

## INVESTIGATIONS INTO KANT'S *DREAMS OF A SPIRIT-SEER*<sup>1</sup>

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### Excerpts from the book *Swedenborg in Deutschland* [Swedenborg in Germany]

In the end, Truth prevails over deception. Just as Jesus' opponents attempt to say that His resurrection was a fake failed when the facts of His post-resurrection appearances became known, so too the assertion that the renowned German philosopher Immanuel Kant did not actually believe that what Emanuel Swedenborg said was credible fails when the actual facts about Kant's positive letter regarding him are known.

Regrettably, no publication has damaged Swedenborg's reputation among intellectuals as much as Kant's biting criticism of him in his mocking screed *Träume eines Geistersehers* [Dreams of a Spirit-Seer]. Published in 1766, this little book was then distributed by Kant himself to all relevant salons and circles and is today still used in scholarly presentations as a crushing witness against Swedenborg's credibility. In *Dreams* Swedenborg's outstanding genius, his significant creative contributions in engineering and science throughout his career in the Swedish Academy of Sciences, all fall into the background as Kant emphasizes only Swedenborg's alleged spiritual abnormalities as evaluated in the balance of Kant's scathing critical methodology. In *Dreams*, Kant even polemically refers to Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* as "eight quarto volumes full of nonsense" and there speaks of Swedenborg himself (or "Schwedenberg," as he deliberately misspells his name) as "a man with no position or staff."

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2. Rev. Nemitz has received an M.Th. from the Academy of the New Church and Harvard Divinity School. He has served as a pastor and Latin translator of portions of Swedenborg's *Spiritual Experiences* for the General Church of the New Jerusalem. He has lectured on Swedenborg at the University of Moscow in Russia, the University of Halle in Germany, the Swedenborg Society in England, and the Swedenborg Scientific Association in the USA. He has made published translations of Lars Bergquist's *Swedenborg's Secret from Swedish* and from German co-translated Gottlieb Florschütz's *Swedenborg's Hidden Influence on Kant*. Currently, he is preparing an English translation of Swedenborg's 1734 pre-theological work *De Infinito* (*The Infinite and Final Cause of Creation*).

It is therefore significant that contrary factual personal, positive testimony of Kant about Swedenborg has now at last come to attention, testimony, that contradicts his published mockery. It is in a letter of a completely different character, which Kant wrote to a Fraulein. Knobloch, in which he expresses himself very respectfully about Swedenborg (spelling his name here correctly, by the way) and fully acknowledges his abilities.

The one who has brought Kant's positive attitude towards Swedenborg to scholarly awareness and who has meticulously explained the correct date of the letter in which Kant expressed his positive attitude to Frä. Knobloch is the evangelical church historian from Marburg Prof. Dr. Ernst Benz (1907–1978). In his 1947 book *Swedenborg in Deutschland*<sup>3</sup> [*Swedenborg in Germany*] Dr. Benz has examined among other things also this contradictory attitude of Kant to his contemporary. His investigation reads almost like a detective report!

Chapter I of the second half of Benz's study about Kant's attitude towards Swedenborg shifts from its first half's reflections on the 63 year old Württemberg Lutheran prelate Oetinger and his problems with the church authorities, which were the result of his long-standing positive attitude towards Swedenborg. There it is shown that Oetinger, despite sanctions initiated against himself, apart from some theological reservations about certain views of Swedenborg, did not let himself be diverted from his positive position toward him. Kant, on the other hand, was in a very different situation in life. As a young aspiring critical philosopher and private lecturer in Königsberg, Kant was seeking with all his might a career in the Protestant university there. Swedenborg stood in the way. Benz expands on this as follows:

“Kant, on the other hand, confronted Swedenborg not as a *homo religiosus* but as a critical philosopher, and he did so at the height of his life, at the end of his thirties, at a moment when he had just fought his way free from the traditional bonds of philosophy to the supranaturalistic school metaphysics of his time and found himself in a mood that encouraged him to criticism, indeed to skepticism, against all metaphysics. He lived in the youthful consciousness of the absolute efficacy and validity

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3. *Swedenborg in Deutschland* F.C. Oetingers und Immanuel Kants Auseinandersetzung mit der Person und Lehre Emanuel Swedenborgs. Nach neuen Quellen bearbeitet. Frankfurt am Main, V. Klostermann, 1947.

of the critical weapons he had forged for himself in the struggle against metaphysics, and from the outset saw in Swedenborg only the representative of an immoderate abuse of the speculative faculties of the human mind, which, fired by fancy and imagination, left all the limits of reason behind them. Thus his criticism of Swedenborg is based not on a pretended readiness to believe, but on a confident consciousness of a critical superiority, which empowers him to trample nonsense in a bold attack. Nothing is further from his mind than Oetinger's point of view: "Test, and keep what is good!". The whole work of Swedenborg appeared to him as daydreaming, the whole work is foolish fantasy. Swedenborg is for him from the outset the phantom on which he demonstrates his critical methods in relentless irony, the bogeyman on which he laughingly lashes out where others shudder with awe, a frilly image of a saint whose costume he tears apart to prove that in reality it is only a scarecrow."

However, as Dr. Benz's detailed research shows in the following chapters, prior to and within Kant's relentless critical attacks on Swedenborg there was a private respect for and acknowledgment of the truth of his discussions about the nature of spiritual reality. Kant's private positive respect for Swedenborg is confirmed, furthermore, in comments recorded by his students in his later lectures on rational psychology, as annotated by Dr. Gottlieb Florschütz in his book *Swedenborg's Hidden Influence on Kant*<sup>4</sup>. Here is this story about Kant in Swedenborg for you about to read in the following translated chapters, II through IX, of the second half of Dr. Benz's book.

How did this change in Kant's attitude escape serious attention? Probably the reason that this positive statement by Kant about Swedenborg has not been attended to is that the date when he wrote it is disputed, namely, whether it was **before** or **after** his diatribe *Träume eines Geistersehers*, because the date references to events noted in the letter are obviously wrong. Whatever, Swedenborg is invariably judged only with reference to Kant's scoffing little book. His appreciative lines in his letter to Fr. Knobloch have been scarcely significantly noticed.

The one who has brought Kant's positive attitude towards Swedenborg to scholarly awareness and who has meticulously explained the correct date of the letter in which Kant expressed his positive attitude to Fr.

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4. Gottlieb Florschütz, *Swedenborg's Hidden Influence on Kant*, Swedenborg Scientific Assoc., I, 2014. 320.

Knobloch is the evangelical church historian from Marburg Prof. Dr. Ernst Benz (1907–1978). In his 1947 book *Swedenborg in Deutschland*<sup>5</sup> [*Swedenborg in Germany*] Dr. Benz has examined among other things also this contradictory attitude of Kant to his contemporary. His investigation reads almost like a detective report!

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5. *Swedenborg in Deutschland* F.C. Oetingers und Immanuel Kants Auseinandersetzung mit der Person und Lehre Emanuel Swedenborgs. Nach neuen Quellen bearbeitet. Frankfurt am Main, V. Klostermann, 1947.

6. In compiling this investigation I gratefully acknowledge not only Dr. Benz' scholarship but also the fundamental research of Dr. J. F. I. Tafel, the initial investigation of Herr P. Keune, and my limited German translation skills assisted by the DeepL and Google translation programs and Herr K. Skarabis.

## II.

### *Kant's Dreams of a Spirit Seer*

The first document [concerning Kant's opinion of Swedenborg] is his essay: *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* [Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Explained by Dreams of Metaphysics], Königsberg bei Kantern, 128 octavo pages, 1766.<sup>7</sup> This essay has an outstanding importance for the development of Kant's philosophy, because in the critical confrontation with Swedenborg's visions and teachings, especially in the criticism of the main work from the beginnings of Swedenborg's visionary epoch, the *Arcana Coelestia*, which appeared in London in 1748–53<sup>8</sup>, Kant developed his doctrine of the limits of metaphysics. Already his biographer Borowski, the future Archbishop of Königsberg, correctly characterized the importance of this critical confrontation of Kant with Swedenborg when he wrote of it:

“(Kant) uses this opportunity to declare at the same time metaphysics to be a contraband. Already here it is nothing more to him than a science of the limits of human reason. Here he already declares quite openly that the questions of the nature of the spirit, of the reality or even the possibility of simple, immaterial beings, of the dwelling place of the soul, of the communion between spirit and body, etc., exceed all our insight. In general, every attentive reader already found here the germs of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and of what K. later gave us.”<sup>9</sup>

This writing contains striking one-sidedness as far as the characterization of Swedenborg's personality and visionary talent is concerned. First of all it seemed strange to the contemporary critics that the scientific merits, which Swedenborg had earned as a leading scholar of astonishing universality

7. See the edition of *Träume* by Kehrbach, 1912 in Reclam's Univ. Bibl. no. 1320. In Kehrbach's edition, Kant's letter to Fraulein von Knobloch is also printed; furthermore, a list of previous editions of the “*Träume*” can be found there, as well as a detailed discussion of the question of the dating of the letter. The question of Kant's relationship to the spirituality of the eighteenth century has been addressed by Kehrbach in his 1880 work *Was Kant a Spiritist?*

8. Kant characterizes this work (Kehrbach p. 52) as follows: “The great work of this writer reveals eight quarters of blind nonsense, which he presents to the world as a new revelation under the title *Arcana Coelestia*, and where his appearances are mostly applied to the discovery of the secret meaning in the first two books of Moses and a similar way of explaining the whole of Holy Scripture.

9. See the *Presentation of the Life and Character of Imanuel Kant* by Ludwig Ernst Borowski, Preuss. Church Councilor. Exactly revised and corrected by Kant himself, Königsberg 1804, p. 66 ff.

in the field of his actual profession, mining science, but also in the field of chemistry, mechanics, geology, mathematics, astronomy, physiology and medicine, and last but not least in the field of philosophy, in his great scientific writings, the *Principia rerum naturalium*<sup>10</sup>, *Oeconomia regni animalis*<sup>11</sup>, *Regnung animale*<sup>12</sup>, are not mentioned or even acknowledged. Moreover, Kant considers the theological writings of Swedenborg, which appeared after his vocation experience, from the outset from the point of view that they are the revelations of an imaginative “spirit-seer.” This scholar, who was equally recognized in Sweden and in the other European countries, was a member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Petersburg<sup>13</sup>, and of the Royal Academy of the Sciences in Moscow at the time when Kant wrote his *Dreams*. He was also known to the members of the Royal Society in London and the Academie Royale in Paris personally and through his works, and is introduced to Kant with a distorted name with the sentence: “A certain Mr. Schwedenberg lives in Stockholm without office or staff, from his rather considerable fortune. His whole occupation consists in the fact that, as he himself says, he has been in close contact with spirits and deceased souls for more than twenty years, collecting messages from them from the other world and giving them messages from the present one,

This judgment of Swedenborg, which, in view of the historical facts, must be called only one-sided, nay, unjust, is now underlined by very severe censures with which Kant continues to treat him and his work, and which seem to have sprung more from preconceived animosity than from objective criticism. “Just as he himself is, if one may believe him, the arch-spirit-seer among all spirit-seers, so is he also certainly the arch-phantast among all phantasts, one may now judge him from the description of those who know him, or from his writings.”<sup>14</sup>

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10. This work contains not only a description of the individual metals, their sources, their processing and industrial utilization, but also a fundamental philosophical introduction with a theory of the origin of the world.

