

**AN ESSAY ON THE CREDIBILITY
OF SWEDENBORG: IN WHICH HIS
CLAIMS AS THE ANNOUNCER OF
THE DISPENSATION, NEW
JERUSALEM**

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An Essay on the Credibility of Swedenborg: In which His Claims as the Announcer of the Dispensation, New Jerusalem by Various

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VARIOUS

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AN ESSAY
ON
THE CREDIBILITY OF SWEDENBORG;
IN WHICH HIS CLAIMS AS
THE ANNOUNCER OF THE DISPENSATION
MENTIONED IN PROPHECY UNDER THE FIGURE OF THE
NEW JERUSALEM,
ARE BRIEFLY
CONSIDERED AND DEFENDED.

"A man who takes up a system of divinity with a previous opinion that either every part must be true, or the whole false, approaches the discussion with great disadvantage."—PALEY.

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MDCCLXXVIII.

PREFACE.

As those who appear before the public are commonly expected to render some explanation of their motives and design, I shall give a brief account of the following little Essay.

It was written at the request of a gentleman, who wished to ascertain what reasons could be offered for holding the sentiments of the New Jerusalem Church; but when it was originally composed, it was intended only for his perusal. Some friends, however, were of opinion that it might be useful if circulated in print; and, from this consideration alone, I was induced to consent to its publication.

My aim has not been to refute or anticipate all the objections which persons who are adverse to the doctrines of Swedenborg may urge against his credibility; nor could the whole of the evidences which support it, and which, I am convinced, are far more numerous and forcible than his opposers imagine, be compressed into an ordinary sized pamphlet. I have, therefore, noticed only the most popular arguments which the adversaries of the New Church have invented against her, and endeavoured to present the general authentication which she derives from the authority of the Scriptures and from Reason.

How far I have succeeded, it is not my province to attempt to determine. Those who are decidedly principled in sentiments adverse to the cause which I have humbly endeavoured to advocate, will not be convinced of its truth by what I have written. But I may be allowed to hope, that the members of the New Church, and those who are yet unprejudiced against her doctrines, will discover in the following pages something to repay them for the trouble of perusal.

THE AUTHOR.

AN ESSAY
ON
THE CREDIBILITY OF SWEDENBORG.

INTRODUCTION.

A slight acquaintance with the history of mankind is sufficient to show, that those to whom the world is indebted for its advancement in morals and science, have not always been able to command attention or ensure respect, but have frequently endured the opposition of power, the frown of bigotry, and the ridicule of ignorance. That the discoveries or dictates of mere human beings should have been disregarded or contemned by those who were unwilling to acknowledge superiority, does not excite much surprise, when the blindness and pride of man are remembered. But if we extend our observation to the inspired messengers of God, we find that they likewise experienced neglect, contempt, and persecution, though they exhibited what has since been thought to entitle them to unreserved veneration: and even He who in support of his doctrines brought the most astounding evidence of Almighty Power, was, when he sojourned upon earth, "despised and rejected of men."

It cannot, therefore, be maintained with any colour of plausibility, that the rejection or slow reception of any doctrine or divine communication, proves it to be unworthy of credence or examination; nor

that truth has an irresistible tendency to subdue error or obtain belief. Indeed the occurrences of every day might inform us, that assent is not invariably produced by an abstract judgment of the understanding; or, rather, that the understanding is frequently influenced by the desires of the will: consequently, if that which is proposed for acceptance be contrary in its nature and effect to those desires; if it question their lawfulness or restrain their indulgence; they will, however imperceptibly, attempt to induce the understanding to resist such a proposition as false or absurd. Hence the common but philosophical remark, "that we easily believe what we wish to be true."

Perhaps it is owing to a partial or entire neglect of the conduct which the preceding facts would prescribe, that the character and writings of Swedenborg have been so generally misconceived and calumniated; though, as a man of extraordinary pretensions, he could not have been supported by a greater weight of rational evidence than that which may be adduced in favour of his claims. But the circumstance of their being denied admission, would seem to strengthen rather than invalidate them, when we recur to the manner in which now-revered persons were originally received. At the present period, indeed, the common method is, to deride the relation of an unusual event, as though the rarity of occurrence were quite sufficient to destroy the possibility of its being true. But this mode of judging should not be adopted by those who profess a regard for the interest of religion, or who would be thought to have a just conception of the nature of evidence; as the enemies of Christianity urge against it, that what is contrary to expe-

rience, or rather, not within the general experience of mankind, ought to be doubted, or condemned as altogether false.

It is not our wish to insinuate, however, that he who declares himself to have an especial illumination should be credited without a rigid examination; nor do we withhold our reproof and commiseration from those "beings of omnivorous credulity" who eagerly seize upon any tissue of delusion which partakes of the wonderful. Caution is necessary where imposture has occurred; and premature decision indicates as much infirmity as the pertinacious denial of well-proved truth. But it may be remarked on imposture in general, that it demands an absolute belief without rendering an evidence more than equivalent to the improbability which its assertions involve: and where the strength of improbability exceeds the strength of the evidence, we may safely deny it our assent. An equilibrium of judgment between the indiscrimination of credulity and the doubts of impervious scepticism, is what all should endeavour to acquire.

But a moderate share of penetration will enable any one to discover, that the members of the New Jerusalem Church found their belief on the most solid basis, and that the credibility of him, whom they consider to have been appointed to teach a comprehensible system of theology, is capable of the clearest proof. It is proposed, therefore, in examining the popular objections against Swedenborg's claims, to exhibit, in a brief manner, the evidence which supports them. For this purpose, we shall first notice the argument, brought by his opposers, from his non-performance of miracles: we shall next endeavour to ascertain, whether there are any reasons

for expecting a more perfect light on theological subjects than Christians have hitherto enjoyed : and we shall then proceed to show, that Swedenborg was the Instrument appointed by the Lord to communicate a full knowledge of every thing connected with religion ; and thus that he was in reality the Announcer of the New Jerusalem Dispensation.

PART I.

THE ARGUMENT AGAINST SWEDENBORG'S CREDIBILITY, DRAWN FROM HIS NON-PERFORMANCE OF MIRACLES, NOT VALID.—It is alleged by those who attempt to refute the pretensions and doctrines of Swedenborg, that had he been gifted with the supernatural illumination which he asserted himself to possess, he would have established his claims to it by working miracles ; and that, as he did not work miracles, there is no truth in his declaration, “that he was commissioned by the Lord to teach the doctrines of the New Jerusalem Church.” This argument is much relied on by his opposers ; but those who support his views, consider it very weak and defective, since it is not warranted by the Bible, or by reason : and how it came to be adopted by those who would be esteemed for candour or judgment, will appear surprising when its grounds are examined.

If we suppose that miracles are the proper or only evidences of true revelation,—or of that communication which God has had with his creatures through the medium of selected persons,—we ought to reject, as false, whatever pretends to be revelation, when it has not this indubitable and necessary evidence ; be-