

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE
ATTITUDE OF THE JASPER COLONY
TOWARD SLAVERY AND THE
CIVIL WAR

An unrecognized aspect of the life and writings of the Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), was his theoretical and practical interest in freedom. This led him to a new appraisal of the negroes and the question of slavery. Writing before the French Revolution, he advocated, from the standpoint of religion, many of the principles which later bore fruit in Europe and America and explain some attitudes held by some residents of Iowa during the Civil War.

All the world knows that Swedenborg was a pioneer in scientific discovery, that he anticipated the theory of evolution, that he was an eminent mathematician, that he held important government positions, and that he was the founder of a religious movement; but few know that he was also a pioneer in the realm of human relations and in Christian institutions. This latter term is used advisedly. Like his contemporaries, Voltaire and Rousseau, Swedenborg challenged institutionalism, especially that of Christianity; the difference between Swedenborg and the French philosophers lay in the fact that Swedenborg was constructively and creatively religious. Long afterward, when Emerson caught Swedenborg's spirit, he gave him the name *mystic* which has clung to him ever since.

Swedenborg's father was an eminent Bishop in the Swedish Church; and, from the age of six, the son had, he tells us, studied zealously the history and principles of Christianity. Later he became convinced that the church of his day as

then organized had killed the spirit of Christianity. When he was in London in 1744, he became deeply interested in the Moravians, who thought themselves the true Lutherans. From this contact with the London Moravians, Swedenborg experienced some influence similar to that felt by John Wesley, another great contemporary. In neither case can it be called a conversion — that is, in the commonly accepted sense of the term. Yet ever after both men were different.

During this period another movement was in progress — the Society of Friends or Quakers. Their founder, George Fox, died when Swedenborg was three years old; but he heard of the Quakers when a boy, and their revolt against institutionalism profoundly influenced him. Tempermentally he was quite unlike Fox and never adopted any Quaker customs. Some of his followers, however, became closely allied to the Friends, especially in regard to slavery. Thus the last quarter of the seventeenth century and the first three quarters of the eighteenth century saw the revolt of Voltaire and Rousseau, the new interpretation of religion by Swedenborg, and the rise of the Quakers, and the Methodists. Each of these was destined to influence America.

The revolt against institutionalism was common to all these movements. Swedenborg was not so much concerned about forming a new church as he was about preserving the spirit of religion, the part that must be left free. He did, however, recognize after the year 1757 that the old church had ceased to supply human need and then began to teach the New Church, or the Church of the New Jerusalem. The date of this New Dispensation ushered in the “second coming” of the Lord in *spirit*. This teaching Swedenborg took from the Gospel of St. John which had greatly influenced him. He rejected the teaching of Paul because it seemed

to him contrary to the "influx of the Spirit", and because of his seeming belief in a physical "second coming".

That Swedenborg now planned a New Church without the attendant evils of institutionalism was often difficult for his disciples to grasp. In his *Apocalypse Revealed*, however, he emphatically stated his purpose. "'And I John saw the holy city New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven,' signifies a New Church to be established by the Lord at the end of the former [1757], which will be consociated with the New Heaven in Divine truths as to doctrine and as to life."¹ This was written in 1766. From this time on he received continually the "influx of the Spirit", and believed the New Church would gradually permeate the old. No new organization would be needed, the one already at hand would change. In 1770 Swedenborg published his great work, *The True Christian Religion*. This, like all his works, was written in Latin with the avowed intention of converting the intelligentsia. Unlike the Apostle Paul, Swedenborg appealed directly to the Universities, the religious leaders, and the educated classes. In this latter book he again emphasized the New Church. He wrote:

There have been several churches on this earth, and in the course of time they have all been consummated, and after their consummation new churches have arisen, and so to the present time [1770] Consequently when truth is consummated in a church, good is also consummated there; and when this takes place, the church comes to an end, that is, is consummated. . . . It is written in many places that the Lord will come in the clouds of heaven. . . . And as no one has hitherto known what is meant by "the clouds of heaven", it has been believed that the Lord would appear in them in Person. Heretofore it has not been known that "the clouds of heaven" mean the word [i. e., *Logos*] in the sense of the letter, and that the "glory and power" in which He is then to come, mean the spiritual sense of the Word, because no one as yet

¹ *The Apocalypse Revealed* (Rotch Edition, 1925), p. 1015.

has had the least conjecture that there is a spiritual sense of the Word, such as this sense is in itself.²

As time went on, Swedenborg's disciples built a new organization. Some called it after the prophet's name, the Swedenborgian Church, but his followers called it the New Church, or the Church of the New Jerusalem. The first one to deny that Swedenborg meant to establish a New Church was his influential American disciple, Henry James, Sr. James was a co-worker with Emerson, Thoreau, and all the Concord transcendentalists, with William Lloyd Garrison and all the reformers, with Carlyle, Tennyson, and the best thinkers of the Europe of his day.³ James, an intimate friend of Emerson, proclaimed Swedenborg the greatest influence on his life; but, like Emerson, he felt free to criticise the master.