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12. A description of these works, which are currently not available in Germany, can be found in my forthcoming work on Swedenborg, Munich 1947, Hermann Rinn Publishers.

13. Cf. Sw’s. Self-biography in R. L. Tafel: *Documents* vol. I Doc. 2 p. 7 and the Eulogium of Samuel Sandel there. Doc. 4, p. 22.

14. Cf. Kehrbach a. O. p. 45.

Kant now tests the whole sharpness of his witty wit on the person thus characterized. "If many writers who are now forgotten or will one day be nameless have no small merit in that they did not respect the expenditure of their intellect in the elaboration of great works, then without a doubt the greatest honor of all is due to Mr. Schwedenberg. For certainly, his bottle in the lunar world is completely full and does not give way to a single one among those which Ariosto saw filled there with the reason lost here and which will have to seek their owners again some day, so completely is the great work emptied of every drop of it."<sup>15</sup> Even before Kant utters a word of appreciation of the contents of the *Arcana Coelestia* itself, at the head of his reflections on this book he places the sentence: "The great work of this writer contains eight quarto volumes full of nonsense," and does not forget to point out, for the more thorough discredit of the book, the scathing criticism which the distinguished theologian Dr. Ernesti has made of this work of Swedenborg from the standpoint of Lutheran orthodoxy in the first volume of his *Bibliotheca Theologica*, p. 784. So from the outset, indeed, nothing is omitted to arouse in the reader the very worst prejudices, and before any evaluation of the contents of Swedenborg's work.

The presentation of Swedenborg's ideas itself is also interwoven with similarly sharp judgments. It is not necessary to enumerate them all. Characteristic of the overall judgment is the concluding sentence, which corresponds perfectly to the vehement tone of the introductory characterization of the work: "I am tired of copying the wild fantasies of the worst raving man of all, or of going on with them to his descriptions of the state after death. I have other doubts also. For although a collector of nature places in his collection, among the prepared specimens of animal procreation, not only those that are formed in a natural way, but also freaks, he must be careful not to let everyone see them, and not too clearly. For there might easily be pregnant persons among the rash, with whom it might make a bad impression. And since among my readers there may be some who are just as well in other circumstances with regard to the ideal conception, I would be sorry if they should have made some mistake here. However, because I warned them right at the beginning, I stand for nothing, and hope that they will not burden me with the "moon calves" of freakish ideas that,

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15. Cf. Kehrbach, above note 0, pp. 51–52.

on this occasion, would like to be born of their fertile imagination.”<sup>16</sup> So Kant believes Swedenborg’s work could evoke only spiritual freaks in the heads up of receptive minds.

As proofs of Swedenborg’s visionary gift, the three well-known incidents are then cited that were told at that time at the German courts and in the learned and noble societies as showpieces of Swedenborg’s spirit-seeing:<sup>17</sup> (1) the story of the Queen of Sweden, which Oetinger also repeatedly cites as the chief legitimation of Swedenborg’s visionary gift; (2) the story of the lost receipt of the Lady of Marteville, a paper which, on the strength of a conversation Swedenborg had with her deceased husband, was recovered a year after the latter’s death; and (3) the story of the fire of Stockholm in 1759, which Swedenborg while staying at Gothenburg beheld at the same hour and communicated to his friends there, an event which was not confirmed until three days later by news which had in the meantime arrived from Stockholm. As regards a source for the first story the report of an envoy from the Swedish court is mentioned, but regarding a source for the other two events only “the common legend, the proof of which is very questionable.” Kant’s writing itself gives the impression that he knew of Swedenborg exclusively from his work *Arcana Coelestia*, which he cites.

### III.

## Kant’s Letter to Fräulein von Knobloch

A completely different picture of the assessment of Swedenborg is shown in the second document in which Kant speaks extensively about the Nordic seer, even appearing as a crown witness for the truth of his visionary experiences: Kant’s letter to Fräulein Charlotte von Knobloch<sup>18</sup>. This letter is the answer to an inquiry that this Fräulein had addressed to Kant to ask for clarification from him about the strange stories that were circulating at the time about Swedenborg. Kant excuses himself for his long silence in response to

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16. Cf. Kehrbach a. O. p. 59.

17. The numerous contemporary reports on these three eras are compiled in *Documents* No. 271–276, vol. 2, 1 p. 613–690, as well as in part in H. de Geymüller: *Sw. und die übersinnliche Welt*, Stuttgart-Berlin 1936, pp. 309–333.

18. In Kehrbach a. O. p. 69 ff as appendix.

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this inquiry by saying that he had first wanted to make careful inquiries about Swedenborg before he dared to share his judgment with her. He himself is not very inclined to ascribe any meaning to such visionary events. "So much is certain that, notwithstanding all the stories of appearances and actions of the spirit realm, of which a large number of the most probable are known to me, I have at all times deemed it most in accordance with the rule of sound reason to direct myself to the negative side, not as if I thought I had seen the impossibility of it ... but because they are altogether not sufficiently proven"; however, he had just for this reason endeavored to procure certainty.

Kant now tells the Fraulein the same three stories—of the Swedish Queen, of the Lady of Marteville (who is here called Harteville), and of the fire in Stockholm. For the first story he names as a witness a Danish officer who is a friend of his, and who learned the story at the table of the Austrian envoy Dietrichstein in Copenhagen, when the latter received a letter from the Baron von Lützow, the Mecklenburg envoy in Stockholm, who "in the company of the Dutch envoy to the Queen of Sweden... had himself witnessed the strange story himself."

Kant, however, as he continues in his letter, was not content with this first, well attested communication, but made further inquiries. "I wrote to the said officer in Copenhagen and made all sorts of inquiries of him. He replied that he had again spoken to Count von Dietrichstein, that the matter was really so, that Professor Schlegel had testified to him that it was not at all to be doubted." The Danish friend further advises him to address Swedenborg personally, an advice which Kant also followed. "I accordingly wrote to this strange man, and the letter was delivered to him by an English merchant in Stockholm. It was reported here that Swedenborg's gentleman had received the letter with appreciation, and had promised to answer it. However this reply never came." Nevertheless Kant does not cease in his efforts. "In the meantime I made the acquaintance of a fine man, an Englishman, who was staying here last summer, and whom, by virtue of the friendship we had established together, I instructed to obtain more detailed information on his journey to Stockholm about the miraculous gift of Herr von Swedenborg." This Englishman's report not only brings Kant a confirmation of the history known to him, but also gives him an impressive picture of Swedenborg's personality." According

to his (the English friend's) first report, with the previously mentioned account, according to the testimony of the most respected people in Stockholm it happened exactly as I have told you elsewhere. He had not spoken to Herr von Swedenborg at that time, but he hoped to speak to him, although it was difficult for him to persuade himself that everything that the sensible people of this city said about his secret contact with the invisible world of spirits was true. His subsequent letters, however, are quite different. He has not simply spoken to Herr von Swedenborg, but has also visited him in his house, and is in the utmost astonishment at the very strange thing. Swedenborg is a sensible, pleasing, and open-hearted man. He is a scholar, and my oft-mentioned friend has promised to send me some of his writings in a short time. He told this without reserve, that God had given him the peculiar quality of dealing with departed souls at his pleasure. He referred to quite notorious proofs. When he was reminded of my letter, he replied that he had well received it with appreciation, and would have answered it already, if he had not resolved to make this whole strange matter public before the eyes of the world. He would go to London in May of this year, where he would publish his book, in which the answer to my letter, following up on each article, would be found."

Following this account of his explorations of Swedenborg, Kant now reports the story of the woman of Marteville and of the fire in Stockholm as "a pair of proofs where the whole public still living is a witness and the man who reported it to me was able to examine it directly on the spot." Kant cites the story of the fire in Stockholm as particularly convincing. It "seems to me to have the greatest evidential power of all, and it really does remove all conceivable doubt. What can one say against the friend who writes this to me has investigated all this not only in Stockholm, but about 2 months ago in Gothenburg itself, where he knows the most respectable houses very well and where he has been able to fully inform himself of a whole city, in which since the short time of 1756 most of the eyewitnesses are still alive. At the same time he has given me some report of the way in which, according to the statement of the Lord of Swedenborg, his communion with other spirits takes place, in the same way his ideas, which he gives of the state of deceased souls. This portrait is strange, but I do not have the time to give some description of it."

Kant closes his letter with the regret of not having met Swedenborg himself. "How I wish that I could have asked this strange man myself; for my friend is not so well versed in methods as to interrogate that which can give the most light in such a matter. I eagerly await the book that Swedenborg intends to publish in London. Every arrangement has been made that I shall have it as soon as it will have left the press."

#### IV.

### Contradictions Between the *Dreams* and the Letter

The contrast of these two statements by Kant about Swedenborg is striking. The following are the most important differences:

1. In *Dreams* Kant calls Swedenborg by a false name: "Herr Schwedenberg"; in the *Letter* with his real name, which the latter bore since his elevation to the peerage: "Herr von Swedenborg."

2. In the *Dreams* he knows him as a "certain Mr. Schwedenberg without office and staff," in the *Letter* he describes him as a "scholar."

3. In the *Dreams* he calls him an "arch phantast among all phantasts" and a "great enthusiast" whose work is "emptied of every drop" of reason. In the *Letter* Swedenborg appears as a "reasonable, pleasing and open-hearted man."

4. In *Dreams* Kant gives the impression that he only knows Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia*: there his work is dismissed as "eight quarto volumes full of nonsense." In the *Letter* Kant writes how he eagerly awaited Swedenborg's works promised to him by his English friend and how he had made every effort to obtain the latest work promised by Swedenborg.

5. In *Dreams* Swedenborg appears to Kant as well as to the rest of the world as an unknown fool who had written the *Arcana Coelestia*, whereas in the *Letter* he appears as a man full of important spiritual rank, whose personal acquaintance Kant finds very desirable, with whom he enters into correspondence, with whom he regrets not being able to converse personally.

