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REPORT  
of  
COMMITTEE ON EXAMINATION

This is to certify that we the undersigned, as a Committee of the Graduate School, have given Aldena Carlson final oral examination for the degree of Master of Arts. We recommend that the degree of Master of Arts be conferred upon the candidate.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

May 30 1917

Joseph Beach, for Hardin Crag  
Chairman  
Carlton Brown

Richard Benson

Prof. Swenson and Prof. Thoms were invited to the Examinations, but asked to be excused.

REPORT  
of  
Committee on Thesis

The undersigned, acting as a Committee of  
the Graduate School, have read the accompanying  
thesis submitted by Aldena Carlson  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

They approve it as a thesis meeting the require-  
ments of the Graduate School of the University of  
Minnesota, and recommend that it be accepted in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts.

Harold Craig  
Chairman

David F. Swenson

Joseph Beach

Aug 30 1917

CA. H. L. 1081

The Influence of the Writings of  
Emanuel Swedenborg  
Upon the Personality, Philosophy, and Works of  
William Blake

A Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Minnesota

by

Aldena Carlson

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporaries of "mad" William Blake could hardly have failed to remark upon the similarity of his peculiar views and strange speeches to the teachings of the Swedish Seer, Emanuel Swedenborg, whose doctrines, if not familiar to them directly thru his writings, must have been so thru the creeds of the "Swedenborgians". To those who knew Blake at all intimately there must have seemed to be a resemblance of vagaries, if nothing more. It seems inconceivable that the more discerning should not have seen the Swedenborgian doctrine as a direct source of Blake's mystic ideas; but the comments of contemporary writers indicate that they either entirely overlooked the connection between Swedenborg and Blake or failed to realize its real significance.

Crabb Robinson relates, in his Diary, conversations he had had with Blake, in which the latter criticized Swedenborg, but he says nothing of any significant influence of the Swedish Mystic upon Blake. In fact, in a letter to Dorothy Wordsworth he says of Blake, "He is not so much a disciple of Swedenborg and Bohmen as a fellow <sup>(1)</sup> visionary", a statement clearly indicative of his failure to understand the true relation between the two Mystics. Smith and Cunningham make no mention whatever of Swedenborg and his doctrine, but treat of Blake as 'sui generis'. Tatham, in defending Blake against the charge of madness, points out Swedenborg as another visionary <sup>(2)</sup> who was not mad, <sup>(3)</sup> but makes no mention of any direct and significant

(1) Diary, Dec. 10, 1825, Symons, William Blake, p. 257.

(2) Letter to Dorothy Wordsworth, Feb. 20, 1826, Ibid. p. 272.

(3) Life, pub. by Russel, pp. 19-21.

relation between the two. He refers to Swedenborg as a "great and learned German", and one may infer that he has made no great study of the Seer in any connection.

Gilchrist, the first non-contemporary biographer, quotes 'Al-  
lingham' as saying that Blake may in his apprenticeship days have met  
Swedenborg any day on the London streets and adds that "of all men  
the engraver's apprentice was to grow up likest to Emanuel Sweden-  
borg; already by constitutional temper<sup>am</sup>ent and endowment was so."<sup>(1)</sup>  
Later in the same paragraph he speaks of Blake's having been "consid-  
erably influenced, but in no slavish spirit", by Swedenborgian writ-  
ings "appearing in his manhood". He also mentions Blake's later  
criticism of Swedenborg. These statements, and Gilchrist's general  
treatment of Blake's personality and works, indicate that while he  
was aware of the Swedenborgian influence upon Blake, he by no means  
considered it of fundamental significance.

Swinburne, writing three years after the publication of Gil-  
christ's 'Life', speaks of Blake as "this prophet who came to do  
what his precursor, Swedenborg, had left undone"<sup>(2)</sup>, and expatiates upon  
Blake's criticism of Swedenborg, but says nothing of direct influence  
of the latter upon the former.

H.G.Hewlett, in an article published in *The Contemporary Review*  
ten years later (1876), says, "To Swedenborg, whose works he is also  
known to have studied, Blake was greatly indebted"<sup>(3)</sup>, and later points  
out several instances where Blake makes use of Swedenborgian ideas,  
language, and style. This seems to be the first statement of Blake's  
direct indebtedness to Swedenborg.

(1) *Life*, pp.15-16.

(2) *Blake*, pp.234-58.

(3) 'Imperfect Genius', *Contem.Rev.*28, pp778 ff.

Ellis and Yeats, writing in 1893, are very clearly aware of the importance of the element of Swedenborgian influence in accounting for Blake's personality, philosophy, and works. They suggest for the first time that Blake was probably influenced by hearing Swedenborgian talk in his childhood home. They further suggest that Blake as a child conceived of himself as destined to surpass Swedenborg, a suggestion I am inclined to reject, for reasons which I shall later make obvious. Finally, they explain Blake's rejection of much of the Swedenborgian doctrine, in his 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell, as due to its lack of "anything stimulative or suggestive". They see Blake as a disciple of Swedenborg, who transcended the teachings of his master thru his greater powers of imagination, a view which as an all inclusive one is true and satisfying.

Ellis and Yeats may be said to have so fully established the importance of the matter of Swedenborgian influence upon Blake that no biographer or commentator has since altogether omitted reference to it. But there yet remained much to be done, and Sampson, writing in 1905, remarks: "We need too some deeper study than has yet been attempted of the sources from which he (Blake) received and absorbed his ideas, notably...and his precise debt to Swedenborg." Two years later, E.J.Ellis gave, in his "The Real Blake", most significant evidence that such a study had been successfully undertaken and carried very far.

(1) Works of Blake, p.2.

(2) Ibid, p.23.

(3) See Garnet, Blake, p.7; and Langridge, Blake, p.58. Miss Langridge advances the rather naive suggestion that Blake made Swedenborg's doctrine of 'correspondence' so much a part of his mental fibre that one feels certain he would have fought his way out into this channel had Swedenborg never written."

(4) Blake's Poetical Works, Preface, p. xviii.

(5) Later writers, Symons, Brooke, Deselincoirt, Stokes, Wallis, and Berger have treated of the matter, Berger, only, has added new data.

Ellis has printed for the first time Blake's Marginalia on (1) Swedenborg's 'Angelic Wisdom Concerning Divine Love And Wisdom', and has pointed out many passages in the latter that undoubtedly were sources of some of Blake's theories and utterances. Ellis makes use of all significant available facts concerning Blake and fills in and rounds out the discussion with inferences founded on what one feels to be deep study and understanding of the mystic, half self-asserting, half self-concealing soul of Blake. Delightfully satisfying as this is, to the intuitive type of mind at least, one is, however, rendered a little uneasy by the positive tone in which inferences are presented as facts. In spite of this slight defect, 'The Real Blake' must be considered as the standard work of all Blake literature, and the study of the matter of Swedenborgian influence it presents, as the most complete and significant yet made.

Pierre Berger, the French critic, publishing in 1915, has done almost faultless work in comparing and contrasting Blake with his teacher, Swedenborg. While he has not rejected Ellis's inferences, he has eliminated the questionable element in their presentation. His tracing of the resemblance of Blake's symbolism to that of Swedenborg is the most satisfactory yet accomplished; this notwithstanding the fact that in one instance he falls into the error of reading (2) symbolic meaning into perfectly obvious metaphor.

Gardner, publishing in 1916, has added nothing new on the question of Swedenborgian influence. Indeed, as a treatment of one phase of a general discussion of Blake, Ellis and Berger have between them achieved fairly ideal completeness.

(1) The Real Blake, Chap.xii.

(2) William Blake, Poet and Mystic, p.206, in discussing Blake's

There remain , however, two things yet to do, or rather one thing to do, and a way to do it. The thing is to make a specialized study of this phase alone, involving a more minute and complete study of details than has ever been felt necessary in a general treatment; the method is to treat the question of influence as a matter of chronological development. This, then, is to be my attempt in this paper. My general theory concerning the Swedenborgian influence upon Blake is that it had its inception in his childhood, remained more or less "dormant" during his youth, was recognized by him and made a matter of examination and conscious adoption, modification, and rejection, in his early manhood, and remained always a potent and fundamental, tho greatly modified, element in his personality, philosophy, and works.

couplet, "If the sun and moon should doubt  
They'd immediately go out".

Berger ingeniously works out a symbolic meaning for this passage, whereas it is obviously a very simple metaphor, a part of Blake's triade against 'reason' and 'doubt'.



## CHAPTER I

## CHILDHOOD: EARLY SWEDENBORGIAN INFLUENCES

In considering the significance of the period of childhood in the life of William Blake we must measure by no ordinary standards. So intimate was the relation between his childhood and manhood that we can state it in no other terms than that the man remained always the child. The reason for this lay in certain inherent qualities of Blake's personality. The most common and potent factors that ordinarily transform the childhood personality into that of the man are: formal education, work, social environment, the growing power of reasoning, the "spiritual" or moral-ethical "rebirth", and the cumulative experience of living. These factors, so much a matter of course in the ordinary life, were either lacking or peculiarly restricted in the life of Blake. Academic schooling he had none whatever. For his life work he chose first engraving, later painting and literature, and since in all three he showed intense individuality both in formulating his ideals and in clinging to them always with an almost blind tenacity, their influence was that which develops but does not transform. To the influence of social environment Blake was peculiarly impervious. His childhood was solitary, in spite of its city environment. As an apprentice at fourteen he had already acquired peculiar characteristics that held him aloof from his fellows; and though in later life he had a real hunger for friendship and social intercourse, his intolerance for anything that pressed in upon his keenly sensitive individuality was so great that he again and again withdrew within himself in raging fury or sullen bitterness. Reason Blake not only distrusted but denied and despised; whatever influence

it had in his life he himself would have regarded as illegitimate and vicious. His "spiritual rebirth" was but a conscious examination and consequent acceptance, modification, and rejection of hitherto unconsciously or tentatively held truths and ideals. As for experience of living itself, Blake's interpretation or misinterpretation of his experience was so deeply tinged by his all pervading and colorful individuality that their effect could only be to intensify, not change. Whatever influences, then, were potent in Blake's childhood remained, in all likelihood, potent and vital influences thruout his entire life.

Reading the scanty accounts of Blake's early childhood, one is struck by a peculiar feature. The child Blake saw visions and told about seeing them. The first vision, we are told from a remark made by his wife and reported by Crabb Robinson, occurred when he was but four years old. At this time he saw "God put his head to the window, and was set a-screaming"<sup>(1)</sup>. A second vision, occurring when he was eight or ten years old, may be told of in the words of Gilchrist: "Sauntering along, the boy looks up and sees a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars. Returned home he relates the incident, and only thru his mother's intercession escapes a thrashing from his honest father for telling a lie."<sup>(2)</sup> From Tatham we have this account: "Blake asserted, from a boy, that he did see them (visions); even when a child his mother beat him for running in and saying that he saw the prophet Ezekiel under a tree in the fields."<sup>(3)</sup> The last of the early visions of real

(1) 'Reminiscences', 25/2/52, Symons, p.293.

(2) Life, p.7. Gilchrist does not give his source for the account.

(3) Tatham, Life, Russel, p.20.

account occurred in the early days of his apprenticeship: "Sometimes his dreaming eye saw more palpable shapes from the phantom past; once a vision of 'Christ and the Apostles' as he used to tell"<sup>(1)</sup> With these accounts in mind, we are prepared for Crabb Robinson's statement of what Blake himself said, in his old age, concerning his power of vision: "of the faculty of vision he spoke as one he has had from early infancy. He thinks all men partake of it, but it is lost by not being cultivated".

To say that Blake was born a visionary would not be to say anything decisive about him as having been supernaturally endowed, for every imaginative child is a potential visionary. But for the child to become a confirmed visionary, one who believes fully in his visions and tells of them, it is necessary that the faculty of vision in him be given stamina and permanence by some amount of sympathetic tolerance and credence. This, then, Blake's childhood environment must have given--not to him directly as a seer of visions, I admit, remembering what happened when he told of them!--but to vision in general. And to Blake, judging him by his later life, this difference would not be a matter of vital importance; for we learn from numerous anecdotes that to deny his personal possession of a power which he claimed was only to confirm and intensify his own faith in it.

Moreover, when we examine these visions of Blake's childhood we see that they are of a peculiar kind: visions of God, angels, prophets, Christ and the Apostles; they are all "religious" visions. Evidently the atmosphere of Blake's childhood home tolerated, suggested

(1) Gilchrist, *Life*, p.18.

(2) *Diary*, 17th Dec., 1825; Symons, p.264.

ed, fostered, belief in "religious" visions only. Such an atmosphere in the home of English lower middle class trades people can emanate only from strong faith in peculiar religious doctrines, doctrines of a creed which emphasizes the validity and importance of "spiritual visions" enough to make such matters common subjects of "religious" conversations and discussions among its adherents. Exactly such a creed is Swedenborgianism. (1)

We are prepared, then, to accept Gilchrist's statements, (1), that William's elder brother James "had his spiritual and visionary side too, would at times talk Swedenborg, talk of seeing Abraham and Moses, and to outsiders seem like his gifted brother 'a bit mad'; and, (2), that the father was "a dissenter". We are fairly well prepared to accept also the inferences of Ellis and Yeats and later writers that both were Swedenborgians in Blake's childhood, or had, at least, strong Swedenborgian leanings; and that the atmosphere of the home was one in which symbolic interpretation of the Scriptures and the revelation of spiritual truths by means of "visions" were fundamental elements of religious belief and matters of common conversation. (3) (4)

To admit these childhood visions of Blake as evidence of the early influence of Swedenborgian suggestions upon his childish mind it is not necessary that the visions themselves be interpreted. They

(1) See any of Swedenborg's Works, or any treatise upon Swedenborgianism. Ency. Brit. Chap. XXVI gives a good account of Swedenborg's own beliefs and how he acquired them.

(2) Life, p. 55.

(3) The Real Blake, Chap. II. Ellis seems to be the only authority who definitely calls Blake's father a Swedenborgian. Wallis, Berger, and Stokes accept the statement of his having had at least Swedenborgian leanings, and that the home was one in which Swedenborgian "language" was common. That Blake's father, if a Swedenborgian, should have punished his son for "seeing visions" (as according to Gilchrist he did) is fully explainable; for, as Ellis points out, believing in vision in general and believing in one's own son's visionary powers are two very different matters. (4) Ellis and Yeats, Works, pp. 2&7.

may be taken as bona fide "supernatural" experiences; they may be regarded as hallucinations; or they may be explained as merely vivid metaphorical representations of imaginative visions. From Blake's own utterances may be gathered evidence to support both the first and the last theory. He often, in later life, spoke in the most positive and matter-of-fact terms of his visions, but on one occasion, at least, he intimated that the "vision" was but a matter of the imagination: asked where he saw that of which he spoke, "Here, Madam," he replied, tapping his forehead. The second theory must have been that held by those of his contemporaries who disposed of him by calling him mad!

