

CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY SWEDISH FOLLOWERS

In 1772, when Swedenborg departed from the natural world in London, the New Church existed only in his Writings and in the hearts of some of his disciples. The most devoted among these, was undoubtedly Dr. Beyer, who became acquainted with Swedenborg when he visited Göteborg in 1776.¹ Dr. Beyer seems to be the only person outside of Swedenborg's family with whom Swedenborg maintained correspondence during the last several years of his life. Swedenborg endeavored to support Dr. Beyer in his faith in the New Church, a faith which eventually brought him and his co-religionist Dr. Rosén a lawsuit for "heresy."

Dr. Rosén just barely survived this lawsuit, having died in September 1773, and despite some restraints that the Consistory Court of Göteborg imposed on his teaching, Dr. Beyer wrote his invaluable *Index* of Swedenborg's Writings, which he completed before his death in 1779. He thus became the great "sustainer" of the New Church in its founder's native country. It was in this capacity that he became acquainted with Augustus Nordenskjöld in the 1770's. Nordenskjöld in turn was to propagate the doctrines of the New Jerusalem not only in Sweden but, above all, abroad.

Augustus Nordenskjöld was born in Finland in 1754 and settled in Stockholm in 1772, the very year of Swedenborg's death, after having defended his thesis on mineralogy at the University of Turku. As an employee of the Royal College of Mines, where Swedenborg had spent his entire career as a mineralogist, he studied Swedenborg's scientific and religious writings with great enthusiasm. By the middle of the 1770's he

[†]Continued from *The New Philosophy* vol. 97 ns. 3 & 4 (July-December, 1994), pp. 427-445. See p. 427 of that issue for copyright statement and acknowledgements.

^{*} Address for reprints: 17 Rue Mozart, F-78330, Fontenay-le-Fleury, France.

¹R. L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. I, p. 624.

became a devoted follower who endeavored to spread the doctrines of the New Church not only in his own country, but also throughout the world at large.

Augustus Nordenskjöld first began his missionary activities by converting his two brothers Charles-Frederick and Adolphus-Gustavus to the doctrines of the New Church. Adolphus-Gustavus remained in Finland, but Charles-Frederick joined Augustus in Stockholm in order to help him acquire Swedenborg's manuscripts and to have them copied and distributed as widely as possible.

Swedenborg had already published his works in Latin in Amsterdam and London. The Nordenskjöld brothers undertook the project of having them translated into Swedish and French. Augustus began by establishing an office for the sole purpose of having Swedenborg's Writings copied. At the time of his appointment as Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign affairs in 1777, Charles-Frederick began corresponding with certain individuals who were favorable to assisting with the Nordenskjölds' translation and publication efforts abroad. Among them were the Marquis de Thomé in Paris, the Abbé Pernety in Berlin and the French surgeon Chastanier in London. Clearly he was in contact with a wide geographical area.

Linguistically, the task at hand was relatively simple. English and German translations of Swedenborg's major religious works already existed. In view of this, it was decided to concentrate on the publication of the works in French, which, at that time, had the advantage of making them accessible not only to the French but to the cultural elite of Europe at the end of the XVIIIth century.

However, the "Swedenborgianism" of the two Nordenskjöld brothers was not strictly confined to the religion of the New Church. During a stay in London in 1779-80, Augustus Nordenskjöld met a Jewish doctor, Gumpertz Levison, whose acquaintance confirmed him in his interest in alchemy. It was in London that Augustus published a treatise called *A plain system of alchemy*.² On strength of Augustus' personal recommendation, Doctor Gumpertz was able to go to Stockholm in order to set up a laboratory of alchemy in the King's service.

²London, 1779.

King Gustavus III had been rather easily convinced of the utility of such an enterprise, and his sense of good judgment was not highly developed. The King was not as fond of esoteric preoccupations as was his brother Prince Charles, who had accepted membership in the *Exegetic and Philanthropic Society*, founded in 1786 by Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld. Gustavus III, on the other hand, was initiated into a masonic lodge in 1772 and went to Italy in the following year in order to “seek the light” given by the last Stuart king, Charles-Edward, who had been promoted to the highest masonic rank by his grandfather.³

But if Gustavus III took any interest at all in Augustus Nordenskjöld’s work, it was for purely materialistic reasons. The King needed to fill the coffers of the State, and the reputations that both Nordenskjöld and his spiritual master Swedenborg held as mineralogists served to convince him that the feasibility of making gold was guaranteed. According to his disciple Nordenskjöld, Swedenborg had sung the praises of alchemy. It is curious to note that the very man who passed on this false information to Augustus Nordenskjöld also offered to be his French translator, Pernety.⁴ It is astonishing that Augustus Nordenskjöld did not distrust such a doubtful source in the field of Swedenborgian “orthodoxy.” But one believes exactly what one wishes to believe, and for Augustus Nordenskjöld, the idea of a natural alchemy corresponding with the spiritual regeneration of man was an admirable design worthy of Swedenborg.

The indirect influence of Pernety on the Court of Sweden is confirmed by Gustavus III’s desire to purchase some copies of the French translation of *Heaven and Hell*. This raised certain practical difficulties due to the fact that Swedenborg’s religious works had been banned from Sweden since 1771. Even though the King was the official head of the Church of Sweden, a bookseller would not dare to import any manuscripts without the explicit permission of the Consistory Court.⁵

Perhaps it is useful at this point to refer to the speculation that Gustavus III may have offered 30,000 French Francs to Moët for all his translations of

³ C. Th. Odhner, *The early history of the New Church in Sweden. The state at the time of Swedenborg’s death* (in *New Church Life*, Bryn Athyn, Pa., Vol. XXXI (1911), p. 294.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

Swedenborg's works. One may well wonder why the King of a country in which Swedenborg's religious writings in Latin had been banned for twenty years would have wanted to spend a fortune for obtaining their translations in French.⁶ But if we take into account Gustavus III's passion for alchemy together with the erroneous information which Augustus Nordenskjöld and Pernety had given to him about Swedenborg's attitude towards alchemy, isn't it possible to conclude that we have an explanation for the curiosity shown by Gustavus III about the "arcana" revealed by Swedenborg on this subject? Is it not a possibility that the purchaser of the translations of these manuscripts might not also gain the exclusive rights for their use? As far as the King was concerned, these works certainly were worth their weight in gold.

In 1783, Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld went to London for a period of three years and brought with him Swedenborg's manuscripts. There he became a member of the *Theosophical Society*, whose aim was to spread Emanuel Swedenborg's writings and religious ideas. It should be mentioned that one year prior to his arrival, some activity had already begun with the publication of Pernety's translation of *Heaven and Hell* in Berlin and the publication of Chastanier's translation of *The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrines* in London.

About that time Augustus Nordenskjöld expressed his wish to become:

the editor of the New Church Writings in various languages. This would be sufficient to fill my whole life and nothing else would bring me more pleasure.⁷

Because the publication of Swedenborg's religious works in Sweden had been forbidden since 1771, his ideas had to be expressed in other forms. The first of these "pseudo-Swedenborgian" writings was published in 1783 by Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld under the title *Oneiromantia or*

⁶ Letter from Augustus Tulk to Gustavus Billberg: Stockholm, February 2, 1817, reproduced in the archives of the society *Pro Fide et Charitate*, leaf 90, Library of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, under the code Swedenborg 196, New series 4.

⁷ H. Lenhammar, *Tolerans och bekännelse tvång* (Tolerance and Obligatory Profession of Faith), a doctoral thesis defended at the University of Uppsala in 1966, p.184.

the Art of Interpreting Dreams.⁸ This anonymous work was an encyclopedia of dreams and was a collaborative effort by the two brothers.

The following year, the newspaper *Aftonbladet* was to print texts by Swedenborg without mentioning his name, which allowed the paper to continue publication under the protection of Count Creutz,⁹ among others. But it was under the aegis of the *Exegetic and Philanthropic Society* founded in 1786 by Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld and based on the model of the *Theosophical Society* in London that a major effort devoted to spreading the doctrines of the New Church took place. The particulars of this activity will be described in the chapter on *The Role of Strasbourg* which deals with the relationship between the Swedish society and the *Société harmonique des Amis Réunis*. Let us recall that at that time, contrary to the distribution of the doctrines of the New Jerusalem in London which led to the development of a powerful organization, the influence of true Swedenborgianism increasingly diminished in Sweden giving way to the practices of somnambulism and magnetism. Nevertheless, all of this does not in any way detract from the results obtained by the Nordenskjöld brothers. I was astonished to find the following statement in an article published in the highly respected scholarly publication LYCHNOS, the Yearly Review of the Swedish Society of History of Sciences.