6. In *Dreams* the stories of Swedenborg's visionary talent are introduced as incidents, which are only proved "by the common legend, the proof of

which is very difficult” and after which he apologizes for having “taken on such a despised business of carrying on tales.” Likewise, he remarks in the introduction to his *Dreams*: “He (the author) confesses with a certain humiliation that he was so faithful to the truth of some tales of the kind mentioned. He found—as common, where one has nothing to look for—he found nothing.” The *Letter*, on the other hand, gives an exact account of the living eyewitnesses, some of whom are mentioned by name, and underlines their credibility by describing in detail how and by what means they were found. In which way and by whom the most careful verification of the narrated stories told on the spot, i.e. in Stockholm as well as in Gothenburg. Yes the whole letter has as its main subject the report of Kant of the positive success of his research; he found not “nothing”, not “fairy tales”, but the full confirmation of the “common legend” on the basis of testimonies and inquiries of the most trustworthy witnesses, “the most respected people in Stockholm.”

7. In *Dreams* Kant emphasizes that he got the impression that Swedenborg was the “arch phantast among all phantasts” not only from reading his *Heavenly Secrets*, but also “from the description of those who know him”, and that means here, who know him personally. From the *Letter*, however, just the opposite emerges: There Kant reports of his English friend that the latter, on the basis of a personal visit and conversation, gave him the impression of a reasonable, pleasing and open-hearted man and scholar, whose credibility is also attested by numerous fellow citizens of Stockholm.

These great differences in Kant’s assessment of Swedenborg, as they are in the two documents mentioned, has sparked the dispute between the parties. How did Kant’s relationship to Swedenborg develop? Did Kant first write his *Dreams*, did he first allow himself to be carried away into a violent criticism in an upsurge of the critical philosopher’s displeasure at Swedenborg’s visions, but later, on the basis of careful inquiries, let himself be taught better? Did his attitude towards Swedenborg take place *a philosopho male informato ad philosophum melius informandum* [from a poorly informed philosopher to a better informed philosopher], or did he at first have a friendlier idea of Swedenborg on the basis of his “explorations”, but under the impression of reading the *Arcana Coelestia* saw himself induced to dismiss him in the aforementioned sharp manner?

The question now seems to be easily solved by referring to the date of the letter to Fräulein von Knobloch. The *Letter* was published for the first time in 1804, in the aforementioned Kant biography by Borowski<sup>19</sup>, in the appendix of which it is printed as the second document, pp. 211–225, and with the date: Königsberg, August 10, 1758. According to this, the case would be clear: the *Letter* would have been published 8 years before the *Dreams* and the development of Kant would have taken place in such a way that he first informed himself exactly about Swedenborg's visionary talent, trusted the reports that reached him at first and granted a certain credibility to his gift of sight, but under the impression of the reading of the *Arcana Coelestia*, decided to make a sharp criticism. But this very smooth solution is complicated by the fact that not only the date of the letter itself, but also the other data contained in the letter are wrong.

## V.

### The Wrong Dates Of The Letter

First of all, the date: Königsberg, Aug. 19, 1758, as far as the year is concerned, is demonstrably wrong, for all the events mentioned in the letter, the fire of Stockholm, the story with the Swedish queen, the story of the receipt, took place in the time after 1758, and could therefore not yet be mentioned in a letter of the year 1758, if one did not want to make a "spirit-seer" out of Kant himself. This has been convincingly and flawlessly demonstrated by the Tübingen philosophy professor J. F. J. Tafel<sup>20</sup>, a prominent researcher of the German Swedenborg community, the well-known translator of Swedenborg's writings, and at the same time Swedenborg's most fiery apologist, in his *Abriß des Lebens und Wirkens Emanuel Swedenborgs, verbunden mit einer Würdigung der Berichte und Urtheile Stillings, Kloppstocks, Herders, Kants, Wielands und Anderer*, Stuttgart und Cannstatt, 1845. It is unnecessary to list individually all the evidence that Tafel lists in the aforementioned work. It may suffice to point out that, according to the unequivocal findings of all contemporary sources,

19. see p. 253 note 3.

20. On him, see Th. Müllensiefen: *Leben und Wirken von Dr. Joh. Pr. J. Tafel, Professor der Philosophie und Universitätsbibliothekar zu Tübingen*, Basel 1868.

the fire of Stockholm took place in 1759, that Herr von Marteville did not die until on April 25, 1760, the story of the recovered receipt, which according to the accounts did not take place until a year after his death, could not have taken place until 1761, and that the story with the Swedish queen also took place in 1761<sup>21</sup>.

Moreover, it can be proved that the Danish officer, who is Kant's first witness, sent his report to Kant before leaving for the army of the Count of St. Germain in 1762<sup>22</sup>, so that the later explorations, of which Kant reports in his *Letter* to, the vain wait for his answer, the Englishman's visit to Swedenborg and his repeated letters to Kant must have taken Swedenborg place after this time.

One could now assume that the closing date of Fraulein von Knobloch's letter was changed by mistake or through negligence, but another circumstance suggests that there was a certain intention here, for the two other dates mentioned in this letter by Kant have also been altered. In the letter the historical date of the fire of Stockholm, 1759, has twice been changed to 1756. Thus it reads on p. 221: "It was in the year 1756 when Hr. v. Swed. came ashore at Gothenburg arriving from England on Saturday at 4 o'clock in the afternoon towards the end of the month of September." On p. 223 it says of the city of Stockholm: "a whole city, in which, since the short time of 1756, yet most of the eyewitnesses are still living." In making this change, an editor was evidently at work, who wished to bring the dates mentioned in the letter into line with the altered date of composition of the letter by a corresponding alteration.

The discovery of this fact has now aroused, as said, the passion of the parties. Obviously a very striking development in Kant's position on Swedenborg has taken place. But in which direction? Has Kant, from an initial scoffer, become a Swedenborgian afterwards? Or did he, after an initial rapprochement, turn away from him at the cost of his better knowledge? On this very point the opinions were as different as the interests of the contending parties. Swedenborg's friend Tafel saw in the change of dates a confirmation of the thesis, which seemed to him most desirable, that the *Letter* was written only after *Dreams*. He was very anxious to prove that the harsh judgment which Kant passed upon Swedenborg in *Dreams* did not

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21. Im. Tafel a. O. p. 228 ff.

22. Cf. R. L. Tafel, *Documents*, vol. 2, 1 p. 6228: The result of Prof. Kant's investigation.

represent his final opinion of Swedenborg's person and doctrine, but that later, on the basis of more careful information, he had learned better. From an initial state of passionate rejection, Kant had thus, on the basis of better investigation, come to a subsequent recognition of the authenticity of Swedenborg's visionary gift. This apologetic intention need not deter the historian from paying careful attention to Tafel's arguments, the more so as Tafel's thesis is also strongly advocated in the exhaustive collection of all documents concerning the life and teachings of Swedenborg, the *Documents concerning the life and character of Emanuel Swedenborg, collected, translated and annotated by R. L. Tafel*, Swedenborg Society, London 1875–1877<sup>23</sup>. Some of the arguments pointed out by Tafel are indeed most striking.

For there is not only the fact that the dates are changed intentionally and in agreement with each other, but that the editor of the letter attaches special importance to the changed and historically wrong dates, even puts them into the center of consideration. Borowski, in fact, publishes the *Letter* under the heading "How did Kant think about Swedenborg in 1758?" and adds to this question as a note: "How he later thought about him is shown by *The Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. The letter was thus presented to the audience from the outset with the explicit tendency to point out to the reader that the letter had appeared before the *Dreams*, that the letter's appreciative judgments about Swedenborg were completely outdated by the subsequently published writing of 1766.

Here, then, spoke an editor who made a point of presenting Kant's negative judgment, as expressed in the *Dreams*," as a final judgment. According to the results of a critical examination of its contents, the letter could not have been written before the end of the year 1762, since all the events stated in it fall within the period from 1759 to the end of 1762. If it had been written in the period from the end of 1762 to 1765, it would not have been necessary to change its date, and especially the historical date of the fire of Stockholm, which was mentioned twice in the letter; the editor could have been content with the fact that the *Letter* had appeared at all

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23. In R. L. Tafel's *Documents* vol. 2, 2 no. 184 pp. 1138 it says: In this letter, as published there, all the dates have been falsified; the object of this falsification was to produce the impression that the letter had been written before, instead of having been written after the publication of the *Träume*, etc., and that this work, and not Kant's letter to Madame von Knobloch, contained this final judgment in respect to Swedenborg. This falsification of dates was first exposed by R. Im. Tafel, and is abundantly proved In Doc. 27 and 272."—On Green, see R. L. Tafel, *Documents* vol. 2, 2 Note 743: *The Englishman Green*, pp. 1222–25.

before *Dreams*, which was what mattered to him. The fact of the threefold change of dates, together with the strongly underlined tendency to present Kant's negative judgment as the final one, already seemed to Tafel to be sufficient proof that the *Letter* was originally written after the *Dreams*," but was afterwards transferred by alteration, or, as Tafel says, by "forgery," and by "pious fraud," to the time before the appearance of the *Dreams*.

This thesis of "falsification" seemed to be confirmed by a number of other arguments. Could Kant really be expected, after having informed himself so extensively about Swedenborg's personality, not even to call the Nordic scholar by his proper name in his *Dreams*, to refer to the scholar known throughout Europe as a "certain Mr. Swedenborg without office or staff"? Should we expect him to be intellectually dishonest, that the same stories, the authority of which he himself had proved and made known with such an expenditure of trouble, by personal letters and by commissioning friends, by locating and hearing so many living witnesses, he afterwards called "nothing" in *Dreams*, and set down as incidents which "have no other guarantee than the common legend, the proof of which is very difficult?" Should Kant, against his better knowledge, have subsequently recanted his own earlier judgment and become a liar to himself?

In addition, Tafel tried to find out the date of the original writing of the letter on the basis of further data. The following two facts seemed to provide him with a historically secure starting point for this. First, he took up the mention of the English friend who visited Swedenborg in Stockholm on Kant's behalf. Tafel thought he saw in this person the Englishman Green, who had been on terms of close friendship with Kant during his stay in Königsberg, and of whom it can be proved that he first met Kant in 1768. (Tafel p. 237–244). Tafel sees another clue in the mention of Swedenborg's planned trip to England, "where he would publish his book, in which also the answer to my letter according to all articles should be found." According to Tafel<sup>24</sup>, with a careful examination of the biographical testimonies about Swedenborg's life in the years in question, this information can only refer to the journey Swedenborg took in 1768 via Antwerp to London, in order to publish his book *De commercio animae et corporis* there. Accordingly Kant's letter, which speaks of Swedenborg

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24. Im. Tafel a. O. p. 273 ff.

having the trip in mind for May, would be written in 1768, which would correspond with the date of the meeting with Green in 1768.

Thus a number of historically based arguments, which are elaborated in more detail in *Documents concerning the life etc. of Swedenborg*, seem to confirm that the *Letter* was written in 1768, i.e. two years after the *Dreams*, and that in these two years the aforementioned turn in Swedenborg's judgment had occurred on the basis of more detailed investigation.

