

A SYSTEM OF OCCIDENTAL OCCULTISM¹

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WE are so used to connecting the idea of occult teachings with the Orient that the very intimation of the existence of similar currents in the Western Hemisphere of our globe is apt to take us by surprise. And yet the saying "*Les extremes se touchent*" proves true even on this field of human activity, for both the extreme Northwest and the extreme Southeast of Eur-Asia are cradles and hearths of either Christian or Buddhistic "secret doctrines." India, the land of heat and fire, is a fertile soil on which Asiatic Theosophy flourishes, while Sweden, the land of ice and snow, has fostered the greatest European system of occultism, that of Emanuel Swedenborg. The Scandinavian and Hindu branches of the Aryan race thus prove their kinship by drawing on the rich resources of an inheritance common to both, the innate consciousness of the awe-inspiring presence of a superhuman power. This fact is, no doubt, at least to a great extent, due to natural environment. Under the glowing sun of India as well as in the icy cold of Sweden's winters the human mind meets with nature as an overwhelming, almighty, mysterious and enigmatic power ensnaring in its meshes not only the mineral and vegetable but also the animal and human realms. Who or what is this wonderful power,

¹ The study of Swedenborg's Theosophy is by no means an easy task. He is a very voluminous writer. The correspondences between the human body and all its organs with the "Grand Man" are treated of in 205 paragraphs in the *Arcana Coelestia*, and the quotations from said work in "Heaven and Hell" amount to no less than 5,290. He often repeats himself, and his Theosophy is so interwoven with his Theology and Exegesis as to make a very careful sifting process indispensable. Add to this that he uses a terminology of his own, and that his numerous definitions—they amount to more than 2,000—often are subtil and hairfine, and it must be admitted that a study of his one hundred volumes is an almost superhuman test of patience and endurance. However, as Emerson says, not all can study them but those who can will reap a rich reward. All we claim for the following brief outline sketch is that it may serve as an introduction to such a study.

against which human efforts seem to avail nothing? Where is the key to this inscrutable problem? The Hindu mind answers this question by Oriental Occultism, while the Scandinavian offers the solution in a system of Occidental Theosophy.

Occult teachings were nothing new in Sweden when Emanuel Swedenborg concentrating, as it were, into one bright and brilliant focus his rich ancestral inheritance of Scandinavian lore and wisdom appeared before the eighteenth century—the era of “illumination”—as the herald and exponent of a system of Christian Occultism, which unexpectedly hit that period of skepticism as a stroke of lightning from a clear sky. The ancient Scandinavian Poetic Edda (derived from the Sanskrit Veda) is a veritable storehouse of occultism and wisdom-teachings. Later St. Bridget touched the strings of the occult harp radiating from the Vadstena monastery vibrations that were felt through the whole Catholic world. But it was not until four hundred years later that the gates were fully opened to the abundant treasure house of the Swedish occult world through the publication of three epochmaking Theosophical works of Emanuel Swedenborg, *Worship and Love of God* (1745), *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell* (1758), and *Angelic Wisdom concerning the Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom* (1763).

After these brief prefatory remarks we introduce to our readers not only Sweden's, but also Europe's, greatest theosophist and mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772).

The first “Theosophical Society” in the world, bearing that name, was formed in London in 1783, eleven years after the death of Swedenborg. Its leading principles were derived from the above mentioned theosophical works of his.

Emerson, in his *Representative Men*, classifies Swedenborg as a “mystic,” while his first adherents call him a “theosophist.” Is there any essential difference between these two definitions? The Century Dictionary defines a “theosophist” as “one who professes to possess divine illumination,” “a believer in theosophy”—; and “theosophy” is according to the same authority “knowledge of divine things; a philosophy based upon a claim of special insight into the divine nature, or a special divine revelation.” “Mysticism” again is, according to Brande's and Cox's *Dictionary of Science, Literature and Art*—“a word of very vague signification, applied

for the most part indiscriminately to all those views or tendencies in religion which aspire towards more direct communication between man and God (not through the medium of the senses, but through the inward perception of the mind), than that which may be obtained through revelation." And the same authority continues: "They (The Theosophists) differ from the mystics who have been styled Theopathic, whose object is passively to receive the supposed communication of the Divinity and expatiate on the results."