But whatever the "explanation" of these visions, their prevalence and their nature may be taken to prove that in Blake the inherent, common childish power of "vision" was awakened, stimulated, and substantiated by the Swedenborgian atmosphere of the home, and was therefore not, as in other men, early "lost by not being cultivated". That this childhood influence was especially significant to Blake was due to the fact that, as has already been pointed out, he retained more fully than is common the childish core within his mature personality. A seer of visions in childhood, Blake became a visionary for life. Moreover, from the talk of his father and brother concerning Swedenborg's interpretation of the Bible as written in symbolic language, Blake must have been furnished also a suggestive idea as to the only medium in which vision and spiritual experience can be fully expressed. Discriminate and reject as he might later, therefore, Blake was indebted for life to Swedenborg for the two vital characteristics of his thought and writings, for the two funda-

(1) See Chap.V.

(2) Gilchrist, Life, p.320. Gilchrist quotes but does not give source

mental elements of his mysticism--vision and symbolism. The full amount of his debt we can regard as a relative matter, to be judged after investigation of what was later deliberately accepted or rejected and the conscious and unconscious use of the former. Here there is ample room for error and disagreement, but the validity of the debt itself is well-nigh indisputable. We have, indeed, proof<sup>(1)</sup> that Blake himself realized and acknowledged this debt.

(1) See Chap.IV.

## CHAPTER II

## YOUTH: THE PERIOD OF "REACTION"

There followed <sup>upon</sup> this childhood of visions and solitary dreams, a period during which Blake drifted as far away as it was ever possible for him to drift away from the Swedenborgian influences of his childhood home. There were several reasons for this. He was no longer a child in the home but an apprentice, and later a workman, who in spite of his aloofness must to some extent be thrown into intercourse with fellow apprentices and workmen. He was learning and working at his trade of engraving and finding it a source of inspiration and a new means of expression. This was the period of his experience as a lover; his emotional life was seeking other channels than those of religion. It was the period of his early married life, of his first and only venture into "society", and of his attempt at a business partnership; all three were very potent factors in drawing him out from himself and in centering his thots on outward objective life rather than on subjective thot and mystic vision. Finally, it was the psychological period of greatest deflection from integral personality--youth--the period in which the normal personality, passing from normal childhood to conventional maturity, swings the farthest out into "erratic" individuality; and none the less the period in which the "abnormal" child, destined for nonconforming maturity, swings the farthest in toward conventionality and conformity.

The outward events of Blake's life during this period, which, roughly speaking, extends from his fourteenth to his thirtieth year, from 1771 to 1787, were his apprenticeship, the beginning of his work as an engraver, his love affair with Polly Woods, his courtship of

and marriage to Katherine Boucher, the setting up of the new home, his venture into social life as one of the Mathew's coterie, his partnership with Parker, and the death of his brother Robert.

The literary products from which we are to judge his mental and spiritual development during this period are 'Poetical Sketches', 'An Island In The Moon', and 'Songs of Innocence'. The first of these is a series of fervid poetic expressions, "commenced in his twelfth, and occasionally resumed by the author till his twentieth year"<sup>(1)</sup>. 'An Island In The Moon' is for the most part a piece of whimsical absurdity, the work of a temporary mood. 'Songs of Innocence' comprises a series of poems written before, during, and perhaps immediately after his study of Swedenborg, and published in<sup>(2)</sup> 1789.

An analysis of the thirty poems and prose-poems included in 'Poetical Sketches' enables one to divide them into three classes: (1), a group of imitative poems, in which the imitative elements entirely obscure all originality; (2), a group of conventional poems of the time, in which the form and phrasing is imitative but the thought more or less original; (3), a group in which both phrasing and thought are strikingly original. The first two classes offer little of importance to this discussion, except that insofar as they are imitations of other authors and show a complete absence of anything Swedenborgian, they are evidence of the general "reaction" of this period.

(1) Mathew's 'Advertisement', printed as a preface to the first edition. Sampson, Blake's Poetical Works, p. 8.

(2) The Songs of Innocence were begun several years before their publication, since some of them were at first a part of the manuscript of 'An Island In The Moon'. We have no means of knowing how long before their publication they were completed, but as Blake's process of printing by engraving was a tedious one, we may surmise that very few, if any, were written after the study of Swedenborg in 1787.



The poems of third group are of real importance for two reasons: (1) they contain an element which not only is not Swedenborgian but is, as far as Swedenborgian influence upon Blake is concerned, anti-Swedenborgian; (2), they contain an element related to Swedenborgianism. The following short quotations from poems of this group will serve (1) as material for illustration and explanation of these two elements.

From 'To Spring':

"Come the eastern hills, and let our winds  
Kiss thy perfumed garments; let us taste  
Thy morn and evening breath; scatter thy pearls  
Upon our love-sick land that mourns for thee.

O deck her forth with thy fair fingers; pour  
Thy soft kisses on her bosom; and put  
Thy golden crown upon her languished head,  
Whose modest tresses were bound up for thee!"

From 'To Summer':

"O thou who passest thro' our vallies in  
Thy strength, curb thy fierce steeds, allay the heat  
That flames from their large nostrils! thou O Summer,  
Oft pitched'st here thy golden tent, and oft  
Beneath our oaks hast slept, while we beheld  
With joy thy ruddy limbs and flourishing hair."

From 'To Winter':

"Lo! now the direful monster, whose skin clings  
To his strong bones, strides o'er the groaning rocks:  
He withers all in silence, and in his hand  
Unclothes the earth, and freezes up frail life.

He takes his seat upon the cliffs,-the mariner  
Cries in vain. Poor little wretch, that deal'st  
With storms!-till heaven smiles, and the monster  
Is driv'n yelling to his caves beneath mount Hecla."

'Song':

"How sweet I roamed from field to field  
And tasted all the summer's pride,  
Till I the prince of love beheld  
Who in the sunny beams did glide!

(1) These quotations are made from the 'Poetical Sketches' as printed by Sampson, Blake's Poetical Works, pp. 1ff. Editions differ slightly.

He shew'd me lillies for my hair,  
 And blushing roses for my brow;  
 He led me through his gardens faire  
 Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May dews my wings were wet,  
 And Phoebus fir'd my vocal rage;  
 He caught me in his silken net,  
 And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,  
 Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;  
 Then stretches out my golden wing,  
 And mocks my loss of liberty."

The "strikingly original" element in these selections is, of course, the predominance of vivid and unrestrained metaphor. These and other poems of this group, 'To Autumn', 'To The Evening Star', 'My Silks and Fine Array', 'Love and Harmony Combine', 'The Wild Winds Weep', and still others, are not poems containing metaphor, but poems which are metaphors. When metaphor reaches this stage in poetic expression it is becoming, or is on the verge of becoming, symbolism. To see how near is the approach to symbolism it is only necessary to compare the selections quoted with passages from later poems which are admittedly "symbolical":

(1)

From 'To My Myrtle':

"To a lovely mirtle bound,  
 Blossoms showring all around,  
 O how sick & weary I  
 Underneath my mirtle lie!"

(2)

From 'Tiriel':

"And aged Tiriel stood and said: 'Where does the thunder sleep  
 Where doth he hide his terrible head? and his swift fiery  
 daughters,  
 Where do they shroud their fiery wings, and the terrors of  
 their hair?"

So striking is the resemblance both of phrasing and imagery of these passages, selected at random, to the selections from 'Poetical

(1) Rossetti MS., Sampson, p. 167.

(2) Ellis, Blake's Poetical Works, Vol. I, p. 284.

Sketches that it seems strange that no critic has called attention to this relation between Blake's early and later work.

If now we admit that there is an element of symbolism in these poems, the question naturally arises how truly we can call this element Swedenborgian. When Swedenborg asserted that the Scriptures were written in symbolical language he meant that words had a "spiritual" as well as a "natural" meaning, and that literal "natural" language carried a hidden "spiritual" meaning. The symbolism that Blake uses in these poems is not this inner symbolism of words. For such symbolism Blake was not yet prepared. He was not yet ready to declare that "Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most sublime poetry"<sup>(1)</sup>; not yet ready to invent a symbolical language of his own. The symbolism he uses here is the symbolism of imagery. There is, however, a distinct relation between these two forms of symbolism, for, as we shall see later, both Swedenborg and Blake based much of their symbolical interpretation and symbolical language upon metonymy.<sup>(2)</sup> Moreover, the fact that when Blake began to write at all he found a form of symbolism a natural means of expression is a significant element in tracing the Swedenborgian influence in his development. Is it not clearly the Swedenborgian suggestion of a hidden meaning, of vision that saw more than the "natural" eye was meant to see, that makes itself felt in these poems? True, every poet has this power of "vision" and "symbolism" to some extent, or he is no poet. But is the metaphor of Blake with its force and pervasiveness, quite the metaphor of other poets?

(1) Letter to Butts, 6th July, 1803, Russel, Letters, p. 121.

(2) See chap. 5.

It seems to me that we hear in these poems an echo of Blake's childhood visions. They are full of mystic overtones that come only from a mind mellowed by a peculiar contemplation, a contemplation as yet far from profound, but which has made room for many things.

But, as has already been said, these poems contain also an element that not only is not Swedenborgian but is anti-Swedenborgian. This element is also a part of the "symbolism" of the poems; it is the poetical feeling and color displayed in the imagery of nature and the use of nature images itself. Emotion and love of nature are very foreign to Swedenborgian literature. Swedenborg's heaven and hell, his angels and devils, are described with less emotion than most of us would find necessary in a description of a foreign country and its people. Swedenborg is intellectual in heaven and calmly observant in hell. Swedenborg sees nature as nothing but a well ordered system precisely regulated by its relation of "correspondence to its "spiritual causes". One wonders at first where London-bred Blake learned such passionate love for and delight in nature, and one accepts eagerly Gilchrist's statement (given, characteristically, with no reference to source) that "as he grew older the lad became fond of roving out into the country, in those days not so remote from London as to be beyond reach of a young boy"<sup>(1)</sup>. Blake's imagery in these poems is the imagery of nature, but of nature seen thru the vision of imagination. This imaginative vision was the power which was presently to set Blake free from the too cramping bonds of Swedenborg's religious vision and enable him to create new visionary conceptions, new laws of the relation of the "natural" and "spiritual", and a new symbolism.

(1) Life, p.6.

'An Island In The Moon', considered by all his earlier biographers a very insignificant and unworthy piece of work, and therefore left partially unpublished till Ellis included it in his 'The Real Blake' in 1907, has only a slight, questionable, and yet, if valid, peculiar, significance in tracing the vein of Swedenborgian influence. It was written shortly after the publication of the 'Poetical Sketches' and represents Blake's violent and bitter reaction against the criticism and patronage that had been offered him by his fellow guests in Mrs. Mathew's drawing room affairs. <sup>(1)</sup> Coming from an ordinary personality, it would represent nothing more than an immediate reaction against a specific cause and so would reveal little beyond a tendency to rather violent temper and a fluency of caustic language. But Blake was the ordinary man in very few respects, certainly not in his social relations. His intercourse with the Mathews and their friends was his first experience in social life; it was an outgrowth of that youthful "reaction" during which he seemed to be trying to adjust himself to "normal" life; it marked the high tide of what he probably considered adjustment. But to believe such adjustment possible was to forget his solitary, visionary childhood, his lack of school-fellowship, his quarrels with fellow apprentices. Questioning and opposition, not unlikely mixed with depreciation and ridicule of his peculiar ideas and manner of expression, infuriated him, and his growing irritability combined with his oddity to lose him all favor among the group composed of those who were of better social status than Blake and who therefore were inclined to regard themselves as generous in taking notice of him and his wife at all. <sup>(2)</sup>

(1) "Nollekins" Smith, Biography, Symons, p. 360.

(2) Ibid. p. 360.

Disillusioned, wounded, and furious, Blake was turned back upon himself. To relieve his feelings he wrote a satire upon his late "friends". The significance of 'An Island In The Moon' to this discussion is (1), that the satire is an allegory in which Blake uses strange "symbolical" names for the characters;(2), that the language has a certain tang of Swedenborgian plainness<sup>(1)</sup> and directness; (3), that to show his deep offence and dislike Blake makes use of crude language frequently encountered in Swedenborg's descriptions of infernal regions.<sup>(2)</sup> There is practically nothing here, however, that admits of direct proof, and I wish to do little more than suggest a theory, which to me is much more than possible, that we here see Blake repudiating the part of his personality he had been trying to cultivate and taking refuge in those traits and feelings that had been inbred in him--and at once unconsciously betraying the Swedenborgian coloring that had so deeply tinged his mind in childhood.

But in chapter XI of 'An Island In The Moon' we suddenly come upon three very different bits of verse. They are very briefly introduced and their difference is left wholly unaccounted for.

"Said Miss Gittipin, 'Pray, Mr. Obtuse Angle, sing us a song.'

Then he sang,

'Upon a holy Thursday'.....

"After this they all sat silent for a quarter of an hour, and Mrs. Nannicantipot said, "It puts me in mind of my mother's song--  
'When the voices of children are heard on the green'....

"Then sung Quid,

'O father, father, where are you going?'....

(3)

"Here nobody could sing any longer."

(1) This similarity of style cannot very well be illustrated, but it is very apparent to readers of both authors.

(2) Cf. Swedenborg's 'Heaven and Hell'

(3) These quotations will, of course, be recognized as the opening words of three of the 'Songs of Innocence'. 'The Real Blake', p.79.

This sudden change Ellis interprets for us most beautifully:

"Having begun with laughter, Blake ends very suddenly with a mixture of feelings. He has drifted by mere accident into the idea of the 'Songs of Innocence! ... He was too young and good natured to keep up the mood of bitter derision for long at a time. He has lost his way into the region of beauty when he intended mere mockery."<sup>(1)</sup>

Although the 'Songs' were published in 1789, two years after the close of the period here treated as that of "youthful reaction", they belong in spirit to this period rather than to that of the later "spiritual awakening",<sup>(2)</sup> They are significant to this discussion in two ways: (1), they are marked by complete absence of anything Swedenborgian, and, (2), they represent in its fullest measure and purest form that wealth of imaginative vision and sympathetic understanding of which we have already seen something in 'Poetical Sketches' and which Blake later deified as "Poetic Genius". The 'Songs' express an effort--the greatest effort poet ever made--to find in pure, spontaneous, unquestioning joy--childhood's joy--the solution of all the problems of adjustment to life. It is 'Poetic Genius' interpreting, simplifying, glorifying life. Here and there is expressed a momentary question, a momentary fear; but all questions are happily answered, all fears are gently soothed. "Tom, the chimney sweep", for all his griefs, is presently "happy and warm"; "Another's Sorrow", that seems to question our right to happiness, is comforted by God; "The Little Boy Lost" soon becomes "The Little Boy Found"; the ant wandering lost in the dark is lighted home by the glow-worm; so all the ills of human and animal life are comforted by the "human form divine", Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love."<sup>(3)</sup> With this Swedenborg's pre-

(1) 'The Real Blake', p.82. (See succeeding page for (2) and (3).)

cise, pseudo-scientific theories of a "dead" systematized nature, a mechanical world, a highly conventional heaven, and a systematically evil hell, had nothing to do.

