

WILFRED HOWARD

AN APPRECIATION

Wilfred Howard, who served on the board of the Swedenborg Scientific Association for many years, passed into the spiritual world on February 12, 1976, at the age of 90. He served as secretary of the association from 1920 to 1957. Mr. Howard was also well known as a secretary during this period in several other organizations. He taught mathematics and physical science for 40 years in the Academy of the New Church, retiring from that position 23 years ago.

Mr. Howard made many studies in Swedenborg's science and philosophy. He was especially interested in the correlation between Swedenborg's thought and the science of our day. The first of these studies, published in *THE NEW PHILOSOPHY* in 1913, and the last one forty-four years later in 1957, bracket a crucial period in the history of physics, when so many changes were taking place that affected the way man thought about nature.

His first paper appeared when only a very few were aware of Bohr's theory of the atom, and the general theory of relativity was not yet published. The "new" quantum theory did not appear until 13 years later. By the time of his last paper conclusions about physical reality had become frozen in the sense that "models" of earlier physics ideas had been eliminated to the point that the mind was incapable any longer of imagining models that satisfied the demands of mathematical physics nor the new data available from the laboratories.

There were further changes: the attack upon deterministic laws, the appearance of what appeared as incongruencies, such as the "duality" of the wave-particles, the ambiguous interpretation of the indeterminacy principle, not to forget the influence in so many areas of thought of the "proven" evolutionary theory—all these things happened during Mr. Howard's active period. His paper of 1957, written after his retirement, clearly shows that he was well aware of the major areas of thought.

Despite these changes there was a stability about Wilfred Howard's own thought in the sense that for him certain problems remained to be solved. One of these had to do with the existence of the ether. With the ether as with other problems, he understood well that cultures develop their "beliefs." Since beliefs

vary, they cannot all be true. An outstanding example of this in our culture is science. Science that is done in one period is undone or replaced by other science in a later period. Consequently Mr. Howard was aware of the contrast between twentieth-century science and the science of Swedenborg's day, and this contrast held much of his attention.

The importance of the meaning of the existence of the ether in particular and of the doctrine of atmospheres in general is illustrated in the following remark of his paper "Is There An Ether?"

The doctrine of the atmospheres and of the ether is too fundamental to be so dismissed, for the whole structure of Swedenborg's doctrine of creation and sustentation in both world rests on these atmospheres. [THE NEW PHILOSOPHY 1957, p. 131]

That this question reaches from the philosophical works even into the Writings is supported by the final sentence of the paper.

The question that we would ask, therefore, is whether in the light of the facts of science as we understand them, and our interpretation of these facts in the light of our own philosophy, we are presuming too much in assuming that the particles that compose the atom are in reality manifestations of those discreted substances of the ether referred to in the *Divine Love and Wisdom*. [Ibid., p. 142]

The Rt. Rev. Willard D. Pendleton, in his memorial address for Mr. Howard, referred both to his own work in the Academy and to his work with the Swedenborg Scientific Association, and concluded as follows:

It was, then, as both a student of doctrine and a teacher of youth that Wilfred Howard served the New Church. As a student of doctrine, he was zealous in his search for the truth; as a teacher of youth, he was sustained by the highest ideals. Note here what he said in an address to the General Faculty in 1920 on the subject of "Educational Ideals." "As the perception of truth on the part of the founders of this institution was the chief instrumentality in its foundation; so the perception of truth with each generation will be the chief means of its continued preservation, leading in ever increasing measure to the restoration of all those qualities which are truly human. Toward a spiritual renaissance, a reformation of the race, the end and stream of the Divine Providence is ever moving; and in the day of its fulfilment, it shall not be said of the conjugal that men know not what it is; or of the love of heaven, that it is last in the series of human loves. For to restore these loves is the Divine end in the revelation of truth to man, and the 'arm of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save'" (see Isaiah 59:1).

This thoughtful and moving statement typified the faith of the author;

indeed, it may rightly be said that it was his declaration of faith in the authority of the Writings and his expression of confidence in the work of New Church education. Here was a man who, "having put his hand to the plough" (Luke 9:62), did not look back but always forward. We are grateful, therefore, that in his ninetieth year he has been called by the Lord into His kingdom, where all those things for which Wilfred Howard labored on earth will be fulfilled. As he enters into the life of the spirit, our thoughts and affections go with him, and we are reminded of the marvelous workings of the Lord's Divine providence which looks only to what is eternal.

EDWARD F. ALLEN

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