As a further elucidation of the relation between these two currents of Occultism the following quotation from Schaff-Herzog's *Encyclopedia* might be of interest: "Theosophy is distinguished from Mysticism, speculative theology, and other forms of philosophy and theology, to which it bears certain resemblance, by its claims of direct divine inspiration, immediate divine revelation, and its want, more or less conspicuous, of dialectical exposition."²

Whatever significance we may attach to the above definitions they seem to indicate that the demarkation line between Theosophy and Mysticism is very thin and is to be found rather in the difference of methods than of results, which latter in both cases are the same, though in the former they are arrived at by means of spontaneous activity and efforts while in the latter a passive expectance serves the same purpose. Swedenborg consequently is just as much entitled to a place among Theosophists as among Mystics, as the reader of his three above mentioned works might find. In these interesting volumes he has, as I am going to show, revealed theories about God, creation and man, which secure to him a high rank among occult writers and make him the very originator and, at least so far, the only conspicuous representative of Occidental or, we might say, Christian Occultism in modern times. We therefore will give a brief sketch of his theosophical system, leaving it to our readers to continue its study and to compare it with the Oriental Occultism which in our time has become almost fashionable among the many thousands of educated men and women who have turned away from established religious organizations to seek the truth elsewhere.

² All these authorities place Swedenborg among mystics and theosophists alongside with Jacob Bohm, Madame Guyon, Fenelon, Molinos, while Dean William Ralph Inge does not give Swedenborg a place in his work on *Christian Mysticism*.

God is, according to Swedenborg, Essence and Existence, the first and the last, the beginning and the end of everything, the Alpha and the Omega of creation. The Divine is essential essence and essential form. It is uncreate and infinite. The Divine is Divine Love as to its essential essence, and Divine Wisdom as to its essential form, and from both emanates or flows the Divine energy or active force into all creation energizing and sustaining it as the spring moves the clock, or steam and electricity their respective engines. (Swedenborg's world-conception is mechanical not dynamic). In the spiritual world God appears encircled within an aura or sphere, just as the natural sun is surrounded by a corona, and he is in fact the sun of the spiritual world, yea, the central sun of the entire universe. From the spiritual sun flow light, heat and energy, but its light is wisdom and its heat is love, while its energy is represented by its actinic rays.

This spiritual sun, however, is not God, but God himself dwells in it in human form, yea, he is, as Swedenborg expresses it, "very man" or "essential man," he is in fact "the only real man," the prototype of all men. This is not to be confounded with anthropomorphism. Swedenborg does not conceive of God as a gigantic human being (or Haeckelian vertebrate), even though he calls him "God-man," for thereby he means that in God are present and function all the elements that constitute true humanity. This "God-man" is surrounded by four spheres, auras or atmospheres which all emanate or flow from him. These spheres are in the order of nearness or distance from their common origin as follows: the divine aura (nearest to God), the magnetic aura, the ether and the air. (It should be remembered that in the spiritual world are only appearances of space as also of time.) It is in and by means of these atmospheres that creation is effected, for Swedenborg most emphatically avers that God did not create the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*).

In *The Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom*, No. 55, he writes: "From Absolute Nothingness, nothing is or can be made. This is an established truth. The universe, therefore, which is God's image, and consequently full of God, could be created only in God and from God; for God is *Esse* (being) itself, and from *Esse* must be whatever is. To create what is, from nothing, which is not, is a direct contradiction."

But here we are confronted with the question: how could God who is infinite, out of his own infinite substance create the finite world? Every one familiar with abstract thinking will here find himself standing face to face with an apparently unsolvable problem. Swedenborg's answer is as follows: The first finite forms are certain "vortex-points" produced by the Divine will, or the movement within the infinite Divine substance itself (*Principia* Vol. 1, Ch. 1, 2, 3). These "vortex-points," which under the Divine influence arrange themselves into "vortex-rings," are the very beginnings of the finiting of the infinite, and thus constitute the Logos through which the universe was created (*Philo Judaeus and John*, ch. 1, v. 1).

This seems to be a very close approach to the Pantheistic world-conception. But Swedenborg stands on a strictly theistic vantage-ground and sharply distinguishes between God and the created world. And right here the distinction between this herald of Occidental Theosophy and for instance Hegel, or Buddhism or Oriental Occultism or other Pantheistic systems appears in full light, for he evades the trap, in which so many thinkers have fallen at this crossroad, by an original and keen reasoning. He says in *The Divine Love and Wisdom*, No. 56: "Every created thing, by virtue of this origin (from God), is such in its nature that it may be a recipient of God, not by *continuity*, but by *contiguity*. (This will be explained in what follows.) By the latter and not the former comes its capacity for conjunction. For having been created in God from God, it is accordant, and is an analogue, and through such conjunction it becomes like an image of God in a mirror."