There were no results from the great projects of translation and publication; the circle of potential readers of the great writings still had to have recourse to the Latin editions that Swedenborg himself had published abroad.¹⁰

Thus, as far as the author of this article is concerned, Pernety's and Chastanier's translations, which we will consider in subsequent chapters, never existed, neither did the *Compendium of Works by Emanuel Swedenborg*

⁸ *Oneiromantia eller konsten att tyda drömmar*, Stockholm, 1783.

⁹ Jacques Roos, *Aspects littéraires du Mysticisme philosophique: William Blake-Novaliz-Ballanche*, Strasbourg, Heitz, 1951, p.8. Count Creutz died in 1785 and thus could not have assumed the chairmanship of the *Exegetic and Philanthropic Society*, founded in 1786, as Jacques Roos states.

¹⁰ R. Ambjörnsson, "Guds republik." *En utopi från 1789* ("God's Republic." A Utopia in 1789). In LYCHNOS, Yearly Review of the Swedish Society of History of Sciences, 1975-1976, Almqvist & Wiksell International, p.9.

(*Abrégé des ouvrages d'Emmanuel Swedenborg*), published in Strasbourg in 1788, which served as the basic reference for so many commentators on the Swedish revelator, notably the Abbé Barruel and Balzac. The author of the article likewise ignored the fact that among the foreign members of the *Exegetic and Philathropic Society*, was J.P. Moët, the translator of all of Swedenborg's religious works, whose influence, in all honesty, was not felt until some thirty years later.

One can certainly regret the lack of accuracy of the translations attributed to Pernety, not to mention Brumore's strange version of the *Delights of Conjugal Love*, but we cannot question the effectiveness of the overall plan for the translation and publication in French of Swedenborg's religious works. The efforts made by the Nordenskjöld brothers had been fruitful for they were not idle dreamers, but men of action. The scope of their efforts was not limited to Stockholm and Sweden but also included the London-Berlin-Paris triangle which later on expanded to include Strasbourg and Lyon-Avignon as publication centers, and even to Moscow in eastern Europe.¹¹

Moreover, their radius of influence was not strictly confined to the European continent. In 1787, Gustavus III charged their friend and co-religionist, Charles Bernard Wadström, to lead an expedition to East Africa in order to examine the possibilities of founding a Swedish colony there. Augustus Nordenskjöld became enthusiastic about this project and published in London, in collaboration with the Swedenborgian Robert Hindmarsh as editor, his *Plan for a Free Community upon the Coast of Africa under the protection of Great Britain; but entirely independent of all European Laws and Governments with an invitation, under certain conditions, to all Persons desirous of partaking the Benefits thereof. Embellished with a large and Elegant View of Sierra Leone on the Coast of Guinea*.¹² The project for creating a Swedenborgian community exists in a more detailed form in his pamphlet *Församlingsformen uti det Nya Jerusalem* (Plan of the New Jerusalem Community) published in Copenhagen in 1790.

¹¹ A. E. Arppe, *Anteckningar om finska alkemister* (Notes on Finnish Alchemists), Information given by the Finnish Society of Sciences on April 15, 1867 (=Contribution to the knowledge of Finland's people and culture, edited by the Society of Sciences, Helsinki, 1870), Part 16.

¹² E. A. Arppe, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

In order to draw attention to the international character of the community to be created, Augustus Nordenskjöld added Wadström's name next to his name as author as well as the names of the American Colborn Barrel, and the Prussian Johann Gottfried Simpson. At this time the United States had just repatriated a certain number of freed black slaves to Freetown, the capital of the Sierra Leone colony and England had recently sent eighty former prostitutes there as well. Above all, it was the purity of the native African population emphasized by Swedenborg in his Writings¹³ and Wadström's enthusiasm that made this country, in Augustus Nordenskjöld's opinion, the ideal land for the founding of a Swedenborgian society. The New Church was to be the State religion in Sierra Leone, where one's own works were to be the source of any political power, and love, the foundation of marriage, "the very Pillar of the Community." The fact that Sierra Leone Company was a purely commercial enterprise did not diminish Augustus Nordenskjöld's dedication to the project. Despite his failing health, he went there in order to participate actively in the life of this "Swedenborgian" colony. Perhaps he was motivated by the lack of understanding shown toward him by his British co-religionists who excluded him and his friend Wadström from the New Church Society, despite Wadström's many contributions, particularly in his role of editor of *The New Jerusalem Magazine*.

Augustus Nordenskjöld died shortly after he arrived in Africa and this was not the only misfortune that occurred there. The community in Sierra Leone was bombarded by French privateers and Wadström, who was staying in England at that time, traveled to Paris to claim reparations from the French Republic, which had just proclaimed the Rights of Man in all countries. The French government gave the following reply:

The Sierra-Leone Colony is not founded on human principles, and if the citizen Afzelius has suffered, although he is a Swede and a naturalist, this is an inevitable consequence of the misfortunes of war, to which all men can be exposed. Accordingly, the claims

¹³Jonsson/Hjern, *Swedenborg*, p.170.

made by these good Swedes are of no concern to the government of the French Republic.¹⁴

Although the French government proved insensitive to the sufferings of the Swedish members of the Sierra-Leone Swedenborgian community, Wadström himself later pursued a brilliant career in Paris, which he called a “market of poisonous loves.”¹⁵ It was there, in 1795, that he published *Some ideas on the nature of numerical values and the necessity of combining the interest of the farmer with that of the merchant at the time when a new financial plan is being established*. This treatise won him both the honor of French citizenship and the post of Director General of the *Crédit Agricole* in Paris. In that same year, he also wrote an *Adresse au Corps législatif et au Directoire exécutif* asking these organizations to contribute to the abolition of slavery and the protection of colonists in a system which, according to the author was:

founded on entirely new principles and quite different from those adopted in Europe, and having nothing in common with the political and financial system that seems to have prevailed there.

In a similar effort, he revived the *Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, an association which he recreated under the name of the *Friends of Blacks and Colonists*. Wadström became its president and was responsible for drafting its statutes.

Above all, it was his translation of his *Essay on Colonization* that brought him his greatest glory. One day Wadström received the following letter:

Paris, 25 Germinal, Year VI.

Cafarelli, Brigade General of the Royal Engineers to the citizen
Wadström.

¹⁴B. von Beskow, *Minne af Öfverirektören Carl Bernhard Wadström* (To the Memory of C.B. Wadström, Director General). in *Proceedings of the Swedish Academy* in 1796/33, Stockholm, 1861, p223.

¹⁵“Veneris marknad.”

Citizen, I received yesterday the invaluable book you had the kindness to send us. General Bonaparte knows that you gave him the only copy as a token of the esteem you have for him and from your sense of great devotion to humanity, to which you have consecrated your life. I am happy to express gratitude and to be able, while assuring you of the Commander-in-Chief's distinguished esteem, to convey my own sentiments about your virtues and your talents.

I am very truly yours

Cafarelli.¹⁶

On April 5, 1799, Wadström died in Paris from consumption at the age of fifty-four. In the *Décade philosophique*, a publication edited by the famous economist Jean-Baptiste Say, Wadström's death was considered as a loss for all of humanity. To quote:

Paris has just witnessed the death of one of the greatest, one of the most famous philanthropists, Mr. Wadström. A man who devotes his life to the public weal deserves public homage. Perhaps there never has been a private individual who has done more for the benefit of other people with less self-interest than the friend whose loss we now mourn.¹⁷

Of the three great early Swedish followers of the New Church, only Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld remained alive long enough to be able to become a member of the association *Pro fide et charitate* which came into existence after the *Exegetic and Philanthropic Society*. He lived until 1828. In the year 1819, he published his *General Considerations on Present Day Christianity, and the Light Shed by Emanuel Swedenborg on Religions* (*Considérations générales sur le Christianisme actuel, et la lumière que Monsieur Emmanuel*

¹⁶ B. von Beskow, op. cit., pp. 226-227.

¹⁷ B. von Beskow, op. cit., p. 229.

¹⁸ Rostock, 1819. Anonymous publication.

Swedenborg répand sur les religions)¹⁸ in French.

This book has its own story. Every complete edition of it except for one, was burned in Mecklenburg after having been confiscated by the authorities there. I was able to consult a partial copy in the Royal Library in Stockholm and after reading it, I came to the conclusion that Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld became wiser in his later years. He seemed to have regretted his brother Augustus' impetuous nature together with his excessive elation and preoccupation with alchemy.¹⁹ Despite this, had there not been the three young Swedes: Augustus Nordenskjöld, Charles Bernard Wadström and Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld, one may well wonder where Swedenborgianism would be in the world of today?

¹⁹ In spite of Gustavus III's friendship for Augustus Nordenskjöld, he did not always overlook his exuberant behavior. One can understand this in light of the fact that Augustus Nordenskjöld had "danced on the ruins of the Bastille" in order to celebrate the anniversary of July 14, 1789 (see E.A. Arppe, op. cit., p. 80). Moreover, Augustus was very well aware of his own anti-royalist actions. In a letter to his brother Charles-Frederick (Manchester, July 23, 1791), he wrote: "Last year, I celebrated the French revolution in Paris, this year in Manchester in excellent company, (several) toasts were proposed that would have cost us our heads in Sweden."

