

The Use to be Accomplished by a Swedenborg Scientific Association.

An address by Rev. Frank Sewall, delivered at the meeting to form the Swedenborg Scientific Association, held in New York, May 27th, 1898.

IT IS an acknowledged principle in science that an organism is grounded in use, and therefore the true form of any organization must be that which will serve most perfectly for the carrying on of its use. It becomes us, in coming together with a view to forming an associated body, to arrive at :

- I. A clear idea of the use to be performed.
- II. An agreement as to the best methods of performing this use.

As to the use itself, I may, without too much exaggeration, say that it is to take up the work laid down nearly a century and a half ago by the illustrious author in whose name we are assembled.

That the stupendous achievements of Swedenborg in the fields of science and philosophy from the time they were first published, even until now, have been practically lost to the sight of the scientific world, it would be useless to deny. Even the Church has ignored them, practically at least, by open neglect, if not discouragement, of their study. For their only introduction to the knowledge of the modern world we are indebted mainly to those outside the professed New Church body, namely : to a learned clergyman of the Church of England, the Rev. Augustus Clissold, the translator into English of the *Principia* and of the *Animal Kingdom*, and to the American transcendentalist, Emerson, whose eloquent raptures over the magnificence and sublimity of Swedenborg's work as a philosopher the New Church has been pleased to quote to the world, without ever, as a body, having acquired any adequate idea of what it was that the famous essayist was thus praising, permitting even the editions of the London Association of 1845 to go out of print, and being indebted to scholars and experts not of our body for whatever public appreciation or bringing to notice of Swedenborg's deserts the world has witnessed in recent years. (Witness the edition of the *Ontologia*, translated from the photolithograph MS. by Prof. Cabell, of Urbana University, and published at the expense of the Rev. William R. Alger, of Boston ; the researches, recently published, of German and other European scholars, into the merits of Swedenborg's Cosmogony, as also of his psychology and philosophy in general. See article by the astronomer Nyrén, of Pultowa, Russia, on Swedenborg and the Nebular Hypothesis, in the *Vierteljahrschrift*

der Astronomischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig, 1897, p. 81 ; articles on *Swedenborg* and *Kant*, by Prof. Vaihinger of the University of Halle, in the *Kantstudien*, vol. I and II ; the article by Max Heinze, Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Saxony, on *Kant's Vorlesungen uber Metaphysic*, showing the impress of Swedenborg upon Kant's mind and teaching, notwithstanding all the assumed persiflage of the "Dreams of a Visionary," etc., in *Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, Philologisch-historische Klasse 14, pp. 556 ff., Leipzig, 1894. etc.) While we must not overlook the notable exceptions to this general neglect of Swedenborg's scientific works in those productions of avowed New Churchmen, the magnificent translations of Dr. Wilkinson and Dr. Strutt, of England, of the fragments of the philosophical and anatomical series, (*Generative Organs, Posthumous Tracts, Outlines of the Infinite*, by James John Garth Wilkinson, Member Royal College of Surgeons of London ; *Principles of Chemistry, Miscellaneous Observations*, by Charles Edward Strutt, Member of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh) in the colossal work undertaken by the late Rev. Dr. Rudolph Tafel, in translating, editing and publishing the work *On the Brain*, also in the translation and publication in America of the work *De Anima*, ("On the Soul, or Rational Psychology,") translated from Latin and edited, with introduction and notes, by Frank Sewall, New York, 1886 ; still it must be allowed that these works, like others, received but little attention from the New Church as a body, that, with the exception of the work on the Brain, they have been allowed to go out of print and to become inaccessible to the ordinary student, while the work on the Brain is left with only two of the projected four volumes ever brought to completion.

The reasons for this neglect and lack of appreciation in the past it is not necessary here to go into, except so far as they throw light on the duty of the present. In brief, it may be said that the interest in the theological writings had the rightful precedence, not only in meeting the more immediate need of the world, but also as really introductory to a true and worthy interest in the scientific and philosophical writings, and that whatever has been the appreciation shown by scientists and scholars as such, who have not at the same time

been receivers of Swedenborg's theological teachings, this cannot equal in depth and value that which will be felt by those who shall see and rightly estimate the two systems in their mutual significance, and behold them in their synthetic completeness as constituting a single and perfect system. On the other hand, while the early receivers of the theological doctrines showed but little appreciation of the scientific works, for the sufficient reason that they knew almost nothing about them, and were not, as a general thing, men of scientific acquirements such as to render them capable of understanding them if they had known them, it must be said that in this regard New Churchmen are not very different from the rest of the world at the time, even that which called itself scientific.