With the 'Songs of Innocence', which mark its farthest point, we may fittingly close the period of Blake's "youthful reaction" against Swedenborgianism. If it had ever been possible for Blake to grow entirely away from the Swedenborgian influences of his childhood it would have been in this period. That it was not possible, that when he began his search for the real principles which were to govern his life he took his beginning from a study of Swedenborgian doctrine, was due to total inability to really change, which has already been commented upon. Blake had not entirely lost his faith in religious vision and the Lord of Swedenborg's interpretation of the Bible; he had found imaginative vision and the "Poetic Genius".

(2) See p.13 and note(2).

(3) See Sampson's edition of the 'Songs', pp.97,101,102,103,98.



## CHAPTER III

THE STUDY OF SWEDENBORGIAN DOCTRINE: ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION:  
THE MARGINALIA ON 'ANGELIC WISDOM'

Many of the events of Blake's "reactionary" period had had a profound effect upon him. The first months of his married life, if we are to believe Ellis, <sup>(1)</sup> had been tragically unhappy; his social and business ventures had both been failures; in 1787 his beloved brother Robert died. We may add to these outward circumstances the fact that Blake was nearing his thirtieth year, he had passed the period of experiment and indecision and had reached the period of mature reflection and decision. His spiritual and moral-ethical awakening and readjustment took the form of deliberate study and conscientious and fearlessly independent thought and decision.

Blake's father had died in 1784; it is possible, as Ellis points out, <sup>(2)</sup> that his Swedenborgian books fell in part to the patrimonial lot of William. In 1787 was published the English translation of Swedenborg's 'Angelic Wisdom Concerning Divine Love And Wisdom'. The date of this publication and the date of the completion of Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' fix very definitely the period of Blake's study of Swedenborg, part of which consisted in the criticism and annotation of the 'Angelic Wisdom', as occurring between 1787 and 1790. We have further evidence of this as the studious, self-examining period in Blake's life in the fact that 1788 was the year during which he studied and annotated Lavater's 'Aphorisms', <sup>(3)</sup> in a determined and deliberate effort to arrive at self-knowledge. Whether his

(1) 'The Real Blake', Chap. XI.

(2) Ibid. p. 102.

(3) Gilchrist, Life, Chap. VIII. 'The Real Blake', Chap. XIV.

revival of interest in and return to Swedenborgianism was purely the cause or in part the result of his study of Swedenborgian books cannot be exactly determined. But if the theories of the two preceding chapters of this paper be sound, we may definitely regard this as the period of deliberate examination of the tentatively accepted creed of his childhood--a heritage which had never been lost to him. Perhaps the beginning of his friendship with Flaxman, who was a Swedenborgian, had not a little influence in directing his thots back to the doctrine of his childhood.

It is significant that in the account of the death of his brother Robert we have the first mention of a vision occurring in Blake's manhood. Blake watched by his dying brother's bedside continuously for two weeks, and "at the last solemn moment the visionary eyes beheld the released spirit ascend through the matter-of-fact ceiling, 'clapping its hands for joy'".<sup>(2)</sup> Thirteen years later Blake wrote, "Thirteen years ago I lost a brother and with his spirit I converse daily and hourly in the spirit, and see him in my remembrance in the regions of my imagination. I hear his advice, and even now write from his dictation".<sup>(3)</sup> It was the spirit of this brother which appeared to Blake to teach him how to print his 'Songs of Innocence'. Is it a mere coincidence, a mere omission on the part of his early biographers, that makes his years of youth and early manhood--the period I have called "reactionary"--so barren of visions?

But however invalid the theory of Blake's deflection from Swedenborgian ideas may appear, we are now to witness no uncertain return

(1) Gilchrist, Life, pp. 16 & 33.

(2) Ibid. p. 59.

(3) "Nollekins" Smith, Biography, Symons, p. 363. Cunningham, Life of Blake in 'Lives of Eminent Painters and Sculptors', p. 133.

toward them. We may here leave theory and stand upon the solid ground of facts. We have arrived at the point of Blake's deliberate acceptance and rejection of Swedenborgian doctrines embodied in Swedenborg's most representative work, 'The Angelic Wisdom Concerning Divine Love And Wisdom'.

In order to make the fullest and most enlightening possible use of the Marginalia I have treated the material in three ways. (1), I have prepared a transcript of the most significant passages and annotations from the Marginalia as printed by Ellis; (2), I have gathered from Blake's comments the connected bits of Swedenborgian doctrine he accepted, and of his own doctrine where he rejected that of Swedenborg or went beyond it, arranging these in parallel columns so as to show fully derivation, development, and inter-relation; (3) I have made an abstract of the fundamental ideas expressed by Swedenborg and those of Blake as either resting upon them, transcending them, or diametrically opposing them. Where quotation marks are used the exact words of the authors are quoted; where not, the passages have been condensed and only the gist given.

(1) Transcript from Marginalia: ( The initials of the author's names are given as means of identification. The numbers are those of Swedenborg's paragraphs.)

(7) S. "A spiritual idea does not derive anything from space, but derives it all from state."

B. "Poetic idea."

(8) S. Man may comprehend that the Lord is everywhere but not in space not as a natural idea but by the aid of spiritual light.

B. "Observe the difference between natural and spiritual as seen by man. Man may comprehend, but not his natural or external man."

(10) S. Space and distance in the spiritual world are love and wisdom. The lord appears to men according to their degree of love and wisdom.

B. "He who feels love descend into him, and if he is wise, may perceive it from the Poetic Genius, which is the Lord.

(11) S. "God is very man. In all heavens there is no other idea of God than the idea of a man. The reason is that heaven, as a whole, and every part, is in form as a man."

B. "Man can have no idea greater than man...But God is man not because he is so perceived by man, but because he is the creator of man."

(12) S. "They who are more wise than common pronounce God invisible."

B. "Worldly wisdom, or demonstration by the senses, is the cause of this."

(13) S. "The negation of God constitutes hell."

B. "The negation of Poetic Genius."

(14) S. "Soul is not possible apart from its body, nor body apart from its soul."

B. "Thought without affection makes a distinction between love and wisdom as it does between body and spirit."

(27,28) S. "If a person...should say that a plurality of Infinities, of Uncreates, of Omnipotents, and of Gods is possible, proved they have one and the same essence...is not the same essence one identity?"

B. "Essence is not Identity, but Essence proceeds from Identity, and from one Essence may proceed many Identities as from one affection may proceed many thoughts. Surely this is an over-

sight. That there is but one Omnipotent, Uncreate, and God I agree. But that there is but one Infinite I do not. For if all but God is not Infinite they shall come to an end, which God forbid."

(49) S. The love of God in us is a human and not a divine quality, for if divine it would be a part of God's infinity in us loving the rest outside us, and it is contrary to the essence of God to love himself.

B. "Take it so or the contrary it comes to the same, for if a thing loves it is infinite. Perhaps we only differ in the words Infinite and Eternal."

(68) S. "Man is only a recipient of life...from his hereditary evil he reacts against God. In proportion as he believes that all his life is from God...reaction becomes the property of action, and acts with God as from himself.

B. "God and evil are here both good, and the two contraries married."

(164) S. "Natural things in their origins are dead...the dead sun is created through the living sun by the Lord."

B. "How could life create death?"

(166) S. " All things were created by the Lord through the living sun and nothing through the dead sun."

B. "The dead sun is only a phantasy of evil men."

(237) S. "Man comes first into the natural degree. This increases...until he reaches...the rational. The second degree, the spiritual...is opened by the love of uses...love towards the neighbor... The third degree...by love towards the Lord."

B. "Study science till you are blind. Study intellectuals till you are cold. Yet science cannot teach intellect .

Much less can intellect teach affection. How foolish it is then to assert that Man is born in only one degree, when that one degree is receptive of the three degrees; two of which he must close up or destroy or they will descend. If he closes up the two superior then he is not truly in the third, but descends out of it into mere Nature or Hell. Is it not also evident that one degree will not open the other, and that science will not open intellect, but that they are discrete and not continuous so as to explain each other except by correspondence which has nothing to do with demonstration, for you cannot demonstrate one degree by the other, for how can science be brought to demonstrate intellect without making them continuous and not discrete?"

(239) S. "Man...after death, if he becomes an angel...speaks ineffable things incomprehensible to the natural man."

B. "Not to a Man, but to the natural Man."

(295) S. "Angels were told to think spiritually and...tell what they thought...they could not...No word of spiritual speech is like natural speech...nor of spiritual writing like natural writing...except the letters, each of which has an entire meaning."  
(1)

B. "They could not tell him in natural ideas; how absurd must men be to understand him as if he said the angels could not express themselves at all to him."

(419) S. "Material love has become impure through the separation from heavenly love in parents."

B. "Therefore it was not created impure and is not naturally so."

(1) I have repunctuated this passage for the sake of clearness.

(421) S. "The love or will is defiled in the understanding and by it, if they are not elevated together."

B. "Mark this. They are elevated together."

(432) S. The initiament or primitive of man as it is in the womb after conception no man can know because it cannot be seen. It is of spiritual substance that does not fall into natural light... The right half of the brain at smallest is of love, the left of understanding. Its form within is in the form of heaven, but its exterior form was seen in it in opposition to that Order and Form.

B. "Heaven and Hell are born together."

(2) Chart showing what Blake accepted from Swedenborgian doctrine, and the development of his own doctrine. (The numbers refer to the passages quoted in the transcript, which are sources of the statements here made.)

Accepted Swedenborgian Doctrine. Development of Blake's Doctrine.

Space and time are states in the spiritual world; space is love, time is wisdom. (7) (10)

The lord appears to men according to their degree of love and wisdom. (10)

God is a man. (11)

The quality of Infinity in man is from God. (27) (28) (49)

Soul is not possible apart from body, nor body apart from soul. (14)

This Lord is Poetic Genius. (10) (13)

This is not because man so perceives Him, but because He is the creator of man. (11) (27) (28)

Man is Infinite; his power to love proves his Infinity; if he were not Infinite he would not be immortal. (27) (28) (49)

To make a distinction between soul and body is to think falsely as do they who make this distinction. (8) (14)

The natural world is from spiritual "causes".(166)

The relation is not one of Life to Death nor of mere correspondence. There is a relation of Identity; the natural world separated from the spiritual is a phantasy.(166) (164)

There are three degrees of "state" in man--natural, spiritual, and celestial.(237)

Man is born into all three degrees since it would be impossible for him to pass from one discrete degree into another.(237)

Angels may communicate with man, but not with "natural" man nor in "natural" ideas.(239) (295)

Angels may communicate with man, since Man is not necessarily Natural Man. (239) (295)

Science and understanding based on the evidence of the senses are not valid.(12) (237)

When there is a "separation" of love and understanding, God and Man, understanding is good only when it conjoins itself to love, Man when he perceives his life as from God.(68)(421) (432)

Love and understanding, spirit and body, God and Man are one. They are "Separated" only when man thinks of them as "separated".(68) (421) (432) (14) (8)

Material love has become impure thru separation from spiritual love.(419)

It was not created impure and is not necessarily so.(419)

(3) An Abstract of the fundamental ideas of Swedenborg and those of Blake as either resting upon them, transcending them, or diametrically opposing them.

It will be seen from the foregoing that Blake at this time definitely accepted the following Swedenborgian doctrines: The three divisions or degrees of the "state" of man; that space and time are "states" in the spiritual world; that every thing "Natural" has a "Spiritual" cause; the possibility of communication between angels and men; that God is a man; that man's will and understanding (love and understanding) must be tightly related to each other and to

(1) Swedenborg uses "love" and "will" as synonymous terms.



God to be good; that the natural or material is degraded by separation from the spiritual.

But in the following points Blake differed definitely from Swedenborg: Swedenborg that of man as finite with something of God's infinity within him; Blake that of man as infinite--a part of God's infinity. Swedenborg that of the natural and spiritual as separate and "naturally" antagonistic, and related only as cause and effect and by correspondence; Blake that the natural a reflection of the spiritual and therefore identical with it, and a mere phantasy when considered apart from it. Blake that that the idea of such "separation" was the cause of the "separation", and such "separation" was not only therefore false but evil and the cause of evil. The same was true of a "separation" of soul and body, will and understanding. Swedenborg believed man born into the natural degree only; Blake believed man born into all three degrees, and that it remained for him to cultivate the "uses" of the spiritual and celestial degrees as well as those of the natural.

The heart of Swedenborg's doctrine was correspondence; that of Blake's doctrine was unity or identity. Swedenborg is the scientist who is satisfied with a material world which corresponds to a spiritual; Blake is the poet who can accept the material only as ideally related to the spiritual--that is, identical with it. The one is satisfied with a humanity capable of becoming spiritual by overcoming the natural, and ruled by The Lord; the other is satisfied only with a humanity in whom the "natural" is "spiritual" and who identify themselves as one with God--and that God Poetic Genius.

## CHAPTER IV

## 'THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL'

While Blake was studying Swedenborg and Lavater he was writing 'Thel', probably 'Tiriel', and possibly some of the 'Songs of Experience' and some of the miscellaneous poems now usually alluded to as parts of the Rossetti and Pickering Manuscripts. 'Thel' was engraved in 1789, 'Tiriel' in 1791, the 'Songs of Experience' in 1794; the miscellaneous poems were neither engraved nor published during Blake's lifetime, so that no very definite dates can be ascribed to them. I have tho't best to depart from strict chronological order at this point and defer the discussion of all these poems to a later chapter. There were two reasons for so doing: 'Thel' and 'Tiriel' are prophetic poems, and may best be grouped with others of their kind; the 'Songs of Experience' and probably "earlier" miscellaneous poems are closely related to those known to have been written later, some as late as (1) 1811. Moreover, the work most closely related to the study of Swedenborg and the Marginalia on 'Angelic Wisdom' is the prose work, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'. The Marginalia, as has been shown, is valuable as a record of Blake's analysis of Swedenborgian doctrine, and of his rejection, acceptance, and transcendence of specific points. But the scope of Marginalia could not satisfy Blake's intensified 'prophetic' instinct. In 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' we find him crystallizing his theories and presenting them in a synthetic, positive work of his own.

'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' is valuable to this discussion both as to form and content. In form it is so close and deliberate

(1) A few poems may be definitely dated; see Symons, pp. 138 ff.

an imitation of Swedenborgian writings that it must be called parody. Its contents afford three very clear and direct proofs of "influence": (1), Blake "acknowledges" his debt to Swedenborg; (2), he makes a formal declaration of independence from Swedenborgian doctrine; (3), he reasserts and reiterates the chief point wherein he differed from Swedenborgian doctrine--the theory of Unity as transcending the theory of Correspondence. The 'Marriage' is, furthermore, as a whole and in itself, valuable in that its origin can be very clearly traced to certain passages of Swedenborg's 'Angelic Wisdom'. This last point offers the most logical beginning and I shall therefore treat of it first.

In commenting upon the Marginalia, Ellis points out No.68 as the germ of the idea of 'The Marriage'<sup>(1)</sup>. No.68 reads: "Man is only a recipient of life...from his hereditary evil he reacts against God. In proportion as he believes that all his life is from God...reaction becomes the property of action and acts with God as from himself."

Blake's comment upon it is: "Good and Evil are here both good, and the two contraries married."