The whole creation then, man not excepted, is not Being or Life in itself, but consists of forms created to serve as receptacles of the Divine Life. If this Divine Life was withdrawn from the created form they would dwindle away and die, for everything lives by Influx of and from the Divine Being, and the individual forms vary according to the degree of their ability to receive and retain the Divine Life. Thus some of these forms become earth, stones, metals, crystals, or other minerals, which represent the lowest or angular form, while others assume the manifold manifestations of the vegetable kingdom, characterized by the spherical or circular form. Others again rise above these primitive na-

ture-forms and become rationally thinking beings clothed in the perpetually spherical or spiral form. Some of these forms or receptacles are able to retain the inflowing Divine Life only for a short time, owing to the fact that they are not in possession of higher and more perfect vessels of reception, why they are accidental and ephemeral manifestations of the indwelling Divine life. Such are the inorganic nature-forms. Such also are the different genera and species of the vegetable kingdom, and such forms are also the many varieties of animals that inhabit the earth. They all retain the inflowing Divine Life for a certain time only, whereupon they let it go. Consequently they are mortal and perishable. Man, on the contrary, being the most perfect receptacle of the Divine Life, lives forever. This is in fact the very foundation of his immortality.

The Influx of the Divine Life, when passing from God to the created forms, which as it were absorb it, is *not continuous* but *broken* by and through the atmospheres, through which it passes, as for instance a ray of sunlight, during its wanderings through earth, water and air, is modified by its contact with these material substances. This is why life manifests itself in different "planes" and within different "spheres," so that we everywhere meet with "life within life," or life revealing itself in, and reacting against different atmospheres or auras. Consequently Swedenborg observes that life appears in *three degrees*; to-wit, one degree for each one of the atmospheres of the created universe, of course not counting the inmost or Divine aura, which also is threefold. Swedenborg calls these degrees "degrees of altitude," or "discreet degrees," thereby indicating that they do not mix or flow into one another, but are absolutely and completely separated from one another, so that none of them can through any kind of *évolution* or process of refinement evolve into or merge into another degree. This means, in other words, that spirit in not refined matter, that soul and body are completely separated by a degree of altitude, and that men can never become gods, as Oriental Theosophy teaches.

In man the three degrees of altitude appear within the spheres of will, understanding and action, which are actual forms for the reception and retention of the inflowing Divine love, wisdom and energy, for man, as has already been said, in no wise possesses life by or of himself, but he is only a form for the reception of life.

In God these same degrees of altitude are represented by the Divine Love, the Divine Wisdom and the Divine Energy or efflux (in orthodox theology designated as father, son and holy ghost, erroneously represented as three distinct persons). The Divine Being as father or infinite love is invisible to the whole creation, and consequently can never be seen by human eyes under this aspect. But as Logos, or as the Divine Wisdom or Truth he has been seen here on earth, and was so seen for instance when Jesus said to the apostle Philip (John xiv:8): "Philip, he that hath seen me hath seen the father," and "I am in the father and the father in me," or "The father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works," or "I and the father are one." These sayings furnish a rational explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity, which, according to Swedenborg, does not consist in a union of three persons, but rather is a trinity in one person, namely, a trinity of Divine Love, Divine Wisdom and Divine Energy within the Lord Jesus Christ who consequently is God as revealed in the flesh, the very God-Man.

In the Sacred Scriptures of Christendom these degrees of altitude are responsible for the threefold sense or meaning, the one hidden within the other: the natural or literal accessible to all men, and the esoteric or inner senses: the spiritual and the celestial, perceived only by those whose spiritual sight is opened.

In fine, life everywhere is manifested in the three degrees of altitude. In a general way we see them revealed in all expressions of life in the natural world with its innumerable physical forms that live, move and have their being within the terrestrial atmosphere whether on this or other planets, while on the spiritual plane life—such as it appears in the inner, finer atmospheres, where it is imperceptible to our gross physical senses—clothes itself in more substantial forms, which more perfectly and in a fuller measure receive the Divine influx. It is within these finer atmospheres, which in no wise are attenuated or refined air, but entirely heterogeneous substances—and not on some distant planet in the visible universe—that we find the spiritual world. Separated from this inner world, during our mundane existence, by a degree of altitude so completely and perfectly that no refinement of our material or physical bodies can ever carry us across the border-line, we nevertheless live in a constant connection with that world, which in fact is the world of causes, while our world is the sphere of effects. This con-

nection takes place in accordance with the law of correspondences, for Swedenborg asserts most emphatically that a perfect correspondence exists between the natural and the spiritual world so that all the phenomena of the former are nothing but manifestations of the latter on the material plane of life. The spiritual world is essentially like the natural world, which is moulded after the pattern of the former, the only difference being that the spiritual world is substantial, while the natural is material.