In 1850 Emerson published his *Essay on Swedenborg*. This essay aroused a tempest of criticism. It set James to work on his *The Church of God not an Ecclesiasticism*, which he published in 1854. This book had much influence especially in the Middle West where the New Church Societies were rapidly multiplying. As a result, James followed this book with five others in rapid succession: *The Nature of Evil* (1855), *Christianity the Logic of Creation* (1857), *Substance and Shadow* (1866), *Secrets of Swedenborg* (1869), and *Society the Redeemed Form of Man* (1879). This latter book was especially extolled by the Swedenborgian pulpits and study groups of Iowa, urged upon the people as a key to social betterment, and described as true to the spirit of the master.⁴

Another contribution which Swedenborg made to the

² *The True Christian Religion* (Lippincott, 1925), Secs. 753f, 757, 776, 779.

³ *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, January, 1885, p. 53. See also Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston, 1935), Vol. I, where James's relation to Swedenborg is discussed in detail.

⁴ *The Echo* (Published at Solon, Iowa), 1900-1903.

thought of the eighteenth century was his doctrine of "correspondence". It is true this was not new. It was used by Plato, the Neoplatonists, the Cambridge Platonists, and John Milton. In fact the best general example is found in *Paradise Lost*:

What if earth
Be but a shadow of heaven, and things therein
Each to the other like, more than on earth is thought?⁵

Paradise Lost was published twenty-one years before Swedenborg was born. But Swedenborg's presentation of this ancient doctrine worked an influence far beyond that of his predecessors. It molded the thought of Emerson and through him the expression of the whole transcendental movement in America.

Another reason for the rapid spread of Swedenborgianism was its complete acceptance of the findings of science. Swedenborg was the foremost scientist of his day. He sensed the coming "warfare of science and theology", thought it unnecessary, and prepared for it his interpretation of the Bible. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, everybody read the Bible and the majority claimed to take it as their guide in matters of intellect and social behavior.

Swedenborg told his readers not to take the Bible literally. Being a profound student of the Gospel of John, he caught the attitude of Jesus in his discussion with the literal minded Nicodemus. Swedenborg taught an *internal sense* of scripture. This, often confused with the old allegorical interpretation, insists upon the moral implication and ignores much of the actual text. There could be no quarrel with science on this basis. This also influenced Emerson and the whole literary output in America during the first half of the nineteenth century.

⁵ Book 5, lines 575-577.

The opposition to institutionalism and the doctrine that things on earth "corresponded" to things in Heaven had some effect on the attitude of Swedenborgians on slavery.

But the most direct and important influence of Swedenborg was in the direction of *freedom*. In his writings he took the side of the negro, giving him abundant praise. He believed that the African, in his unspoiled condition, was really a higher type than his so-called civilized captor. Symbolically he pictured the development of the New Church in Africa among these unspoiled children of nature who lived the good life, according to the best of their knowledge, and, as he believed, worshipped one God. In *The Last Judgment*,⁶ Swedenborg gives a detailed description, in the manner of the romanticists, of the Africans:

I have heard it announced that at this day a church is being established with many in Africa, and that revelations are made at this day; and that they are receptive of the Heavenly Doctrine, especially concerning the Lord. . . . And, as I was attending, I heard that they were expecting a revelation concerning Christ, whom they call the Only Man, from whom every man is a man Moreover, they knew many things respecting heaven and hell, of which Christians are ignorant. . . . *These said that it could not be otherwise than that God, the Creator of the Universe, should appear in the world, because he created men, and loves them; and that His appearing must be made even to the ocular sight in the human form.*

It was afterwards shown in obscure vision how the Heavenly Doctrine would proceed in Africa; namely, towards the interior parts, even to the middle of it; and that it would then proceed towards those who were at the sides on the Mediterranean Sea, but not to the coast; and then, after a time, would turn itself back towards Egypt. . . . That doctrine [of the New Church] does not extend as far as to the Africans that dwell near the coasts, since the Christians come thither, who insinuate scandals, and who have a human and not a divine idea concerning the Lord. The Africans are more receptive of the Heavenly Doctrine than others.

⁶ *Last Judgment* (Posthumous, 1928 edition), Vol. I, Secs. 115-124.

on this earth, because they freely receive the doctrine concerning the Lord, and have it as if implanted in themselves that God will altogether appear as a man. They are in the faculty of receiving truths of faith, and especially its goods, because they are of a celestial disposition The African race can be in greater enlightenment than others on this earth, since they are such that they think more interiorly, and so receive truths and acknowledge them.

In a long passage in *A Continuation Concerning the Spiritual World*,⁷ he declared that "the Africans are more *internal* than the rest of the Gentiles". That is they are more receptive to truth as it is intuitively grasped. "The Africans comprehended and received these truths, [anthropomorphism and incarnation] because they think more internally and spiritually than other nations. Such being the character of the Africans even in the world, there is, at the present day, a revelation among them They acknowledge our Lord as the God of heaven and earth Ingenious wickedness, too, they call stupidity, because there is not life, but death, in it. . . . It was told me from heaven, that the truths now published in the Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning the Lord, concerning the Word, and in the Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem, are orally dictated by angelic spirits to the inhabitants of this portion of the globe." He goes on to show a *correspondence* between their physical and spiritual hunger. He also shows their spiritual superiority to the institutionalized Christians of Europe. He held it superfluous and unnecessary for European missionaries to try to force upon the Africans their "old church" institutions.