This passage may be interpreted as the germ of the 'Marriage', provided the interpretation goes far enough. To arrive at the point that Blake meant to symbolize in the 'Marriage' the union of good and evil, as two abstract contraries, in the union of the will of God and man, is to have interpreted far more truly than have those who have seen the 'Marriage' as symbolical of the union of "desire and reason", "the lower and higher nature of man", "the will and understanding", etc. But to stop here is to stop one step short of arriving at the

(1) 'The Real Blake', p.107.

heart of Blake's mysticism--Unity.

The fullest and clearest source, as far as it can be found in any one passage, is, after all, not in the passage pointed out by Ellis, but in a later passage not annotated by Blake. This passage is paragraph no,276, and I shall quote it in its entirety.

"That the natural mind, which is a hell, is in complete opposition to the spiritual mind, which is a heaven. When loves are opposite, then all things of perception become opposite; for from love, which constitutes the very life of man, all other things flow, as rivers from their source: Those things which are not grounded in the love, separate themselves in the natural mind from the things which are grounded in it, the latter being in the middle, and the rest at the sides: these last, if they be truths of the church, from the Word, are removed from the middle to a greater distance at the sides, and at length are exterminated; and in this case the man, or the natural mind, perceiveth evil as good, and sees the false as truth, and vice versa: hence he thinks malice wisdom, insanity intelligence, cunning prudence, evil arts ingenuity; and then he also sets at naught the divine and celestial things of the church and worships and exalts corporeal and worldly things to the highest place: thus he inverts his state of life, so that what belongs to the head he makes belong to the sole of the foot, and tramples on it; and what belongs to the sole of the foot he makes belong to the head: thus a man, from being alive, becomes dead; he whose mind is a heaven is said to be alive, and he whose mind is a hell to be dead."

We see Swedenborg here reaffirming the extreme antagonism between the natural and the spiritual, and illustrating the inversion of good and evil in "the natural mind, which is hell". Now this is

saying much more than that man may oppose himself to God and be evil or join his will to God's and be good; it is definitely asserting that the natural as a state can never be reconciled with the spiritual as a state--the natural must remain or be superceded by the spiritual. Remembering that Swedenborg asserted that man was born in the natural degree only, we see that he meant that man thinking and acting from inborn impulses thinks falsely and acts evilly. This is nothing more or less than a form of the theory of "natural depravity"; the inborn and irreconcilable struggle between flesh and spirit, instinct and formal "goodness", Man and God.

But Blake, we have already seen, asserted that man is born into the spiritual degree as well as the natural; that there is no valid separation of body and spirit, of Man and God. Hence, to Blake there could be no tyranny of "spiritual goodness" seeking to triumph over "natural depravity"; no ascetic exaltation of the soul conquering a naturally sensually degraded body; no God whose chief acts were punishments of man's acts. There was to him a Unity between soul and body, God and man, which made strife, antagonism, even difference, an unnatural conception; a Unity that made the thots of Man and the acts of the body valid and good; a Unity which satisfied his poetic idealism--that he may have thot of as a mystic Trinity: God, the Poetic Genius, the source of all creation and creative imagination; Man the Christ, the inheritor of the powers of God, hence one with him; imagination the Holy Spirit, the power thru which Man perceives God and so understands himself. To Blake, as we have already seen and as we shall see more and more, the conception of a separation of the natural and spiritual was not only a falsity--it was the chief source of all error and evil in the world. Small wonder that he felt

impelled, once this theory had fully gripped him, not only to record his disagreement with Swedenborg by comments on the latter's statements, but to reprove Swedenborg for uttering "old untruths", and finally, to teach his own "prophetic" truths. This reproof of Swedenborg becomes a part of his declaration of independence in the 'Marriage'; the central idea of the marriage of heaven and hell symbolizes the central theory of Unity of spiritual and natural.

No one who is at all familiar with the writings of Swedenborg can fail to note at once in the 'Marriage' general resemblance in form. Specific resemblances may here be pointed out, but scarcely illustrated since such illustration would require an almost unlimited amount of quotation from the work of both writers: (1) the "Memorable Fancies" are patterned upon Swedenborg's "Memorable Relations"; (2), Prophets, Angels, and Devils are represented as speaking to Blake as they do to Swedenborg, in his native language and on terms of equality and familiarity; (3), the positive tone of assertion of discovery of spiritual truth is equally strong in both; (4), both discover spiritual truths by actual visits to spiritual regions; (5), Blake burlesques Swedenborg's ingenuity in making orderly divisions and arrangement of spiritual regions in his division of "a printing house in hell" into chambers; (6), there is thruout a Swedenborgian flavor in style and language, such as was found in 'An Island In The Moon', but here much more pronounced; (7), there is a direct use of Swedenborgian symbolism in the use of such terms as "marriage", "heaven", "hell", "angels", "devils", etc.; (8), Blake sometimes slyly twists a

(1) See the fourth "Memorable Fancy". The passage will be quoted later.

(2) See the third "Memorable Fancy".

(3) Swedenborg frequently uses this term in expressing a relation between "states" and "loves", and in other ways. See passages quoted for other terms.

Swedenborgian phrase into humorous burlesque, as in the passage where he describes the Leviathan as advancing "with all the fury of a spiritual existence"<sup>(1)</sup>. But all these resemblances may be summed up in one statement: the 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell'<sup>(2)</sup> was written as a deliberate parody upon the works of Swedenborg. Whatever one's judgment as to the value of parody 'per se' as a measure of "influence", it is plain to see that is at least evidence here of Blake's thorough knowledge and understanding of Swedenborg, and of his skill in overcoming him with Swedenborg's own weapons and in his own style of combat.

We are now ready to examine the far more important evidence of influence, the content of the 'Marriage'. We are to see, (1), how Blake "acknowledges" his debt to Swedenborg; (2), how he declares his independence from the absolute acceptance of the doctrines of the latter; (3), how he states and restates his own theories, all centering about the theory of Unity.

In 'The Last Judgment, written in 1758, Swedenborg had declared that "The last judgment (a spiritual judgment and the beginning of a new spiritual heaven) was commenced in the beginning of the year 1757, and was fully accomplished at the end of that year"<sup>(3)</sup>. This statement had a special interest for Blake for 1757 was the year of his birth. The opening paragraph of the 'Marriage' reads:

"As anew heaven is begun, and as it is now thirty-three years since its advent, the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, and the return of Adam into Paradise. See Isaih, Chap. XXXIV and XXXV."<sup>(4)</sup>

- (1) See the fourth "Memorable Fancy".  
 (2) Stokes, 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Introduction, p.19.  
 (3) 'The Last Judgment', p.458.  
 (4) Stokes' edition and that of Ellis, Works, Vol.I, pp.239 ff, have been used as the basis of this discussion.

Ellis inference from this passage that Blake had from childhood been aware of this coincidence of prophecy and birth, and so had seen himself always as an apprentice who was at this age to attain his mastership and begin the labor set for him, of outprophesying his master, I regard as obviously erroneous. We have no evidence of Blake's having been conscious in his childhood and youth of any such special relation between himself and Swedenborg, and certainly the attitude of Blake's parents toward their son's early visions precludes the possibility of their having emphasized any such relations. Blake may very well have been aware of the prophecy, but I doubt that it had any special significance for him till after his study of Swedenborg. On the other hand, I am very much inclined to agree with Stokes, who calls attention to the fact that thirty-three, Blake's age at the time of the publication of the 'Marriage', 1790, was also the age of Christ when he was crucified, and who says, "In this splendid and daring metaphor, therefore, Blake depicts the release of his imagination from the thralldom of the earlier mystic... and its resurrection and ascension into the freedom of a transcendental heaven." (2) The daring of the metaphor is not beyond Blake, especially when (3) we remember that to him Christ meant the divine in man.

But whatever the exact interpretation of the metaphor, one can scarcely fail to interpret it as implying that Blake was announcing his departure from creeds that were no longer of great value to him. "Swedenborg is the angel sitting at the tomb, his writings are the linen clothes folded up": this sentence is at once an acknowledgement of indebtedness and a declaration of independence, and as the latter

{ 1 } 'The Real Blake', pp.11-12.

{ 2 } Introduction, p.19.

{ 3 } "Concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ he said, 'He is the only God. But then he added, 'And so am I, and so are you.' C.R. Diary, p. 225.



it becomes reinforced proof of being the former, for one does not declare independence where there has not been allegiance.

Blake's first declaration of independence in the 'Marriage' is found even before the passage just quoted, namely in the 'Argument', which prefaces the book. This preface, however, most critics agree was written later than the 'Marriage' itself, since it resembles very much Blake's later "prophetic" books, and uses the symbolical name "Rintrah", which is introduced in 'Jerusalem' as the name of one of the sons of "Los".<sup>(1)</sup> "Rintrah" seemingly symbolizes intellectual power and imagination, which Blake often calls "wrath", and which he here symbolizes as a raging lion which "roars and shakes his fires in the burden'd air"--roars against arbitrarily fixed bounds for moral and spiritual truths. The 'Argument' is a curious parallel to the symbolism of 'The Mental Traveler', which will be spoken of later. It pictures the struggling progress of "the just man" in "a perilous path", till the "perilous path" becomes "planted" and the "villian" and the "sneaking serpent" make it their own--when the "just man" is driven again into "barren climes" and to "the worlds where lions roar". Interpreted, it describes the process by which "truth" painfully sought for and discovered by "the just man" becomes "accepted", narrowed, perverted, till "the just man" is forced to abandon it and seek for new "truths". It symbolizes directly Blake's "wrath" against Swedenborg and his abandonment of the "planted paths" of the latter's teachings.<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) See Russel and MacLagan's edition. "Rintrah" appears in 'Milton', see edition by the same authors.

(2) My interpretation of this and other parts of the 'Marriage' are partly those of Ellis and Yeats, Stokes, Berger, and other critics. I find it practically impossible to give the exact amount of credit due to specific works. A very small portion is original.

Having in the 'Argument' and the first passage of the 'Marriage' acknowledged his debt and asserted his independence, Blake in the second "Memorable Fancy" further explains his justification for "daring so roundly to assert" what had been "revealed" to him. From the passage quoted below it will be seen that Blake justified his repudiation of Swedenborg and his own "prophesying" by three principles: (1), that Poetic Genius is God and the source of all religion; (2), that therefore all poets have a valid intuition of truth, which comes to them as "the voice of honest indignation"; (3), that he is not honest who resists his genius and refuses to "prophecy".

"The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them; and whether they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, and so be the cause of imposition.

"Isaiah answered: I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discovered the infinite in everything, and as I was then persuaded, and remain confirmed, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote.

"Then I asked: Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so?

"He replied: All poets believe that it does, and in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything.

"Then Ezekiel said: The philosophy of the East taught the first principles of human perception. Some nations held one principle for the origin, and some another; we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests and Philosophers of other countries, and prophesying that all Gods would at last be proved to originate in ours and to be the tributaries of Poetic Genius. It was this that our great poet King David desired so fervently and invokes so pathetically, saying by this he conquers enemies and governs kingdoms; and we so loved our God, that we cursed in his name all the deities of surrounding nations, and asserted that they had rebelled. From these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the Jews. This, said he, like all firm persuasions, is come to pass, for all nations believe the Jews' code and worship the Jews' God, and what greater subjection can be?

"I heard this with some wonder, and must confess my own conviction...and is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratification?" (1)

(1) Much in this and other passages can be traced to Paine's writings.

Certain of the "Proverbs of Hell" contained in the first "Memorable Fancy" may also be taken as bearing strongly on Blake's attitude toward Swedenborg as one of the formalists in religious doctrine, who make creed a bond to fetter human reason and imagination.

"The Tigers of wrath are wiser than the Horses of instruction."

"Expect poison from standing water."

"Improvement makes strait roads, but the crooked roads without improvement are the roads of Genius."

"The ancient poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged and numerous senses could perceive. (1)

"And particularly they studied the genius of each city and country, placing it under its mental deity. (1)

"Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of and enslaved the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects; thus began priesthood.

"Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

"And atlast they pronounced that the Gods had ordered such things.

"Thus men forgot that all deities reside in the human breast." (2)

The fourth "Memorable Fancy" contains the most important matter relating to Blake's changed attitude toward Swedenborg. Blake describes how an angel (whom we soon discover to be Swedenborg himself) came to warn him of his future punishment: "Consider the hot burning dungeon thou art preparing for thyself to all eternity, to which thou art going in such a career". The angel then conducts Blake to Hell and shows him his lot. One cannot help noting at this point the difference in general style of description between Swedenborg and Blake. The latter is the poet always, and even in a parody such as this poetic passages creep in; the following passage is an example.

(1) These two passages explain Blake's own system of symbolism in the use of geographic names. See Chapter V.

(2) This last section is clearly not a "Proverb"; it appears among them owing to Blake's laxness of arrangement. As the connection in that is close to that of the real proverbs I have included it here.

"At last to the east, distant about three degrees, appeared a fiery crest above the waves. Slowly it reared like a ridge of golden rocks, till we discovered two globes of crimson fire, from which the sea fled away in clouds of smoke; and now we saw it was the head of Leviathan. His forehead was divided in streaks of green and purple like those on a tiger's forehead. Soon we saw his mouth and red gulls hanging just above the raging foam, tinging the black deep with beams of blood, and advancing toward us with all the fury of a spiritual existence."

No such passage can be found in all Swedenborg's works.

Continuing, Blake tells how when the angel leaves him he finds himself "sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river, by moonlight, hearing a harper who sang to the harp, and his theme was: The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water and breeds reptiles of the mind". Later he tells the angel, "All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics". Blake here plainly means to make clear two things: that he sees himself as having been a victim of Swedenborg's metaphysics, and that he looks upon change of opinion as not only justified but as the only means of saving the mind from the noxiousness of standing water.

Blake then forces the angel to accompany him to see his own lot. Weighting himself with "Swedenborg's volumes", Blake with the angel in his arms "leaps into a void". "Here, I said, is your lot, in this space, if space it may be called. The last clause in this sentence shows how conscious Blake is of Swedenborgian doctrine. The angel's lot is a "deep pit"; here are "seven houses of brick", and in one of them they see monkeys tied by chains and feeding upon themselves and one another. Blake is here again emphasizing the fact that Swedenborg and the churches are bound by their creeds and are feeding their intellect only upon such theories as the creeds allow. The angel (Swedenborg) complains, "Thy phantasy has imposed upon me, and thou oughtest to be ashamed"; whereat Blake returns, "We impose upon one

another, and it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only analytics". Blake is weary of Swedenborg's scientific analysis of all things both spiritual and natural; scientific analysis gives no room for intuition, which to Blake takes the place of reason since it is the emanation of the Poetic Genius.

But Blake does not leave us entirely dependent on symbolism in understanding <sup>the point of</sup> his difference with Swedenborg. In the last passage of the fourth "Memorable Fancy" he specifically tells us his estimate of Swedenborg:

"I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise. This they do with a confident insolence springing from systematic reasoning.

"Thus Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new, tho it is only the Contents or index of already published books.

"A man carried a monkey about for show, and because he was a little wiser than the monkey, grew vain, and conceived himself as much wiser than seven men. It is so with Swedenborg. He shows the folly of churches, and exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious, and himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net.