Notwithstanding Swedenborg's favorable and flattering recognition by the learned bodies of his time, the royal favor which he enjoyed in courts, and in his scientific and political relations, the princely patronage under which his great scientific works were published, (viz: by the Duke Rudolph of Brunswick) and his election to membership of the Chief Academies of Science in Europe, to the Royal Society of London, August, 1742 (invited by Sir Hans Sloan), to the Imperial Academy of Russia, December, 1734; to the Academy of Science in Stockholm, January, 1741, his nomination to membership in the last being made by the celebrated naturalist, Linnæus; and the inclusion of a part of his mineralogical works in the Transactions of the Royal Academy of Science of France,* nevertheless, it must be admitted that there existed at that time very few minds capable of grasping such a system as that of Swedenborg, and a very meager supply of scientific data and information necessary for any just appreciation of the real significance of his theories. Nor was Swedenborg an exception in this respect of inadequate appreciation. The history of modern science shows that the earlier discoverers and speculators in the field of physics failed for years to awaken any public in-

**Art des Forges et Fourneaux a Fer. Par M. le Marquis de Courtivron; et par M. Bonchu Correspondant de l'Academy Royale des Science quatrieme section. Traite du Fer, par M. Swedenborg; traduit du Latin par M. Bonchu, MDCCLXII.* This work is published in Imperial folio, and covers 197 pages, and is embellished with fine illustrations. The introduction begins as follows: "The translation of the work of M. Swedenborg, which supplies the fourth part of the 'Art of Forging,' is given in order to furnish a comparison of the works carried on in Sweden with those of France. This foreign Savant, who has written several works on Metallurgy, has been employed by the Swedish government in connection with the iron and copper industries of that kingdom for the sake of the enlightenment which the government may derive from one so fully acquainted with the subject."

terest, not to speak of enthusiasm, in their discoveries. (See articles in Harper's Magazine, 1897, on *The Century's Progress in Physics*, etc., by Henry Smith Williams, M. D.) If Swedenborg's doctrine of the evolution of the universe from a solar vortex, anticipating all that is true in the system generally attributed to Kant, failed of recognition at the time, it was probably for the same reason that that of Kant himself was treated with almost similar neglect. Probably the general capacity of the learned world at that time to appreciate Swedenborg's real contributions to the world's learning was aptly enough expressed in the words of M. Matter, Honorary Counsellor of the University of Paris, in his *Vie de Swedenborg*: "The immense essay, which fills the first volume of the *Opera Philosophica et Mineralia* (viz: the *Principia*) excited only a sort of stupid wonder, but the practical utility of the other two volumes was at once recognized by the learned."

If we are warranted in believing that the world is ready at this time to give the science and philosophy of Swedenborg a worthier hearing, it will be because the scientific progress of the last century has furnished the data and experience which both call for, and will corroborate the principles laid down by him and generally regarded at the time as purely hypothetical. It will be because the world has awakened from the "stupid wonder" with which it first heard the theories of Swedenborg concerning the ethers, the magnetic vortex, the evolution of motions, of forms, and of atmospheres, the discrete degrees of being, their relation by correspondence, the nature of light and of vision, functions of actives and passives, the absence of a void, the contiguity of all things, and the influx of life from within by series of substances in vibratory motion, etc., and because in the vast wealth of material furnished by modern experiment, all these great doctrines will now find means of demonstration that in Swedenborg's day were not available, and for the further and more important reason that the scientific and philosophic scholar of today is demanding an explanation of these phenomena which he finds in no hypothesis yet offered outside of those of Swedenborg.