## VI .

### Can An Archbishop Falsify Data?

But who was supposed to be the author of the falsification? No suspicion could fall on Kant himself, for such a falsification not only contradicted his generally recognized and practiced sense of truth, but the letter was not even in the part of Borowski's biography that had been reviewed by Kant himself. Borowski had submitted this biography, which he had drafted as a continuation of his treatise *Über die allmahlichen Fortschritte der gelehrten Kultur in Preußen bis zur Kantischen Epoche* [*On the Gradual Progress of Learned Culture in Prussia up to the Kantian Epoch*], 1792, to Kant in 1792<sup>25</sup>. The latter had reviewed it, made various deletions, added some remarks, but had urgently forbidden its publication during his lifetime. In accordance with Kant's wishes, Borowski had published Kant's biography only in 1804, and with a twofold extension: first, in the notes to the part which Kant himself had gone over, he had also added the parts which Kant had deleted in the manuscript, as well as his remarks; further, he had added to the original biography, which in the 1804 printing reaches to p. 104, by an addition of another 100 pages, and added to the whole some enclosures, among which appears as Enclosure II Kant's letter to Fräulein von Knobloch under the aforementioned ominous heading: "What did Kant think about Swedenborg in 1758?"

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25. Borowski reports on this in detail in the preface to his biography of Kant, p. 2 ff. He gave Kant his manuscript with the inscription: *Skizzen zu einer zukünftigen Biographie* (Sketches for a future biography).

Tafel, however, did not dare to call Borowski the author of this falsification<sup>26</sup>, but only expresses himself in general: “The by far greater probability speaks for real intention (of the falsification), which also lay very close. It was in the interest of both the churchmen and the superficial enlighteners, who, around the time of the writing of that biography of the church councilor and later archbishop Borowski, led the great word, not to let any evidence arise that could have brought down their edifice; it was in the interest of Kant’s supposed friends to protect him from the reproach of the ridiculous and not to let him write anything that could have been denounced as superstition.” Above all, the last motive seemed especially plausible, for Kant’s epistolary statements from the time immediately after the publication of the *Dreams* showed that the fear of making himself ridiculous by seriously addressing Swedenborg’s visions was not far from his mind.

If we assume for a moment that Tafel is right in his thesis, many effective arguments could be put forward to support it.

First of all, the vehemence of the criticism that Kant brought forward against Swedenborg in his *Dreams* did not go unchallenged, especially in theological circles. Thus, in 1767, the Tübingen theology professor Clemm had pointed out the one-sidedness of the anonymously published *Dreams* in his dogmatic textbook, the *Vollständige Einleitung in die Religion und gesamte Theologie*, vol. 4 p. 204, and had tried to correct the distorted picture of Swedenborg. To correct the excesses of this criticism was all the more close to his heart, as Clemm himself, was said to be the author of Kant’s anonymously published writing<sup>27</sup>. Clemm writes: Mr. Emanuel

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26. Im. Tafel writes a. O. p. 254: “But this does not prove anything against Borowski; long before, some naturalist or supernaturalist fanatic, or even a supposed friend of Kant’s, could have allowed himself the falsehood or the pious claim, in order to weaken the impression that Kant’s improved view of Swedenborg could have been in favor of the latter.”

27. Clemm writes about this a. O. p. 205: “The dreams of a spirit-seer, explained by dreams from the metaphysics, are also in many hands; a certain preacher even wanted to make me the author of it; but he must have read little of my writings, otherwise he would judge differently from the style; but for the answer serves him, when he reads this, that I have written no book anonymously in my life, and also do not intend to so write. If I write something, then all the world may know who wrote it; for I have no need to creep in the dark. Even if I write unpleasant truths of the world, I often say them, because no one shies away from the truth. By the way, the author of the *Träume*, if I set aside his all too clever thoughts and expressions, which may well be left out, he may also be whoever he wants, is not an unskilled head. Oetinger, too, read *Träume* shortly after their publication and was the first to inform Swedenborg about them. In his letter of December 4, 1766, he writes (Clemm a. O. p. 213): “Habemus Librum ,*Träume eines Geisterseher’s*, qui te tantum evehit Laudibus

Swedenborg (he calls him by his real name), a man who is not only engaged in such speculations, as the author of the *Dreams* thinks, but has held important offices, being appointed co-supervisor of metallurgy and mining matters in the Kingdom of Sweden, He also seems to be secured against the attacks of a hypochondriac way of life by many long journeys, which he is still in the habit of doing. From his youth, he focused on physics and mathematics in such a way that he was able to combine the theoretical and the practical in a skillful way. His works in folio, which he wrote at a time when he had no thought of dealing with spirits, and which I have perused with diligence, in which he describes various machines useful in the mines, will give sufficient proof of this to a connoisseur."

Already before Clemm, Oetinger in 1765 had published his protective pamphlet *Swedenborgs Irdische und Himmlische Philosophie* [Swedenborg's Earthly and Heavenly Philosophy] and caused a great sensation in the learned world of Germany. In this writing Oetinger sketched an overall picture of Swedenborg's importance as philosopher, naturalist and visionary on the basis of a careful study and comparison of his scientific and his visionary writings. This work, however, was not distributed in bookshops until 1766 and consequently Kant was unable to get hold of it before writing his *Träume*. In the years after 1766, Oetinger's further protective writings for Swedenborg appeared continuously. So, after all, in the time shortly after the appearance of the *Dreams* various works of well-known scholars and theologians were available, which, in contrast to the derogatory criticism of an Ernesti, brought a careful appreciation of the person and the complete works of Swedenborg, and which could probably induce Kant

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quantum, ne videatur fanaticus, te deprimit criminationibus ..." Also in his writing: *Gespräch vom Hohepriestertum Christi 1772* (*Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Ehmman 2 Abth. Vol. VI p. 185) he expresses himself about it: "By the way, in the book *Träume eines Geistersehers* Swedenborg's whole teaching is concentrated, as if mixed with idealism, i.e., all people are in the same intimate connection with the spirit world, only they do not feel it, because they are too gross." Another friend of Oetinger, the well-known theosophist and natural scientist Philipp Matthäus Hahn, also dealt with the *Träume* and in his diary of 1766, which is available in manuscript, he critically dealt with this writing on 40 pages. I hope to be able to publish a copy of this criticism in the near future. Let us add that in 1786 a detailed critical discussion of the *Träume* appeared as a preface to the translation of Swedenborg's: *Revision der bisherigen Theologie sowohl der Protestantischen als Romisch-katholischen*, Breslau bey Gottlieb Löwe, 1786. In the preface of this translation by an anonymous author, there is a "test attempt, whether it is already established that Swedenborg belongs to the visionaries," in which Kant's writing with the "verunglückten Buchtitelwitz" is thoroughly re-evaluated.

to revise his one-sided and boyish judgments of Swedenborg, the more so as he was known as the author of the anonymous writing<sup>28</sup> to such Berlin

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28. The detailed critique of Kant's "dreams" at the end of the 18th century is available in the writing of an anonymous author. The title itself is already a protest against Kant's remark about the "certain Mr. Swedenborg": *Emanuel von Swedenborg's, former Royal Swedish Assessor at the College of Mines in Upsala and Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm member, Academy of Sciences in Petersburg: Königl. gelehrte Societat zu Upsala und Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Stockholm Mitgliedes, der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Petersburg Korrespondenten*, Breslau, Gottlieb Löwe, 1786. The first part of the book is a translation of the original Latin text, together with an attempt at an examination of whether it has already been established that Swedenborg belongs to the swarmers. In this "examination attempt," which precedes the translation on pp. I–LIV, the anonymous author first treats the title of Kant's writing (he recognizes Kant as the author) and calls it an "unfortunate book title joke" (See V.). The title "Geisterseher" does not apply to Swedenborg in any way, but "according to the author's intention, it was intended to excite a laughable idea of the man to be judged right from the start." However, this manner does not seem philosophical to me. He then proves in an individual investigation that in the first part of his writing Kant presents himself as a skeptic, but that "in the second part of this writing, which is called historical, the previous skeptic is completely transformed into a full dictator" (See X.). "Extraordinary things, as insignificant as they seem to be in themselves, are never under the auspices of historical-critical examination and a reasoning that follows from it. Therefore, I cannot agree with what the author p. 75 says about his subject, that it is an indifferent task that deserves to be called more play than a serious occupation. But why do we make play of something that might have been a serious occupation? (See. XV–XVI). The author remarks on Kant's sentence: "A certain Mr. Schwedenberg lives in Stockholm," etc.:" That is not in the least different from what would happen if someone in Stockholm wrote: "A certain Mr. Cont lives in Königsberg from his philosophical professorship." As if such a scribe would consider Professor Kant a *hominem quendam* sc. *obscurum*, not knowing how well known and respected he is in the learned world. But the then flourishing Mr. *Magister legens* could have known, when he so wrote, that Mr. von Swedenborg was Royal. Swedish assessor at the mining college, that he had voluntarily resigned from his office and that his salary, because of his great merits, was left to him for life, from which he also lived mainly that he had received nobility because of his practical skill in mineralogy and chemistry, that he possessed immense talent in the most important areas of mathematics, anatomy, physics, natural history, algebra, and many others. He was already known through the most learned writings in these sciences and as a member of various academies. Of this man, our previously skeptical author makes the straight, but admittedly unproven judgment: "he is certainly the archphantast among all phantasts" (XVII f.). He points out how unlikely it would be that Kant, after referring to the three known, historically well-founded remarkable incidents, apologizes for having "taken on such a despised business of taking fairytales further". On p. XXII, the author states that Kant's assertion that Swedenborg's writings are "volumes full of nonsense" is "dictated by the *ratio decidendi*: because supernatural, spirit-worldly revelation is asserted therein." Yes, according to this peculiarity, the Bible would also have to be full of nonsense; indeed Adam, then Abraham. Moses, David, Isaiah, especially Ezekiel and Daniel, finally Mary, John, Peter and others, especially Paul—all these brave persons would have to have been archphantasts according to this kind of philosophical reason for decision." See. XXIV: To first declare Swedenborg a phantast without any evidence and then to reason about him is, as it is called in schools, a *petitio principii* and a great sin against logic.

theologians such as Sack, Spalding, and Süßmilch, to whom, through Moses Mendelsohn, he had presented a copy of his *Dreams*<sup>29</sup>.

Another argument seems to support Tafel's thesis. It is a striking fact that Swedenborg neither answered Kant's letter, nor did he fulfill his promise to answer Kant's questions in his book soon to be published. Such a book, in which Swedenborg had delivered a confirmation of the visionary experiences attributed to him, concerning the well-known three showpieces, has never appeared<sup>30</sup>. Now, as already mentioned, from the correspondence between Oetinger and Swedenborg from the years 1766-1768, it is clear that Oetinger repeatedly begged Swedenborg to give a short self-biographical description of his conversion and to make it publicly known in print that he had "turned a philosopher into a revelator," and that he would also like to make known his witnessed visions, such as the story with the Queen of Sweden herself<sup>31</sup>. In the same years also the English friend and promoter of Swedenborg, Dr. Hartley, addressed his teacher with the custom to publish a self-biography, in order to give him a handle against possible attacks of opponents<sup>32</sup>. Not only Kant, but also other followers and critics in Germany and England addressed Swedenborg during these years with the request to make known his most important experiences. This would make clear the fact that Swedenborg did not answer Kant's request in a personal letter, as he did against Oetinger, but put him off to a paper he wanted to publish in London on this subject, in order to answer the requests of all the questioners.