CHAPTER 2

PERNETY AND THE ILLUMINATI IN AVIGNON

The history of the Academy or Society of the *Illuminati in Avignon* began in Berlin with Pernetý's arrival in the Prussian capital.

Antoine-Joseph Pernetý was born on February 13, 1716 in Roanne, France, and was educated in Lyon under the guidance of his cousin Jacques Pernetti, a priest. Antoine-Joseph was also ordained and took his vows as Benedictine monk in 1732. In 1758, he published his *Fables égyptiennes et grecques* which included a lengthy introduction on the subject of alchemy, followed by a *Dictionnaire mytho-hermétique*, a dictionary also pertaining to alchemy. When Bougainville left for the Falkland Islands in 1763, Pernetý accompanied him as his ship's chaplain and upon returning to France, he stayed in Avignon, where he devoted his efforts to

creating certain masonic rites. (Posterity has associated Swedenborg's name with those rites, although there is no proof that justifies such an interpretation.) Sometime later, Pernety traveled to Berlin.

When King Frederick the Great of Prussia engaged the Abbé Antoine-Joseph Pernety as his librarian, he thought he had engaged Abbé Pernetti, Antoine-Joseph's cousin. The educated monarch had read with great pleasure Pernetti's *Lettres sur les physionomies*¹ and wanted to have the author as his personal librarian. In any case, this is the anecdote that is recounted by all of Pernety's biographers. But, the truth is that there is more to the story than merely a case of mistaken identity. Dieudonné Thiébault, Pernety's predecessor in the post of librarian to Frederick the Great, reveals in his *Souvenirs de vingt ans de séjour à Berlin*, that Jacques Pernetti was not the author of *Lettres sur les physionomies*. The true author was Father Bougeant, who had asked for Pernetti's permission to use his name because he feared reprisals similar to the ones he had suffered after the publication of his work *Le Langage des Bêtes*.² King Frederick could have consoled himself with the knowledge that even if he had engaged Abbé Pernetti, he still would not have had the genuine author of the *Lettres sur les physionomies*.

Evidently Frederick was not terribly distraught about the mistake he made in the appointment of his librarian. Pernety knew how to win everyone's favor, and contrary to what has often been stated, Frederick's affection for him was not compromised by Pernety's activities as a translator of Swedenborg. This is documented by Boisson in his *Quatre lettres inédites de Frédéric II le Grand à Dom Pernety*.³

During this time Swedenborg was the subject of much discussion in Berlin. In compiling a list of the German translations of Swedenborg's works, Joanny Bricaud recalls the influence he had on the intellectual life in the Prussian capital.⁴ She is, however, seriously mistaken in her as-

¹Jacques Pernetti, *Lettres philosophiques sur les Physionomies*. La Haie, J. Neaulme, 1748.

²Dieudonné Thiébault, *Mes souvenirs de vingt ans de séjour à Berlin ou Frédéric le Grand*, Paris, F. Buisson, 1804, Tome V, pp. 86-87.

³*Mémoires de l'Académie de Vaucluse*; Deuxième série. Tome XXIX. Année 1929 (3è et 4è trimestres).

⁴Joanny Bricaud, *Les Illuminés d'Avignon. Etudes sur Dom Pernety et son groupe*, Paris, Librairie Critique Emile Nourry, 1927, p.57.

sumption that Pernety read these translations. Pernety did not know German and said so himself in a letter to Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld.⁵ In order to read Swedenborg, Pernety did not need any knowledge of the German language at all because he knew Latin and was able to read Swedenborg's works in their original editions. According to the letter to C.F. Nordenskjöld, he owned all of Swedenborg's published works, except the *Arcana Coelestia*.

Pernety's interest in the New Jerusalem developed later on. In the preface to his translation of *Heaven and Hell*, he claims that in 1771, one of his colleagues in the Royal Academy had loaned him some of Swedenborg's works upon the occasion of the visit of the Queen Mother Lovisa-Ulrika to her brother Frederick the Great. Pernety's treatise *La connaissance de l'homme moral par celle de l'homme physique*,⁶ written five years later, however, bears no evidence of his having read Swedenborg, despite its Swedenborgian title. In his letter to C.F. Nordenskjöld, Pernety indicates an important date in his role in the history of Swedenborgianism: September 29, 1779. On that day, he asked the first question pertaining to Swedenborg's works among a group of alchemists he had recently formed. The group came to be universally known as the *Illuminati in Avignon*.

Who were the first members of this group? In writing to C.F. Nordenskjöld, Pernety spoke of a "Polish nobleman" who told of the marvelous resurrection of two peasants. Pernety, who, according to Dieudonné Thiébaud "believed everything and in everything," seems to have been convinced of the authenticity of what had been revealed to him by "Count Thadée Lessige GRABIENSKA, Nobleman of Liva, known in Holland under the name of Janiewske; in England under the name of Soudkowski; in France and some parts of Germany under the name of Ostap; in Hamburg and Altona under the name of Slonskimp."⁷ After having initiated himself into the group, it was not long before this noble-

⁵ This letter of October 20, 1781 constitutes a veritable gold mine for those who take an interest in Pernety and his activities. I became aware of it thanks to a copy translated into Swedish located in the Royal Library in Stockholm: L 2:41.

⁶ Antoine-Joseph Pernety, *La Connaissance de l'Homme moral par celle de l'Homme physique*, I-II. Berlin, chez G.J. Decker, Imprimeur du Roi, 1777.

⁷ A letter from Grabienska to the Dutch editor Pierre F. Gosse of February 24, 1787, published in the *Portefeuille d'un ancien typographe ou Receuil de Lettres*, The Hague, 1884, pp. 80-84.

man initiated others, too, upon the order of the Word of God. Included among them were his wife, his mother-in-law, Countess Stadnisca, his daughter Annette Grabianka, his sister and brother-in-law, Count and Countess Jean Tarnowski, as well as Mademoiselle Bruchier from Strasbourg, who was his daughter Annette's tutor and also the clairvoyant who was to serve as their oracular medium.⁸

In terms of numbers, the Grabianka family had an enormous impact on the new society. But it was Louis-Joseph-Bernard-Philibert de Morveau, known as "Brumore," initiated prior to Grabianka, who was even more influential. Brumore served as librarian to the King's brother, Henri, at his Castle of Reinsberg, near Berlin. Henri had hired a troop of French actors, one of whom, Bauld de Sens, was also a member of the secret Society. It is known that he entrusted Pernety and Brumore with two rare documents dealing with alchemy : *Le Livre de Mardochée* and *Le Livre d'Elie Artiste*.⁹

If it is true that Pernety was a true idealist and that Grabianka had a volatile personality, Brumore was a very clever charlatan. His personal influence on Prince Henri was considerable. I have found some mention of the Prince in the register of the members of the *Illuminati in Avignon*,¹⁰ which could, of course, be another piece of deception by Abbé Brumore. Before learning from the "Voice of God" in Basel, that the "city in the South" where the Society was to settle was to be Avignon, Brumore "paid a visit" to Elie Artiste in Hamburg in order to become better informed on gold making. But did Elie Artiste, Swedenborg's "intimate friend and financier," ever really exist?¹¹ Brumore's statements to this effect in the *Journal Encyclopédique* of December 1785, to corroborate the article by the Marquis de Thomé, have no factual basis. Furthermore, when Brumore

⁸Joanny Bricaud, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

⁹Joanny Bricaud, op. cit., p 39.

¹⁰Member no. 999 according to ms 3.090 in the Calvet Museum in Avignon.

¹¹Joanny Bricaud, op. cit. p.40.

It seems as though he did. See Reinhard Breymayer's paper read at the international colloquium on *Lumières et Illuminisme* (Cortona, October 3-6 1983), whose Proceedings were published in *Criticae Storia Letteraria* 9 (Pacini Editore—Pisa): "Elie Artiste": *Johann Daniel Muller de Wissenbach/Nassau (1716 jusqu'après 1785) un aventurier entre le piétisme radical et l'illuminisme*. But, as Breymayer states (op. cit., p. 77): "Muller was not Swedenborg's financier, as they said; this assertion is a legend. Neither was he his friend" (See Note 52 of the same paper).

translated Swedenborg's *Conjugal Love*,¹² he completely distorted the original text. It is in light of this background that Pernety was to ask four questions to his guardian angel, Assadai, and to the Voice of God, pertaining to his work as Swedenborg's translator. But, contrary to what he stated in the letter to C.F. Nordenskjöld, he asked his first question on September 29, 1779, long before he began translating Swedenborg. The question he posed was not about *Heaven and Hell*, but *Conjugal Love*, which Brumore was to translate:

Wanting to know God and the truth for His greatest glory, I ask thee, Voice of God, to tell me whether I should consider as true everything that is contained in Swedenborg's treatise called: DELITIA SAPIENTIAE DE AMORE CONJUGIALI?¹³

The nonsense found in the reply to these questions could be given any number of interpretations.