To emphasize this Swedenborg wrote: "In Heaven the Africans are the most loved of all the gentiles; they receive the goods and truths of Heaven more easily than the rest; they wish to be called the obedient, not the *faithful*."⁸ By

⁷ Secs. 73-78.

⁸ *Arcana Coelestia*, Sec. 2604.

“faithful” he meant subject to man-made creeds and confessions of faith. Their natural knowledge of God and their desire to obey him, he held, goes back to primitive times when inspiration came to men as to the Old Testament prophets who had no Bible. So “from these Words [ancient revelation, Word, Logos] religious things spread through Egypt and Ethiopia into the kingdoms of Africa”.⁹ He also held that the Africans were more moral in their sex and marriage relations than the institutionalized Europeans.¹⁰

He reached his climax when he boldly proclaimed that the “Heavenly Doctrine will spread itself through Africa and thence into Asia — that the church which now perishes in Europe will be established in Africa, and that this will take place from the Lord alone through revelations, and not through emissaries from Christians”.¹¹ In fact, he said, the New Church (minus institutionalism of course) already existed in Africa where “they freely receive the doctrine concerning the Lord. They have it, as it were implanted in them that the Lord will appear altogether as a man. They are in the faculty of receiving truths of faith”.¹²

The effect of this teaching was almost immediate. In spite of the fact that Swedenborg idealized the Africans, wrote without ever having visited that continent, and was largely motivated by his rejection of the religious institutionalism of his time, the Swedish government, assisted by the French, sent an expedition to explore Africa (which up to that time had been scarcely penetrated) in the interest of bettering the condition of the negroes throughout the world.

⁹ *Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*, p. 117.

¹⁰ See *Conjugal Love*, Sec. 113f.

¹¹ *Spiritual Diary*, Sec. 4777.

¹² *Last Judgment*, p. 118.

This expedition, which long has escaped the attention of historians, was due to one of the earliest anti-slavery agitators, Karl Wadström. He was twenty-six when Swedenborg died in London on March 29, 1772. Early becoming a disciple of Swedenborg, he was especially influenced by the master's writings on the Africans. Taking these writings as inspired truth, his humanitarian leanings induced him to call together certain other Swedenborgian disciples at Norrköping in 1779 to form an organization to combat slavery in all its forms. Aside from George Fox's famous *Letter to the Barbadoes* in 1671 and sporadic attacks by the Quakers, this was the first organization to attack slavery. The time seemed ripe.

Gustavus III, who came to the throne of Sweden in 1771, looked with favor upon the new humanitarianism and mysticism. Halldin, the poet, made much of the teaching of Swedenborg and he was widely read. Sir Augustus Nordenskjöld, an eminent mining engineer and chemist, advocated the principles of Swedenborg and proved of great assistance to the cause. The new proposal proved so popular that Dr. Spaarman, a well known Swedish botanist and physicist, and Captain Arrehenius joined Wadström in preparation for the African expedition. In May, 1787, Gustavus III sent the expedition with Wadström at its head to explore Africa, for the purpose of establishing a Swedish colony on the western coast as a base from which to oppose the slave trade. M. de Staël, Swedish Ambassador to Paris, lent his interest to the movement and persuaded the French government to grant the commission a free passage on a French boat from Le Havre to Senegal. In August they set out with the determination to fight a victorious battle against slavery.

The members of the party made careful notes both from a scientific and from a humanitarian point of view. At the

end of the year 1788 they set out on their return journey. Wadström came at once to London on his return to Europe to consult Robert Hindmarsh, the most active leader of the New Church movement in England. They gathered about them Henry Gandy, Thomas Clarkson, and Granville Sharp, and all threw their resources at the feet of William Wilberforce. The anti-slavery cause now became a major issue not only among the disciples of Swedenborg, but also throughout the whole of England.

In the meantime Wadström began putting his notes in order with the idea of publishing a book dealing with his African expedition. His first book, the reworking of these notes, was published in London the next year, 1789, under the title *Observations on the Slave Trade. . . . during a Voyage made in 1787 and 1788 in company with Dr. A. Spaarman and Captain Arrehenius*. This book was later translated into French and exerted a far-reaching influence. In 1794 Wadström published his *Essay on Colonization In Africa including those of Sierra Leone and Bulama*.

In the meantime the influence of Wadström, Hindmarsh, and the Swedenborgian groups had penetrated America. The first person actively to promote the cause of the New Church and its social outlook on slavery was James Glen, a Scotchman, who was converted to Swedenborg's teachings in 1781. He early determined to become a messenger of the new doctrine to America. After a term of preparation he reached Philadelphia, where, on June 5, 1784, he delivered the first Swedenborgian lecture in the new world. Several persons soon after "received" the doctrines, and Glen then moved on to Boston, where more converts were made. The writings of Swedenborg now began to circulate freely in reading groups along the Atlantic coast. In October of this year a box of New Church writ-

ings was received from England. They were eagerly bought at a Philadelphia auction and became the nucleus of the Philadelphia Society.

