THE HUMAN MIND

A Study by Hugo Lj. Odhner

V. Memory and Imagination

The memory of man may be viewed under many aspects. Thus it may be defined as "the permanent state of the changes and variations of the purely organic substances of the mind" (DP 279). It is also the storehouse for all the knowledges which the mind has formed for itself on the basis of bodily sensations and conscious mental experiences. Its successive formation in a world of fixed cycles and seasons is responsible for our being aware of the passing of time. It can be regarded as a reflex of the natural world—as a marvelous individual replica of the world in which we live—as the scene wherein our spirits play and labor. Sometimes it may appear in darker hue: as the convenient burial ground of things forgotten—of dead states which anon will rise as dreaded ghosts to confront us with the sins of our youth and the tragedies of other days, with the pathos of things undone and of hopes unrealized. But always the memory is the organic complex of all that we call our own. It is the proof of our continuous and persistent personality, from which nothing can ever be totally expunged—even if it be suppressed from shame, disregarded as insignificant, or renounced as evil.

The import of this persistence of memory is made clear in the Writings. For there it is shown that man's sensual is the ultimate of order upon which all interior things rest as on a foundation. "Man's sensual is comparatively fixed"—with the kind of fixity which appears in the ultimates of the spiritual world. While man lives in the world, he therefore "acquires to himself a fixed plane" which cannot be changed to eternity; wherefore he remains to eternity such as he was made in the world. "He has this plane with him, but it becomes entirely quiescent" (SD 5552).

This "sensual" ultimate of order is identified with the corporeal memory. Man retains this after death as to its every detail. But it can no longer grow or change (AC 4588, SD min. 4645, 4646). In this connection, Swedenborg cites the proverb from Ecclesiastes, "Where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (11:3). The reference

is to the fact that man's interiors are terminated in the external memory and its affections and scientifics, and that such as is the order which we impose on this ultimate plane, such is the character of the interior things which flow into it, because they are modified in it (AC 3539:2, AC 3679:5; HH 466).

Man can be reformed as long as he lives on earth, because interior ideas can then reorder the vessels or ideas of the corporeal memory. These ideas are prepared under the government of the Lord's all-seeing providence, "especially by the connecting of such things as agree with other ideas of the corporeal memory so that, when one is excited, another next to it and akin to it may be produced and thus be bent to good." All knowledges, and thus also the cognitions of faith, are disposed into connected chains by the Lord, so far as man's state allows. (SD 4037, AC 5881). This is done continually and secretly, through the mediation of spirits and angels who are usually not aware of this their function (SD 4041–4044).

After death the external memory remains unchanged and can receive no new knowledges. Its form—its agreement or correspondence with the internal or spiritual man—is fixed according to the ruling love. No new harmonies can be established after death. (SD min. 4645, 4646; AC 4588). Hence a "change of organization" is quite impossible in the spiritual body after the material body has been rejected (CL 524:3; BE 110; DP 326:5). Man's corporeal memory becomes quiescent and passive after death—so that it then serves only as an unconscious plane, like our bodies when asleep (AC 4901:3, 4588; HH 345, 461; cf. SD 5548, 5549, 5552). If the ideas of the corporeal memory should be permitted to remain active, the spirit would be held in the gross imperfections of his earthly state (SD 4716, 3962, 2989, 3129, 4125; AC 2477, 2479); and there would also ensue a conflict with the memories of the men with whom the spirit was associated, so that these men would become obsessed and insane (AC 2477, 6192, 5858; SD 3783, 3962, 4001). Or it might simply cause the peculiar phenomenon called "second memory" (AC 2478; SD 3917; HH 256). This does not mean that the corporeal memory cannot be re-awakened with spirits under exceptional circumstances, as when it is necessary to compel them to confess evils which they deny having committed (HH 461:3, 464; SD 1932, 4430: AC 2482, 2483).

But since spirits cannot normally use their own corporeal memories, and yet need to determine their thoughts into ultimates of mental space and time, it is provided that they use the memories of men still living on earth. Thus Swedenborg wrote in his *Diary:* "I have spoken with spirits about the corporeal material things of man, that they are the ultimates of order; that . . . the ultimates are in man's natural mind, which is formed from the senses of the body, whence comes the memory of objects, which are material ideas. . . . From living experiences it was shown me that spirits can speak from (*ex*) man, or from his outmost or material memory, or his natural memory, although man does not at all know that this happens. . . . Yea, it was told me that the ideas of infants are open and can best serve. . . . Hence it was granted me to conclude that the natural minds of men are the ultimates of order and are, as it were, vessels, wherein the spiritual and celestial ideas of angels cease . . ." (SD 2751–2754). But still the spirits retain their natural memories, and, if the human race became deficient, angels and spirits could be remitted into that state so as to serve as vessels (SD 2755).