"Now hear a plain fact. Swedenborg has not written one new truth. Now hear another. He has written all the old falsehoods.

"Now hear the reason. He conversed with angels who are all religious, and conversed not with Devils who all hate religion, for he  
(1)  
was incapable thro his conceited notions.

"Thus Swedenborg's writings are all a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime, but no further.

(1) Possibly a suggestion that religious truth may be learned from "unbelievers". Blake was learning much from Paine.

"Hvae now another plain fact. Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus, or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespeare an infinite number.

"But when he has done this, let him not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine."

The last sentence has always been interpreted to mean that Blake, after all, regarded Swedenborg's wisdom as "sunshine" compared with the "candle light" of other "prophets". So interpreted it is a testimony to Blake's respect for Swedenborg's teaching as that of the master whom, after all, neither he nor others could outdo. To me, however, the passage clearly means that Blake considers all human understanding but "candle light" in the "sunshine" of truth--hence no one need boast of his attainments. The wording would seem to bear out such interpretation, since Blake says "he only holds a candle in sunshine", not in the sunshine. So interpreted the passage also bears out the main argument I am here presenting, that Blake is announcing and justifying his turning from Swedenborgian "light" to hold his own "candle" in the "sunshine" of truth.

Blake ends his declaration of independence in the last passage of the fifth and last "Memorable Fancy", in these words:

"Note. This Angel (not the same angel he had told of before) who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend: We often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well.

"I have also: the Bible of Hell; which the world shall have whether they will or no!"

Blake thus announces himself as ready to teach the world his

own doctrine, the wisdom of the "Devils" with whom Swedenborg would not converse--the Bible of Hell, that is of the "natural" mind, the body, and Man, all of whom Swedenborg had designated as "hell" and (1) evil. It now remains to point out the particular passages in which Blake states and restates what this doctrine is to be--the doctrine, as has already been pointed out, of Unity. Reading these passages, we need to keep in mind three very important points which they clarify and emphasize: (1), they show Blake's doctrine as differing from Swedenborg's; (2), Blake's doctrine is, however, an outgrowth from as well as a protest against the Swedenborgian doctrine of correspondence; (3), we find here again the fundamental difference between the scientific mind of Swedenborg, which was satisfied with objective correspondence and irreconcilable strife between the natural and spiritual, and the poetic instinct of Blake, which demanded Unity between them.

In the first passage following the argument, and in the passage immediately following that, which he calls "The Voice of the Devil", Blake forcefully explains the error of the church and Bible in regard to good and evil and the division of body and soul, and states his own principle of Unity.

"Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence.

"From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell."

"The Voice of the Devil

"All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:-"

(1) It must not be forgotten, however that Blake did not regard the "natural" as in itself holy; it is holy because of its Unity with the "spiritual".

\*1. That Man has two real existing principles, viz. a Body and a Soul.

\*2. That Energy, called Evil, is alone from the Body; and that Reason, called Good, is alone from the Soul.

\*3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

\*But the following contraries to these are true:-

\*1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul, for that called Body is a portion of the Soul discovered by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.

\*2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body, and Reason is the outward circumference of Energy.

\*3. Energy is Eternal Delight.\*

The Resurrection that Blake may be said to be teaching in his "Bible" is the resurrection of the body from the state of degradation and "natural sin" imposed upon it by those who did not see, as he saw, that the soul and body are one--the natural and spiritual "married".

In the last paragraph of the second "Memorable Fancy" we find Blake again reverting to his theory of the one-ness of soul and body and the consequent innate purity and sacredness of the latter:

"The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true, as I have heard from Hell.

"For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of life, and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt.

"This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.

"But first the notion that Man has a body distinct from his soul must be expunged; this I shall do by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the Infinite which was hid.(1)

"If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to Man as it is, infinite.

"For Man has closed himself up till he sees all things thro' the narrow chinks of his cavern."

It will be seen from these passages that Blake regards all error as emanating from the first grand error that "natural" and "spiritual" soul and body, are separated and the latter not holy. When this error is disproved, then the "natural" will be "consumed in fire", that

(1) Blake's method of printing was evidently "symbolical" to him.



is, will cease to exist as a separate conception, and man's perception will be "cleansed" so that he can "perceive the infinite". Again we see both the resemblance and the difference between this and the Swedenborgian doctrine. Man has indeed two natures and the spiritual or infinite is therefore not clearly revealed to him; but the revelation is to come about not by the "spiritual" or soul's overcoming the "natural" or body and superceding it, but by the realization of the truth that the body and soul are one.

In the fifth and last "Memorable Fancy" we find a new development of the theory of Unity. Since Soul and body, God and Man, are one, the impulses of the body are not to be restrained by arbitrary law, and man is not to be governed by an arbitrary God. Therefore Christ was a "lawbreaker" and was virtuous only as He acted "from impulse and not from rules".

"Once I saw a Devil in a flame of fire, who rose before an angel that sat on a cloud, and the Devil uttered these words:-

"The worship of God is honoring his gifts in other men, each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best. Those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God.

"The angel then replied:-

"Thou Idolator, is not God one? and is he not visible in Jesus Christ? and has not Jesus Christ given his sanction to the law of ten commandments, and are not all other men fools, sinners, and nothings?"

"The Devil answered:- Bray a fool in a mortar with wheat, yet shall not his folly be beaten out of him. If Jesus Christ is the greatest man you ought to love him in the greatest degree. Now hear how he has given his sanction to the law of the ten commandments.

"Did he not mock at the Sabbath, and so mock the sabbath's God? murder those who were murdered because of him? turn away the law from the woman taken in adultery? steal the labor of others to support him? bear false witness when he omitted making a defence before Pilate? covet when he prayed for his disciples and when he bid them shake off the dust of their feet against such as refused to lodge them? I tell you no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue and acted from impulse, not from rules".

To interpret Blake as here and in other passages arguing for

(1) It is a little difficult to make clear the difference between the conception of separation, which Blake acknowledged existed--as an evil--, and actual separation. See later comment.

bodily license (as even his most faithful interpreter, Ellis, may be accused of doing) is to not realize the logical and ideal completeness of his doctrine of natural and spiritual Unity. The body that realizes this ideal of one-ness with spirit is not likely to have impulses that require freedom in the sense of license. However, all that concerns us here is the opportunity to emphasize once more the difference between Swedenborg's doctrine and Blake's: Swedenborg's ideal was a spirit-conquered body; Blake's was a spiritual body, a body spiritualized by the realization of its one-ness with spirit. To Blake Christ's impulses were holy and needed no restraint by law because He was the incarnation of this union of body and soul. (1)

In conclusion it may be well to recapitulate the various important contributions of the 'Marriage' as the chief document in establishing the relation between Swedenborg and Blake: (1), As a whole it is traceable in its germ idea to passages in Swedenborg's 'Angelic Wisdom'; (2), Its form is a parody upon Swedenborg's writings, including a use of Swedenborgian "symbols"; (3), It contains a definite, though metaphorically expressed, acknowledgement of Blake's indebtedness to Swedenborg as a former master; (4), It states Blake's own justification for departing from Swedenborgian doctrines; (5), It sets forth Blake's central doctrine of Unity, and emphasizes at once its Swedenborgian origin and its differentiation from that doctrine; (6), It emphasizes the difference between Swedenborg and Blake as the difference between the scientist-philosopher and the philosopher-poet. Blake's revolt against Swedenborg is very fittingly epitomized in the last sentence of the 'Marriage': "One Law for the Lion and the Ox is Oppression".

(1) The interpretation of Blake's doctrine as that of Unity is my own. I may be carrying it too far at this point; it seems valid to me.

## CHAPTER V

## THE EVIDENCE OF SWEDENBORGIAN INFLUENCE

IN BLAKE'S LATER WORKS AND IN HIS LETTERS AND REPORTED CONVERSATIONS  
(1790-1827)

It has been the attempt of the four previous chapters of this paper to discover and establish three distinct elements of the relationship of Blake's mysticism to that of Swedenborg. The first chapter attempts to prove that as a child Blake "accepted" Swedenborgian "vision", and became a visionary for life; the second chapter foreshadows his acceptance of symbolism, as evinced by his use of a form of it in 'Poetical Sketches' and 'An Island In The Moon'; the third and fourth chapters give evidence in Blake's own words of his examination of Swedenborgian doctrine, and attempt to prove that from Swedenborg's doctrine of Correspondence Blake evolved his own doctrine of Unity. It will be the work of the present chapter further to establish, elucidate, and illustrate these three elements by material from Blake's later works and from his letters and reported conversations. Concerning vision we shall find definite statements which will do much to establish both the resemblance and the difference between Blake's conception and that of the master seer from whose writings and teachings he derived his belief in visionary powers. Of Blake's acceptance and use of symbolism, concerning which this paper has so far offered little but theory, we shall happily find evidence both definite and conclusive. As regards the doctrine of Unity we have already had the most conclusive evidence; what we shall find here will be merely reiteration and re-illustration, and to a very slight degree, development.

The sources upon which this chapter is based are: (1), 'Songs of Experience', published in 1794; (2), miscellaneous poems, called by Ellis 'Ideas of Good and Evil' and 'The everlasting Gospel', and included by Sampson in his publication of the 'Rossetti' and 'Pickering' Manuscripts, (1793-1811); (3), 'The Prophetic Books', probably written from 1789 to 1804; (4), certain prose 'Discourses' published in connection with his art of engraving, some written as late as 1810; (5) Blake's letters, published by Russel, dating from 1795 to 1827, the year of Blake's death; (6), reported conversations, mainly those reported by Crabb Robinson in his Diary and Reminiscences of the years 1825-8, and a few occurring in Cunningham's Life of Blake, also relating to the last part of Blake's life. In using these documents the chronological order will be preserved as nearly as practicable, and such passages only will be cited as have a direct significance in relation to the three elements of vision, symbolism, and the doctrine of Unity. For the sake of convenience the chapter will be divided into sections, each section treating of the material of one of the various sources enumerated above.

### I. Songs Of Experience:

As material for showing the development of Blake's philosophy the 'Songs of Experience' are very important because of their complete contrast with the 'Songs of Innocence'. Instead of the earlier pure joy and acquiescence we have in these later 'Songs' fierce misery and rebellion. The element of "rebellion" is of direct significance

(1) Ellis, Blake's Poetical Works, Vol. I, pp. 103ff.

(2) Sampson, Poetical Works, pp. 137 & 263.

(3) †The Real Blake', Chaps. XXV and XXVII.

(4) Ellis, Works, Vol. II.

(5) One letter dates presumably from 1784, but it contains nothing pertinent to this discussion.

to this discussion because it is a phase of Blake's quarrel with the Swedenborgian doctrine of the opposition of "good" and "evil", representing the spiritual and natural, and the consequent necessity of restraint of the latter by laws, moral and religious. Blake having come to see that recognition of the unity of spiritual and natural made men both good and happy, hated the artificial restraints of laws and institutions which failed to recognize this principle.

Analyzing these poems, we find that they may be grouped into the following divisions: Against the church and formal religion, 'The Little Vagabond', 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'A Little Boy Lost'; Against the artificial and harsh restraints of childhood: 'The Nurse's Song', 'Holy Thursday', 'The Voice OF The Ancient Bard', 'The School Boy'; Against restraints upon "love": 'The Angel', 'Clod And Pebble', 'My Pretty Rose Tree', 'Ah Sun Flower', 'The Garden Of Love', 'A Little Girl Lost'; Against law, moral and natural, which did not recognize man's unity with divinity: 'To Tirzah', 'Infant Sorrow', 'London', 'The Human Abstract', 'A Divine Image'.

Viewed in the light of Blake's philosophy, the 'Songs of Innocence' may be said to depict the happy life of the child who lives in unconscious "unity", while the 'Songs of Experience' portray the misery of those upon whom the artificialities of life have forced a sense of disunion. A moment's thought will show that this conception differs materially from the Swedenborgian and ordinary religious doctrines, which think the child "innocent" because unconscious of evil, (tho he may be evil, in fact is, since he is in the "natural" state only.), and which attributes his later unhappiness to the struggle between good and evil, one of which must be overcome. Blake's conception is here as elsewhere at once an outgrowth from and a protest

against the Swedenborgian doctrine of objective correspondence but subjective opposition of spiritual and natural.

It may be worth mentioning also that we find in these poems (as their titles indicate) that interest in and love and understanding of child, animal, and flower, which is a part of the manifestation of the Poetic Genius in Blake--the spirit that set him free from the rigid "laws" of Swedenborg.

## II. Miscellaneous Poems:

Among the miscellaneous poems are found passages of such varied importance to this discussion that I have thought best to quote the most important as they occur and to point out their significance without any formal division into types. I shall follow the 'Rossetti' and 'Pickering' Manuscripts as printed by Sampson, and refer to individual poems by number where titles are lacking.

In III, R. MS., Blake shows a consequence of the conception that the natural is not one with the spiritual and is therefore not pure and holy but evil and needing the restraint of "law":

"I saw a chapel all of gold  
That none dare to enter in,  
And many weeping stood without  
Weeping, mourning, worshipping.

I saw a serpent rise between  
The white pillars of the door,  
And he forc'd and forc'd and forc'd  
Down the golden hinges tore,

And along the pavement sweet,  
Set with pearls and rubies bright,  
All his shining length he drew,  
Till upon the altar white

Vomiting his poison out  
On the bread and on the wine."

Law restraining the natural and denying its identity with the spiritual creates guilt.

In XI, R. MS., we find Blake using the symbolical names 'Thames' and 'Ohio' as he uses other geographical names in his 'Prophetic Books' (1)

"Tho born on the cheating banks of the Thames  
Tho his waters bathed my infant limbs,  
The Ohio shall wash his stains from me;  
I was born a slave, but I go to be free."

In XXIX, R. MS., we catch again the note of protest against formal religion:

"Come hither, my boy, tell me what thou seest there.  
A fool tangled in a religious snare."

In XXVII, R. MS., we find Blake using the symbols, "Spectre" and "Emanation", which in his 'Prophetic Books' he uses as symbols of the division within man's own personality, which makes him unhappy. (2)

"My Spectre around me night and day  
Like a wild beast guards my way;  
My Emanation far within  
Weeps incessantly for my sin.  
A fathomless and boundless deep,  
There we wander, there we weep;  
On the hungry craving wind  
My Spectre follows thee behind."

In CXXIV, R. MS., Blake expresses his protest against arbitrary established law, which even tho established by God is a "tyranny:

"To God  
If you have formed a Circle to go into,  
Go into it yourself, and see how you would do."

In 'The everlasting Gospel', R. MS. III, we find him protesting, as in the 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell', against the idea that obedience is virtue, by showing that Christ himself was a "lawbreaker". The idea is here as in the 'Marriage' that man is divine--is both God and Christ--when he recognizes the unity of spiritual and natural.

(1) See Section III of this chapter. By those who attempted to interpret Blake without an understanding of his symbolical use of such names this passage was held to indicate that Blake at one time thot of immigrating to America!

(2) See Section III for explanation of this symbolism.