Is that thou, is that thus thou, is that still thou who art questioning me? what art thou asking me? he walked on the paths where heaven had put him; he had the wisdom of the wise, he spoke, he told the truth; but in the satisfaction of thy heart, what remains to be understood? God called thee, God fixed thee, the day was and thine eyes closed, and thou art still dozing, and thou fearest not that death strikes thee on the way of thy life? and thou fearest not that thy hand becomes dry before beginning thy works? O, my son, it is thy fault, weep, wail, repair it, because Assadai will see the throne of his God only after the accomplishment of thy works.¹⁴

It was eighteen months later that the Voice of God approved the printing of Pernety's translation of *Heaven and Hell*¹⁵ and also his taking his

¹² See further on in this chapter.

¹³ *Cahier de correspondance concernant la secte des Illuminés d'Avignon*; Calvet Museum in Avignon (Ms 3090), p. 15, No 35.

¹⁴ Answer quoted by Pernety in his letter to C.F. Nordenskjöld of October 20, 1781. Ms L 2:41 in the Royal Library in Stockholm.

¹⁵ 12.3.1781. *Cahier de correspondance*, p. 45, No 86.

first liberties with the translation early in 1782. The "Voice" later supported the attacks he made in his preface "against the would-be philosophers in our days."¹⁶

Pernety's four questions are all that can be found pertaining to Swedenborg in the records of the activities of the Society! It is difficult to understand how one could find any kind of Swedenborgian influence in this lodge of alchemists. It is a fact that two of the leading members of the lodge translated some of Swedenborg's works. But if these two defrocked priests really took an interest in Swedenborg, they did not share his doctrines with their colleagues. Did they even have the necessary knowledge to do so? Brumore seems to have been interested in only one of the Swedish revelator's works, *Conjugal Love*, and this was in a superficial way.

And Pernety? It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the motivating force for his activities as Swedenborg's translator was his contacts in 1781 and 1782 with Swedenborgians of that period. R.L. Tafel, to whom we are indebted for this valuable information¹⁷ does not mention any names, but it is clear from other statements in the same source from Tafel that, among those admirers of Swedenborg were C.F. Nordenskjöld and the Marquis de Thomé.¹⁸

Thanks to R.L. Tafel we also know that in 1776 C.F. Nordenskjöld was preparing an edition of French translations of Swedenborg's works which included biographical notes.¹⁹ Charles Robsahm, the author of the *Mémoires concernant Swedenborg*, a document which formed the core of the material used by the Nordenskjöld brothers for their introduction to Pernety's work,²⁰ states explicitly that his material was to be used "by a society whose aim it is to translate several of his (Swedenborg's) writings into French."²¹

¹⁶ 19.1.1782. *Cahier de correspondance*, p. 55, No 104.

¹⁷ R.L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol I, p.637.

¹⁸ R.L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. I, p. 621.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Discours préliminaire pour tenir lieu de Préface*, pp. 1-37 of Pernety's translation of *Heaven and Hell*, Berlin, G.J. Decker, Imprimeur du Roi, 1782.

²¹ R.L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. I, p. 621.

We must surmise that C.F. Nordenskjöld, who had entrusted Robsahm with the task of preparing introductory material for the translation, was already engaged in the process of gathering a group together for this purpose. In 1786, the work of translating Swedenborg became the focus of his *Exegetical and Philanthropical Society*. In light of the above, we should not exclude the possibility that, then as well as during the following year, C.F. Nordenskjöld may have tried to ally himself with magnetizers in order to promote the translation of Swedenborg's works.²² Some six or seven years earlier, he had wanted to unite Swedenborgianism and alchemy in his praiseworthy aim of making the Writings of his great Swedish compatriot better known among the European public. In any case, he, together with his brother Augustus, undertook the lion's share of the preparatory work for the introduction to Pernety's book.

By proving how little attention Pernety paid to Swedenborg prior to 1779, I want, once and for all, to refute the often stated false opinion that Pernety created Swedenborgian masonic rites in Avignon between 1760 and 1770. This error is due to an article in Lenning's *Encyclopédie de la Franc-maçonnerie*, 1822-1828, stating that the Academy of the Society of the *Illuminati in Avignon*, which the author correctly maintains is a masonic lodge, had a superior degree, the *True Mason*, based on the doctrines of both Saint-Martin and Swedenborg.²³ This frequently cited account confuses two facts: first, the masonic rite of the *True Mason* degree was created by Pernety in Avignon in 1766, which, according to Joanny Bricaud, who seems well-versed in masonic institutions, was the point when the hermetic teachings began.²⁴ Secondly, it was nearly twenty years later, when the secret society known as *The Illuminati*, settled in Avignon. It very well may be that later on Pernety revived his degree of the *True Mason* within the Avignon community, but Swedenborg really had nothing to do with the rites created by Pernety between 1760 and 1770.²⁵

²² See the chapter on *The Part played by Strasbourg*.

²³ Quoted from R.L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. I, p. 636.

²⁴ Joanny Bricaud, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

²⁵ Emmanuel Rebold, *Histoire générale de la franc-maçonnerie*, Paris, A. Franck Libraire, 1851, documents this confusion: p. 142: "1760. Creation in Avignon of the mother lodge of the Swedenborgian rite (called the *Illuminati in Avignon*), by the Benedictine Dom Pernety and the Polish starost Grabianka."

In actuality, Swedenborg played a minor role in the *Academy of the Illuminati*. However, the fact that translations of Swedenborg were produced by two of its main members, Pernety and Brumore, and the evidence that Grabianka wished to ally himself with the Swedenborgians in London,²⁶ certainly contributed to fostering the illusion that *The Illuminati* were a Swedenborgian sect.

Although not a Swedenborgian himself, Pernety has had an extremely important role in the history of the New Church. His translation of *Heaven and Hell* was the first translation into French of a religious work by Swedenborg. Generally speaking, Swedenborgians have tended to underestimate this first translation. This view is certainly understandable given the fact that Pernety in his capacity as a translator took far too many liberties. (The primary responsibility of a translator is to remain faithful to the original text.) When Pernety came across a paragraph that did not suit him personally, he simply changed it. We have already noted that he interjected answers from his oracle into his translations. Although he was a defrocked priest, he nevertheless remained faithful to tenets of Catholicism. He managed to extricate himself from this difficulty by drafting his famous *Note sur l'adoration des saints*, whose content was in contradiction to statements in the introductory passages. In addition, there is erroneous information about Swedenborg contained in the introduction. For example, while Pernety admired Böhme and wrote that Swedenborg shared his admiration for him, Swedenborg never read Böhme, as one of his letters to Dr. Beyer in Gothenburg proves. Swedenborg also never had discussed hermetic philosophy, yet we know of Pernety's passion for this philosophy and that he made Swedenborg a partisan of it, too.²⁷

It was not long before protests came from Swedenborg's first disciples. In London, Benedict Chastanier expressed his indignation in a letter that has not been preserved, although we have Pernety's reply to it on October 10, 1783. Pernety defends himself as follows:

²⁶ See further on in this chapter.

²⁷ It could be, however, that these paragraphs had been drafted before falling into Pernety's hands. See the following chapter, devoted to Benedict Chastanier.

In regard to the note I inserted on the homage paid to Saints, I thought it was necessary for the instruction of the Catholics in order to show them the abuse.²⁸

From Paris, the Marquis de Thomé launched a violent, but indirect, attack against Pernety about the same time. He wrote in a letter to C.F. Nordenskjöld:

But however necessary it is that the progress of these revelations be as rapid as we desire, it is still more necessary that those who declare that they believe in them should act accordingly. Ought I, for instance, to have expected that after impressing upon Abbé Pernety that the translation of the theosophical works of Swedenborg required the utmost exactness and the greatest fidelity, and that only those who ought to be regarded as real friends of the new revelation, who admitted it without reservation, and after having received an answer from him that he was of the same opinion—ought I to have expected, I say, from him, six months later, a translation in which he abbreviates, alters, adds, omits and transposes to his liking, and where he contradicts without respect and without shame what this revelation teaches consistently from one end to the other? It was no doubt in order that the abomination of desolation might be completed that a priest of the Roman communion should, under the pretext of believing in the new revelation, have laid his sacrilegious hand upon it. I broke off correspondence with him...²⁹

Chastanier repeated his attack in 1785 by publishing the preface of his translation of *Du commerce établi entre l'âme et le corps*, (Influx, or, Intercourse of the Soul and Body), a *Refutation of Pernety's Note on the Saints* of no less than twenty-one pages. Let me complete this selection of severe, but justified criticism by quoting a paragraph from his pamphlet *L'Anatomie du Symbole de Saint Athanase* :

²⁸ Quoted from the French translation of Swedenborg's treatise *Intercourse between Body and Soul*, London-The Hague, 1785, p. 61.

