanics, which came under his observation; besides sending home models of all such inventions as he thought might be useful to his country. These letters and services won for him considerable notice; and on his return to Sweden, he assumed the editorship of a new periodical work, entitled "Dædalus Hyperboreus." Among the contributors to this magazine, was the celebrated mathematician, Christopher Polheim, who has been called the Swedish Archimedes. Swedenborg's connection with Polheim seems to have led to his appointment to the office of Assessor of the Board of Mines, which he held with distinguished honor for many years.

In the year 1716, Polheim invited him to go with him to Lund, on a visit to Charles XII., who had just escaped from Stralsund. He was very kindly received by the King, and obtained from him his official appointment as Assessor. He was to assist Polheim in his undertakings, to have a seat in the College of Mines, and to give his advice, especially when any business of a mathematical nature was on hand.

Charles seems to have at once discerned the rare abilities of Swedenborg, and with a desire of uniting him in still closer bonds of amity with his favorite Polheim, he advised Polheim to give him his daughter in marriage. To this proposal

Swedenborg appears to have been in nowise averse. He lived with Polheim, at once as his coadjutor, and as his pupil in mathematics; and having thus constant opportunities of seeing the fair Emerentia, Polheim's second daughter, had become enamored of her graces. In one of his letters, he remarks: "Polheim's eldest daughter is promised to a page of the king's. I wonder what people say of this in relation to myself. His second daughter is, in my opinion, much the handsomest." The attachment, however, was not mutual, and the lady would not allow herself to be betrothed. Her father, who deeply loved Swedenborg, caused a written agreement to be drawn up, promising his daughter at some future day. This document, Emerentia, from filial obedience signed; but, as ladies generally do, when forced to love in this way, took to sighs and sadness, which so affected her brother with sorrow, that he secretly purloined the agreement from Swedenborg. The paper was soon missed; for Swedenborg read it over frequently, and, in his grief at its loss, besought Polheim to replace it by a new one. But as Swedenborg now discovered the pain which he gave to the object of his affections, he at once relinquished all claim to her hand, and left her father's house. This was his last, as it was his first endeavor after marriage. In after years, when jocosely asked whether he had ever been desirous of marrying, he answered: "In my youth I was once on the road to matrimony." And on being asked what was the obstacle, with his characteristic simplicity he said: "She would not have me." Considering the studious and abstracted life which he eventually led, it is not to be regretted that he remained unwedded. That he was no harsh despiser of the sex, we know well from his writings; and that his life was in agreement with



his books, we also know. The loveliest descriptions of female grace and beauty we have ever met with, are contained in his works, chiefly in his treatise on "Conjugal Love." M. Sandell, a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Sweden, who pronounced a magnificent eulogium on his fellow-member, Swedenborg, shortly after his death, says: "Though Swedenborg was never married, it was not owing to any indifference toward the sex; for he esteemed the company of a fine, intelligent woman as one of the most agreeable of pleasures; but his profound studies rendered expedient for him the quiet of a single life."

Swedenborg seems to have had much intercourse with the King. In one of his letters, he says: "I found his Majesty very gracious to me; more so than I could expect. This is a good omen for the future. Every day I laid mathematical subjects before his Majesty, who allowed everything to please him. When the eclipse took place, I had his Majesty out to see it, and we reasoned much thereupon. He again spoke of my 'Dædalus,' and remarked upon my not continuing it; for which I pleaded want of means. This he does not like to hear of; so I hope to have some assistance shortly." But assistance did not come, and "Dædalus" went the way of many such undertakings. Talking of mathematics one day, Charles remarked that "he who knew nothing of mathematics, did not deserve to be considered a rational man;" a sentiment which Swedenborg thought "truly worthy of a king."<sup>11</sup>

Charles XII. was now engaged in the siege of Frederickshall, and Swedenborg's aid was called in. He very ingeniously planned rolling machines, by which two galleys, five large

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