

Autobiographical
Letters
of
Emanuel
Swedenborg

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Autobiographical Letters

1. Answer to a letter written to me by a friend

A letter from Swedenborg to the Rev. Thomas Hartley¹

I rejoice at the friendship which you manifest in your letter; and I thank you sincerely for both, but especially for your friendship. The praises with which you overwhelm me, I receive simply as expressions of your love for the truths contained in my writings; and I refer them, as their source, to the Lord, our savior, from whom is everything true, because he is the truth itself (John 14:6). I have considered chiefly the remarks you make at the close of your letter, where you express yourself as follows: “If, perchance, after your departure from England, your writings should be the subject of discussion, and occasion should arise for defending you, their author, against some malignant slanderer, who may wish to injure your reputation by a web of falsehoods—as those are in the habit of doing who hate the truth—would it not be well for you, in order to repel such slanderers, to leave with me some particulars respecting yourself, your degrees in the university, the public offices you have filled, your friends and relations, the honors which, I am told, have been conferred upon you, and anything else that might be useful in establishing your good name, so that ill-conceived prejudices may be removed; for it is our duty to use all lawful means lest the cause of truth should suffer injury.” After reflecting on this, I have been led to yield to your friendly advice, and will now communicate to you some particulars of my life, which are briefly as follows:

I was born at Stockholm on the 29th of January in the year 1689.² My father, Jesper Swedberg, was bishop of West Gothland,

1. Rev. Thomas Hartley, A.M., a friend of Swedenborg, and one of the first receivers of his doctrines, was a clergyman of the Church of England, and rector of Winwick, Northamptonshire. The letter asking for particulars respecting Swedenborg's life, to which the above is a reply, was written August 2, 1769. (See *Documents Concerning Swedenborg*, Vol. 1, pp. 3–5, 6–9.) [—Translator]

and a man of celebrity in his time. He was also elected and enrolled as a member of the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel; for he had been appointed by King Charles XII bishop over the Swedish churches in Pennsylvania, and also over the church in London. In the year 1710 I went abroad. I proceeded first to England, and afterwards to Holland, France, and Germany, and returned home in the year 1714.³ In the year 1716, and also afterwards, I had many conversations with Charles XII, king of Sweden, who greatly favored me, and in the same year appointed me to the office of assessor in the College of Mines, which office I filled until the year 1747, when I resigned it, retaining, however, the salary of the office during my life. My sole object in resigning was that I might have more leisure to devote to the new office enjoined on me by the Lord. A higher post of honor was then offered me, which I positively declined, lest my mind should be inspired with pride. In the year 1719, I was ennobled by Queen Ulrica Eleanora, and named Swedenborg; and from that time I have taken my seat among the nobles of the rank of knighthood, in the triennial sessions of the Diet. I am a fellow and member, by invitation, of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm; but I have never sought admission into any literary society in any other place, because I am in an angelic society, where such things as relate to heaven and the soul are the only subjects of discourse; while in literary societies the world and the body form the only subjects of discussion. In the year 1734, I published, at Leipsic, *Regnum Minerale*, in three volumes, folio. In the year 1738 I made a journey to Italy, and stayed a year at Venice and Rome.

With respect to my family connections, I had four sisters. One of them was married to Eric Benzelius, who subsequently became the

2. The original edition has "1689." In *Letters and Memorials*, Volume 2, (Swedenborg Scientific Association, Bryn Athyn, Pa., 1955) page 676, there is this footnote: "There has been much speculation as to why Swedenborg wrote 1689 instead of the true date 1688. See Swedenborg's own explanation as reported by General Tuxen. He told me (writes Tuxen) he was not born in that year but in the year 1688. The reason why he had written 1689 was because of the correspondence of that number. Therefore, when in his letter he had first written 1688, an angel present told him he should write 1689 as being more suitable to himself." [—Editor]

3. The original edition has "1714," but Swedenborg did not return to Sweden until after April, 1715. [—Translator]

archbishop of Upsala, and through him I became related to the two succeeding archbishops, who both belonged to the family of Benzelius, and were younger brothers of Eric. My second sister was married to Lars Benzelstierna, who became a provincial governor; but these two are dead. Two bishops, however, who are related to me, are still living; one of them, whose name is Filenius, and who is bishop of East Gothland, officiates now as president of the House of the Clergy in the Diet of Stockholm, in place of the archbishop, who is an invalid; he married my sister's daughter; the other, named Benzelstierna, is bishop of Westmanland and Dalecarlia; he is the son of my second sister. Not to mention others of my relations who occupy stations of honor. Moreover, all the bishops of my native country, who are ten in number, and also the sixteen senators, and the rest of those highest in office, entertain feelings of affection for me; from their affection they honor me, and I live with them on terms of familiarity, as a friend among friends; the reason of which is, that they know I am in company with angels. Even the king and the queen, and the three princes, their sons, show me great favor; I was also invited once by the king and queen to dine with them at their own table, which honor is generally accorded only to those who are highest in office; subsequently the crown prince granted me the same favor. They all desire me to return home; wherefore, I am far from apprehending, in my own country, that persecution, which you fear, and against which in your letter you desire in so friendly a manner to provide; and if they persecute me elsewhere, it can do me no harm.

But all that I have thus far related, I consider of comparatively little importance; for it is far exceeded by the circumstance, that I have been called to a holy office by the Lord himself, who most mercifully appeared before me, his servant, in the year 1743; when he opened my sight into the spiritual world, and granted me to speak with spirits and angels, in which state I have continued up to the present day. From that time I began to print and publish the various arcana that were seen by me and revealed to me, as the arcana concerning heaven and hell, the state of man after death, the true worship of God, the spiritual sense of the Word, besides many other most important matters conducive to salvation and wisdom. The only reason of my journeys abroad has been the desire of making myself useful, and of making known the arcana that were

entrusted to me. Moreover, I have as much of this world's wealth as I need, and I neither seek nor wish for more.

Your letter has induced me to write all these particulars, in order that as you say "ill-conceived prejudices may be removed." Farewell; and from my heart I wish you all the happiness both in this world, and the next; which I have not the least doubt you will attain, if you look and pray to our Lord.

Eman. Swedenborg

2. My early youth⁴

From a letter of Swedenborg to Dr. Beyer

I will now give you an account of my first youth: From my fourth to my tenth year I was constantly engaged in thought upon God, salvation, and the spiritual affections [*passiones spirituales*] of men; and several times I revealed things at which my father and mother wondered, saying that angels must be speaking through me. From my sixth to my twelfth year I used to delight in conversing with clergymen about faith, saying that the life of faith is love, and that the love which imparts life is love to the neighbor; also that God gives faith to everyone, but that those only receive it who practice that love. I knew of no other faith at that time, than that God is the creator and preserver of nature, that he imparts understanding and a good disposition to men, and several other things that follow thence. I knew nothing at that time of that learned faith which teaches that God the father imputes the righteousness of his son to whomsoever and at such times as he chooses, even to those who have not repented and have not reformed their lives. And had I heard of such a faith, it would have been then, as it is now, above my comprehension.

I remain, with all affection and friendship,

Your most obedient servant and friend,

Eman. Swedenborg

Stockholm, November 14, 1769

To the Reverend and Most Learned Doctor and Lector

Gabriel A. Beyer, Gottenburg

4. See *Documents Concerning Swedenborg*, Vol. 2, pp. 278–280. [Translator]