

REVIEWS

RECENT ARTICLES ON SWEDENBORG

Of considerable interest to New Church men is an article appearing in *Christian Herald*, August, 1961, entitled "Religious Offbeat." It is written by Rev. Earl L. Douglass, B.A., Litt. D., a Presbyterian minister of some note, and one seldom finds a more careful, balanced, and unbiased presentation of the teachings of the Writings from a non-New Church man.

Dr. Douglass first explains that the term "off-beat" is not necessarily a derogatory appellation, being used to refer to those who reject, or rebel against, accepted customs. He then gives a short biography of Swedenborg, alluding to his claims to have seen into the spiritual world, and quoting from the Writings (*Invit.* 52) in support of this claim. He also refers at some length to the several well-known events which testify to Swedenborg's intercourse with the spiritual world.

The author then passes from a consideration of the history of Swedenborg to a consideration of his works in science, philosophy, and religion. His attention is mainly turned to the teachings concerning heaven and hell—"Swedenborg's most valuable and enduring contribution to religious thought and life would appear to be the extent to which he made men conscious of an unseen spiritual world." He presents the teachings of the Writings on this subject in such a way that one feels sure he personally believes them. However, in treating of the basic teaching of the sole Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the rejection of the Christian doctrine of the vicarious atonement, and the Canon of the Word, the author points out that all these teachings are unacceptable to "evangelicals."

In the *Carnegie Magazine*, January 1962, appears an article written by Rev. Leon C. le Van, pastor of the (Convention) New Jerusalem Christian Church in Pittsburgh. Entitled "Swedenborg: Carnegie's First Mentor," the article is evidently a biography of Swedenborg, which carries with it an evangelical twist.

Swedenborg's accomplishments in the fields of the natural sciences are related, emphasis being laid on the variety of his genius.

As to the teachings of the Writings, Rev. le Van refers to the doctrine that Christ is the one Divine Person, and he also devotes some time to an explanation of how Swedenborg could have seen into the spiritual world. He also refers to the fact that Swedenborg taught about the Bible, the Divine Providence, The Divine Love and Wisdom, and the True Christian Religion. He quotes a number of well-known personalities, including Helen Keller and Dr. Newton, as vouching for the veracity or the dependability of the teachings or the character of Swedenborg. A strong emphasis is also laid on the "New Age" which Swedenborg foresaw.

Being myself firmly convinced of the Divine authority of the Writings, I find much to criticize in the fact that at no point in either of these articles is any reference made to Swedenborg's claim concerning the Divinity of his works (see SD 6101; *Lord*, Pref.; *et al.*), nor even to his having been Divinely called to his mission. It seems that such an omission must inevitably lead the uninformed reader to conclude that the teachings of the Writings were Swedenborg's ideas, and as such have no more than human authority.

I would also criticize le Van's statement that "The New Age on earth *will be* (italics added) one in substance with the Second Coming of the Lord, Swedenborg maintains." The fallacy in this statement is more clearly seen when we draw an analogy between the first and the second advents, for it is evident that the incarnation, and not the growth of the Christian Church, constituted the first advent. The Writings state directly that they themselves are the second advent of the Lord. (See TCR 779; AE 641; *et al.*)

Dr. Douglass is affirmative enough to accept Swedenborg's teachings on heaven and hell as a contribution to Christian thought, but he makes no mention of the claim of Divine inspiration. He thinks of them as coming from a man whose brilliance and personal integrity testify to the veracity of his other claim—that of introduction into the spiritual world. One cannot help feeling that, had the former claim been kept in mind, such an objective investigation of the Heavenly Doctrine might well have added another name to the rolls of the New Church.

P. M. Buss

THE SPIRITUAL DIARY, VOL. 1. Emanuel Swedenborg, Swedenborg Society, London, 1962.

A copy of this new translation has just arrived. It is significant that the complete set of the *Spiritual Diary* has been out of print for many years. The last edition was a translation by Bush and Buss back in 1889.

It is hoped that a review of the new work will be available in these pages soon, and these comments serve only as an announcement. Although the title page does not announce the translator, we read over the signature of A. W. Acton in the section "Special Preface to Volume One" the following:

The present translation was first made in draft form by the Rev. W. H. Acton. He devoted years of loving labour to this work but did not have time to prepare his translation for the press. Having acted as consultant to the Rev. W. H. Acton, I was asked, at his death, to be responsible for the translation. This necessitated going over the whole work afresh. I have had the valued assistance of the Rev. F. F. Coulson who was appointed my consultant, and who made many helpful suggestions as to the translation and the many textual problems which are peculiar to this work.

E. F. A.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of the NEW PHILOSOPHY was delayed by other demands on the time of the editors. It is hoped that subscribers share the editors' opinion that these articles and the fine picture of Mr. Genzlinger's model of Swedenborg's flying machine have been worth waiting for.

A few weeks before the mailing of this issue, subscribers were notified that it would be combined with the July-September number into a double issue. This plan turned out to be incompatible with postal regulations, and accordingly this issue is in the usual quarterly form.

The July-September issue, containing the transactions of the annual meeting and Mr. Allen's address on "Cause," went to press at the same time as this one. It is scheduled to be mailed very shortly.