The New Church spread rapidly across the Alleghenies into the Middle West. The movement was strong enough in 1812 to publish a periodical at New York. This journal, called *The Halcyon Luminary*, was published by Samuel Woodworth, the poet. Woodworth, who is popularly known as the author of *The Old Oaken Bucket*, was one of the most enthusiastic followers of Swedenborg in the early days of the New York Society. His literary ability and prestige made *The Halcyon Luminary* a decided success from the first. During the first year it had more than 3000 subscribers and made a large number of converts. As the New Church grew, it soon had between fifty and sixty periodicals. Many of these, like the *Echo* in Iowa, were intended to circulate within a State. Others, however, had national and international circulations. The most important of the latter group was *The Intellectual Repository*, which began publication in January, 1812, in London. This journal had a wide circulation in America and influenced American public opinion for several years. It was to this paper that James Glen, the first to introduce Swedenborgianism to America, sent his letter *On the Negro Character*, quoted later.

Glen, after his visit to North America, decided to carry the new doctrine to South America. Accordingly he established a New Church at Demerara, in British South America, in 1788 and continued as its pastor until his death on September 8, 1814. During this pastorate he traveled widely, founding "reading groups" and making a careful study of the African. The more Glen saw of the negro, the more he became convinced that his idealized picture, gathered from the writings of Swedenborg, must be changed,

and he modified his idea about giving negroes freedom without careful preparation. He also found it difficult to lead them to an acceptance of Christianity. They preferred rum and tobacco to the "heavenly wisdom".

Glen's point of view, as expressed in his letter of 1812, is of great importance since it fixed the attitude of the majority of New Church leaders in England and America on the slavery question. The New Church now decided the best policy was to accept the institution of slavery for the time being, and to attack the slave trade. Denmark had voted to prohibit the importation of slaves in 1792. In 1813 Sweden and in 1815 the Dutch abolished the slave trade. The immediate acts were mainly due to the influence of the French Revolution, but a remote reason lay in the agitation of the New Church leaders as they interpreted Swedenborg. In the light of this, Glen's letter, read alike by the English and the American New Church Societies, is significant. The letter in full is as follows:¹³

ON THE NEGRO CHARACTER

To the Editors of the Intellectual Repository

M. D. H. 5th December, 1812 and 55. Mibiri, Demerary.

Gentlemen:

Among the infernal falses received and taught by the Babylon and the Dragon, this is a gross one, that the most dark and distant nations are all capable of being, by their own zealous missionaries, made good and sincere christians. I heartily hope the new church of the Divine Human will never be tainted with this gross false:—indeed there is no fear of it; as Swedenborg, in various places of the revelations, by him, and especially in the adorable revelation concerning *Divine Providence*, has placed this subject beyond a doubt.

It is the will of Divine Providence that I should live now about 36 years in this colony; and sorry should I be to see it, and all the

¹³ I am indebted to Professor Reginald W. Brown, librarian at the Library of the New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, for the correct text of this letter.

West Indies, thrown into anarchy and deep distress, from a false notion, against the laws of divine order, that the time is now come when all the poor negro slaves, who are sitting in the shadow of death, can lift up their eyes and see the glorious light of the Gospel.

That slavery is *not the will* of the Divine Father of mankind every man must allow; but that it is a *permission* of the Divine Providence, no reasonable man can deny: it is permitted, like wars, like diseases, and various other evils on this earth, not only to prevent a much greater evil, but, if possible, to be the means of good. — I am very sensible that the whites in the West Indies are deep in the loves of self and the world; but these very whites live according to the good laws of civil life, *and in this state many of them are very excellent men, and valuable members of civil society*: but if negroes, under the pretence of being christians are to become free people, then all laws of civil life are at an end, and *murders, conflagrations and desolations* march forth in infernal triumph here, and bankruptcies among the creditors in Britain. The very best of the Fula (Foola) and Mandingo negro men, who can write Arabic, read the Alcoran, and chant prayers, and who I believe are good mahometans, yet, as the sign of their being born gentlemen in their own country, will say, when asked, “my father had six wives,” or “ten wives:” the love of polygamy is hereditary in them; how much more in the other negro nations, who, in comparison with the Fula and Mandingo, are illiterate and savage! This love of polygamy is *in the inmost delight* of all negroes, and accumulates or increases in successive generations, and in them it is *not* imputed as a sin after death; but *for this reason* it is against the laws of Divine order that they should become christians. And if the men are in this love of polygamy, I may venture to say, a large majority of the women are in the still worse lust of polyandria.

To make *external, superficial and apparent* christians of all the negroes in all the West Indies may be easily done in two or three months; but what is an *external without an internal*? It is a *deception*, it is a *profanation*, and is of no importance after death; when all externals which do not correspond with internals are cast off for ever.

I believe the negro regiments which Great Britain raised in the West Indies within these last twenty years were all manufactured into christians by baptism: but let me ask any reasonable man if this was not prostituting and profaning what should be sacred?

At this rate, any negro may be baptised christian for three or four dollars, and can show a certificate that he is so.