²⁹ R. L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol I, p.638.

It is incontestably ridiculous, even beyond everything that can be imagined, for a Christian I mean, to do what was done some years ago by a certain Magician by profession, a present member of that Society / the *Illuminati in Avignon*/ in order to know whether he should publish his *mutilated, abbreviated, changed and adulterated* translation of an excellent treatise of the same author.³⁰

The hostile reception of his first translation, if it indeed really was his work,³¹ did not hinder Pernety from publishing two volumes of *Divine Love and Wisdom* in Lyon in the year 1785.

It is curious to observe that Brumore, with his version “à la française” of *Conjugal Love*, was treated much less severely. In every publication in which Chastanier condemned in 1785 Pernety’s translation, Chastanier also expressed the wish that *Conjugal Love* “should be in the hands of all married couples.”³² The author probably had not yet read Brumore’s free translation of the work. In a personal letter to me, the former President of the *French Society of the New Church*, Paul Flon wrote:

...Brumore’s work entitled *Traité curieux des charmes de l’Amour conjugal* is judged very severely in Swedenborgian circles. In reality, it is just a coarse caricature of Swedenborg’s admirable writing *Delitia Sapientiae de Amore Conjugali*.³³

Despite their translation work, both Pernety and Brumore took only a very slight interest in Swedenborg and it is evident that they did not consider themselves his disciples. The proof of this is that once the secret

³⁰ Op. cit., p. 30.

³¹ Cf James Hyde’s article: *Benedict Chastanier and the Illuminati of Avignon*, in *New Church Review*, April 1907, Vol. XIV, p. 189:

It appears, however, that like the French New Jerusalem (*De la Nouvelle Jérusalem et de sa Doctrine Céleste*), the draft translation of *Heaven and Hell* was made by La Pierre, and revised and edited by Pernety, who while doing this work must have introduced his misrepresentations of the original, hence the word “falsificated” which Chastanier uses to describe the translation.

³² *Du Commerce établi entre l’âme et le corps*, London-The Hague, 1785, p.81, No 33.

³³ Private letter of December 6, 1962—However, this *Treatise* was republished in the “Collection Ressources” with Slatkine, Geneva-Paris, 1981.

society had become a community and had moved its activities to Avignon upon the order received from the Voice of God, Catholicism became the religion that was practiced and professed.

Sophie de Korwin-Piotrowska informs us that the Protestants who wished to join the community had to be converted to Catholicism before they were admitted.³⁴ In strict opposition to Swedenborg, who teaches the tenet of the Triunal God, *The Illuminati in Avignon* advocated the adoration of the Holy Virgin as the fourth divinity. Marc de Vissac, in his local chronicle of Pernety's society, does not believe this.³⁵ But Alice Joly recalls the title of Pernety's last work: *Les Vertus, le Pouvoir, la Clémence et la Gloire de Marie* (The Virtues, Power, Mercy and Glory of Mary).³⁶ Further evidence supports Joly's view. In 1786 Grabianka left for London in order to tell the Swedenborgians in England that they must alter the doctrine of the New Church on this major point. In his work: *Rise and Progress of the New Church*, Robert Hindmarsh gives an extraordinary account of Grabianka's appearance in the New Church circle in London and his efforts toward reforming Swedenborgian tenets on the issue.³⁷

The tentative alliance of the Avignon group with true Swedenborgians proves that the Society wished to reach a greater community. They were of the opinion that the only feasible union was one with the New Church. Their disappointment in seeing these expectations lost forever was so strong that they took their revenge by publicly condemning Swedenborg's treatise on *Conjugal Love*. Brumore, the translator of the work, subsequently abandoned Avignon in 1785 for Rome, where he is said to have attempted to found another society. He died in 1786, the very same year as Grabianka's visit to London.³⁸

As the Society began to flourish in Avignon, a core group increased rapidly in Berlin where Grabianka initiated his entire family. One of

³⁴ Sophie de Korwin-Piotrowska, *Balzac et le monde slave*, Doctoral thesis, Fac. Lettres, Paris, Honoré Champion, 1933, p. 231.

³⁵ Marc de Vissac, *Dom Pernety et les Illuminés d'Avignon*, 1906, p.231. Joanny Bricaud used numerous passages from this work.

³⁶ Alice Joly, *La Sainte Parole des Illuminés d'Avignon*, in the *Cahiers de la Tour Saint Jacques II, III, IV* (2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters of 1960: *Aspects de l'Illuminisme au XVIIIè siècle*), p. 116.

³⁷ Robert Hindmarsh, op. cit., pp. 41-49; the main point of Grabianka's mission p. 44: "That there are actually FOUR PERSONS IN THE GODHEAD; the Virgin Mary..."

³⁸ February 23, 1786; quoted from Alice Joly, op. cit., p. 109.

Pernety's brothers joined this group, as well as several other Frenchmen,³⁹ and two Englishmen, the Bousie brothers, who became initiated by the Voice of God.

By 1785 membership in Avignon grew to about one hundred and among those members were leading citizens as well as members of noble families. The names of the Duke and Duchess of Wurtemberg were on the registers as well as Prince Henri, Brumore's former employer. Jacques Roos recollects that the Duke Charles of Sudermania, the heir of the Swedish crown, sent the minister Reuterholm and Captain Silfverhjelm there as his personal ambassadors.⁴⁰ Two Englishmen, William Bryan and John Wright, arrived from London on foot.⁴¹ And Grabianka, while quarrelling with the Swedenborgians in England, undertook a letter-writing campaign with information about the *Illuminati in Avignon*, that was distributed in Sweden and Holland, and elsewhere.

We must recognize that the community had a certain success and that its success was notably appreciated in the milieu where Pernety was particularly comfortable: among freemasons. In 1784, the *Société des Philalèthes* in Paris organized an "international convention of freemasons from all countries and of all systems" of about one hundred delegates all together. On the invitation list we find "the Englishman Bousie, associate of the Illuminati," "the Baron de Corberon, the Marquis de Thomé, Count Grabianka and Dr. Chastanier" representing "the Swedenborgians and the Illuminati in Avignon."⁴² Corberon was not yet a member of the Avignon society. His profound studies of Swedenborg's works during his stay as Ambassador in Zweibrücken (Deux-Ponts), was later to win him a

³⁹ Joanny Bricaud, op. cit., p.39.

⁴⁰ Jacques Roos, *Aspects littéraires du Mysticisme philosophique au début du Romantisme: William Blake-Novalis-Ballanche*, Strasbourg, Editions P.H. Heitz, 1951, p.9.

⁴¹ *A Testimony of the Spirit of Truth*, concerning Richard Brothers, the Man appointed of God to govern the *Hebrews*, the *Elijah* promised by the Lord, in these last Days, to come and restore all Things, dignified with the Title of *His King*, who will be evalted to the Throne of *David*, in Mount *Zion*, in Jerusalem. In an Adress to the People of Israel, etc., to the Gentiles called Christians and all other Gentiles. With some Account of the Lord's gracious Dealing with his Servant *William Bryan*, One of the Brothers of the Avignon Society, and by Revelation from *God* declared to be a Jew of the Tribe of Judah. London: Printed in the year of Christ 1795. Sold at J. Wright's No. 48, Down Street, Manchester-Square (39 p.).

⁴² *Les Cahiers de la Tour Saint-Jacques II, III, IV* (2nd, 3rd and 4th quarters of 1960: *Aspects de l'Illuminisme au XVIIIè siècle*), pp/ 38, 40.

place among the Swedenborgians. Although he became acquainted with Pernety, it was Grabianka who finally convinced him to join the Avignon lodge.⁴³ Despite his violent attacks against Pernety, the Marquis de Thomé had been a member of *The Illuminati* since 1783 and had also been associated with New Church people in London and in Stockholm. Like Bénédict Chastanier, he combined his Swedenborgianism with freemasonry.

But why then is Pernety's name absent from the list of invitees? Was it perhaps Grabianka who omitted it? We know for a fact that there were schisms in Avignon. Adrien Marcel's study *Les Quatre maisons des Illuminés d'Avignon*⁴⁴ brilliantly illustrates his hypothesis that there was no community there in the strict sense of the term. In Avignon, Grabianka, who was known as "the King of the People of God," initiated changes that gradually altered Pernety's doctrines. Despite this, Pernety, who left to settle in Bédarrides with Count de Vaucroze, still had adherents in Avignon who met together now and then at the home of the Marquis de Montpezat.