What place in creation has man according to this Occidental Theosophy, what is his destiny and final fate, the aim and purpose of human life? When at death man's spirit sheds his mortal coil, never to return to it again, he first enters the "Intermediate World," the vast reception room for all the departed from all the worlds in the universe. While in this immense "receptaculum" he gradually attains to a state of equilibrium between the good and the evil elements in his makeup. He is, as it were, weighed, measured and appraised with strict reference to the qualities he has acquired during his earth life—his Karma as the Orientals would call it—and the result of this process decides his destiny for all eternity. If his good qualities are predominant he rises to the heavenly world, and if the evil are in the lead he sinks to the underworld—, drawn or attracted to the one or the other by his "ruling love." The heaven-world consists of innumerable societies arranged in two kingdoms—, the realm of love and the realm of truth—, and in three regions: the first, second and third heaven, corresponding to the three domains of the natural, the spiritual and the divine, or the will, understanding and action in man, or love, truth and energy in God. To the one or the other of these heavenly societies the spirit of a good man will be drifting after death, and there he lives forever in the company of other congenial decarnate spirits held together by the tender bond of sympathy, and during ages innumerable growing into a warmer love and a clearer understanding, while performing "uses" for the welfare of the whole Heavenly community and of the entire human race in all the inhabited worlds of the universe, for as Swedenborg says, "The Lord's kingdom is a kingdom of uses."

It will appear from this brief sketch that the oriental doctrine of reincarnation has no place in this system of Occidental Theosophy. According to Swedenborg man's spirit never returns to this

earth after the death of the body, for retrogression in his evolutionary career is impossible, in so far as it would involve a sinking down from a higher degree of life into a lower, which already has been passed. But how explain the fact that we sometimes meet with people who claim to be able to remember former existences here on earth? The key to this strange phenomenon is, according to Swedenborg, to be found in the connection between the natural and the spiritual worlds, for man is in constant communion with the inhabitants of the other world. This communion—under normal conditions—takes place unconsciously on both sides of the border-line. Exceptionally, however, man might become conscious of experiences stored in the memories of other intelligent beings communing with him, and he then naturally confounds them with his own, thinking that he himself has lived through them. (See H. and H. No. 257.)

Let us finally make a brief summary of the general features of this Occidental Theosophy by considering its main characteristics in order to classify it and designate its proper place in the Pantheon of human thought. In order to make such a brief survey practical we shall call the attention of the readers to some of the most conspicuous distinctions between eastern and western theosophical speculation.

Oriental Theosophy then is Pantheistic and Buddhistic, while Swedenborgian Theosophy is strictly Theistic and Christian. Oriental Theosophy commingles God, man and the world, while Swedenborg draws a sharply defined demarkation line between them, through the doctrine of the three degrees of altitude (discreet degrees), thus leaving no room for a pantheistic conception of the universe. According to Swedenborg God in no way can be confounded with the universe, which is his creation. Man also is created by God as an individual and will remain such to all eternity. No evolution or growth can ever transform a man into a god. If this were possible then man sooner or later, during his course of evolution, would reach a stage where his individuality was lost, and he would, as it were, merge into "the all" (universe) and disappear as a drop of rain in the ocean, which also, according to Oriental Theosophy, is his final destiny. Swedenborg therefore is a Theistic Theosophist. This much so far as Swedenborg's relation to Oriental Theosophy is concerned.

Let us now turn to another phase of his teachings. His theosophy is a strictly monistic religio-philosophical system. The whole universe is conceived of as circling around a central sun and being sustained and governed by the same immutable laws from center to circumference. God does not share his world-dominion with an enemy almost as powerful as himself (the devil of orthodoxy). His aim and purpose with creation was to produce a heaven of blessed spiritual beings around his throne. Man's destiny therefore from the first beginning is to become an angel. In fact all angels have been men, and the world consequently serves as a seminary of heaven. From God all creation emanates—and to him it longs to return just as the heat and light, which flow from the natural sun, produce a variety of live forms—whether vegetable or animal—which all turn their faces to the source of their lives. Furthermore, Swedenborg's Theosophy offers a solution to the "Riddle of the Universe" just as simple as it is rational and plausible. He does not seek this solution in far distant realms, but he finds it in man himself, for every man is, according to him, as it were, a little universe, a microcosm, and in his own organism he can read the solution of the riddle of the macrocosm, or as he prefers to designate it the "Maximus Homo," the "Grand Man," meaning thereby not only the spiritual or heaven-world but also all organizations—communal or national—which exist as organic societies for the purpose of performing "uses," in so far as they grow into likeness with their heavenly pattern, in fine what the Greek would call a "Kosmos," why Swedenborg's world-conception also might be properly called a "Kosmosophy."