The general law is that angels and spirits have their actual abodes in the thoughts and affections of men, although they indeed live an apparently independent life in their heavenly mansions (LJ 9, DLW 92). It is therefore said that a spirit "no longer subsists on his own basis, but upon a common basis, which is the human race" (LJ 9). This means that there is no mental state with man—no knowledge, no thought—which is not instantly available for the use of spirits and angels, should the need arise. Angels would make use of the interior things of man's thought, spirits would make use of his natural memory; and this whether man was awake or asleep. "Many men can at the same time serve as a plane for one angel. The Lord arranges that what is absent in one person may be in another; He also composes one thing from many. . . ." "Natural truths are in the place of a foundation . . . and man is in these when he reads the Word" (SD 5607–5617).

Swedenborg also testifies that spirits terminate their thoughts in the material ideas—the ideas of places and objects—which fill the memories of the men with whom they are (SD 3605, 3608–3610, 3753, 3022). Without these, they would feel lost (SD

3610, cf. SD 4017). The memory of man is quite open to spirits, who can instantaneously run through his ideas until they come to a state or field of ideas familiar or congenial to them; and each spirit would take on whatever memories were congenial to his nature. Indeed sometimes man feels as if his mind were torn asunder and suffers because opposite states are aroused (SD 4224, 2852). But for man's sake it is provided that all this should occur without spirits being conscious of the man with whom they are. They are conscious only of the ideas among which their thought dwells, somewhat as we are while we are reading a book. And a sensual or corporeal spirit (who is less discriminating) is apt to take on the whole memory of a man so that the spirit thinks himself the man: which is allowed partly for the sake of man's protection. Such mental identifications make it sometimes possible for a consociate spirit in the other world to appear before others almost as a "double" of the man on earth! (Cf. TCR 137:8, 12.)

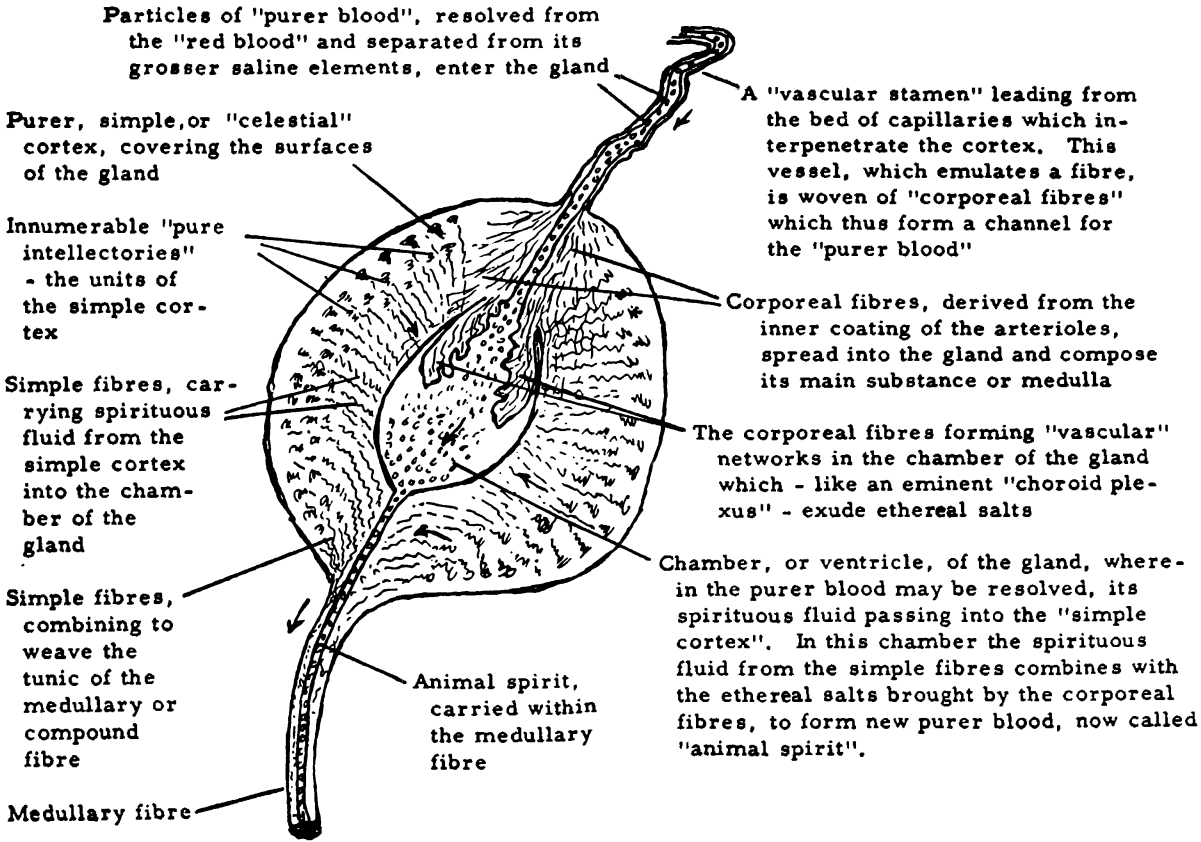
What we so naively call "our" memory, and think of as our private archives, is therefore a spiritual creation wrought miraculously by the Lord through myriads of agencies beyond our analysis. And this not only for our use—during a brief lifetime; but for the use of the hosts of the heavens and the legions of hell. What the relation of the whole memory-plane of mankind may be to the forthstanding ultimates—the hills and valleys, the fauna and flora—of the spiritual world, is something which we might some day come to see more clearly.