"Was Jesus humble, or did He  
Give any proofs of Humility?  
When but a Child he ran away  
And left His Parents in dismay.

.....  
But He acts with triumphant pride,  
And this is the reason Jesus died.  
If He had been Antichrist, creeping Jesus,  
He'd have done anything to please us:  
Gone sneaking into the synagogues  
And not used the Elders and Priests like dogs.  
Humble toward God, haughty toward Man,  
This is the race that Jesus ran.  
But when He humbled Himself to God,  
Then descended the cruel rod.  
'If thou humblest thyself, thou humblest Me;  
Thou also dwelst in Eternity.  
Thou art a Man; God is no more.  
Thine own Humanity learn to adore."

(1)

In 'The Mental Traveler' we find an echo of the 'Argument' of the 'Marriage'. Here again is portrayed the struggles of a new "Truth", "born a boy", to free it self from conventional "truth", "A Woman old"; his marriage with "the Woman old, who grows young because of his "shrieks and cries"; the birth of a new "truth", which presently grows into "a Woman old", and so on thru a continuous cycle of opposition to and final "acceptance" of "truth". Viewing it in the light of Blake's other utterances, we see this as another bit of evidence of his rejection of truths outgrown and of his protest against enforced conformity.

In 'Auguries of Innocence', P. MS., Blake expresses in beautiful poetic language a form of his philosophy of Unity:

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand,  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour."

It will be seen that this is also a poetic expression of Swedenborg's No.79 in 'Angelic Wisdom', which reads, "The Divine is the



same in things the greatest and the most minute." But Swedenborg's meaning, as is shown by Nos. 77 to 79, is that the element of divinity is the same in all since it emanates from the same source, while Blake sees the same divinity in all because all is divine.

In the last part of the same poem are found these two lines relating to vision:

"We are led to Believe a Lie  
When we see not Thro' the Eye."

To Blake, as we shall see in the Section following, there was a great distinction between seeing thru the eye and seeing merely with the eye.

### III 'Prophetic Books!

It is evident that no exhaustive study of the entire contents of the 'Prophetic Books' is possible in a paper of this scope and time allowance. Even with the help of such effective keys as have been provided by Ellis and Yeats, <sup>(1)</sup> the labor of interpreting a single "book" of one of the poems is equivalent to that of reading several volumes of ordinary English. All that I have attempted is a "reading" of the most important of the poems, with the aid of commentaries and notes, with a view to obtaining a general idea of style and content and special evidence of similarities in the kind of symbolism used by Blake and that interpreted from the Bible by Swedenborg. What may very probably be over looked in such a superficial treatment is, of course such bits of evidence as similarities in meaning between symbols used by Blake and those interpreted from Scriptures by Swedenborg. Such evidence would be highly valuable, and its possible omission is very regrettable.

(1)'The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical.'

Necessarily disregarding, then, the matter of interpretation, by means of the evidence I have been able to gather from the 'Prophetic Books' I would attempt to establish two theories concerning Swedenborgian influence on Blake's use of symbolism: (1), The fact that Blake chose to write his poems in a language of symbols so far beyond mere metaphor that they are for the most part unintelligible to the ordinary reader is in itself evidence of the profound influence of Swedenborg's interpretation of the Bible upon the mind of Blake; (2), The kinds of symbols Blake uses are strikingly similar to those Swedenborg professed to interpret from the Scriptures. The proof of the first theory must rest pretty much upon general arguments; for proof of the second it is possible to produce plenty of specific evidence.

1. Symbolism itself as evidence of Swedenborgian influence:

From Swedenborg's 'Arcana Caelestia', chapter on 'Internal Sense' we read these significant statements:

"NO.1404. In these narratives (of the Bible) which are matters of true history, all the declarations and words, and each of them singly, have in the internal sense, an entirely different signification from that which they bear in the literal sense; and the historical facts themselves are representative. Abram, who is first treated of represents, in general, the Lord, and, in particular, the celestial man; Isac, who is afterwards treated of, in like manner represents, in general, the Lord, and, in particular, the spiritual man; Jacob also, in general, represents the Lord, and, in particular, the natural man. Thus they represent the things appertaining to the Lord and to his church."

"NO.1405. But the internal sense is of such a nature, as has

thus been clearly shown, that, in it, all things are to be understood, even to the minutest particles, abstractedly from the letter, and just as if the letter did not exist: for in the internal sense is the soul and life of the Word, which does not appear, unless the literal sense is as it were evanescent. It is thus that the angels, by gift from the Lord, have a perception of the Word when it is read by man."

From these two passages it is perfectly clear what Swedenborg meant by his interpretation of the Bible as written in symbolical language. It also becomes clear what Blake means when he says: "Why is the Bible more entertaining and instructive than any other book? Is it not because they (books of Homer, Virgil, Milton, also mentioned) are addressed to the Imagination, which is the spiritual sensation, and but mediately to the understanding or reason?" This passage is proof that Blake accepted and valued highly the Swedenborgian interpretation of the Scriptures as symbolical. Finally, it becomes clear that Blake had accepted the symbolical language as the highest form of literary medium, when we read what he says of 'Milton' the 'Prophetic' poem written during his sojourn at Felpham:

"A sublime allegory which is now perfectly completed into a grand poem. I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be any other than the secretary; the authors are in eternity. I consider it as the grandest poem that this world contains. Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most sublime poetry."<sup>(3)</sup>

(1) It must be remembered that to Blake "Imagination" meant far more than the word ordinarily conveys. It was to him an emanation from the 'Poetic Genius', and signified something more spiritual than we understand from even the word "intuition".

(2) Letter to Dr. Tussler, 23rd Aug., 1799. Russel, p. 63. The fact that Blake thought the poetry of the great poets symbolical undoubtedly strengthened his determination to make his own so.

(3) Letter to Butts, 6th July, 1803, Russel, p. 121. That Blake did not use the term "allegory" in the ordinary sense is evident from the language, and more evident from the poem! He used the term because he could find no other--what other is to be found?--hence there is no contradiction between this passage and the one following.

Why Blake was not satisfied to write his poems as allegories, in the ordinary sense, is explained by the following passage from his 'Second Account of his Last Judgment Picture, for the Year 1810: (1)

"The Last Judgment is not fable or allegory but Vision. Fable or allegory is a totally distinct and inferior kind of poetry. Vision, or Imagination, is a representation of what actually exists really and unchangeably. Fable or allegory is formed by the daughters of Memory. Imagination is surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration, who in the aggregate are called Jerusalem. ...

Allegories are things that relate to moral virtues. Moral virtues do not exist. They are allegories and dissimulations. ...

"The Hebrew Bible and the Gospel of Jesus are not allegory but eternal vision or imagination of all that exists." (2)

That Blake, then, wrote his poems as "allegories" of such a peculiar sort that his contemporaries, reading them or hearing of them, tapped their foreheads almost in the author's presence, was due to the fact that he had been led by Swedenborg to see all greatness and interest of the Bible as resting upon its use of symbolic language, and to feel that therefore symbolical poetry must necessarily be the sublimest form of literature. That Blake found this mode of writing very useful in minor ways--for speaking of matters that could not well be treated of in ordinary language and for abusing friends and enemies in secret, for instance,--can not, and need not, be denied. But that this was a minor result of his use of symbolism and not the great purpose of it let the poems themselves attest. Blake had, after all, a philosophy to proclaim, and he fervently believed that symbolism was the highest medium in which to proclaim it.

(1) Ellis, 'The Real Blake', p. Chap. XXVII.

(2) The last statement is an additional, and still more definite proof that Blake accepted Swedenborg's interpretation of the Scriptures. The preceding statement concerning moral virtues bears out well previous statements in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' and 'The Everlasting Gospel'. In spite of apparent contradictions, one is more and more impressed with the underlying consistency of Blake's philosophy.

## 2. Evidence of Swedenborgian influence in the symbols.

An analysis of Blake's symbols enables one to divide them into seven groups. These are: (1), Names of real persons, (2), Geographic names, (3), Names of the four directions, (4), Names of organs and regions of the body, (5), Names of animals, (6), Names of common objects, (7), Invented "mythological" names. I shall present a very brief analysis of each group, with the purpose of showing what in each may be called Swedenborgian.

(1) Of names of real persons we find Blake constantly using "Newton", "Locke", "Milton", and others, as names of conditions or "states" instead of persons. He uses also names of contemporaries, such as "Schofield", for Schofield, a soldier with whom he had had a quarrel. From a reference to Swedenborg's works, especially to his 'Dictionary of Correspondence', we find that Swedenborg interprets all Biblical proper names as symbolical.

"Cain signifies faith separate from love."

"Abel signifies charity or love. God conjoined with truth."

"Ezekiel represents the doctrine of Truth and the Word, and thence exploration, made amongst the men of the church, as to their internal state of reception."

"John signifies the good of Love to the Lord, and consequent good of life."

Blake also makes frequent use of Biblical names as symbols, though whether he attaches to them the exact meaning given them by Swedenborg one cannot determine without a very close study of meaning.

(1) In interpreting Blake's symbols to the extent of at least understanding them as symbols, I have depended very greatly on the works of Ellis and Yeats, Berger, and Russel and MacLagan. I find it impossible in most specific cases to give individual credit. The organization into classes and the direct comparison with Swedenborg's definitions is all that I can claim as original work.

(2) Ellis, in 'The Real Blake', Chap. XXVIII, pp. 331-2, points out uses of "in", "within", and "is" in Blake that point to Swedenborgian origin.

(3) Examples cited here are from the 'Dictionary'.

(2) Of geographic names Blake makes such constant use that there is scarcely a locality in England which is not represented in one or more of his poems. This kind of symbolism must have been especially exasperating to those who attempted to read Blake literally, as witness the following:

"Go thou to Skofield: ask him if he is Bath or if he is Canterbury." (1)

"Hampstead, Highgate, Finchley, Hudon, Muswell Hill, rage loud (2)  
Before Bromion's iron tongs and glowing Poker reddening fierce."

"And Tweed and Tyne anxious to give up their souls for Albion's sake." (2)

Blake also uses the names of continents symbolically, so that the 'Prophetic' book, 'America', is by no means a prophecy concerning our particular country. It should be pointed out, however, that in these geographic, as well as in all symbolic names, Blake makes use of metonymy. America and the West, for instance, represent to him something of a state of greater freedom and perfection. Swedenborg makes a similar use of metonymy, as I shall show by underlining certain significant words in the following passages:

"Goshen, land of, signifies the inmost of the natural mind."

"Jordan, land of, signifies what is lowly, consequently, what is distant from what is celestial, as the external things of man are from things internal."

Further study reveals the fact that Swedenborg interprets symbolically every geographic name in the Bible, and that the interpretation is very largely based on metonymy.

Blake's use of metonymy is doubly significant; not only does it provide additional evidence of Swedenborgian influence, as has just been shown, but it furnishes also a connecting link, as was suggested in Chapter II, between the metaphor-symbolism of 'Poetical Sketches'

(1) 'Jerusalem', Russel and Maclagan, p.18. (2) Ibid, p.15.

and the word-symbolism of the 'Prophetic' poems. This use of metonymy and its double significance should be borne in mind in all analysis of the symbolism of Blake.

(3) and (4): Blake's use of names of the directions, and of organs and regions of the body, is so conveniently summed up by Russel and Maclagan that I shall make use of their statement. Of the invented "mythological" names here mentioned I shall speak further in discussing (7).

"Urizen is the Intellect; he is called a Plowman, and rules in the zenith, in the South, in Air, in the Head and Eyes of man. Luvah is the Emotional life, he is called a Weaver and rules in the Centre, in the East, in Fire, in the Heart and Nostrils. Tharmas is the life of the Senses; he is called a Shepherd, and rules in the Circumference, in the West, in Water, in the Loins and Tongue: in his region is the door of perception, and it is when this western door is closed that man believes himself to have a body apart from his soul. Urthona is that power known in its highest form as Inspiration and in its lowest as instinct; he is called a Blacksmith, and rules in the Nadir in the North, in Earth, in the Womb and Ears: he has a vehicular form named Los (the vehicle, that is of Inspiration) the spirit of Prophecy, and in a certain sense the Prophet, Blake, himself." (1)

Turning to Swedenborg, we find that he also constantly interprets direction and bodily organs and regions as having symbolical significance: concerning the first we read in the 'Angelic Wisdom'--

"No.121. Hence it is that in the Word, the east, in a supreme sense, means the Lord, and, in a respective sense, love towards Him; the west, love towards Him decreasing; the south, wisdom in light; and the north wisdom in shade; or similar things determined in regard to the state of those who are treated of."

Concerning Swedenborg's use of names of bodily organs and regions there is much to learn in his 'Heaven and Hell', where he explains heaven as being in the form of a man, each bodily region having its own significance. A typical statement may be found in No.94:

"It has been shown that the universal heaven is as one man, and that it is in form a man, and is therefore called the Grand Man. It

(1) Russel and Maclagan, Blake's 'Jerusalem', Introduction, p.X.

has also been shown, that the angelic societies, of which heaven consists, are hence arranged in the same order as the members, organs, and viscera in man; so that there are some that have their stations in the head, some in the arms, some in the breast, and some in every distinct part of those members. The societies, therefore, which are in any member in heaven, correspond to the same member in man. ...It is from that correspondence that man subsists; for man derives his subsistence solely from heaven."(1)

(5) With regard to Blake's use of the names of animals as symbols, a bit of interpretation is here offered, which attempts to prove that Blake not only obtained the idea from Swedenborg, but that here at least he definitely accepted Swedenborg's meaning. The two passages used are from 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'; the first is one of the 'Proverbs' and the second is the last statement in the 'Marriage', and both were quoted in the chapter dealing with that work.

1. "The Tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction!"

Referring to Swedenborg's 'Dictionary', we find:

"Tigers represent the infernal cupidities of self love."

"Horses signifies knowledges or understanding of the Word and, in opposite sense, the understanding of the Word falsified by reasonings."

Remembering that by "wrath" Blake meant intellectual power or activity, and translating, we find that Blake probably meant to say, "Self love which reveals itself in intellectual power and activity is "wiser" than instruction founded upon (false) reasoning concerning religion and life."

2. "One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression."

From Swedenborg's 'Dictionary' we find:

"Lion signifies divine truth in power."

"Ox signifies the celestial natural principle, also natural exterior good."

"Translating", we have, "One law for divine truth in power (that

(1) Ellis treats of Blake's acceptance of the idea of the "Grand Man" in 'The Real Blake', Chap. XXIX. (2) Chap. IV, P. 38.



is, for the man who has realized his own divinity and so acts from that "power") and for natural exterior good (that is, "moral" good as preached to the "natural" man) is oppression".

Remembering that Blake meant the 'Marriage' as a declaration of independence and a justification of his abandonment of the "planted paths" of Swedenborg's "reasoning" and "metaphysics"-- anything concerning reasoning always in itself abhorrent to Blake--, we have no difficulty in reconciling the first "interpretation" with the general theme of the 'Marriage'. The second passage is, as indeed it is seen to be from even its literal interpretation, a protestation against "law" that puts the same artificial restraints and demands upon all; the "interpretation" merely lines it up a little closer with Blake's conception of the divine unity in man as opposed to the idea of spiritual versus natural--that is, the understanding of the idea of unity sets man above the "law" necessary for the "natural-spiritual" man.