However, the writing *De commercio animae et corporis* also does not contain an answer to the question of the different scholars. However, the English translation of this writing, which was organized by Hartley and published in London in 1770, contains Swedenborg's autobiography, which he had sketched out in the meantime in a letter to Hartley at Hartley's urging, and which was also printed in a German translation in Hamburg soon afterwards and included by Oetinger in his further protective writing for Swedenborg,

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29. See above p.134. 5.

30. Tafel thinks, a. O. p. 250, that the answer of Sw. to Kant's letter is contained in the work *De commercio animae et corporis* of 1769, "which takes into account the three philosophical hypotheses (the remarks about Wolff and Leibniz are meant) and therefore is probably the one that should contain the answer to the questions." But this is hardly true, since Kant's inquiry concerned the mentioned three testimonies of the visionary talent of Sws. and not his philosophical views.

31. See above p. 75 ff.

32. This letter of Aug. 2, 1769 is published in *The Documents* vol. 1 doc. 1.

the “Beurtheilungen” [Assessments]. This self-biography does not contain a description of the three visions, but it can be assumed that at the time when he was talking to Green in Stockholm about the answer to Kant’s letter, Swedenborg had the plan to combine a self-biography with a report about the three visions. He was also aware of the fact that he had received more and more inquiries by letter and in person, but that he was prompted to abandon this plan and to limit his autobiography to the few details it contained in the form it was published in 1770, due to the beginning of the lawsuit against him and his Swedish followers on the part of the Swedish church.

Finally, it was possible to cite various factors that made it seem highly probable that Borowski himself had been the one to connect the data. As a theologian and dogmatist, Borowski had a strictly orthodox attitude, while as a pastor and practitioner he was more in the style of the Pietists. He enjoyed great veneration in East Prussia, especially among King Frederick William III, who resided in Königsberg after his expulsion from Berlin, as a church father and a saint of the true faith, but he combined his pious and orthodox attitude and his ecclesiastical practices with a certain cunning and shrewdness, which does not exclude the possibility that he might have resorted to the means of a small data revision in order to exonerate Kant from the accusation that he later found a friendlier attitude toward the enthusiast Swedenborg.

Many things could have prompted him to do so. In 1766 Oetinger’s *Irdische und himmlische Philosophie* had been confiscated by the Württemberg government at the instigation of the Stuttgart consistory. Oetinger himself was punished by being forbidden to continue to have anything printed within or outside Württemberg. His book was no less severely reviewed in the *Göttinger Gelehrten Nachrichten* than Ernesti and Kant had done with Swedenborg’s *Arcana Coelestia*. Ernesti’s scathing criticism was considered in ecclesiastical circles as a legal death sentence that the church itself had pronounced on Swedenborg through his mouth. In the meantime. In the years 1769–1771, the trial of the Lutheran Imperial Church in Sweden against Swedenborg had been rolled up, which had been dealt with not only in the Gothenburg Consistory, but also in the Estates representation of the clergy in the Swedish Diet, and finally by the Estates as a whole, and in the course of which some ecclesiastical opponents had even attempted to have Swedenborg declared insane and interned

in an insane asylum<sup>33</sup>. This process did not end according to the wishes of Swedish orthodoxy, insofar as the king himself and Swedenborg were friends. The fact that the Swedish government, through its councilors and bishops, managed to keep his person untouched, nevertheless led to the banning of Swedenborg's writings in Sweden and to the suppression of his followers.

These events could well have led a theologian of Borowski's disposition and stance to decide to keep even the shadow of suspicion away from Kant, as if the latter had retrospectively revised the judgment of his *Dreams*,<sup>34</sup> which orthodoxy had in the meantime elevated to its own, in favor of Swedenborg. The personality of Borowski himself would not make it seem impossible that he should use the means of a little data alteration for such a pious purpose. It is sufficient to cite a few judgments of Borowski's acquaintances and friends concerning his character<sup>34</sup>. In the court society of the Prussian king, Friedrich Delbrück also stayed in Königsberg in the years 1808 and 1809 as the educator of the royal princes, and had frequent occasion to see and observe Borowski in sermons and in social encounters. Delbrück continuously confided his impressions to his diary, noting, for example, the following: On April 24: "Borowski came. Can his statements always be trusted? "This referred to the political statements of Borowski, who appeared to the king as a comforter in the distress into which the latter had fallen as a result of Napoleon, but of whom Delbrück assumed on the basis of some statements that he was secretly a supporter of Napoleon. Especially at a tea party of the prince, Borowski had made "unexpected speeches" which, to Delbrück's surprise, proclaimed that the emergency helper of the king who had been driven out by Napoleon "believes in the beatific activity of the French and actively proves this belief." On January 19, 1809, Delbrück notes: "Borowski not teaching against, but yet again not denying a papal nature." On the penitential day of the same year: "The whole court disposed itself into the new Roßgärt church to Borowski. If only the pope was not always so transparent in the tactless punitive sermon, whose words in the end echoed as well as any other." On January 13, 1813, however, he wrote to Borowski: "For the first time, Borowski

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33. An account of the trial with a print of all surviving *Documents* in English translation in *Documents* vol. 2, 1 Doc. 245CC, pp. 282-385 under the title: *Swedenborgs Controversy with the Consistory of Gothenburg*.

34. Cf. Alfred Uckeley, *Borowski als Prediger, Königsberg*. i. P. 1931 s 6 ff.

almost betrayed his opinion about Napoleon. The old fox! I don't want to be in close association with him!" I don't want to stick with him!"

These critical remarks sound very much in harmony with the judgments of Joh. Georg Scheffner, a man who was considered a friend of Borowski all his life and claimed himself as such. He writes of him, among other things: "He is a master in the art of speaking to the ears of great people, and the unction, which he mixes into his pulpit speeches, serves him well in social dialogue. To his old age he is vain, proud, demeaning, flattering, arrogant and remained an arch-priest." This testimony is finally rounded off by Abegg's judgment of him in 1798 that he did not like the man, "he bore himself neither in appearance nor in behavior like one of us; he was close to being a hypocrite." Finally, when one learns from Scheffner that "his (Borowski's) dogmatics inclined to Moravianism and that the Moravians are his diligent listeners," one might see in this another argument of his dislike for Swedenborg, for in Swedenborg's writings and visions the Moravians come off badly, a fact which already caused the London Moravians to engage in a fierce polemic against Swedenborg and to launch a campaign of slander against him, which caused Swedenborg much trouble in London, as he was alleged in a frenzied state to have rolled himself in the street in London in a puddle—calumny which is proved to be without any foundation, but which at the time reached John Wesley, who published it in his *Arminian Magazine* in 1781 and 1783<sup>35</sup>.

Arguments which might make it seem conjectural that Kant had indeed been taught better by Swedenborg after the publication of his *Dreams*," and that his careful biographer and apologist felt this to be a blot on the image of his revered Kant, which he edited away with a deft hand after the latter's death by rearranging a few counts. And yet—woe to the historian, one would like to exclaim, who concludes from the probability to the factuality of a thing! All the highly probable reasons given are namely—wrong. The *Letter* is not written after, but before the *Dreams*. The reasons for this thesis are not reasons of probability, but rather lack any hypothetical character.

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35. On the slanders of the London Herrenhuter and John Wesley against Swedenborg, see *Documents* vol. 2, I, Doc. 270 A :G: Critical examination of the charge of insanity brought against Swedenborg p. 581–610 and note 238: Wesley p. 1212–1216.

## VII.

### The True Elucidation of Contradictions

The previous debate on the question of the dating of the letter has already named an argument to which the champion of a neo-Kantian Kant, Kuno Fischer, has pointed in lively opposition to the arguments of the Swedenborgian Tafel. The author of the *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (History of Modern Philosophy)<sup>36</sup>, who develops a masterly presentation and critique of the “Träume” (Dreams), had the idea to turn to a great-granddaughter of Fräulein von Knobloch, Mrs. Charlotte von Klingsporn, née von Knobloch, with the request for information about the date of Fräulein von Knobloch’s marriage and received the answer, which must have given him the greatest joy, namely that the Fräulein had married the Captain von Klingsporn in the year 1763.<sup>37</sup>

With this “Documentary Communication” the case seemed settled. Fräulein von Knobloch married in 1763, so, Fischer concluded, Kant’s letter addressed to Fräulein von Knobloch could not have been written after this date of marriage. Since the events mentioned in the *Letter* took place between 1759 and the end of 1762, the letter must probably have been written in early 1763.

Unfortunately, the Swedenborgians did not deal with this argument. It is not yet completely compelling. A biased proof-reader, who altered the dates of the letter, could also change the salutation, the more so as the publication of the letter was only in 1804. The letter was published only in 1804 and the original of the letter itself was removed. Also, one could easily point out that Kuno Fischer was also a “party” in this dispute and, on the basis of his philosophical views and his own interpretation of Kant, had to attach importance to dating the *Letter* before the *Dreams* and to invalidating the arguments of Tafel, of whom he wrote (p. 236): “Only a Swedenborgian could make such a discovery. Incomprehensible, how it could be applauded by others.”

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36. 2nd ed. Vol. 3 p. 239.

37. Although Im. Tafel in his “Abriss” p. 255 referred to Mendelsohn’s letter, but without citing the passage quoted by him, which had refuted his own theory. Kehrbach mentioned this passage in his introduction, but without noting its importance for the solution of the question of the dating of the letter.

The final clarification is brought only by the fact that Kant has spoken in detail about his relationship to Swedenborg in a third place, namely in the correspondence that he had with Moses Mendelsohn on the occasion of sending his *Dreams*. Strangely enough, the documentary importance of this correspondence, which also vividly explains various passages of the *Dreams*, has escaped both parties who argued about the dating of the *Letter*.

On February 7, 1766, Kant had sent several copies of his *Dreams* to Mendelsohn with an accompanying letter, in which he informed him: "I have sent some *Träume* to you by the traveling post and humbly request, after you have chosen to keep one copy in front of you, that the rest be kindly handed over to Messrs. Sack, Oberconsisto R, Spalding, Probst Süsmilch, Prof. Lambert, Prof. Sultzer and Prof. Formey." Moses Mendelsohn, however, in a letter of April 7 or 8, which is no longer extant, had, contrary to Kant's expectations, not expressed himself very approvingly of the writing, and had expressed to Kant his alienation at the tone of these *Dreams*." To this Kant replied to him on April 8, 1766 (Letter No. 27), with an apologetic explanation. "The alienation you express about the tone of the little writing is proof to me of the good opinion you have formed of my character of sincerity, and even the unwillingness to see the same expressed herein only ambiguously is estimable and agreeable to me. I do not know whether you will have noticed some signs of the displeasure with which I wrote it when you read through this rather disorganized piece of writing. For since I had once given a lot to talk about by inquisitively inquiring about the visions of Schwedenberg, both with people who had the opportunity to know him themselves, as well as by means of some correspondence and finally by obtaining his works, I saw well that I would not be able to rest from the unrelenting demand until I had disposed of my presumed knowledge of all these anecdotes.