It may be said, "instruct the rising generation of negroes, begin to teach them when they are five or six or seven years old, and you will make them real christians." In answer to this, I say, from the bottom of my heart, I believe a negro, or any kind of Indian child, at six or seven years old, is so full of hereditary evil, that is, of pride and greed, of self and the world of sensual and corporeal affections, that it would be as easy to turn a young dog into a young sheep, or to turn a young lime tree into a young mango-tree, as to make them *real internal christians*, etc.

But, by the laws of Divine order, the most illiterate negro is capable of knowing the grand opposites and contraries of good and bad, truth and false. They all know, or are capable of knowing, that *good and truth is of and from God*, and that, in the state God has been pleased to place them in this life, obedience to their master is *good and truth to them*, while disobedience and rebellion is bad and false to them; and that all bad is of and from hell, and leads into hell and all its distress in this life and after death.

I hope, gentlemen, the importance of this subject, in which thousands, I may say millions of mankind are interested at this important period of time will be deemed worthy of an investigation in your valuable miscellany: It is alone the recipients of the divine revelations of Swedenborg that can see this subject in the light of genuine truth, *and disperse the gross and heavy smoke of infernal falses*, in which it has been hitherto obscured and suffocated.

I will safely venture to say, few men have ever enquired by questions, into the thoughts, ideas and affections of negroes and American Indians here, more than I have: and though they have seen me most desirous to pump up all the knowledge I could out of them, yet I never yet found one who had the least desire to enquire after any knowledge of any kind by a single question put to me. Yea, I am certain there is no negro or Indian here, man or woman, who would not *ten times rather* chuse a hand of tobacco, or a bottle of new rum, or five or six bits in dry money, than any kind of knowledge that I could communicate; and as to spiritual knowledges of any kind, they are totally averse to them; they deem them idle and useless: money and sensual pleasures, and fine clothes, are seated in the inmost chamber of their affections.— Can such persons ever be made *real and internal christians*?

Gentlemen, hoping the adorable mercy of the Divine Human will strengthen you to persevere in your noble efforts.

I subscribe,

James Glen

The New Church came prominently on the American political scene with the inauguration of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency in 1801. The new President's tolerance and broad-mindedness endeared him to such young and growing organizations as the New Church. On the occasion of Jefferson's inauguration on March 9th, the Baltimore Society sent him a letter of congratulation to which he replied. This was the beginning of a correspondence which followed between the head of the Baltimore Society and Jefferson.

The one to bring the New Church prominently into the realm of politics was John Hargrove. Trained as a Methodist minister, Hargrove in 1797 became a convert to the new movement. In 1798 he issued a *Valedictory to the People called Methodists*. This called forth much severe criticism from his former church. Encouraged by his wife, however, he held to his determination to follow his convictions and was soon after reordained in the Swedenborgian Church. The next year he became pastor of the Baltimore Society. This was during the pamphlet period which began about 1792, and the New Church put out a large number of pamphlets which exerted a wide influence.

On December 26, 1802, Hargrove delivered before President Jefferson and the Congress at Washington a sermon on *The Leading Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church*. This occasion was made memorable by the fact that Hargrove definitely stated the position of the New Church toward politics. Taking his text from Job 32:10, he said after introducing his subject, "And forever adored be that gracious Providence, who has cast my lot in this happy land, where every man is permitted to announce his opinion free-

ly and boldly, and, 'none to make him afraid.'"¹⁴ He then proceeded to explain the doctrines held by the New Church, concluding with this significant declaration: "But, perhaps, *some* of my attentive and intelligent audience are ready to say, What! Not one word on politics before you conclude? No — not one word. Our supreme executive, the grand legislature, have not, as yet, invaded the offices or duties of the ministers of the gospel; I pray God *we* may never interfere with theirs."¹⁵ This declaration of the New Church, made by Hargrove on December 26, 1802, set a precedent.

The Lutheran Church in America, especially the Missouri Synod, adopted a similar attitude. This explains why the New Church and the Lutheran Church did not split into northern and southern divisions over the slavery question. On December 25, 1804, Hargrove again preached before President Jefferson and Congress, taking his text from Psalms 96:13. This sermon was printed (in February, 1805) at the written request of J. B. Earle, a member of Congress from South Carolina.

Glen's *Letter* and Hargrove's two sermons before President Jefferson and Congress tended to clarify the attitude of the New Church toward slavery and politics. The church, as such, settled down to the position that slavery, as then existing, was an evil but not necessarily a sin, and thus was not a problem for the church. The members of the various Societies, however, did not all agree cheerfully to this.

The most outstanding example was the lecture, *Christianity and Colonial Slavery Contrasted*, delivered by Thomas Goyder on April 28, 1833, at the New Church in Waterloo

¹⁴ *Sermon on the Leading Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church*, p. 6. The sermon was printed in pamphlet form in 1803 soon after delivery and had a wide circulation.

¹⁵ *Sermon on the Leading Doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church*, p. 22.