In 1789 Grabianka met Saint-Martin in London, an event which became the source of the eventual split between Grabianka and Pernety. Saint-Martin had gone to London in the company of Tieman. Although Grabianka had declared himself a "Swedenborgiste," he seems to have also shown a great interest in Saint-Martin.⁴⁵ According to Marcel, Grabianka might have ostensibly preferred Saint-Martin to Swedenborg.⁴⁶ Whatever the truth, Grabianka founded his "New Israel" in Avignon by appointing a new dignitary: "the Man-King." And it fell to a poor Italian gardener, Ottavio Cappeli, to serve in this role.

Under Cappeli, the religious services of the Society are said to have been more or less replaced by debauchery. This, in turn, brought the Society the undeserved martyrdom of a "persecuted church." The Court of Inquisition instituted proceedings against it in 1791 and what follows is the text of the official document published from the proceedings:

⁴³ Joanny Bricaud, op. cit., pp. 86-88.

⁴⁴ in *Mémoires de l'Académie de Vaucluse*, Deuxième série, Tome XXII, 3rd and 4th quarters of 1922, pp. 85-101.

⁴⁵ Alice Joly, op. cit., p. 110.

⁴⁶ Adrien Marcel, op. cit., pp.86-92.

Some years ago, Avignon saw a sect appear that claimed to be destined to reforming the world by establishing a new people of God. Its members, without regard for age or sex, are distinguished not by names but by numbers. The leaders, residing in this city, are ordained by means of a superstitious rite. They say they are very attached to the Catholic religion, but they claim to be assisted by angels, to have dreams and inspirations for interpreting the Bible. The man who presides over the ceremonies is called the *patriarch* or *pontiff*. There also is a king destined to govern the new people of God. A man called Ottavio Cappeli, who has been a gardener, then a servant, is corresponding with them; he pretends to have answers from Archangel Raphael, and he has composed a rite for the reception of the members. The Inquisition Court instituted proceedings against him, condemned him to abjure his errors and to seven years of imprisonment in a fortress. *The same sentence applies to the Society of the Illuminati* for falsely attributing to themselves angelic appearances suspect of heresy; the Court forbids joining them, praising them, and orders the denunciation of its members in the ecclesiastical courts.⁴⁷

Such was Rome's opinion of Grabianka's influence on Pernety's lodge. Soon afterwards, Grabianka departed from Avignon leaving behind him his "people" and numerous creditors. When he did manage to return to Avignon some five years later, it was not to act as a prophet, but to serve as a witness to a marriage, as Adrien Marcel has noted so astutely.⁴⁸

At about the same time that the proceedings against the Society took place, Pernety, whose influence was eclipsed by Grabianka, was arrested, not by the ecclesiastical authorities but by the revolutionaries. His crime must have consisted in the fact that he had lived in Prussia. In any case, he was given his freedom and later died in 1801 in his home town of Valence.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Quoted from Joanny Bricaud, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁴⁸ Adrien Marcel, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The membership of the *Society of the Illuminati* dwindled, little by little, but before it became extinct, it enjoyed its days of glory, convincing all of Europe that it had practiced the true doctrines of the New Jerusalem. We have seen that in the opinion of freemasons, *The Illuminati* were Swedenborgians. The failure of Grabianka's mission in London proved the contrary. While drafting circular letters to be sent to eminent Swedenborgians in Sweden and the Netherlands,⁵⁰ Grabianka emphasized his fidelity to the great revealer of the *Arcana Coelestia* and some were taken in by his approach. In his *Histoire du Jacobinisme*, Abbé Barruel stated that the *Society of the Illuminati in Avignon* was:

a truer expression of Swedenborg's doctrines than the New Church Society founded in London about the same time.⁵¹

But Abbé Barruel was not highly competent in passing judgment on this matter. We know that, like Balzac, he was content with acquainting himself with the doctrines by perusing the *Abrégé des Ouvrages d'Emmanuel Swedenborg* (*The Compendium of the Works of Emanuel Swedenborg*), published in Strasbourg in 1788.

In 1790, the young Swedish Swedenborgian, Augustus Nordenskjöld, spent four months in Paris. Nordenskjöld was severely criticized by R.L. Tafel in his *Documents concerning Swedenborg* because of his liberal views on love and his too great preoccupation with alchemy, an interest which should have made him tolerant of Pernety. Echoes from the activities of the *Illuminati in Avignon* caused Nordenskjöld to report what follows below to a Swedish co-religionist, Charles-Frederick Bergklint. He reported it in turn in letter to another friend. After praising the translator Moët, the editor Maubach and with much reservation, the Marquis de Thomé, Bergklint recounted the following:

Their worst competitor is a so-called Swedenborgian Society in Avignon, in which Pernety, Count Grabianka and many other

⁵⁰Ms in Royal Library in Stockholm: extract (in Swedish translation) of a letter from Count Grabianka, Starost of Poland to a Swede in Stockholm, dated Avignon: February 12, 1787—Cf Note 7).

⁵¹Quoted from the *Histoire sommaire de la Nouvelle Eglise*, Paris-London-New York, 1879, p. 84.

false Swedenborgians are members. These rascals are in rather great error, although they have created great stir in France. They consider Mary as the Queen of Heaven and of their parish, and as the fourth Divinity, in which dignity she has now been installed in this 5th parish [Swedenborg often speaks of the four churches having preceded the New Jerusalem]. They are much concerned with visions, magic, magnetism, alchemy, etc. They accept Swedenborg's writings only to an insignificant degree. They have forbidden the book *De amore conjugiali* as condemnable.⁵²

In order to judge this paragraph in its proper context, we must remember that its original source, Augustus Nordenskjöld, was a Swedenborgian with a passionate interest in alchemy and magnetism, one of the founders of the *Exegetic and Philanthropic Society* in Stockholm, who according to the doctrinarians in London, had corrupted the New Church. It is important to recall that Augustus Nordenskjöld was quoted by one of his intimate friends, a fellow Swedenborgian, an alchemist, a magnetizer and also a member of the same society.

Let us repeat: *The Illuminati in Avignon* were a society of alchemists and, if they also conducted religious activities—and we know that a prayer should always precede the alchemist's effort—these were not specifically Swedenborgian in character.

Although the influence of the Society diminished, interest in Pernety's translations revived and subsequently gave birth to a whole line of pseudo-Swedenborgians by combining a minimum of Swedenborgian doctrine with a maximum of alchemy, magnetism, somnambulism, spiritism, etc. Among them I must mention Captain Bernard and his pious follower, Mme. de Saint-Amour, Balzac with his "intelligible mysticism," and Cahagnet, who re-edited the *Merveilles du Ciel, et de l'Enfer* (*Heaven and Hell*) in 1855, stating with much candor:

We will copy textually his most highly esteemed translator, PERNETTY, who is the most concise in a style which is as logical as it is poetic.

⁵² Translated from A. E. Arppe, *Anteckningar om finska alkemister* (Notes on Finnish alchemists), *Finska Vetenskapsakademiens meddelande* (Publication of the Finnish Academy of Sciences), April 15, 1867, p. 81.

As Swedenborg has stated to us in his apparitions to our clairvoyants that he himself had been induced into error when speaking about the Christ in his revelations as the one true God in Heaven, as well as when affirming that the punishments or *states* of purification (which he calls hell) were eternal, we have had to withdraw everything with this author that is associated with these two errors, and accordingly accept only what is verifiable and admissible by our present studies.⁵³

We should also include mention of Allan Kardec and all his followers who, like Cahagnet, tried to communicate with Swedenborg's spirit in order to solicit his approval of their own ideas. Who were *The Illuminati*, if not spiritists before the advent of spiritism? What were the sessions with the Voice of God, if not spiritualistic sessions with Mlle Bruchier as the medium? Was not Pernety also the first among them to "improve" Swedenborg's doctrines by reconciling them with his own faith in Catholicism? The influence of this man has been enormous. And one can understand why the members of the New Church find it difficult to forgive him for the manner in which he dealt with Swedenborg.

The fact that the Society settled in Avignon in accordance with Brumore's inspired idea, and that all the while an Italian king received ambassadors arriving from distant countries in order to become informed about the activities of this new religious center, could not but remind the Vatican of the sorrowful time of the great schism within the Catholic church. Certainly Grabianka and his co-religionists should not have been taken so seriously by the Court of Inquisition when it fell into the trap set by a handful of spiritists.

⁵³Op. cit., pp. 8-9.

CHAPTER 3

BÉNÉDICT CHASTANIER

"The Founder of the New Church among the French"

In his *Annals of the New Church*, Charles Theophilus Odhner added the flattering title, "The founder of the New Church among the French," after Bénédicte Chastanier's name.¹ My reason for placing quotation marks around it in the subtitle of this chapter is that I disagree with Odhner on this point. Bénédicte Chastanier was not the founder of any church in France, nor any form of worship. Others among Swedenborg's followers are more deserving of this appellation, above all, Le Boys des Guays, more than anyone else.