This utterance contains the definitive proof that Kant has the *Letter* before the *Dreams*," for it professes that all the efforts of Kant to make accurate inquiries about the person and visionary gifts of Swedenborg, which he enumerates in the *Letter*," preceded the writing of the *Dreams*," nay, that the unexpected effect of this zealous effort on Swedenborg's part, which was evidently understood by Kant's friends as an apologia of Swedenborg, prompted the writing of the *Dreams*."

## INVESTIGATIONS INTO KANT'S DREAMS OF A SPIRIT-SEER

Kant speaks here of a “cheeky inquiry into the visions of Schwedenberg” of three kinds:

The first inquiry was made “among persons who had the opportunity to know him themselves.” This refers to the information that Kant had obtained from the Danish officer and the English merchant, of which he reports in detail in his “Letter.

Second, he speaks of inquiries “by means of some correspondence.” This refers not only to the correspondence with the two persons mentioned, but especially to his letter to Swedenborg himself, whose fate he reports in his *Letter*.

Third, he speaks about the inquiries in the form of “obtaining his works.” This refers to the fact mentioned in the *Letter* that the English merchant in Stockholm provided him with several of Swedenborg’s works, which he promised to send to him. Kant’s effort to get Swedenborg’s works is also evident from the message of the *Letter*: “All arrangements are made that I will get it (the work Swedenborg had promised) as soon as it will have left the press,” All of Kant’s inquiries about Swedenborg mentioned in the *Letter* are thus mentioned here in the report about the prehistory of his *Dreams* to Moses Mendelsohn.

About the reason for the writing of the *Träume* one can take the following from this report: Kant had “given much to talk about” by his original *Vorwitzige Erkundigung nach den visionen Schwedenbergs* [Cheeky Inquiry into the Visions of Schwedenberg]. Due to the fact that he as a critical philosopher investigated Swedenborg’s visions in such detail and that he tried by repeated letters and personal inducements to get several friends and acquaintances, like Oetinger to provide him with certainty about Swedenborg’s visionary gifts, he himself had drawn the attention of a larger circle of friends and acquaintances to Swedenborg. For his preoccupation with Swedenborg, he apologetically mentions two reasons in his *Dreams*: on the one hand, his philosophical habit of not rejecting anything untested, on the other hand, his “trustfulness.” Thus it says there in the preliminary report p. 4: “Since it is just as much a stupid prejudice to believe nothing without reason of much that is told with some semblance of truth, as to believe everything without examination of what the common rumor says, the author of this writing, in order to avoid the first prejudice, let himself be dragged away in part by the latter. He confesses with a certain humiliation that he was so faithful to the truth of some stories of

the kind mentioned.” This, as the remark in the letter to Moses Mendelsohn clearly indicates, is an allusion to his own numerous efforts at “retracing’s”, which he describes in such detail in his *Letter*.

The success of this tracing can easily be gauged from the tone and content of the *Letter*. The reserved, but nevertheless approving way in which he expressed himself about Swedenborg in the *Letter* will probably also have formed the basic tone of the statements in which he reported to his Königsberg circle of friends about the results of his “trusting” tracing. Now one can see from the example of Oetinger how quickly the preoccupation with Swedenborg spread once someone began to make a serious effort to study him. Oetinger had hardly read through the *Arcana Coelestia* in 1765 and reported the impression that the reading made on him to his numerous friends in Tübingen, Stuttgart and other Württemberg cities, when everyone began to read Swedenborg. Philipp Matthäus Hahn, the well-known theologian and mathematician, wrote a whole volume of his diary of 1766 full of remarks about Swedenborg, Chancellor Reuß of the University of Tübingen, Professor Kies, the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in Tübingen, Professor Clemm, Ordinary of systematic theology in Tübingen, Pastor Fricker, the well-known Swabian naturalist, representatives of the Tübingen diocese such as Hartmann, various Stuttgart consistorial councillors—all studied Swedenborg, and in the correspondence of the Württemberg scholars and Pietists of those years one of the most treated subjects is Swedenborg’s person and teaching. The Württemberg nobility joins in. Several nobles, among them the Baron von Leiningen, Baron von Veltheim, Baron von Bernardin, besiege Oetinger to produce a German translation of the most important parts of the *Arcana Coelestia*, already the money for printing is provided, letters are collected and spread, in which Swedenborg’s miracle stories are reported, especially the story with the Queen of Sweden. Swedenborg’s teachings begin to take hold of the spirits; a Swedenborg community is formed, which causes an unwelcome stir among the “reasonable people” and the orthodox.

Something similar threatened to develop around Kant. In his letter to Mendelsohn, Kant speaks of an “unremitting inquiry” that had been made to him about Swedenborg. So not only Fräulein von Knobloch had written to him on this matter. The *Letter*, read out in a coffee circle of noble ladies,

had to make Kant appear not only as a witness of the truth of Swedenborgian visions, but as an apologist of Swedenborg and as a philosophical witness of the possibility of a connection with the spirit world in general. Kant was thus besieged from many sides, as the preface to his *Dreams* reveals, which speaks of an "impetuous stopping of known and unknown friends." The "impetuous" inquiries themselves were all the more understandable because the subject of Swedenborg and spirit-seeing were fashionable. At the court of Hesse-Darmstadt, of Electorate Hesse, of Brunswick, spirit-seeing was at home; under Frederick William II, who issued the well-known warning to Kant, it also seized the Prussian court.

Thus Kant's initial preoccupation with Swedenborg got beyond him. He, the critical philosopher, found himself in the embarrassing role of being considered the apostle of spirit vision, and there seems to me no doubt that Kant's witty remark to his readers contains a criticism of the credulity of some of his friends who saw him as an apologist for Swedenborg and spirit vision. After pointing out in *Dreams* that the contemplation of births from the realm of animal procreation could easily make a bad impression on pregnant persons, he continues: "Since among my readers some may be just as well in other circumstances in regard to the ideal reception, I would be sorry if they should have been mistaken about something."

The hope he expressed at the end that "I will not be burdened with the moon calves that might be born from their fertile imagination on this occasion" also sounds like a rejection of the insinuation of the thought which some of his friends and acquaintances had of him, as if he were in favor of spirit vision with Swedenborg. The situation becomes embarrassing for him: he suddenly sees himself in the role of the sorcerer's apprentice, who can no longer get rid of the spirits he called, and now gets rid of them in a philosophical way, reflecting on his philosophical profession, by demonstrating the non-recognizability of the spirit world and the unimportance of this whole area of speculation for the practical moral life of man, and at the same time personally distancing himself from Swedenborg. Out of this distressed situation, which at the same time explains the improvised volatility and the affective charge of his wit, the sharp, biased one-sidedness of his judgments about the person and teaching of Swedenborg, Kant wrote his *Dreams* as a bold hussar ride with which he jumped over the fences of the Swedenborg cult that he himself had bred around himself.

His remarks to Mendelsohn reveal that in doing so he himself felt the petulance that resounds in the tone of this writing in contrast to his other writings, and that he felt it necessary to apologize for it by referring to the events that “forced” this writing upon him.

So this is the solution of the riddle: The *Letter* is written in the year 1763, three years before the *Dreams*. Through his efforts to examine Swedenborg’s visionary experiences, as he describes them in his *Letter*, and probably through the *Letter* itself, Kant had maneuvered himself, without wanting or desiring it, into the role of a witness for Swedenborg’s truth and an apologist for spirit vision. The *Dreams* are the counterblow by which Kant frees himself from the reproach of being guilty of the birth of the “moon calves” in the brains of his friends, the counterblow that has all those who expected him to play the role of an apologist of spirit vision by a sharp blow full of wit and satire to convince him that the task of a philosopher is different. To prove that the god to whom he has hitherto offered incense is an idol, he burns him and puts a fool’s cap on him beforehand. It was precisely this strange experience of suddenly being regarded as a visionary’s witness to the truth that led him to give fundamental thought to the limits of metaphysics. Thus Kuno Fischer is probably right when he writes<sup>38</sup>: “The similarity that he found between the “dreamers of sensation,” the spirit-seers, and the “dreamers of reason,” the metaphysicians of his time, the aerial architects of the various worlds of thought (Wolff and Crusius), gave him cause to characterize the prevailing metaphysics and to proclaim a new conception of it as a science. Swedenborg and metaphysics were, to use the proverb, two birds with one stone for Kant to kill. He struck laughing. The comparison itself was humorous in its very design; it so cheered our philosopher that he pursued it in the best of moods and executed it with a comfortable unsparingness on both sides.”

The insight into this history of the origin of the *Dreams* is sufficient to learn to understand the motives which led Kant to his condemnation of Swedenborg expressed therein, but not to excuse the obvious injustices which sprang from his animosity. The fact remains that he deliberately ridiculed Swedenborg’s person and teaching, although he knew of him that he was more than a “spirit-seer.” The *Dreams* are a retraction of the *Letter*,” in which Kant’s conception of his duties as a critical philosopher

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38. A. 0. 2. Aufl. Bd. 3 S. 232.

triumphed over his historical love of truth, and in which the fear of the curse of ridicule, which he feared to bring upon himself as the advocate of a Swedenborg, was a contributory factor.

This still resonates clearly in the letter to Mendelsohn, in which he writes: "Indeed, it became difficult for me to devise the method by which I was to clothe my thoughts without exposing myself to ridicule. It seemed most advisable to me, therefore, to forestall others by talking about myself. 31I have proceeded quite sincerely, in that the state of my mind is indeed absurd, and both as far as the story is concerned, I cannot refrain from nurturing a small attachment to the story of this kind, as well as, as far as the rational reasons are concerned, some suspicion of its correctness, notwithstanding the inconsistencies which the former, and the fantasies and incomprehensible concepts which deprive the latter of its value. Obviously there were such "others" who were about to mock him, and whose mockery had to be forestalled as soon as possible. Thus Kant offered not only Swedenborg, but also his own earlier appreciative remarks about him, as a sacrifice to the deity of critical philosophy.