It is therefore with no affectation of superiority over our predecessors in the past, whether in the Church or in scientific circles, that we may regard ourselves as called upon to undertake the work laid down by Swedenborg in 1745, and only temporarily and ineffectually resumed, although in a noble spirit and energy, by the London Swedenborg Association, in 1845. The time has come for the further translation and the republication of the scientific works of Swedenborg, because the science of today is in an attitude more favorable to their

proper appreciation and use than ever before, and because the Church itself is becoming aware, however slowly, of the fact that the new Christianity must rest on a new science of the new truths of the ultimate plane of knowledge, and that, so the Lord, in his second coming, will make the "Place of His feet glorious."

In particular, the use before us would seem to divide itself into the following duties :

I. The republishing of those works already translated but now out of print.

II. The translation and publication of works hitherto unpublished.

III. The preservation in photolithograph copies of the work now existing only in manuscript.*

To this work of publication there must be adjoined the duty of the study of the principles laid down in these works, and their widest possible diffusion in the scientific world by means of comparative examination and published criticisms of the science commonly in vogue. The time has come for an aggressive and not a mere apologetic and defensive attitude in those possessed of these scientific and philosophical doctrines. These cannot accomplish their end in silence or isolation. They must be proclaimed, and brought into the most direct and familiar contact with the science of today in all its phases. This can be done :

I. By the study of the works by qualified specialists.

II. By the publication of treatises in a suitable periodical, or formal transactions.

III. By articles, critical or otherwise, inserted in the current scientific and philosophic journals.

IV. And lastly, by a well-equipped and endowed Academy of Science and Philosophy.

It will be seen that the work naturally assumes two aspects, namely : that addressed to those already disciples, and that addressed to those who are not yet convinced. It will, for this reason, be liable to two extremes in the manner of treating Swedenborg's theories, namely : the dogmatic, which will accept these principles as having an authority from a source beyond that of pure reason and experience ; the other, a strictly empirical manner, regarding that as valid only so far as proved by physical demonstration. There will be no harm in this variety of the treatment. On the other hand, there will be great harm in restricting the present investigation and experiment, and in any attempt to compel the acceptance of Swedenborg's teachings in a dogmatic way. It was against this very constraint of dogma not grounded in rea-

son that Swedenborg joined with Kant in the great struggle for the liberty of science in the first half of the last century. While it will be impossible for anyone who has seen a system of truth in its unity and has felt the satisfaction of a complete rational consent, to regard such a system as entitled only to the shifting approval or disapproval of the empiricist and the critic, still the spirit of dogmatism will be entirely out of place in an organization that seeks to attract rather than repel the fellowship of honest and sincere seekers after scientific knowledge and philosophic intelligence.

As regards the organization itself, the question will arise, perhaps, as to the feasibility of making it international in scope, in which case the legal conditions necessary to incorporation or holding of property, etc., will have to be considered.

There will also present itself the interesting subject of the classification of the works of Swedenborg into the several departments of science and philosophy, such as Chemistry, Physics, Physiology and Anatomy, Psychology, Astronomy, Botany, Biology and Evolution, Philology, Sociology, Economics, Politics, History, Ethics and Æsthetics, with possibly the creation of sections devoted to the study of each, and its practical application to the wants of the present time.

Finally, the practical features of the organization will include the providing :

A. The ways and means of supporting the work.

B. The publication of the works, whether in complete volumes or in the form of serials, the publication of collateral studies and elucidations, the appointment of competent editors, and providing for correspondence and interchange with other scientific bodies.

With so high and delightful a mission before us, it will be impossible for us to enter upon its several duties without a devout sense of gratitude to the Merciful Providence of the Lord that has enabled us to conceive and inaugurate this enterprise, and without the desire to implore upon its beginning and progress the Divine favor and benediction. Therefore, let us look to Him "of whose glory all the earth is full."

An important announcement is made on another page, calling for subscriptions to the works, *De Anima* (The Soul, or Rational Psychology) and *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom* of Swedenborg. The plates of these two important works are in existence and a new edition can readily be made. We hope that a generous response will be made to this offer. In our next number we hope to give a notice of the nature of one or both of these works.

* See article by J. R. Swanton, in THE NEW PHILOSOPHY, Vol. I, No. I, "The Distinctness and Necessity of Swedenborg's Scientific System."