This is not to say that the part played by Bénédicte Chastanier in the history of the New Church is unimportant. To the contrary. Even though he did not contribute directly to the inauguration of his preferred religion in France, he did work among the pioneers in London toward establishing the New Church there and became active as a "compiler,"² with the purpose in mind of spreading the doctrines of the New Jerusalem throughout the whole world.

Jacques Roos informs us that Bénédicte Chastanier received subscriptions from Moscow for his translation work.³ The fact that he worked on French translations is explained both by his nationality and also by the fact that French was a universal language at that time. Swedenborg, of course, had written all his religious works in Latin and translations of these works into English and German had preceded Pernety's and Chastanier's first translations of Swedenborg into French.⁴ The French translations, however, were to serve not only the French themselves, but all well-educated Europeans of the time. Having a wider audience in mind did not hinder

¹C. T. Odhner, *Annals of the New Church*, Academy of the New Church, Bryn Athyn, Pa., 1904: vol. I, 1688-1850, p. 141.

²It is Chastanier himself who used this term when signing his *Épître dédicatoire* of the *Tableau analytique et raisonné de la Doctrine Céleste de la Nouvelle Eglise*. "A Londres, se trouve chez l'Auteur, No 62, Tottenham Court Road, Et se vend à la Haye chez P.F. Gosse, Libraire et Imprimeur à la Cour. MDCLXXXVI/à Paris chez M. Barrois l'ainé, Libraire, quai des Augustins."

³Jacques Roos, *Aspects littéraires du Mysticisme philosophique*, p. 8.

⁴*Histoire sommaire de la Nouvelle Eglise*, pp. 12 and 63-64.

Chastanier from dedicating his first translation to the King of France⁵ and another to the Archbishop of Paris,⁶ a rather unexpected action on behalf of a convinced freemason. Let us not forget that the first and best propagators of Swedenborg's religious ideas were Swedes. Did not C.F. Nordenskjöld as a member of the *Theosophical Society* founded in 1783 in London, specify in the statutes of his *Exegetic and Philanthropic Society* in Stockholm, founded in 1786 on the model of the London Society, that the purpose of the Stockholm Society was "the publication of Swedenborg's writings in Swedish, Latin, French and other languages"⁷

Bénédict Chastanier, born in Paris in 1739, was educated in the Collège Sainte-Barbe, where he was so bored that he made several attempts to run away. During one of these attempts, he had a bad fall and broke his leg. Did this experience later serve as the impetus for him to seek professional training as a surgeon and pharmacist in the Hotel Dieu? Chastanier was evidently not particularly interested in pursuing his professional career, for he preferred instead to devote his whole life to two passions: freemasonry and the New Church. In his opinion, these two passions went together very well as is clear from the preface to the first number of his *Journal Novi-Jérusalémite*, edited in 1787, where he encourages all freemasons to adopt Swedenborg's doctrines.

The interest that Bénédict Chastanier held in Swedenborgianism probably dates back to 1776, according to my interpretation of a paragraph in his translation,⁸ *Tableau analytique et raisonné de la Doctrine Céleste de la Nouvelle Jérusalem*.⁹ Concerning this, I must make two important observa-

⁵ *De la Nouvelle Jerusalem et de sa Doctrine Céleste*, Londres: MDCLVXXXII. "Imprimé et vendu par R. Hawes, No 40, Dorsit-Street, Spitalfields...et chez les principaux Libraires des autres grandes Villes de l'Europe."

⁶ See Note 2 of this Chapter.

⁷ C. T. Odhner, *Annals*, Vol I, p.129.

⁸ Op. cit. p. 19:

But if, through an effect of Thine divine goodness, it should be granted to us to arrive, little by little, at the knowledge of all Thine truths, as we have been experiencing daily since 1766, that this was to happen to us, and as it had been granted mysteriously through the Ministry of Thine Swedish Servant, *whom we did not know then* / underlined by me /, it would be granted only to Swedenborg, this faithful interpreter of Thine Word, to reveal them all.

⁹ Op. cit.; cf Note 2 in this Chapter.

tions about the history of French Swedenborgianism. First of all, Benedict Chastanier was often confused with Pernety, the other great introducer of Swedenborg's works in French and who was mainly a "compiler," too. Knowing that Pernety had spent approximately three years during the decade of the seventeen-sixties accompanying Bougainville on his voyages and, more significantly, that Pernety became acquainted with Swedenborg's works in 1779,¹⁰ we can allow for the possibility that the "Swedenborgian" activities prior to this date, could be attributed to Chastanier. Secondly, Chastanier himself stated in the above mentioned paragraph that he did not know about Swedenborg in 1766. Some three years afterward when he had the opportunity of meeting Swedenborg personally, Chastanier did not take advantage of it because, in his opinion, he was just "an old fool, who pretends to keep angels and spirits in bottles."¹¹

These two observations corroborate my thesis: the masonic "Swedenborgianism" of the seventeen-sixties is just a myth, consciously or unconsciously held by some authors in order to support the teachings of freemasonry by means of New Church doctrines. Bénédict Chastanier obviously had a very great share of responsibility in the making of a synthesis of freemasonry and Swedenborgianism. And his position as the reconciler of the two systems was even officially recognized on the occasion of the "International convent of Freemasons from all countries and of all systems," organized in 1774 by the *Société des Philalètes* in Paris.¹²

It is likewise true that by this time, Bénédict Chastanier had already worked a great deal to spread the New Church. He settled in London in 1774¹³ and later acknowledged that the date of his acceptance of the doctrines of the New Church was 1776.¹⁴ He also had joined the *Theosophical Society*, whose primary purpose was to publish and disseminate Emanuel

¹⁰ See *New Church Review*, Vol, XIV (1907): James Hyde, *Bénédict Chastanier and the Illuminati of Avignon*, p. 192, and my chapter on *Pernety and the Illuminati in Avignon*.

¹¹ James Hyde, op. cit., p. 183.

¹² The *Cahiers de la Tour Saint Jacques II, III, IV* (2nd, 3rd and 4th quarters of 1960): *Aspects de l'Illuminisme du XVIIIè siècle*, pp. 38, 40.

¹³ J. Hyde, op. cit., p. 183.

¹⁴ See Note 8 of this chapter. Chastanier was to publish his profession of faith in the *New Jerusalem Magazine* 1790.

Swedenborg's religious works, at its inauguration in 1783. As an early member of the Society, Chastanier's efforts anticipated the work of the English pioneer, Robert Hindmarsh, by advertisement in a newspaper his request that "all the readers of Swedenborg's theological works who appreciate the value of these works" gather together with him.¹⁵

More importantly, he became acquainted with the Nordenskjöld brothers and also became "the sole keeper of Swedenborg's manuscripts."¹⁶ In 1782 Chastanier started to edit French translations of Swedenborg's works, the same year that Pernety began his work as an editor in Berlin. His first volume, *De la Nouvelle Jérusalem et de sa Doctrine Céleste* (The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine), included a *Letter of dedication* addressed to the *King of France*, a *Préface* directed to the French clergy, the whole of Christendom, and to the British nobility who had subscribed to the four volumes of Swedenborg translated by Nicholas de la Pierre in 1781.

According to a footnote in the *Préface*, the mysterious, Nicholas de la Pierre, who had recently died, had translated three other treatises by Swedenborg, notably *Heaven and Hell*. Here is confirmation of James Hyde's thesis that both Chastanier and Abbé Pernety only were the two editors of Nicholas de la Pierre's translations.¹⁷ The two remaining works, *Le Commerce établi entre l'Ame et le Corps* (Influx or Intercourse of the Soul and Body)(1785) and *Du Dernier Jugement et de la Babylone détruite* (The Last Judgment and Babylon Destroyed)(1787), comprised the remainder of Chastanier's work as editor of the de la Pierre's French translations of Swedenborg.

But, being an editor did not exclude the possibility of personal initiative. Pernety's role consisted in making Swedenborg's text conform to Catholic orthodoxy and his sense of creativity led him to include an introductory commentary on Swedenborg's life as well as to add an appendix to his translation of *Terres Planétaires* (The Earths in the Universe). Bénédicte Chastanier faithfully reproduced Nicolas de la Pierre's text, only adding short prefaces. In 1790 he published separately a *Prospec-*

¹⁵ R. L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 1177.

¹⁶ The formulation is by Le Boys des Guays and to be found in his *Revue La Nouvelle Jérusalem*, Dec. 1842, p.320.