Maximus Homo, (also *Magnus Homo*, *Unus Homo*, *Divinus Homo*, and *Coelestis Homo*), is a conception peculiar to Swedenborg's Theosophy, wherein it plays a very important part. It reminds in a certain sense of Platon's and Chr. J. Bostrom's world of ideas. (See "Sweden's Contributions to Philosophy" in *The Open Court*, July 1927), and perhaps still more of Adam Kadmon, the original or "celestial man" in Kabbalistic Theosophy. It is the same thought that underlies the idea of the "Kingdom of God," and the "Kingdom of Heaven" in the Synoptical Gospels, of Augustinus *Civitas Dei*, and in scientific guise meets us in Herbert Spencer's Sociology. Swedenborg, however, has developed his doctrine along independent lines, incorporating into the same elements

entirely foreign to other kindred systems or at least in them existing only in an embryonic state.

The whole universe then is, according to Swedenborg, as it were, a "universal man," a "microcosm," communing and co-operating with the human "microcosm" by means of correspondences, as a consequence whereof the understanding of man implies and logically leads to the understanding of the entire universe, and Biology becomes a helpmate and handmaid of Sociology, a thought that later served as a fundamental principle in a remarkable work of another influential Swedish philosopher.³

Thus the famous device of the Delphian Oracle: "Man, know thyself!" implies not only "self-knowledge" but also at the same time "world-knowledge." The correspondence between the human organism and the world-organism is followed up and elaborated into the very minutest details in a great number of paragraphs in Swedenborg's most voluminous work, the *Arcana Coelestia*, to which we refer interested students.

It should hardly be necessary to remind our readers that by "human form" in the above connection is not understood "shape" or external likeness but rather "functions" or in Swedenborg's terminology "uses," by the mutual performance of which humanity is knit together into one organic entity. To quote from the Appendix to the Apoc. Expl.: *The Divine Love* No. 14: "in the Lord's (=God's) view, the whole human race (including the inhabitants of other planets A. C. No. 6807) is as one man; all in a kingdom are also as one man; likewise all in a province, all in a city, and all in a household. It is not the men themselves that are thus seen together, but the uses in them." And in this sense everything is in the human form.

It can hardly be denied by unprejudiced truthseekers that Occidental Theosophy, as it meets us in Swedenborg's Writings, deserves at least as much attention of modern students of the occult as, for instance Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* and *Isis Unveiled*, Kingsford's and Maitland's *The Perfect Way or the Finding of Christ*, or Rudolf Steiner's, *Leadbeater's* and Annie Besant's now so popular works. It certainly is a matter of regret that so far only a few isolated attempts have been made to continue in the direction

³ Gustaf Bjorklund in his *Coalescence of the Nations*; see "Sweden's Contribution to Philosophy" in the July issue 1927 of *The Open Court*.

indicated by Swedenborg. However, a beginning has been made, for instance, by Dr. Garth Wilkinson in his work on *The Book of Edda called Voluspa, A Study in the Scriptural and Spiritual Correspondences*; by C. Th. Odhner in his work on *The Correspondences of Egypt, a Study in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, and in A. L. Kip's *Psychology of the Nations*. While the two first mentioned works throw new light upon the mysteries of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the latter gives valuable hints to the understanding of the international affairs of our own time. If we add to the former *Religion Rationalized* by Hiram Vrooman, *Symbol-Psychology, A New Interpretation of Race-Traditions* by Adolph Roeder, *The Nature of the Spiritual World* by Alfred Acton, *The Return-Kingdom of the Divine Proceeding* by Lillian G. Beekman, we have mentioned almost all noteworthy attempts to constructive works on the foundations laid by Swedenborg. But the time does not yet seem ripe for such a development. Might it not be that Oriental Theosophy has to run the race to the utmost limits of its strength until Occidental Occultism will be able to open the doors to the rich treasure house of its resources? Then, perhaps, the two branches of the Aryan race—East and West—so long estranged—have learned to understand one another, and join hands on the neutral field of Occultism, in the realm spiritual, for they both draw from the same source, and truth is one even if viewed from different standpoints.