(6) With regard to Blake's use of the names of common objects, it need only be pointed out that those most common in his writings--"plow", "harrow", "gate", etc.--can all be found as having symbolical meaning in Swedenborg's 'Dictionary'. An interesting proof of how deeply symbolical was Blake's mental conception of the outside world is furnished by a passage from a letter to Butts, on Blake's arrival at Felpham:

"Work will go on here with God-speed. A roller and two harrows lie before my window. I set a plow on my first going out at my gate the first morning after my arrival, and the plowboy said to the plowman, 'Father, the gate is open'!" (1)

(1) Letter to Butts, 23rd Sept. 1800. Russel suggests the symbolical interpretation in a note, p. 78.

(7) Concerning Blake's invention of "mythological" names we have already seen something in the passage quoted from Russel and Maclagan. The names there given are the names of the four "Zoas", and all interpretations agree that they represent four "states" of man. Each of the "Zoas" has also a female mate, and is himself further "divided" in to "Spectre" and "Emanation". Terrific struggles are constantly occurring between the "Zoas", between the male and female of each, and between "Spectre" and "Emanation". Happiness can be attained only when all are reconciled. We have here again Blake's central theory of Unity--man's <sup>realizing</sup> conception of inner unity being his only hope of happiness. In the further "divisions" within the "Zoas" themselves we see how Blake's theory developed itself consistently into more and more subtle conceptions. I shall add to the interpretation of the "Zoas" quoted from Russel and Maclagan, the gist of the interpretation made by Berger. Urizen--first born, self knowledge arising from experience, intelligence, and reasoning faculties; his mate, Ahania. Luvah--human love, "the state of the soul governed by emotions"; his mate, Vala. Tharmas--vegetative power, "that state of the spirit which feels only the blind forces of life and growth"; his mate, Enion. Urthona--Los, "the instinct that binds the individual to the universe--the last recollection of primal unity, the spirit of Art and Prophecy"; his mate, Enitharmon. Blake himself describes the characteristics of the four "Zoas" in these words:

"Urizen, cold and scientific; Luvah, pitying and weeping;  
Tharmas, indolent and sullen; Urthona, doubting and despairing"

The spirit of all the 'Prophetic' poems is that of violent strug-

(1) See quotation from poem in Section II of this Chapter, p.52.

(2) 'Blake, Poet and Mystic', Chapter on 'The Four Zoas'. Berger has also, as was mentioned in the Introduction, a very good account of the general resemblance of Blake's symbolism to Swedenborg's.

gle and wild agony, the result of disunion.

Just how Blake arrived at his conception of the four "Zoas" and exactly how he invented the names it is impossible to determine. Russel and Maclagan suggest that the four "Zoas" stand "somewhat in the place of Boehmen's Fountain Spirits." (1) It would seem much easier to accept the suggestions made by Ellis, and by Berger, that Blake derived his four "Zoas" from the Swedenborgian division of man into the three states, "natural, spiritual, and celestial". (2) (3) Further, since "Urthona" or "Los", by which Blake symbolized himself, was to be the conqueror or final unifying force, it occurs to me that Blake was here symbolizing the "conquest" and "unification" of "divided" man by himself (Blake) as embodying the idea of Unity and as the vehicle of Inspiration emanating from the Poetic Genius. I admit, however, that this theory rests on knowledge far too superficial to sustain it. (4) (5) (6)

Concerning the invention of the names, Ellis suggests, "In Swedenborg's No.295 we have a hint about how Blake composed his mythic names, adapting them from any that he could pick up and so far altering as to bring in significant letters." (7) No.295 of the 'Angelic Wisdom' concerns the difference between natural and spiritual language. I have found Swedenborg's 'Dictionary' of more direct helpfulness in the matter. The 'Dictionary' gives the symbolical meaning

(1) 'Blake's Jerusalem', Introduction, p.X.

(2) 'The Real Blake', p.107.

(3) 'Blake, Poet and Mystic', Chapter on 'Sources of Mysticism'.

(4) See quotations from Marginalia in Chapter III, and 'Angelic Wisdom' or other of Swedenborg's works.

(5) See quotation from Russel and Maclagan, p.60.

(6) 'Jerusalem, Bk.I, ll, 24 ff., Russel and Maclagan, p.47.

(7) 'The Real Blake', p.108. The suggestion concerning "significant letters" is the one from which I have worked.

of all the vowels and the consonant h. The definitions follow:

"A--corresponds in the celestial language with affection."

"E and I--in the third heaven they are not able to express these two vowels but instead of them Y and EU, because the vowels E and I belong properly to the spiritual (not celestial) class of affections.

"H involves infinity, because it is only an aspirate...the letter H is the only one in Jehovah which implies infinity."

"O--in the angelic language is a vowel used among the angels of the third heaven to express a sound corresponding with affection."

"U and O--The speech of the heavenly angels sounds much from the U and O. From the expressions in the Word in the Hebrew language, it may in some measure be known whether they belong to the heavenly class or to the spiritual class, thus whether they involve good or truths; those which involve good partake much of the U and O, and also something of A, but those which involve truth partake of E and I. Because affections manifest themselves chiefly by sounds, therefore also, when great subjects are treated of, as heaven and God, those words are preferred in human discourse, which contain the vowels U and O."

These passages are so clearly explanatory of the names "Urizen", "Luvah", "Tharmas", and "Urthona" that little comment need be made. We notice at once the predominance of the favored vowels; only "Urizen", which symbolizes intelligence and reasoning powers has the E and I; "Urthona" the highest of the "Zoas" has both the U and O; all but "Urizen" have the A which signifies affection and the H which signifies infinity; "Urizen" had neither of these qualities since it symbolized the "first born", creation thru division, and reasoning.

Having now at least to some extent established the relationship of the symbolism of Blake's 'Prophetic Books' and Swedenborg's symbolical interpretation of the Bible, little further use can be made of the 'Prophetic Books' within the limits of this paper, beyond pointing out a few significant passages which emphasize strongly some other of the points of this discussion. I am limiting myself here to the use of 'Milton' and 'Jerusalem', since these two are the most

(1) "Urizen" was the "first born", that is the first conception of man's disunion from divinity. Blake seems to regard the "fall" to consist of this conception of disunion. See Berger, Blake, p.107.

profound of the 'Prophetic Books', towards which all the others are gradual approaches. 'Thel', the first, may be said to be the bridge between the metaphor-symbolism of 'Poetical Sketches' and the word-symbolism of the later 'Prophetic' poems.

In 'Milton' occurs the famous passage relative to Swedenborg:

"O Swedenborg! strongest of men, the Samson shorn by the churches  
Shewing the Transgressors in Hell, the proud Warriors in Heaven,  
Heaven as a Punisher, and Hell as one under Punishment." (1)

Another exclamation against Swedenborg for having allowed himself to be bound by formal doctrine and for having divided and opposed "good" and "evil"!

In lines 46-48 of the same poem we have a statement of cause and effect which may be nicely paralleled with a Swedenborgian statement:

"And every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause and not  
A Natural: for a Natural Cause only seems: it is a Delusion  
Of Ulro and ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory."

Swedenborg's statement is:

"The spiritual world is here first treated of; for all causes exist there: we shall afterwards treat of the natural world, where all things which appear are effects."

Finally one line may be quoted as showing how conscious Blake was thruout the 'Prophetic' poems of his mythic personages as representing "states" instead of individuals: the "Seven Angels" say,

"We are not Individuals but states, Combinations of Individual" (2)

It now remains to gather from Blake's few prose 'Discourses' and from his letters and reported conversations such evidence, not already used, as will serve to strengthen further the arguments already advanced. Passages dealing with vision will be especially

(1) Russel and Maclagan, p.19, ll.50 ff.

(2) 'Milton', Bk.II, Russel and Maclagan, p.51, l. 9.

emphasized. I shall endeavor to establish three points in regard to vision: (1), that Blake continued to accept vision as a reality thruout his life as he had been led to do in his childhood thru the Swedenborgian talk in his home; (2), that this vision was in most respects similar to Swedenborgian vision; (3), that there was a poetic element in Blake's vision that was not present in Swedenborg's conception of vision.

#### IV Prose Discourses:

(1)

In the Preface to his 'Descriptive Catalog', printed for an exhibition of his pictures in 1809, Blake makes this significant statement concerning Swedenborg's visions:

"This subject (The Spiritual Preceptor) is taken from the visions of Emanuel Swedenborg (Universal Theol. No. 633). The learned who strive to ascend into heaven by means of learning, appear to children like dead horses, when repelled by celestial spheres.

"The works of this visionary are well worthy the attention of Painters and Poets. They are foundations for grand things. The reason they have not been more attended to is because corporeal demons have gained a predominance. Who the leaders of these are will be shown below. Unworthy men who gain fame among men continue to govern Mankind after death, and in their spiritual bodies oppose the spirits of those who worthily are famous, and, as Swedenborg observes, by entering into diseases and excrement, drunkenness and concupiscence, they possess themselves of the bodies of mortal men, and shut the doors of mind and that by placing Learning above Inspiration. O Artists, you may disbelieve all this, but it shall be at your own peril."

There is every reason to believe ~~to believe~~, from this passage and from the nature of the painting, 'The Last Judgment', and Blake's explanation of its meaning, that Blake accepted Swedenborgian ideas far more unqualifiedly in his art than in his poetry and philosophy. Swedenborgian influences as shown in Blake's art might very well be made an interesting and important chapter of this discussion; both materials and qualifications for study are, however, lacking.

(2)

(1) Published by Ellis in 'The Real Blake', pp. 274ff. Passage from p. 288

(2) Gilchrist and Ellis have splendid chapters on Blake's art.

The following passages from Blake's 'Second Account of His Last Judgment' bear so plainly on the various points they treat of that they need no comment:

"The Last Judgment is one of these stupendous visions. I have represented it as I saw it... ." (2)

"The world of imagination is the world of eternity. It is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the vegetated body. This world of imagination is infinite and eternal, where—as the world of generation or vegetation is finite and temporal. (3) There exist in that eternal world the eternal realities of everything which we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature." (4)

"When any individual rejects error and embraces truth, a Last Judgment passes upon that individual." (5)

Finally, we have from this same 'Account' a splendid statement concerning the consummation of Unity--the burning up of the "natural," or error, in its complete union with the spiritual, the true reality, a development of his theory of Unity, of which we had the first mention in the 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell'. We shall find in the same passages a statement of what Blake meant by seeing "thru" the eye.

"Error is created. Truth is eternal. Error or creation will be burned up, and then, and not till then, truth or eternity will appear. It is burned up the moment men cease to behold it. I assert for myself that I do not behold the outward creation, and that to me it is a hindrance and not action. It is as the dirt upon my feet--no part of me.

"What' it will be questioned, 'when the sun rises do you not see a round disk of fire something like a guinea?' Oh! No! No! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying--'Holy, holy, holy, is the God Almighty!' I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look thru the eye and not with it.

(1) Published in 'The Real Blake', pp. 317 ff.

(2) The passages quoted are from p. 318.

(3) Another instance where it is a bit difficult to defend Blake against the charge of self-contradiction! Blake is, however, here as elsewhere, speaking of the conception of a separate "world of generation or vegetation". Furthermore, what mystic or idealist ever succeeded in explaining away the "natural" world, without some contradiction, in terms at least!

(4) This passage partly explains the foregoing; nature is a mere "reflection" of the eternal and real.

(5) p. 325. Such a "last judgment" Blake had himself passed thru.

(6) See Chap. IV. p. 45.

(7) See lines quoted on page 54.

"The Last Judgment will be when all those are cast away who trouble religion with questioning concerning good and evil, or eating of the tree of those knowledges or reasoning which hinder the vision of God, turning all into a consuming fire."(1)

In one other instance we find Blake expressing himself concerning Swedenborg in connection with his art. In a book of illustrations of Dante Blake draws a series of circles, writes "Homer" in the center and "Swedenborg" within the first circle, and appends this note:

"Homer is the center of all--I mean the poetry of the heathen--stolen and perverted from the Bible, not by chance, but by design, by the kings of Persia, their generals, the Greek heroes, and lastly the Romans. Swedenborg does the same thing in saying that the world is the ultimate of heaven. This is the most damnable falsehood of Satan and the Antichrist."

Ellis points out that this is one of the "old falsehoods" for which Blake scored Swedenborg in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'. Blake's quarrel with Swedenborg is, of course, that by making the world an ultimate of heaven he makes it a separate reality, instead of the "phantasy" it really is when considered apart from its spiritual "cause".

#### V Letters:

Turning now to Blake's letters, we find several passages which describe in very much the Swedenborgian style, the matter of vision.

"And as the time is arrived when we shall again converse in heaven and walk with angels... ." (3)

"Heaven opens here on all sides her golden gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapors; voices of celestial inhabitants are most distinctly heard, and my cottage is also a shadow of their homes" (4)

(1) 'The Real Blake', p.237.

(2) Both the passage and Ellis's comment occur in 'The Real Blake', p.403.

(3) Letter to Flaxman, 12th Sept.1800, Russel, p.71.

(4) Letter to Flaxman, 21st Sept.1800, Russel, p.75.



"And now begins a new life because another covering of earth is shaken off. I am far more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive .... I look back into the region of reminiscence, and behold our ancient days before this vegetated earth appeared in its vegetated mortality to my mortal vegetated eyes." (1)

"My eyes more and more  
Like a sea without shore,  
Continue expanding  
The Heavens commanding  
Till the jewels of light  
Heavenly Men beaming bright  
Appeared as One Man  
..... " (2)

"But this is no easy matter to a man who having spiritual enemies of such formidable magnitude, cannot expect to want natural hidden ones." (3)

From the following passage we see how much Blake shared Swedenborg's feeling of "spiritual compulsion" in all that he wrote. Swedenborg, it will be remembered, wrote all his religious expositions as the result of dreams and visions, and at the command and dictation of spirits. (4)

"But if we fear to do the dictates of our angels, and tremble at the task set before us; if we refuse to do spiritual acts because of natural fears or natural desires, who can describe the dismal torments of such a state! I too well remember the threats I heard!-- 'If you who are organized by Divine Providence for spiritual communion, refuse and bury your talent in the earth, even tho you should want natural bread, sorrow and desperation pursue you thru life, and after death shame and confusion of face to Eternity. Everyone in Eternity will leave you, aghast at the man who was crowned with glory and honor by his brethren, and betrayed their cause to their enemies. You will be called the base Judas who betrayed his friend!' Such words would make any stout man tremble, and how then could I be at ease?" (5)

Again, from such passages as the following we see that Blake wrote at the direct command of angels quite as much as did Swedenborg from whom we often have statements such as, "They (angels) therefore

- (1) See note (4) on preceding page.
- (2) Poem in a letter to Butts, 2nd Oct. 1800, Russel, p. 83.
- (3) Letter to Butts, 10th Jan. 1802, Russel, p. 97.
- (4) See Ency. Brit., or any Life.
- (5) Letter to Butts, 10th Jan. 1802, Russel, pp. 100-1.

desire me to state from their lips that there does not exist," etc. (1)  
 Blake's statement is: "I have written this poem (Milton) from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation and even against my will." (2)

(3)  
 In a poem included in a letter to Thomas Butts, 22nd Nov. 1802, there occurs a note of that poetic element in Blake's vision, which I shall further emphasize from passages in reported conversations. Its importance is that, as has already been pointed out, it is a manifestation of the 'Poetic Genius' spirit which served, in every element of Swedenborgian influence, to liberate Blake from mere slavish acceptance and suicidal imitation.

