

THE FALSE KING CHARLES XII

Among the Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg is a letter, dated February 26, 1725, in which Swedenborg's brother-in-law, Dean Unge, writes: "Let me know, dear brother, what judgment the false King Charles XII has received." When I first read this, I was at a loss to know who was meant by "the false King"; nor was I able to get any enlightenment from any of the sources available to me. I referred the matter to Dr. Bring, Librarian in the Upsala University Library, who had already shown me much kindness. In reply, Dr. Bring, to my great surprise and satisfaction, sent me a pamphlet of forty-six pages which he himself had written, entitled "Benjamin Düster, En Falsk Karl XII, Lund, 1918." * Here Dr. Bring has presented from original sources all available information concerning the false king.

Armed with this pamphlet, I added a short footnote to Unge's letter, giving a brief account of Düster's false claim.† With this the matter rested, and I thought no more about it until the other day when, to my great surprise, I found mention made of the false king in the *Spiritual Diary*. The passage reads in part as follows:

"In the degree that sight directed to the Lord is from the man, that is, from self, in the same degree it recedes from the Lord and is of no efficacy; but in the degree that it is from the Lord, it is efficacious; so likewise with persuasion respecting things which pertain to faith. Otherwise they are like that insane spirit [spoken of in no. 3004]. This insanity is not unlike the insanity of those who thought themselves to be God the Father and God the Son, and this from insane persuasion; and also of him who thought himself to be Charles XII, and who was sent among the insane" (no. 3005).

This passage led me to re-read Dr. Bring's pamphlet, and the re-reading brought it to my mind that readers of the *Spiritual Diary* might like to have some more detailed information concerning the false Charles XII than was given in the footnote above referred to.

Benjamin Düster was born in Finland, about 1682. He left home as a boy, and in Viborg was apprentice to a goldsmith. According to his own account, and there is probably some truth in

* This pamphlet is now in the possession of the Academy Library.

† See *Letter*, p. 371, note 5.

it, in 1705 he joined the army led by Charles XII against Peter the Great, and was captured by the Russians and taken to Novgorod, but two years later succeeded in escaping.

Nothing further is known concerning him until 1723 when he was living in Rige with his wife and three children. He gave sign of his aspiration after grandeur by changing his name to Düsterstern, undoubtedly with the idea of giving out that he was of noble birth. In the same year he left Rige for Lübeck where he worked as a goldsmith. Here he enlarged his claim to nobility by the name Düster von Stern and assumed the title of Adjutant.

In 1724 he left for Stockholm. Here, failing to get work as a goldsmith, in August 1724, on the ground of being an Adjutant, he petitioned King Frederick for support for himself, wife, and four small children.

In this petition, he states that after his escape from Russia he met Charles XII in Turkey and revealed to him a plot by the Russians and Turks to take him prisoner. As a reward for this information, Charles gave him a warrant as Adjutant. Unfortunately, in his subsequent adventures, which he describes in detail, the warrant was burned and he was robbed of all his possessions. He ends his petition with the request to recover certain landed property in Finland which he claimed belonged to his ancestors.

All this was pure imagination and was evidently so regarded by the King and his Council, for nothing was done in the matter.

In November, Düster, despairing of Royal help, went to Upsala accompanied by his son and a servant girl named Lindberg. Here he was visited by an old cavalry man who asked if he had heard the rumor that Charles XII was still living. "Yes," answered Düster. "Do you know where he is now?" was the next question; to which Düster answered, "You see him here before you." Düster then charged the cavalry man to deliver to a certain regimental officer a letter wherein he commanded the officer to attend him, and which he signed "Carolus XII I H"—letters which Düster subsequently claimed meant "dead and in heaven."

By some chance, the letter was seized by the Governor of the Province who at once ordered Düster's arrest and sent him under guard to Stockholm where he arrived on December 9, 1724. At subsequent hearings on December 12 and 14, Düster denied giving himself out to be Charles XII, but claimed to be of royal blood by descent from King Johann III when he was Duke of Finland.

Meanwhile news of the revived late King was spread throughout the land by students returning from Upsala. In Stockholm crowds came to the prison where they could see and talk to Düster through a small opening in the prison door. He was also allowed to receive food and drink, and send and receive messages. Strangely enough, despite his denial, Düster assumed a royal bearing, and in speaking to the people, used the word *We*. From his window he also scattered coins to the crowds below.

Many believed in Düster's claim, chief among these believers being the servant Lindberg who maintained his claim to the very end.

While in prison, Düster conceived the idea of appealing to the Dalecarlians for support. With this in view, he wrote a letter to "the honorable Dalecarlians, both high and low." Reminding his "dear Dalecarlians" of their great service in securing the throne for Gustavus Vasa,‡ he continues: "Your ancestral Carolus still lives and sits in arrest here in Stockholm. I am the same who has written this with his own hand; therefore help me." The letter is dated January 2, 1725, and is signed C. R. S. (*Carolus Rex Sueciae*).

This epistle was sent to the Dalecarlians by secret messenger, whose effort to stir up the Dalecarlians met with little success. The matter soon came to the knowledge of the provincial authorities, and the messenger was arrested and together with the letter was sent to Stockholm.

Düster was brought to trial on February 9, and it was shown by witnesses that he had not the slightest resemblance to Charles XII.§ The Commission then ordered a medical examination of Düster, and this resulted in a report that he was suffering from intermittent melancholia, being apparently rational at one time and then wholly irrational.

On February 17, the Commission gave its judgment. This was announced in a large room so as to accommodate the large number of persons who wished to be present. Düster was to sit in the pillory for three days in succession, with a chain around his neck, and holding in his hand the letter which he had sent to the Dalecarlians; he was then to be sent to the madhouse. The servant Lindberg was to be publicly whipped and then sent to the house of correction, and some other accomplices were sentenced to run

‡ See *Letters*, p. 271, note 5.

§ This is clearly shown by the portrait which is in Dr. Bring's pamphlet.

the gauntlet seven times. The carrying out of the sentence commenced on February 22d. A year later, June 1726, Düster was released in charge of his wife, for conveyance to Rige at the States' cost. But the Rige authorities refused to receive him and in July he was returned to the madhouse where he died four years later.

THE USES OF WORLDLY PLEASURES

The delights of the world and the pleasures of the animus are harmless in themselves, and serve as the fuel and incentives of bodily life and as means and helps to the promotion of ends. This we may see very plainly by considering them one by one. For nature, regarded in itself, is dead and only serves life as an instrumental cause; being altogether subject to the will of the intelligent mind, which uses it to promote ends by effects. And, indeed, a more exquisite spice and sweetness lies in these things when they are only made use of as means and helps. Those persons therefore appear to be somewhat beside themselves who aim, not to moderate, but altogether to exterminate the pleasures of the senses and the delights of the world, as if they were so many deadly and pernicious poisons. For they would deprive bodily life of its appropriate excitements; the progression of ends, of their means; the order of nature, of its course; and themselves, of the proper palm that is the reward of victory; nay, they would deprive free will, which is the human delight, and the right use of which is human wisdom, of all relation to merit; for it depends upon free will that we regard these things not as ultimate but as intermediate ends; since it is an eternal law that everything is judged by its end (II *E.A.K.* n. 323 p. 314).

REFORMATION

The changing of an evil animus into a good can never be done save by the mediation of the rational mind and its intellect, whether that intellect be one's own, or be an intellect persuaded on the basis of faith or authority. Nor can our nature be changed unless we loathe and abhor evils and never let our mind fall back into that state; and unless, from the liberty granted us, we snatch it forth