So far we have been considering the memory in its passive aspects—as a record and repository of past experiences. Now we are to consider the memory in its active state—which we call *Imagination*. We must distinguish imagination from thought, for when we "think" only from memory, we are not properly thinking, since our reason is not employed.

The first activity of the memory we call recollection. Recollection is the recall of some remembered thing in its unchanged state, and in its original connections, so far as these can be segregated. But we may well doubt whether there can be any recollection so pure and perfect that it is uninfluenced by states and ideas later associated with the original memory. Our mind grows as a whole, and tends to act as a whole. We incline to defend our

AN INTERPRETATION OF SWEDENBORG'S CONCEPT OF THE "CORTICAL GLAND"

Based on statements in 2 Econ. 126, 130, An. Spir. 9–14, Fib. 171 et seq.



past, and to revise it and infill it if it should be deficient or vulnerable. It is so that we adopt our past states and weave them into our present personality. Thus recollection merges into imagination, which takes the elements of our memory and weaves it into new patterns.

Swedenborg, in his *Rational Psychology,* specifies that the physiological basis for man's imagination lies in the state of the "cortical gland." The external state of that gland "depends upon its connection with others near it by means of very delicate fibrous threads and arterial ramifications," and in general on the quality of the blood and other fluids. (R. Psych. 118). But the internal state of the gland is determined from the "simple cortex" within the gland, which is devoted to purer intellectual functions, such as thought.

Since imagination requires a physical condition in the cortical substances, it is necessary here to examine Swedenborg's idea of these structures. Modern histology pictures the cortical cells as roughly pyramidal in shape, and as fed by the seepage of nutritive elements through the walls of the blood capillaries. This food is thought to be taken in by the absorptive surfaces of the dendrites—which are fibrous extensions which ramify from the cell. It is also realized that the cell produces certain products which in part find their way into the ventricles of the brain and thus contribute to the formation of the ventricular and cerebrospinal fluids.

This agrees in general with Swedenborg's description. But he —although at that time the cortical cells had not yet been seen individually through the microscope—drew certain further conclusions which modern observers of these cells in their postmortem state have not been able to confirm. He presumed, on the basis of analogy with other organic structures, that the cortical glands were more spherical in shape and that there was a tiny vessel which carried the finest parts of the blood from the capillaries into the gland. He also held that each gland contained a chamber or interstice into which the finer essence of the blood was brought in order to be further purified and vitalized. He compared the cortical gland to a heart through which the "purer blood"—sometimes called the "animal spirit"—circulated, and by which it was flashed out through the nerve-fibre into the brain and body. (See Diagram.)