Road, London. Taking his text from Exodus 21:16,¹⁶ Goyder set out to show the complete incompatibility between the New Church and the institution of slavery. Objecting vigorously to Hargrove's declaration that the New Church should keep out of politics he said, "Here, perhaps, some who teach the absurdity of all absurdities, the doctrine of passive obedience, may urge an objection, and maintain that a Christian minister is stepping altogether out of the line of his ministerial duty, interfering with the political affairs of the country in which he lives."¹⁷

Goyder believed the pulpit was decidedly the place to attack and to discuss "the policy of civil government" which he proceeded to do in a vigorous manner. He held slavery and Christianity incompatible for the following reasons: (1) slavery is due to the love of avarice which degrades a fellow man; (2) Christianity forbids keeping negroes in bondage while they are being instructed for freedom; (3) the natural right of man is freedom; (4) the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament, opposes slavery. It is, therefore, perfect nonsense to attempt to teach, with effect, the doctrines of Christianity, to men whom you hold as slaves! Calling upon such authorities as Paley, Blackstone, and Ivimey,¹⁸ he concluded, "*Christianity and Slavery are altogether incompatible, they are perfect antipodes; they can make not the slightest approximation towards union; there can be no covenant between them.*"¹⁹ Goyder especially attacked the idea of permitting slavery in the English col-

¹⁶ "He that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."

¹⁷ *Christianity and Colonial Slavery Contrasted*, p. 4. This lecture was printed in pamphlet form in 1833.

¹⁸ Joseph Ivimey (1773-1834), Baptist minister, historian, and anti-slavery writer, worked for the abolition of slavery in the British colonies. His *The Utter Extinction of Slavery* exerted a wide and lasting influence.

¹⁹ *Christianity and Colonial Slavery Contrasted*, p. 7.

onies and in America on the pretence of "converting the heathen". Concluding the delivery of this lecture the following petition was submitted to the congregation and, after being signed, was sent to Parliament.

The following is a correct copy of the Petition which was agreed to and signed by the Members of the Congregation assembling for divine worship, in the New-Jerusalem Church, Waterloo Road. To the Honourable and Commons, also to the Lords of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in Parliament assembled The Humble Petition of the Members and Congregation of the New-Jerusalem-Church, Waterloo Road, in the Borough of Lambeth, in the County of Surrey.

Sheweth,

That your petitioners ardently desire the entire and immediate extinction of the degrading and anti-christian system of Slavery throughout the British dominions.

That your petitioners are expecting with intense anxiety the development of the "safe and satisfactory" plan for the abolition of Slavery, which his Majesty's Ministers have declared their intention of disclosing to Parliament on the 14th of May.

That your petitioners are cordially solicitous to assist and support the government in this great achievement, in behalf of justice and our common nature, so honourable to those who shall accomplish it, and by which they will manifest to the world, that they revere the divine precepts, not in word only but in deed, by acting towards our fellow creatures of whatever clime, colour or language, in like manner as they would be done unto.

That your petitioners are deliberately and decidedly of opinion, that the Slaves of the British Colonies have an undoubted and indefeasible right to their freedom without delay and without condition. Your petitioners therefore earnestly implore your Honourable House to adopt decisive measure for the immediate removal of this foul blot, this scandalous violation of the great principles of justice and humanity.

And your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by 192 Persons, attending the Church. Under the Ministry of the Rev. Thomas Goyder.

Witness — J. Alvey, sen. 1 May, 1833.

To be presented —

To the Lords by Lord King.

To the Commons by J. Dennison, Esq. M. P.

Many Americans agreed heartily with Goyder, but the New Church, as such, took no definite action beyond its declaration, already made, that slavery was an evil. The German pioneers, however, who settled first in St. Louis and later in Iowa, had a deep sense of freedom, and steadfastly refused to countenance slavery in any form. Their introduction to it first in New Orleans and later in St. Louis, where they actually saw slaves sold on the auction block, made them ready to join the party of Abraham Lincoln.

In the meantime Richard De Charms wrote his famous appeal. Born in Philadelphia on October 17, 1796, of Huguenot stock, Richard De Charms grew up with a sense of freedom and the value of maintaining it at all cost. His ancestors had fled to England in 1685 after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the story of their sufferings had remained fresh in the minds of their descendants. While in Yale, from which he received his degree in 1826, he began the study of Swedenborg. Convinced of the truth of the writings of Swedenborg which were then spreading rapidly across the country, De Charms decided to go to London to study for the ministry of the New Church under Samuel Noble, the recognized authority on Swedenborg.

When De Charms returned to America, he entered actively into the work of the Church, editing and writing, and in 1832 he became pastor of the New Church in Cincinnati. This group, actively interested in spreading the *Writings* throughout the Middle West, continued by means of pamphlets, missionaries, and lecturers to make "receivers". The number of "receivers" grew rapidly. In 1842 Reverend T. O. Prescott, of the Cincinnati Society, organized the First New Church Society in St. Louis. From this

date the anti-slavery teachings of the New Church profoundly influenced the entire Mississippi Valley. It was this St. Louis Society which developed the colony which later settled in Iowa County.