In view of this solution the question remains unresolved why actually all data in the *Letter* were changed. It cannot be a falsification in the sense of a tendentious backdating of the *Letter* to the time before the *Dreams*. Why then, if the *Letter*, as is certain, was written in 1763, change all dates? Did the editor want to allow his Kant, as it were, a longer period of time for his "conversion" in order not to make the obvious contradiction that exists between the *Letter* and the *Dreams* appear too abrupt and abrupt, and to soften the disconcerting impression of such a contradiction by pointing out the large time span that seemed to lie between the backdated *Letter* and the *Dreams*? We do not know; the original manuscript from which Borowski communicated the *Letter* has disappeared. But is it not also enough to assume an oversight? Should we really expect Borowski to make an intentional change of dates merely because some of his friends call him a "cunning fox," an "unreliable hypocrite," and an "archpriest"? Let us be modest enough to assume that the date 1763 was written indistinctly in the letter<sup>39</sup>, that Borowski read it for 1758, and that after this error had once come to his notice, possibly only when he was correcting it, in the course of which

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39. *Kants Gesammelt. Schriften*, Ausg. der Königl. Preuss. Akademie d. W., Bd. X, Briefwechsel 1. Bd., Berlin 1900 Nr. 36 S. 64.

he noticed the contradiction between the closing date 1758 and the two dates of the volume of Stockholm in 1759, he arbitrarily altered these dates without further examination of the original and the historical facts, then the occasion for the heated dispute of the Kantian and the Swedenborgian who led to a significant clarification of the beginnings of Kant's philosophy and his determination of the limits of metaphysics—the elusiveness and convenience of a proof-reading editor.

It is instructive to compare the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* with the third book of the *Natural History of the Heavens*, in which Kant wrote ten years earlier about the planetary inhabitants.

There Kant set himself the task of dealing with a daring subject that seemed to appeal more to the speculative imagination, to the “frivolity” of the wandering imagination than to responsible scientific thought, the question of the survival of souls on the planets. In his treatment of this subject Kant feels constrained by the fear of falling into the aberrations of this recklessness, and in order to restrain his imagination he keeps before himself from the outset certain critical principles which compel him to remain within the limits of probability. Nevertheless, the obvious pleasure he takes in speculating prompts him also to venture a little beyond the self-drawn boundaries between the probable and the space of free imagination. He, too, senses in himself something of that hunger on the basis of which “the curiosity of the human soul snatches very eagerly at this object so remote from it and strives to get some light in such dark knowledge.” He also ventures into the realm of purely theosophical speculation about the afterlife of the soul. He even admits that it is “permissible,” that it is “decent to amuse oneself with such notions,” but refrains, not without regret, from expressing the hope of the hereafter “on such uncertain images of the imagination.”

Out of this mood, which leaves a certain free space to the speculative impulses, but from the outset interposes the principles of a strict critique to control the speculation, Kant may also have turned to the phenomenon in the years following the writing of this work. His mind and his speculation were not closed to such problems as Swedenborg unrolled in his description of the world beyond and to such phenomena as they were represented by his contact with the spirit world and his mediumistic talent; on the contrary, this mysterious spiritual world of the Nordic seer exerted a strong attraction on

him and his hunger for knowledge and cognition “snatched eagerly” after these alleged revelations of a world hitherto closed to reason. But he turned to the new phenomenon not as a believer, but as a critical philosopher. He was looking for witnesses, he sent safe guards, he was looking for personal acquaintance, he was searching for facts, which should bring the necessary explanations of the phenomenon.

What he found seemed to convince him at first. More credulous friends already saw in him a convinced one and appealed to his proofs. But then the reading of the Heavenly Secrets supplied him with the theory of these phenomena in his hand, the metaphysics on which Swedenborg's system was built, and reminded him of the principles of a criticism, the observance and recognition of which he had imposed upon himself. He also found there much that seemed objectionable and ridiculous to his reason. Then he was seized with the fear of having got too far involved with such things, and with the fear of the curse of ridicule to which he saw himself exposed if he continued to take such things seriously at all. Now it was only a matter of distancing oneself as quickly and thoroughly as possible from all that with which one had burdened oneself, without wanting to, through too great an inquisitiveness and too greedy a grasping for knowledge.

Now there is no longer talk, as ten years earlier, of it being “permissible,” of it being “decent to amuse oneself with such ideas,” although Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* represent nothing other than a continuation of the speculations about the afterlife and the state after death, which Kant himself hints at in the concluding chapter on the inhabitants of the planets, for which he hints at some motives, and from the treatment of which he turns away with a sigh of regret, because now his critical principles do not permit him to amuse himself further with these beautiful things. Now, however, when he finds himself exposed to suspicion and ridicule for having advocated this game, he no longer calls it “permissible” and “decent,” but calls it a fancy, a figment of his imagination and detestable aberration of the human mind. The same wit which he so charmingly expends in the chapters on the planet-dwellers, to elucidate the probability of his speculations on their existence, science, and mode of life, by the analogy of the planet-dwellers with the lice which nest on the heads of various rascals-the same wit now turns with biting acuteness on the author of the same “fancies,” the subject

of which he himself formerly so wittily hinted, and the treatment of which he so unwillingly denied himself.

## VIII.

### Swedenborg's Further Influence on the Aristocracy in Königsberg and Riga.

Kant's sharp criticism of Swedenborg did not succeed in preventing his friends in Königsberg and Riga from studying the Nordic seer. Two decades after the publication of his *Dreams*, a renewed strong interest in Swedenborg can be observed, and to be sure just as much among Kant's friends like Scheffner and Hamann, as with major publishers like Hartung in Königsberg and Hartknoch in Riga.

This renewed study of Swedenborg seems to be connected with the expansion of Freemasonry, which under Frederick William II, was intensively engaged in spiritualistic practices. Especially J. Scheffner, who was war and tax councilor in Gumbinnen, Königsberg, and Marienwerder; who was later Herr auf Springlake am Deymestrom; and became a friend of Herder, Kant, Hippel and Hamann, and later had the same intimate friendship with the Greats in the time of Prussia's misery and rebirth, namely with E. M. Arndt, York, Freiherr von Stein, and especially was close-knit with Queen Louise—seems to have dealt with Swedenborg in more detail.

Scheffner in his highly informative autobiography, which was published in Leipzig in 1816 under the title *Mein Leben, wie ich Johann George Scheffner es selbst beschrieben* (My life, as I Johann George Scheffner myself have described it) but did not come into bookshops until 1823, writes of his second trip to Berlin, which happened in the beginning of the 80s: "During my second excursion to Berlin, I was a Masonic brother who had passed through all its degrees, had read the divine *Poemander*, the *Agricola*, Swedenborg's (sic) *Opera*, etc., also the Rosicrucian discourses and other such schemes of things, although without sympathy, and was received very kindly by the most important guild members." Of such "guild comrades" he mentions, besides the Supreme Court councilor Geuse, Privy councilor Hymnen, Herr von Bischofswerder, above all, the later Minister of State Wöllner—who,

however, displeased him so much as a person that he became the main reason for him to turn away from Masonry. Of him he writes (p. 193): “The princely councilor of law Wöllner, subsequently Minister of State, was even less close to my heart and mind than the former, so that the memory of what I had heard and seen of both of them became a cause contributing to my later renouncing everything that I could still hope to find in the masonic order. Many felt sorry for me because of this renunciation, some were surprised; but I remained convinced of the correctness of my decision: *sat grata bibere*<sup>40</sup>, even though I still believe that through the lodges excellent things could be done for moral improvement.”

However, his subsequent departure from Masonry does not seem to have alienated him completely from his involvement with Swedenborg, presumably because his own nature and disposition encouraged him to do so. In the description of his youth, he writes in detail about the fact that he never got rid of his fear of spirits even in his later life. (p. 9). “Hübner’s biblical histories were still my main book in my sixth year, just as listening to ghost stories was my greatest excitement. From hearing these, notwithstanding my later disbelief in the possibility of apparition, a kind of *caput mortuum*<sup>41</sup> has remained in my blood, which until now does not allow me to step into a dark room without the word ghost flashing before me like an ossianic<sup>42</sup> theme.” In any case it is a fact that Scheffner dealt with Swedenborg extensively after his trip to Berlin, for in mid-September 1784 he turned to Hamann with the request to provide him with works by Swedenborg. The latter informs him in a letter dated September 20, 1784<sup>43</sup>: “I will inquire about Swedenborg, and if he is in stock with Danzel<sup>44</sup>, I will enclose him; if not, I will inquire with Hartung in the future.

In his efforts to procure Swedenborg’s writings, Hamann came across the German translation of *True Christian Religion*<sup>45</sup>—which was published

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40. Lat. “I had drunk enough.”

41. Lat. “head of a corpse.”

42. Ossian was a legendary folk-hero of Gaelic poetry.

43. A. O. p. 40 Letter of Oct. 8, 1784

44. Danzel and Hartung were booksellers.

45. This German translation does not seem to have become known until now. R. L. Tafel has not listed it in his *Documents* (Anmerkungen zur *Vera Christiana Religio* vol. 2,2 p. 1019, but he mentions a German translation, which appeared in 1784 in three volumes iii Altenburg. The oldest preparatory work for a German translation of Swedenborg’s *True Christian Religion* I have been able to find in the file “Swedenborgiana” of Landgrave Ludwig IX, which is in the State Archives in Darmstadt. In these files are pieces of a handwritten

in two parts by the Königsberg publisher G. Hartung in the same year 1784—and he immediately reported to Scheffner on the success of his search, saying of his search with the following words: “Hartung announced in yesterday’s newspaper the second part of Swedenborg’s *True Christian Religion*, 3 fle., 15 gr. I immediately ran to my friend Brahl and asked him to get both parts for me. However he has only been able to send me the 2nd. If you want to look at the latter alone for a few days, I think I will get permission from him to do so.”<sup>46</sup> Hamann even took the trouble to bring this volume to Scheffler himself, for on November 10, 1784, he writes to Scheffner: “I would have brought all of this to your attention in a few brief words on Tuesday morning, most honorable friend, but I found you no longer at home, or preparing to go away, therefore I could only leave the Swedenborg which I too have just received.”<sup>47</sup>

In the meantime, Hartknoch, the publisher of the *Traume eines Geistersehers*, had again become aware of Swedenborg’s writings. In the era of Wöllner, when spiritualism flourished at the court of Frederick William II, when the various lodges and orders were concerned not only with alchemy but also with the question of contact with the spirit world, and where it was good manners to know about the afterlife, it seemed to the enterprising publisher to be just as good a business to publish a book on the afterlife. It seemed to the enterprising publisher as good a business to publish a translation of *Arcana Coelestia*, as it had been earlier to present Kant’s counter-writing against the *Arcana Coelestia* to the public. Exactly twenty years after the publication of Kant’s *Traume eines Geistersehers* Hartknoch discovers that he has “long since owed the public” a translation of the *Arcana Coelestia*, and he finds a scholar in the church councilor Parschke in Weissig who is willing to produce the coveted German translation.