If our imagination depends on general changes of the state of the cortical glands, it obviously follows that if these little organs become too rigid or too relaxed to respond to stimuli in a normal way, there would result various conditions in which the mind could not wholly utilize them, and man would succumb to fanatical imagination, self-hypnosis, fear, mania, or loss of memory; or to various functional diseases of nervous type (R. Psych. 117, Fibre 525, 526). On the other hand, he showed that the state of the "purer blood" would also influence the workings of the imagination. If the chamber of the gland is obstructed by heterogeneous or toxic substances, the gland is so stimulated that it cannot resume the states induced by sensation, but is distorted, causing insane imaginations or fantasies. Even the poisoning of the red blood by intoxicants and drugs causes a temporary disturbance of the senses and the imagination. (R. Psych. 120, AS 19). But the "purer blood" acts more interiorly and its state is affected by man's own personal temperament. The Writings state that the "purer blood" actually attracts to itself such food as corresponds to the state or character of the man, being different in a good man and in an evil man, as to its interior composition (DLW 420, 423).

It is not to be thought that one can distinguish the wicked from the well disposed by any chemical analysis of the blood. Yet it is true that various organs and glands in the brain and in the body are intimately connected with the temperaments and moods of the mind. These organs—which are called the endocrine glands and sometimes even "the glands of personality"—secrete certain chemical substances into the bloodstream quite independently from any direct control by the nervous system. A famous medical authority has written: "It is by the agency of the endocrine glands that our emotions express themselves." * The balancing of the functions of our various organs and vital processes, and of the moods of our minds, is regulated by the secretions of such glands. So indispensable are these secretions for our mental as well as our organic activities, that in a certain sense "thought is the offspring of the endocrine glands as well as of the cerebral cortex." **

Swedenborg similarly points out that the Animus, with its various states and passions, depends on the condition of the "purer

* Alexis Carrel, *Man the Unknown*, New York 1935, p. 102.
** *Op. cit.*, p. 144.

blood." Such states as anger, jealousy, impatience, melancholy, fickleness, stupid pride, foolishness, timidity, fear, envy, forgetfulness, may thus have physical causes, or they may be the results of moral and spiritual perversions. In each case they are reflected in the workings of man's imagination. External causes may be removed by drugs or medicines, or by wholesome and congenial social life. But internal causes can be counteracted only by recourse to sound moral philosophy and religion (Fibre 373).

When it is shown that the imagination is affected by the state of the vital fluids in the brain, it is well to bear in mind that the soul or spirit of man is not only in the brain but throughout its bodily kingdom. And the affections, or loves, of the mind find their special correspondence in the vital fluids or "bloods." The things of the understanding have their correspondent ultimates in the tissues and fibres: as the imagination in the cortical glands and the memory in the whole web of the association fibres of the cortex. But the things of man's will affect the state of the bloods and fluids which circulate in complex gyres through both brain and body.

The imagination, being seated in the cortical glands through which the "purer blood" courses as through a heart, is especially susceptible to a domination by the various affections of the *animus* or lower mind. Yet nothing can enter the imagination which is not based on some sensory impress already visited upon the cortical cells and their connecting fibres. The material for our imagination is always limited to the contents of the memory; but this material is selected and shaped by our loves.

Essentially, the imagination is an internal sensation, a species of internal sight, which has the images and "material ideas" of the memory as objects (R. Psych. 98, 122). It is therefore said to constitute the *interior sensual* with man (AC 3020). Brute animals also possess the imaginative faculty, for it belongs to the lower mind which is sometimes called the *animus* (Adv. 643:3). With man it is especially vigorous in childhood and youth when visual imagery seems to outweigh other forms of symbols (AC 3020). Such imagination from objects of sight and hearing is called "thought from memory" or "thought from knowledge," and tends to be imitative only (AE 355:36, TCR 42). Infants emerge from their mental obscurity by means of such objects, and "as they learn successively to lisp out words and

sound them, at first without any idea, there arises something obscure of fantasy; and as this becomes clear, something obscure of imagination arises and thence of thought" (TCR 335e).

Children live to a large extent in the world of their imagination where all things are possible—in the playful fancies of "let's pretend!" It is a kingdom kindred to the spiritual world! They learn, of course, of the actual world about them, but it is in a sense a closed world, since they cannot understand it. From the realm of the fairy story and the play they enter into the heroic regions of exploit and high adventure. And in their imagination it is they who are the heroes—or else the gracious beauties who deign to be rescued or fought for.

