

# Notes and Comments

## Political and Cultural Climate at the Time of Swedenborg

Dear Editor,

It was gratifying to read Thomas P. Morley's eulogy of Swedenborg as a neurologist in your recent issue. Such recognition is all the more welcome for being rare, and it stimulates the hope that Swedenborg's search for the soul through his studies of the *regnum animale*, the kingdom of the soul (in his work with that title plus the EAK and *The Cerebrum*), may yet help to form a better understanding of the human organic as the containant of the soul. Swedenborg was a pioneer in this area, both anatomically and philosophically.

In such context it might seem petty to seize upon a peripheral point in Professor Morley's article. Still, it matters somewhat what was the political and cultural climate in Swedenborg's homeland at the time of his birth and during his lifetime.

It is true that a period of erudition followed in the wake of the wars of King Gustavus II Adolphus, but it was short-lived and hardly due to the king; nor can it be said that this monarch "had left Sweden at peace and protected from its enemies." And, true too, it was "more than thirty years"—in fact, all of 56 years—after the king's death that Swedenborg was born. The king died in battle in 1632. He is regarded as perhaps the greatest in Swedish history, because of his victories in war and his conquests.

Peace did not follow his death. This was in the days of the Thirty Years War, and the time had not yet come to promote peaceful pursuits at home. The Swedish armies continued the war under some of the generals who had served the king, and this until the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. And being victorious they not only secured Protestantism for Sweden itself and for much of Europe, but also raised the status of the country to that of one of the Great Powers of Europe (and of the world). The Swedish Empire had begun, with new territories south of the Baltic and new land areas

carved from Denmark—and lasting until it came apart with the death of Charles XII in 1718.

Sweden (in those days including Finland) was a warring nation. After Gustavus Adolphus, military campaigns—all victorious except for temporary lapses—continued under his daughter and heir Queen Christina, his nephew Charles X, and the latter's son Charles XI during whose reign Swedenborg was born. And they intensified in the two decades of young King Charles XII, the military genius. The Papal armies under Wallenstein and others had been defeated by Gustavus Adolphus and his generals; but then Russia, Poland, and Denmark were the major foes that prevented an undisturbed peaceful development at home—a development that might well have ensued but for the insatiable appetite for power by the number XII Charles. His endless campaigns drained the resources of the country until the glorious empire simply collapsed under its own weight.

The period of erudition I referred to, the one Professor Morley probably had in mind, lasted for but a few years. Credit for what there was of it, I think, should primarily go to Count Axel Oxenstierna, the great Chancellor of the country in both Gustavus Adolphus' time and that of Queen Christina, and to the queen herself. The latter was a minor when her father died, and it was Oxenstierna who was head of the twelve year regency period that preceded the queen's ascendancy. But soon after assuming the reins of state the queen showed a great interest in the arts and sciences; and buttressed by her status as sovereign of one of the major powers she brought men of learning into the country. This included Descartes, who however died after only a year in Sweden. And Christina—the daughter of the great Protestant king—converted into Catholicism and abdicated in 1654! Then the peace that had lasted for about six of her years as queen was again interrupted, now through wars fought by Charles X. And his son became an ally of Louis XIV of France in the third of the Dutch Wars, and then faced Denmark in yet another conflict.

So there was hardly a climate of peace and erudition in the country when Swedenborg was born. In fact, as a young man he deplored the backwardness of his fatherland, and much of the improvement that followed was due to his own labors and those of some great contemporaries, like Celsius and Linnaeus.

Sweden's present reputation as a pacifist country dates from 1814; since then she has not been involved in armed conflicts. But before that year her history was largely a history of wars.

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*On Common Salt*

Dear Editor,

Reading the new translation of *On Common Salt* has been a most pleasant surprise to me. It is so easy to read that I found no inclination to put it aside to finish later, but enjoyed reading the entire section published at one time. Much of the chemistry is far beyond my sphere of knowledge, but I felt almost as if I were watching the chemists at their work of tasting, touching, measuring, and describing what they saw.

My congratulations to the translators for a masterful piece of work.

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