The main difficulty facing the realization of this plan is the acquisition of a copy of the Latin original of the *Arcana Coelestia*. Hartknoch remembers that Kant had obtained such a copy with much difficulty twenty years ago, that is the copy which had prompted him to his vehement criticism

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German translation of various chapters of the W.C. R., especially the *memorabilia* contained therein, as well as a detailed register of the most important chapters of this writing. The aforementioned translation was probably commissioned by the landgrave, using the Latin copy that Swedenborg himself had sent from Amsterdam to the landgrave in July 1771 with an accompanying letter dated July 13, 1771, cf. *Documents* vol. 2,1 Doc. 247, S. 388–389.

46. A. O. p. 40 Letter of Oct. 8, 1784

47. A. O. p. 54

of Swedenborg, and he endeavors to find this Kantian copy, but in vain. The presumption cannot be dismissed out of hand that Kant, who had published his *Prolegomena zu ether jeden kiinftigen Metaphysik* [Prolegomena to Every Kinetic Metaphysics which can appear as a Science] and who was working on his Riga 1783 with Hartknoch and working on his *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [Critique of Practical Reason], did not want to provide these to Swedenborg around this time. Swedenborg had not long before his death destroyed all but 24 unsold copies of this work, which, like all his theosophical writings, he had printed at his own expense, with the added reason that this work did not need to circulate in so many copies in the world before the desire for it would become stronger and more general, and then one would already seek to duplicate it anyway. After his death, a local printer received the copies mentioned, but he had already sold some of them outside England, each copy for 8 guineas."

The fact mentioned here is not confirmed by Swedenborg's own testimonies. When in 1771 the Landgrave Louis IX of Hesse-Darmstadt, through his envoy in the Hague, Mr. de Treuer, asked Swedenborg to give him a copy of his *Arcana Coelestia*, he replied in a letter from Amsterdam that a copy of this book was available. He replied in a letter from Amsterdam that a copy of this work could not be found either in Holland or in England, since all copies had been sold. However, he offered to obtain a copy for the Landgrave from some Swedish friends who were in possession of the work, and, as the correspondence between Swedenborg and the Landgrave to be published hereafter shows, he fulfilled this promise from Amsterdam in the same spring of 1771. It can hardly be assumed that Swedenborg asked his Swedish friends, to whom he had given a copy of his *Arcana*, to send it back to the landgrave, when he had a whole pile of these copies in stock in London. Even if the alleged burning of his many copies had already taken place before the correspondence with the landgrave, i.e. before the spring of 1771, he had been able to bequeath one of the allegedly remaining 24 copies due to the importance and rank of his petitioner. Thus, the tale of the "old Swede" is probably one of the numerous Swedenborg legends that were created after his death.

Jacobi hurried to send Schönborn's letter to Hamann, who immediately forwarded it to Hartknoch. The publisher, who in his last letter to Hamann had made the realization of his plan for a German translation of the *Arcana*

dependent on the outcome of this search for the Latin original by Hamann-Jacobi, saw in this negative decision a reason to refrain from this plan and also informed Hamann, who then reported in a letter of June 30, 1787 to Jacobi:<sup>48</sup> “The 17th Hartknoch wrote to me, to whom I communicated your extract: “Since the purchase of the Swed. is such a hassle, I am refraining from this venture, all the more so also since you advise against it. However, write if it has already been purchased, in which case will keep it.” So you can be at rest, dear J. F., in view of this petty commission: but he expects you what occasions they call today.”

Thus, the Hartknoch edition of the German translation of the *Arcana Coelestia* did not come about and F. C. Oetinger’s 1765 work *Swedenborgs Irrdische und Himmlische Philosophie* remained for decades the only work, which at least in the form of excerpts and short summaries, that made the main ideas and most important pieces of Swedenborg in German language accessible to the German readership, and this all the more, as it experienced a series of new editions after its confiscation by the Stuttgart Consistory.

## IX.

### Swedenborg’s Counter-Criticism Against Kant

Finally, let us turn once again to Swedenborg himself. What is striking about the Kant-Swedenborg controversy is that Swedenborg, whom Oetinger immediately brought into the discussion, did not engage in discussions with critics. This fact has its reason in the fact that Swedenborg did not like to engage in discussions with critics, especially if they were opponents who were as vehement and unobjective in their criticism as expressed in Ernesti’s review and in *Dreams*. Very characteristic of Swedenborg’s way of reacting to such attacks is the way he responded to Ernesti’s criticism. He let more than a decade and a half pass before he decided to answer Ernesti’s criticism in a page that he attached to his writings in 1771.

This anti-criticism does not provide a treatment and refutation of the individual accusations Ernesti had leveled against him, but merely reports in the declaration that he considered it improper for himself to engage in such

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48. A. O. p. 448 Letter No. 91

obvious slurs; he did not want to give his contemporaries the distressing spectacle of two scholars "biting each other around like two dogs or smearing excrement in each other's faces like two streetwalkers." For the rest, he confines himself to pointing out such passages in his latest work *True Christian Religion* as speak of his vocation and of the revelatory character of his teachings and visions. Above all, he points to nos. 846–851 of his aforementioned work, as well as to its no. 137, which is written in particular against Ernesti.

These pieces, mentioned by himself, are again strikingly not a theoretical discussion of the accusations that the latter had raised against his teachings and visions, but visions, memorabilia, that is, reports of some experiences in the spiritual world. These accounts of experiences tell how Swedenborg is honored to participate in heavenly assemblies where church teachers and clergy from all centuries of church history, from the Apostolic Fathers to the representatives of contemporary orthodoxy so hostile to him, of the type of Ernesti, come together in a theological discussion. In these heavenly assemblies, in which the representatives of orthodoxy take their stand against him and polemicize against his teachings, Swedenborg himself, as the only living contemporary of this earth, takes the floor among so many spirits of the past. Not only does he himself refute his opponents in a theological disputation, in which he appeals to the testimonies of the Gospels, the ancient Church Fathers, and the Confessional Writings, but he also experiences the satisfaction of seeing the Apostolic Fathers of the oldest Christian Church take his side, profess for their part the truth of his doctrine, convict the Orthodox of their error, and in this way bestow upon Swedenborg an imposing vindication before the assembled Council of the Christian Doctors of the Church in heaven.

This is the way the visionary responds to the accusations of his earthly critics: In his visions themselves, he experiences how heaven sits in judgment on his opponents, how the Lord Himself denounces the error of his critic reveals and makes known through the mouths of the angels and the blessed fathers of the most ancient church his judgment, which confirms the truth of Swedenborg's revelations and teachings.

This is the kind of counter-criticism Swedenborg applies not only in his dispute with Ernesti, but also in the struggle with his opponents in the well-known trial that the Gothenburg consistory had initiated against him

at the instigation of Provost Ekebom. Here, too, after some attempts to bring about a clarification by letters to his chief opponent, he refrains from polemics in the style of the time, but lets God decide the matter and makes known His judgment in his visionary reports. In the same vision, communicated in *True Christian Religion* no. 137, he reports how the Lord, through the mouth of the angels and blessed ones, decides against his Gothenburg enemies, and vindicates his servant Swedenborg against the accusations of the heads of Swedish orthodoxy.

The realization of this fact prompted me to investigate whether in Swedenborg's vision reports there is not to be found such a statement of heaven to the criticism that is made in Kant's *Dreams* of Swedenborg's work *Arcana Coelestia*. Now, indeed, one such vision, which is the subject of his *Arcana Coelestia*, is found in the same work, *True Christian Religion*, which contains the visionary accounts in which Swedenborg experiences his heavenly vindication in the face of the attacks of Ernesti and the Gothenburg Consistory. In the "Memories," reported in no. 461, Swedenborg describes how he was caught up into a paradise in the midnight region of the spiritual world, and asks the question of the inhabitants of that paradise assembled there, how they understand it that man does good from God, but quite as if he did it from himself. The question concerns the problem that occupied him most strongly and whose solution he repeatedly presents in most of his theological writings: it is the miracle of human freedom that God allows good to flow into man, but lets man accomplish this good out of his own, and it is the miracle of faith that man recognizes this mystery of freedom and, in recognition of the divine origin of all good gives glory to God alone.

The inhabitants of Paradise now present to Swedenborg their various answers to his question, which, however, do not satisfy him, but cause him to recite to them his own life on this point. "Then I opened my mind to them, and said: You do not grasp it, because you think only according to appearances, and thinking founded by appearances is deception. " After this introduction he sets forth to them in a long speech his "answer according to truth, not appearance," to the question which he had put. After he has finished his speech, the blessed say to him, "We apprehend that you have spoken rightly, and yet we do not apprehend. " Swedenborg then explains to them what they need to do in order to advance to a full apprehension of his doctrine, and concludes his speech with an impressive

miracle, intended to illustrate the power of God to work good. He takes branches from a vine and hands them to you, saying, "Do ye believe that this is of me, or of the Lord?" They answer that it is as from the Lord, thus confirming that they have understood Swedenborg's teaching—Swedenborg indeed is the one who hands them the branches, but it is not he who has created them, but the Lord. And behold—the branches sprout grapes in their hands. The miracle confirms their faith and the truth of Swedenborg's teaching.

Then follows a second miracle: "But as I was going away," continues Swedenborg, "I saw a table of cedar wood, on which lay a book, under a green olive tree, the trunk of which was entwined with a vine. I looked, and behold, it was a book written by me, entitled *Heavenly Secrets*, and I said that in this book it was fully proved that man was a receptacle of life, and not life itself." Thus he experiences in heaven the glorification and wonderful distinction of his first visionary magnum opus.

This is Swedenborg's answer to Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. In *Dreams* the *Arcana Coelestia* had been called a "quarto band of nonsense", Swedenborg himself, the author of this "nonsense" had been titled as the "greatest gusher", the "archphantast among all phantasts". Here, however, the book blasphemed by Kant appears as the object of a celestial, miraculous glorification, the symbolism of which is meant to further emphasize the truthfulness of his book. The glorification of this book is not only to be a heavenly confirmation of the doctrine that man is only the indirect author of all good and that all good and all life goes back to God alone, but is also at the same time to demonstrate this doctrine in itself, because also the revelations that this book contains are not, as Swedenborg expresses here, revelations "of a certain Herr. Swedenborg," as Kant had written, but revelations which are "written by him," which are proclaimed by Swedenborg as the instrument of the Lord himself. Swedenborg as the instrument of the world prepared by the Lord himself, which are therefore not "dreams of a spirit-seer" but revelations of the Lord himself. Thus he experiences in heaven not only the wonderful confirmation of his teaching, but also at the same time the confirmation of his prophetic self-confidence in the glorification of his work before the converted spirits of paradise, miraculously brought about by the Lord.

A heavenly miracle seen in a vision refutes the reproaches of *Dreams*—this is the answer of the seer to the philosopher, written in the same spirit in which the refutation of Ernesti and the consistory of Gothenburg is written, an answer that forgives the polemical form of counter-criticism, but experiences this counter-criticism itself in a vision as a judgment of God on the adversary.<sup>49</sup> □

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