¹⁷ Article quoted in Note 10 of this chapter.

tus for purchase of the posthumous works of the Honorable Philosophic Swedenborg. It is worth noting here, that in 1785, Chastanier wrote a letter to the Dutch publisher Pierre-Frédéric Gosse in The Hague to inform him that the Marquis de Thomé, although a member of the *Theosophical Society* in London, had expressed reservations about that name and that others agreed with his views, that in all probability the Society would soon be called *The British Society for Spreading the New Church Dogmas called the New Jerusalem in the Apostle Saint-John*.¹⁸

It seems that the Marquis de Thomé had a great influence on his fellow believers at that time. Had he not protested against Pernety's inaccurate translation in a letter written to Charles Frederick Norderskjöld in 1782?¹⁹ De Thomé's influence continued to increase among the membership of the *Theosophical Society*. In 1786, when Bénédict Chastanier published his *Tableau analytique et raisonné de la Doctrine Céleste de la Nouvelle Jérusalem*, he added some *Pièces concernant les circonstances de la mort d'Emmanuel Swedenborg* (Articles concerning the circumstances of the death of Emmanuel Swedenborg) in order to prove that Swedenborg had not abjured the doctrines of the New Church. He also included the *Remarks on Animal Magnetism* that the Marquis de Thomé had published in the *Journal Encyclopédique* of September 1, 1785. The *Journal Novi-Jérusalémitte* published by Bénédict Chastanier in 1787, was the first Swedenborgian periodical in the world, with the exception of a Swedish newspaper.²⁰ Four volumes appeared, all containing translations of Swedenborg's works. The preface to the first volume included an appeal to freemasons in favor of the New Jerusalem Church.

Two years later Bénédict Chastanier's name appeared on the list of separatists who wanted to institute a special form of worship for the receivers of the doctrines of the New Church.²¹ Having worked in close cooperation with Robert Hindmarsh since 1783, the year of the founding

¹⁸ Letter from Bénédict Chastanier published in the *Portefeuille d'un ancien Typographe* (Pierre-Frédéric Gosse), "...published at the editor's expense? The Hague, 1824.

¹⁹ R. L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 637.

²⁰ *Samlingar för Philanthroper* (Collectons for Philanthropists), Stockholm, 1787, that is to say the same year as the *Journal Novi-Jérusalémitte* appeared.

²¹ Robert Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church*, London, 1861, p. 78.

of the *Theosophical Society*, Chastanier published an important article in order to justify this separation from the Church of England.²² He also continued his task as an editor of Swedenborg's works in French. In 1791, he recommended the publication of the *Diarium Spirituale* whose Latin manuscript he had in his possession.²³

All of the above suggests the image of a very orthodox Swedenborgian. However there was another side to Bénédict Chastanier, one which was fascinated by spiritism and alchemy. Just prior to the beginning of the year 1771, he published *Emanuel Swedenborg's New Year's Gift to His Readers*, forty pages in which Swedenborg's raised spirit defends the separation of his Church and denies the existence of eternal punishments in Hell.²⁴ Chastanier, however, later retracted what he said about these matters due to pressures brought upon him by his fellow believers. A reference to Chastanier's interest in alchemy appears in a letter written by Henry Servanté, the descendant of a French family and editor of the *New Jerusalem Magazine*, the journal of the English Swedenborgians that dates from 1790. The letter was addressed to his friend James Glen, a Scotsman who had left for Philadelphia, and included the statement that he knew only one of the members of the New Church who was interested in alchemy "for amusement": Bénédict Chastanier.²⁵

At first sight, this revelation is surprising considering the ardor with which Chastanier fought against Pernety, Grabianka and the other *Illuminati in Avignon*. Compared to those men, Chastanier represents, relatively speaking, the very orthodoxy of the New Church. I must also add that Chastanier seems to have earned the respect of his fellow believers during his lifetime, and even more so after his tragic death in Scotland. His efforts in spreading the New Church were undoubtedly far more important than any of his indiscretions in judgment.

²² C. T. Odhner, *Annals*, Vol. I, p. 161 (Chastanier and Hindmarsh in the *Magazine of Knowledge*).

²³ C. T. Odhner, *Annals*, Vol. I, p.162.

²⁴ C. T. Odhner, *Annals*, Vol. I, p. 162.

²⁵ Letter from Henry Servanté to James Glen of 1.6.1806, published in the *Monthly Observer* I: 417-423.

In May 1801, Benedict Chastanier returned to Paris, where he lodged with Ralph Mather, an English friend who had just returned from the United States. Also living at Mather's were the Baron Heinrich von Bülow, a German propagator of New Church doctrines,²⁶ and the Swedish theologian, Gustavus Knös. Thanks to the letters that Knös sent to his family which have been preserved in Uppsala University Library, we know a great deal about the life of this circle of New Church followers. There is solid evidence that Bénédict Chastanier's main purpose was to publish Swedenborg's theological writings in French.

In a letter found in the Uppsala University Library which he sent to his Swedish co-religionist, Charles-Frédéric Nordenskjöld, Chastanier proposed the publication in French of *Apocalypse Révélée*, already partially published in Avignon in 1785 under the title *L'Anatomie du Symbole de St Athanase*. This letter is filled with optimism. Chastanier maintains that he is "associated with a certain number of scholars and men of letters, some of whom can be rightly considered as writers of the highest order."²⁷

Who were these writers? Letters by Gustavus Knös enlighten us on this subject. They were the two great French translators of Swedenborg's works: J.P. Moët, "Rousseau's former friend,"²⁸ then over eighty years old, and Parraud who, at that time was engaged in translating *The True Christian Religion*. In addition there was Daillant Delatouche, the compiler of the *Abrégé des Ouvrages d'Emmanuel Swedenborg* (Compendium of the Works of Emanuel Swedenborg), published in Strasbourg in 1788. According to Knös, Delatouche was as poverty stricken as Chastanier. The proof of this is that both men came to the point of selling their precious copies of *Arcana Coelestia* in order to alleviate their poverty.²⁹

²⁶ Under his gallicized name Henri de Bulow, he was to publish in 1809 in Berlin: *Coup d'oeil sur la doctrine de la Nouvelle Eglise Chrétienne ou le Swedenborgianisme*, drafted in French in the prison of Colberg (according to C.F. Gosse, cf Note 18).

²⁷ R. L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 1179.

²⁸ Letter from Gustavus Knös to his brother Charles-John: Paris, 9th Fructidor 10 (27.8.1802). Ms Uppsala University Library.

²⁹ Letter from Gustavus Knös to his brother Charles-John: Paris, 19.11.1802 (28 Brumaire XI). Ms Uppsala University Library.

When Mather returned to the United States, Chastanier was obliged to go home to England, where his poverty increased to an even greater extent. In 1806, Henry Servanté recorded Bénédicte Chastanier's miserable life on earth. By that time, Chastanier had spent forty years of his life as an exile in England. He had been married three times and he was totally destitute. (see #25) One can understand why, after having failed in his attempt to relaunch his propaganda campaign in favor of his master's writings, he, as sole holder of Swedenborg's manuscripts, was forced to pawn them in these difficult circumstances. What a crime in the eyes of his fellow believers! And yet no one wanted to take the first step in casting a stone against him. R.L. Tafel, for example, who was so hard on Pernety, seems to have been very understanding of Chastanier.³⁰

At this point I must add that the situation of the New Church in France was not the same in the beginning of the XIXth century as it had been during the 1780's. The contrast between the two periods is perhaps most apparent in the attitude of the Marquis de Thomé. In 1783, he wrote to Charles-Frederick Nordenskjöld that within one year, all of Swedenborg's writings would not only be translated, but also would be widely distributed.³¹ But by twenty years later, according to a letter from Gustavus Knös to his family, the Marquis de Thomé had reconverted to Catholicism.³²

Bénédicte Chastanier's tragic end is worthy of one of Selma Lagerlöf's novels. During a business trip to Scotland, the vessel on which he was to return to London was brought to a standstill because of bad weather. Chastanier told the captain that he wanted to profit from this delay by paying a visit to a friend living nearby. He never arrived in his friend's house, nor did he ever come back to the vessel returning to London. The day after he left the ship, his body was found buried under the snow on a roadside much like Lagerlöf's hero, Gösta Berling. Unfortunatley no charitable major's wife was there to stoop over the snow-covered body of the former propagator of the doctrines of the New Church and tear him away from a terrible white death.

³⁰ R. L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. II, Part II, pp. 811-812.

³¹ R. L. Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. I, p. 621.

³²Gustavus Knös to his brother Charles-John: Greifswald, August 1, 1803; ms Uppsala University Library. The Marquis de Thomé's English co-religionists were not aware of this defection, yet they did not appreciate the Marquis. In the letter mentioned in Note 25), we find the following passage:

The Marquis de Thomé was formerly in England, and, in the early period, visited the society in the Temple. He was living in Paris about five or six years ago. Mr. Parraud, the translator of the *Theology*, entrusted de Thomé with the correction of part of the works for the press; but he shamefully neglected it in the absence of Parraud, and was responsible for a sheet full of errata having been added. He is understood to be an indifferent recipient, abounding with phantasies incompatible with the writings: Like many of the French, unsteady.

(To be continued)