In the meantime the influence of De Charms was increasing through *The Precursor*, a monthly periodical which he began publishing in Cincinnati in September, 1836. In 1840, De Charms accepted a call to Philadelphia thereby becoming yet more influential in national affairs. While acting as minister in Philadelphia, he delivered at Washington in 1850 his famous *Discourse on the True Nature of Freedom and Slavery*, the occasion being the one hundred and eighteenth anniversary of Washington's birth. This address was printed almost immediately in pamphlet form and widely distributed. It was much discussed in St. Louis and to a great extent determined the attitude of the New Church group in that city. It was during this year that the Iowa Society was "spying out the land" and preparing for their trip north. De Charms asserted that the white man debased himself by enslaving his black brother and that slavery made labor disgraceful. "In this respect, it is more especially a civil and political evil."²⁰ He continued:

But whether slavery is a *sin*, is quite another question. Not a little confusion of ideas seems to prevail in some minds on this subject. . . . "The Lord", says the doctrine of our Church, "required no more of a man than that he should do according to what he *knows* to be true" Hence, if slavery be an evil, all who are implicated in it — even those who are innocently implicated — must suffer in some degree from it. But those who do not know, or believe, it to be wrong, are not condemnable on account of *as sin*. Neither are those guilty sinners, who have had slavery entailed on them by hereditary transmission. But to those who do know, or believe, it to be sinful, the implication of it is indeed a heinous offence both against God and man. . . . Now we cannot

²⁰ *A Discourse on the True Nature of Freedom and Slavery*, p. 22.

believe that slavery in our southern states is heinously sinful. We do indeed believe it is an evil: but we hold it to be an evil mercifully permitted, in the divine restorative economy, for an ultimate or final good. . . . The institution of slavery was entailed upon the southern states by the mother country's cupidity. Hence we regard it there in the light of an hereditary evil, which requires much love and wisdom — great prudence, care, patience and tender solicitude — in its eradication. It must be regarded as a politically constitutional disease, which can be cured only by time, wise political dietetics, and intelligent skill exciting the body politic's recuperative energies.²¹

De Charms thought that slavery should be ended by a gradual process. This theory went back in the main to James Glen. The main body of the New Church fell in line with him. The anti-slavery sentiment, however, was strong enough to hold the members of the Church solidly against slavery. When the Republican party was formed in 1854, opposed to the extension of slavery, all the Iowa New Churchmen joined the party.

The Jasper Colony, at this time, was scarcely three years old and had gone through an economic change that might have been serious had the colonists not formerly agreed to hold together religiously. Having come to Iowa County some time during the spring of 1851, they had formally worked out a constitution to which they all bound themselves as did the Pilgrims in the Mayflower Compact. The binding article of the agreement made by the Iowa Swedenborgians read as follows:

The only religion that shall exist here among us, shall be that in accordance with the doctrines of the Church of the New Jerusalem as revealed for all time through divine revelation given to the world by Emanuel Swedenborg. Only those shall be admitted to membership in this society who accept these doctrines in the governing of their lives. And any deviation from these divine teachings shall not be tolerated — against this the elders of the congre-

²¹ *A Discourse on the True Nature of Freedom and Slavery*, pp. 26ff.

gation, who at all times shall be characterized by love and wisdom, shall be on guard.²²

This agreement was signed by Carl Frederick Naumann, H. H. Diekhöner, Heinrich Groeth, Carl Miekel, J. H. Scheele, F. W. Diekhöner, I. Ch. Klaus, Johann Heinrich Schachtsick, Valentine Hartmann, Frederick Schachtsick, Carl Otto Vette, Heinrich Christoph Kostfeld, F. W. Junker, Frederick Wm. Diekhöner, II, Hermann Schloemann, E. Heinrich Schloemann, Johann Fredr. Schlüter, Casper Heinrich Uthoff, Frederick Grothoff, and Karl Kunz.

In the spring of 1853 the colony, which had organized on the basis of communal life, abandoned the idea of communism and the colonists began to buy their own farms. This change, however, in no sense broke the harmony of the members of the Iowa New Church, nor did it have any effect on the attitude of the colonists toward social or religious questions. The communism seems to have been, like that of the early Christians from whom they took the pattern, entirely voluntary.

Since the Swedenborgian colonists were, however, entirely European in background and feeling, they had no desire to forsake their new homes which had cost them so much travel and effort, for service in the United States army. As time went on and the conflict drew near, patriotic meetings were held in the Excelsior School²³ and addresses were made by sympathizers with the cause of freedom. The entire membership of the Lenox group believed slavery to be a great evil. They held, however, to the moderate view of the Swedenborgians represented by Glen and Hargrove and never adopted the extreme abolitionist position. They all

²² Constitution of the First German Church of the New Jerusalem in Lenox Township, Iowa County, Iowa.

²³ For the history of this school see the article, *Excelsior*, in *The Palimpsest*, June, 1935. The information here is from private letters to the author.

voted for Lincoln and supported him loyally — especially his Emancipation Act.

The men of the neighborhood were members of the Home Guard. They drilled carefully and faithfully, expecting that they might be attacked from the south. On several occasions men were gone for several days to a larger community, probably Vinton, to receive special drill. The local organization was very far from being adept and the men were well aware of this. The members of the New Church Society never planned to enlist, but they did purpose to be ready for any attack that might be made upon them. As men in the neighborhood were drafted for service in the Civil War, they went to join a company at Muscatine. Those who returned home to Lenox on furlough took charge of the local men and gave them more thorough drilling.