This use of an increasing mass of knowledge to make the imaginative life more rich and pleasant is to the child the very object of learning. But as he approaches puberty he begins to be introspective—and commences to marvel at the wonder of self, and to suffer a disillusionment as he contrasts his romantic picture of himself with the modest and awkward reality, and compares his plastic dream-world with the matter-of-fact and unyielding world about him. He grows self-conscious and discontented, and seeks to hide his sensitive soul behind a front of bravado, imitative of the cruder (but probably most prominent) features of adult behavior.

Indeed, the statement in the book of Genesis seems here to be literally true with most children: "For twelve years they served Chedorlaomar, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled" (Gen. 14:4). The spiritual sense of the passage is that evils and falsities do not appear in childhood, but serve the apparent goods and truths of infancy, which appear good but are yet contaminated with hereditary evils (AC 1667, 1668).

Fortunately, the youth's imagination does not stand still at this point. It progresses through the stage of unstable, intense emotions when the imagery of the mind reflects many budding passions not yet tutored, nor really understood; but it emerges into states of relative peace when a new moral idealism points the compass of the mind toward a goal even more promising than the lost dreamland of childhood.

For soon the faculty of imagination wins a new dignity. Its use in the adult world begins to be seen. The youth, whose eventual task must be to build the world of the future, must at-

tempt to visualize the aims and ideals of that world before he is flung out into its bewildering complexities. He must stand aloof and contrast the logic of virtue and the folly of vice—with the keen sense of reality which imagination can furnish. He must listen to the music of the spheres, contemplate the harmonies of color and form, thrill to the poesy of human words, and vision a master plan of order and beauty—a world refined of coarseness and evil, devoid of friction and stupidity, of sordid poverty and ugly passion.

Without the imagination, what power could man have—though he knew the inmost laws of the universe—to change the face of this sorry world? What progress could be made, what gratitude felt to those who have labored in the past?

But even when youth has passed, imagination functions to lighten every task. It is not enough to retire within ourselves and there build a free world nearer to our heart's desire, beyond fear of criticism or the impact of stern outward conditions. Imagination must be channelled into the direction of actual needs. It must depict the heavens for which we strive here on earth. Its creative faculties must be invoked to find facile modes for doing the world's work, to invent and discover, to give beauty to science and ease the ponderous work of reason, to lend grace and brilliance and meaning to our social routines, and transform our many obligations and burdens into the gentle art of living.

But let us not forget that imagination, if left to itself, runs riot with our reason. Uncontrolled, it becomes the sporting-place for our worst lusts. It seeks with delight forbidden channels, where gather the dregs and offal of the mind. The Lord mercifully grants us this faculty in which are mirrored the inner depths of our desires—things which otherwise would not be revealed or restrained until they have come into acts. Through our imagination we can study our real selves—our "proprium." For in imagination our lusts can fatten on the imagery of hell—can indulge in the thrills of revenge, and welter like swine or roar like blood-thirsty lions. There we can accomplish with vicarious satisfaction the fulfilment of our evil love. There we can gloat over our enemies or be masters of the earth! There we can twist fact into fancy, and truth into falsity, murder the reputations of others, and hypnotize ourselves into insane fantasies.

And let us note that these things are not harmless pastimes.

For the power of imagination is such that it becomes transformed into intention and purpose. The will of man is formed and confirmed in the things of the understanding. Suggestion eventually compels action. And motives—truly human motives—cannot be built in the imagination. The *human* begins in the rational.

And indeed the Divine intent was not that the imagination should be an end in itself, or should convey the final truth. The function of the imaginative faculty is to present the visible forms of the natural world as symbols which can represent rational order and spiritual and Divine truth. In the childhood of our race imagination was consecrated to ritual, which became the mother of all the arts. The Word was written in symbols, in correspondences and representatives, as a sacred drama within which men and angels could sense the presence of a spiritual import and a Divine wisdom. And when the Lord taught the multitudes on earth, He spoke a language to challenge the imagination; for "without a parable spake He not unto them."

This is the purpose of the imagination: to build the forms of the memory into new vessels which suggest ever more of the inner meanings of life even when we cannot express them as rational ideas; and thus to point our eyes upward toward heaven.

(*To be continued*)

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Fifty-eighth Annual Meeting of the Swedenborg Scientific Association will be held in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday, May 25th, in the auditorium of Benade Hall, at 8:00 p.m. The usual reports will be given, after which Mr. Kenneth Rose will deliver the Annual Address. It is hoped that local Chapters of the Association will send in their reports in time for the Annual Meeting.