A memorandum sent in a letter tells the story of Captain George C. Burmeister who in April, 1861, was a student in Western College. At this time he was "President of the Light Guards". A request came to this group for volunteers. On April 20, 1861, eleven young men went from Western College to Cedar Rapids to enlist in the First Iowa Regiment. Captain Burmeister was from Lenox but not a member of the New Church. On a hurried visit to his home he made a speech in the Excelsior School which created a "great stir". His parents did not want him to go to the front, but he insisted and enlisted in the First Iowa Regiment.

About this time "the Union League" furnished speakers for patriotic meetings in the Excelsior School. The speakers presented the cause for freedom which touched the German colonists. They never forgot that freedom was their own purpose in establishing their colony. After the speeches the speakers always "asked for volunteers etc". Often violent discussions followed the speeches by members of

the Union League. Sometimes there were "some present who believed the south should decide about the holding of slaves, and the North should 'keep out' ". These latter, however, were not members of the Lenox group.

Women's patriotic meetings among the Swedenborgians were also the order of the day. The women often traveled long distances and attended meetings "north in Benton County". They called these meetings "quilting bees". At these "bees" the women made uniforms and various articles for the soldiers. The girls wrote to and received letters from the "soldier boys". The Lenox Society had always kept in close touch with Muscatine and Keokuk. It was at this time that Mrs. Annie Turner Wittenmyer, working through the Soldiers' Aid Society, an organization started in Keokuk, attracted national attention. She enlisted the sympathy of the women of Iowa who formed local groups for welfare work on behalf of the soldiers. These groups did the work since taken over by the Red Cross.

As the war went on, the "Home Guards" took their drilling ever more seriously. A pasture belonging to Newton Wilkins was finally chosen as the most central place for the drill field. Wilkins, who conducted the first post office in the township, also acted as drill master. The "Home Guards" comprised the men of the Lenox New Church and also the men of the entire neighborhood. Later Wilkins enlisted and the Guards went to the nearby settlement of Norway to drill. A Mr. McQuin took Wilkins' place unless some soldier from the community was home on furlough when the duty was given to him.

Patriotic meetings under the direction of the "Union League" were also held at Norway. At the latter place the meetings were often addressed by Mr. McQuin and by Jacob Springer as well as by many others. The speakers were always men loyal to the North.

During the period of drilling at Norway sham battles were often held, in which those representing the South were always defeated. These men were armed with "plaster laths" while those representing the North were fully equipped by the government with canteens, knapsacks, and with muskets with bayonets attached.

On one occasion, a rumor reached Iowa County that General Sterling Price was making a raid in Missouri and that he planned to march into Iowa. Soon another rumor quoted Price as boasting that "he would go into winter quarters in the Amanas where the fat oxen would furnish good food for his men". All Iowa County prepared for a possible invasion. The men drilled, while the women kept steadily at their work. General Price kept gaining; then came the good news that he had been checked at the battle of the Big Blue, near the Kansas boundary. At least one Lenox man served in this campaign. He wrote home and his letters were eagerly read by the entire community.

The "founders" of the Lenox Colony seem to have been free from race prejudice. Being Germans, they had none of the race feeling characteristics of the southern States. During their stay in St. Louis they had seen the results of this racial feeling and of the slave traffic. They had seen slaves sold on the auction block in front of the old Courthouse. At least one member of the colony had, in St. Louis, been in the employ of a wealthy slave-holder who also employed white men. He described how the white family "dined apart" and how the white employees were served in another room by themselves, while the negroes "squatted out under the trees until the others had finished when they were given what remained".

To this German colonist who had come to the "new country" this seemed the extremity of social injustice. One day he beckoned to an aged and faithful negro, for whom he had

developed an affection, to come to sit beside him at the table. The negro at first refused to come, but at the insistance of the German, he finally came. Since the newcomer could speak only a few words of English, he was at a loss to understand the turmoil which followed. He was seized, and his life threatened. Finally a fellow workman who spoke both German and English came to his rescue and explained that the German meant no offense, that he was a foreigner, and did not know the "ways of the country". Many such cases came to their notice. Not one of the Lenox colonists had the slightest sympathy with slavery.

The Lenox group had yet another reason for their hatred of slavery and of war. Their good neighbor, postmaster, drillmaster, and friend, "Newt" Wilkins, was captured and kept a prisoner in Andersonville. His hardships and intense suffering while in prison caused his death and his body was buried in a country cemetery near the Lenox New Church. The story of his suffering and his early death deeply impressed the German colonists with the cruelty in the new world. They had hoped for better things in America!

At last the weary years of the war came to an end. The Lenox New Church group had experienced the ruthlessness which men continued to practice in a country so new that they had hoped such things need not be. But they held fast to their teaching and their hope for a new day. They clung closer to Jasper²⁴ and its symbolism of the Utopia that is to come. "The first foundation was Jasper."

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²⁴ The colonists named the new colony Jaspis (English Jasper) from Revelation 21: 19 — "The first foundation was jasper." This the colonists, reading Luther's translation, applied to their new home in Lenox, Iowa County.