"A frowning thistle implores my stay.  
 What to others a trifle appears  
 Fills me full of smiles or tears;  
 For double the vision my eyes do see  
 And a double vision is always with me.  
 With my inward eye, 'tis an old man grey;  
 With my outward, a Thistle across my way."

So truly does this conform to purely poetic "vision", so much is it an echo of the feeling in 'Poetical Sketches', that it might be considered as having nothing in it of that other sort of Blakean and Swedenborgian vision; however, in the lines just preceding it, Blake tells of visions of angels and of his dead father and brothers, in quite the true Swedenborgian style--except, of course, that the language is poetic.

Even more beautifully poetic is that whimsical "vision" which Blake describes in a Preface to 'Europe', printed by Ellis in 'Poetical Works', and of which Ellis says, "Blake seems to have disused (4) it as out of keeping with the tone of the rest of the book." (5)

(1) 'Heaven and Hell, No. 311. (2) Letter to Butts, 25th Apr. 1803, Russell, p. 115. (3) Russel, p. 109. (4) p. 366, Vol. I.

The poem is too long to insert here; the following is the gist of it: Blake finds a fairy telling some of the secrets of life, "mocking as he sat on a streaked tulip, thinking none saw him". Blake catches the fairy in his hat and the fairy promises to write out the secrets on "leaves of flowers",

"If you will feed me on love thots, and give me now and then  
A cup of sparkling poetic fancies..."

The poem concludes:

"When I came  
Into my parlour and sat down to write,  
My fairy sat upon the table and dictated Europe".

With this must be associated one other account of a fairy vision, which is recounted by Cunningham as having occurred in a conversation (1) between Blake and a lady "who sat by him in a company".

"I was walking alone in my garden, there was a great stillness among the branches and flowers and more than common sweetness in the air; I heard a low and pleasant sound, and I knew not whence it came. At last I saw the broad leaf of a flower move, and underneath it I saw a procession of creatures of the size and color of gray and green grasshoppers, bearing a body alid out on a rose leaf, which they buried with songs and then disappeared. It was a fairy funeral."

These passages should enable us to see, as it is highly desirable to do, that element in Blake's vision, and in all his philosophy as well, which was never "Swedenborgianized".

#### VI Reported Conversations:

From the conversations reported by Crabb Robinson as occurring in the very last part of Blake's life to additional passages will be quoted to show how much vision of the Swedenborgian kind remained a part always of Blake's mysticism. Another two passages will be

(5) This passage and the one quoted on this page are, of course, out of strict order in this Section. I have used them here because of their immediate connection with the matter in hand.

'Cunningham, Iives of Eminent Painters', p.137.

quoted as being direct expressions from Blake of his estimate of Swedenborg.

"He reverted soon to his favorite expression, my Visions. 'I saw Milton in imagination and he told me to beware of being misled by his Paradise Lost...' As he spoke of Milton's appearing to him, I asked him whether he resembled the prints of him. He answered, 'All'. 'Of what age did he appear to be? 'Various ages--sometimes a very old man'." (1)

"I asked him in what language Voltaire (with whom Blake had had a spiritual "interview") spoke. His answer was ingenious and gave no encouragement to cross-questioning. 'To my sensations it was English. It was like the touch of a musical key; he touched it probably French, but to my ear it became English.'... 'I shall print no more', he said, 'When I am commanded by the spirits then I write, and the moment I have written, I see the words fly about the room in all directions. It is then published.' " (2)

As to the first passage, we need only parallel it with such statements of Swedenborg as, "I once heard the angels talking with  
(3)  
Newton", to see its significance. The passage relating to the language of "spirits" also has a direct parallel in a passage from Swedenborg: "Wherefore the angels speak with man in natural language or  
(4)  
in a man's mother tongue".

The last two promised passages from Robinson's Diary are:

"Incidentally Swedenborg was spoken of. He was a divine teacher --he has done much good and will do much good--he has corrected many errors of Popery, and also of Luther and Calvin. Yet he also said that Swedenborg was wrong in endeavoring to explain to the faculty what the reason cannot comprehend; he should have left that. As Blake mentioned Swedenborg and Dante together I wished to know whether he considered their visions of the same kind. As far as I could collect he does. Dante he said was the greater poet. He had political

(1) Diary, 17th Dec. 1825, Symons, p.263.

(2) Ibid. 19th Feb. 1826. Ibid. p.268.

(3) 'Angelic Wisdom', No.82.

(4) Ibid, No.257.

objects. Yet this, tho wrong, does not appear in Blake's mind to affect the truth of the vision."<sup>(1)</sup>

"Swedenborg. Parts of his scheme are dangerous. His sexual religion is dangerous."<sup>(2)</sup>

These two passages are so clear both in themselves and in their relation to what has been said concerning the difference between the doctrines of Swedenborg and Blake, as to need no further comment.

### Summary:

Summing up very briefly the evidence of this chapter, we may say quite conclusively that in his later writings, his letters, and his conversations, Blake reveals his debt to Swedenborg in definite and well-nigh unmistakable terms. He not only accepts Swedenborg's idea of a symbolical interpretation of the Scriptures, but he puts the idea of symbolism into practice by adopting it as his medium of expression. In inventing a system of symbols for this purpose he again borrows suggestions from Swedenborg. In his 'Prophetic Books' he develops and presents his doctrine of Unity--a doctrine which is to restore to mankind the happiness lost thru the false conception of the division and antagonism between "spiritual" and "natural", taught by Swedenborg and the churches. He retains the power of vision which came to him as a result of Swedenborgian influences in his childhood, so that he speaks in his old age of the<sup>(3)</sup> faculty of vision "as one that he has had from early childhood". Finally, this Chapter should

(1) Diary, 10th Dec. 1825, Symons, p. 258.

(2) Ibid, p. 260.

(3) See Chapter I, p. 8.

have made it clear that the Swedenborgian influence in all three elements, vision, symbolism, and doctrine, is all the more clearly distinguishable because it is so vividly contrasted with that spirit inherent in Blake's nature and cultivated by him, which enabled him to transmute and individualize each of the elements that he had derived from the teachings of the older mystic---the spirit of the Poetic Genius.

## CONCLUSION

In measuring the amount and value of Swedenborgian influence upon Blake's obscure childhood and youth, we cannot hope to obtain demonstrable results. The known facts directly or indirectly connected with his childhood are these: (1), Swedenborgian literature had been translated into English and read in London; (2), Blake's father was a "dissenter"; (3), Blake's elder brother was a Swedenborgian in manhood, and talked in the Swedenborgian vernacular of "prophets", "visions", and "spiritual" meanings of Scriptural language; (4), Blake had "visions" as a child; (5), These "visions" were "Swedenborgian"--visions of God, prophets, and angels; (6), Blake spoke in later life of vision as a faculty he had always possessed, and related in his old age some of the visions of his childhood; (7), 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' makes it clear that Blake is abandoning certain Swedenborgian teachings, and certain passages are open to the interpretation that this abandonment meant a translation into the more purely spiritual after a bondage lasting, as the earthly life of the Christ had lasted, from birth to the age of thirty-three. The inferences based upon these facts and upon facts of Blake's later life and personality are: (1), Blake's father was probably a Swedenborgian, and his elder brother was probably a Swedenborgian in youth as well as in manhood; (2), Swedenborgian doctrines were very likely discussed in the home, so that the child Blake had suggested to him the power and reality of vision, and the symbolical interpretation of the Scriptures; (3), Blake, being a highly imaginative child, absorbed these ideas readily, and having a personality peculiarly impervious to influences in later life, he retained thru life the influences of

his childhood to a very great degree. The conclusion reached from these facts and inferences is that Blake received in childhood, from Swedenborgian suggestions, a "bent" toward mysticism, and, likewise, received the two elements which were at once the chief inspiration and the chief tools of this mysticism--vision and symbolism.

The known facts that may be made use of in determining the Swedenborgian influences upon Blake's youth are still more meagre: (1), It was the period during which Blake was more exposed to "outside" influences than during any other period of his life; (2), The accounts we have of this period are very bare of "visions"; (3), Of the literary products of this period, the first, 'Poetical Sketches', written during several years of his early youth, shows, in its most original parts, an unusual amount of metaphor so striking and vivid as to suggest symbolism; the second, 'An Island In The Moon', written in a mood of rebellious anger against social environment, is couched in language having a Swedenborgian "flavor", and is, moreover, a rude allegory; The third, 'Songs of Innocence', written near the end of this period, shows a new element, an understanding and love of flower, animal, and child life, which is due to a spirit of intuitive imagination, an inherent quality which Blake afterwards deifies as 'Poetic Genius', and for which he was not in any way indebted to Swedenborgian influence. The deductions which I have drawn are: (1), This period was "reactionary" in Blake's life and exhibits the least trace of childhood influences; (2), In 'Poetical Sketches' we find the first suggestion of the use of symbolism, a metaphor-symbolism which owes its origin to the fact that Blake's mind had been deeply imbued in childhood with the idea of "hidden meaning" in all things; (3), In 'An Island In The Moon' we see a reaction within the "reaction", and



therefore a reversion to Swedenborgian tendencies; (4), In 'Songs of Innocence' we find the highest tide of the "reaction", the fullest development of the 'Poetic Genius'. My conclusion is that during this period Blake received no additional Swedenborgian influence, but rather an impulse of reaction against it. Childhood influences, however, were merely dormant, not dead. They reveal themselves faintly in the pseudo-symbolism of 'Poetical Sketches' and in 'An Island In The Moon'. Furthermore, this was the period during which was developed Blake's inherent spirit of 'Poetic Genius', the spirit which eventually enabled him to transcend and transmute Swedenborgian "law".

Concerning the period of Blake's study of Swedenborg the known facts are so sufficient that inference is scarcely needed. (1), Blake made a study of Swedenborg's 'Angelic Wisdom Concerning Divine Love And Wisdom', and annotated certain passages. (2) This Marginalia furnishes a definite summary of what Blake at this time accepted, modified, or rejected. (3), This summary and numerous statements made in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', which he wrote soon after as the first positive declaration of his own philosophy, show that Blake began by examining Swedenborg's theory of correspondence and ended by formulating a theory of identity between the spiritual and natural. Seeing in the doctrine of objective resemblance, but subjective severance and antagonism, of the natural and spiritual, evil and good, body and soul, man and God, the great error which was the cause of all human unhappiness, Blake insisted that the conception of complete unity or identity would restore to man his birthright of happiness. Because he felt that when man acted from this conception of unity with the spiritual, and only then, all his "natural" actions were good, he opposed and reviled the idea of formal religion and moral

law as arbitrary bonds, designed to make men virtuous thru restraint. Blake's development of Swedenborg's theory of correspondence into a theory of unity, of exact resemblance into identity, of cause and effect into reality and reflection of reality, is clear and logical enough. A more mystical and less "logical" development was his theory that the conception of a separation of natural and spiritual, altho a fallacy, actually brot about the separation; so that the individual who harbored this conception was in the "natural state" only and hence thot and acted blindly and wrongly. Blake's other great departure from Swedenborgiamism was his substitution of the 'Poetic Genius' for the Lord of Swedenborg's formal religion. The spirit thru which this God revealed himself to men and blessed them was Inspiration; The spirit which enabled men to receive the blessing and realize their own infinity and divinity was Imagination.

The only inference needed here rests on fairly clear proof. It is that Blake at this time made a deliberate and thorough study of Swedenborgiamism in order to arrive at a definite doctrine satisfying to himself. That the doctrine he chose to study was Swedenborgianism is a strong confirmation of the inferences concerning the Swedenborgian influences in his earlier life.

The evidence gathered from the sources which relate to Blake's later life and works is largely confirmation and elaboration of already advanced theories. The key note of 'Songs of Experience' and the miscellaneous poems is protest--against the separation of spiritual and natural, against the degradation of the "natural", and against the artificial restraints of religion and moral law. In the 'Prophetic Books' we find Blake teaching his doctrine of Unity in symbolical language. This symbolical language is his own invention,

but he has derived the idea of symbolism as the highest form of expression from Swedenborg's symbolical interpretation of the Scriptures, and, moreover, his system of symbols is largely based on Swedenborgian suggestions. In the prose 'Discourses', letters, and reported conversations is found valuable and convincing evidence of Blake's life-long acceptance of Swedenborgian "vision". In Blake's conception of vision, however, there is a poetic element which is a manifestation of the spirit of 'Poetic Genius'. These sources contain also many definite statements of Blake's estimation of Swedenborg; these statements show that Blake thought Swedenborg a great master, but one who erred grievously, a "foundation for grand things", but not one whose doctrines were complete and perfect, a wonderful interpreter, but not a wise and true prophet.

It is very clear that in comparison with the definite and decisive evidence of the later chapters of this paper, the theories advanced in the chapters concerning Blake's childhood and youth are very weak. The Marginalia on the 'Angelic Wisdom' is, in fact, the first piece of positive proof concerning the connection of Swedenborg and Blake. I have retained the earlier chapters, however, from a feeling that no study of his life and works can fully and satisfactorily explain Blake's personality and mysticism, unless it regards him as having from the first been deeply influenced by Swedenborgianism. The Swedenborgian elements are too fundamental and vital to have been merely acquired; they must have been inbred.

But even disregarding these theories, there should be evidence enough in the later chapters to prove that Blake received from Swedenborg the three fundamental elements of his mysticism: the doctrine

of Unity, the very heart of his mysticism; vision, whereby he comprehended it; and symbolism, thru which he was enabled to express it.  
And again we must see vision and symbolism not only as tools but also as sources of inspiration of mysticism itself.

But we cannot measure Blake's debt to Swedenborg with any real fairness unless we are at all times fully aware of the fact that he never became a Swedenborgian. Blake was by his very nature incapable of becoming a follower, and he was particularly incapable of becoming a follower of Swedenborg because of the diametrically opposed forces of their personalities. We must remember always that Swedenborg was the scientist-philosopher, and Blake the philosopher-poet. Philosophy was thus the the common mean thru which their ideas met; but this philosophy was mysticism, and no mysticism was ever either fully transmitted or fully adopted by even the most explicit of teachers--which Swedenborg, indeed, might be said to be--and the most docile of disciples--which Blake certainly was not! Blake's personality may be said to have been directed and developed by Swedenborgianism; it can not justly be said to have been formed by it. Blake's philosophy was founded upon Swedenborgian philosophy, but it transmuted and transcended its most vital principles. Likewise, Blake's work received inspiration, direction, and much material from the writings of Swedenborg, but it cannot be said to be in any real sense Swedenborgian literature, for there pervaded it a poetic quality that was nowise Swedenborgian. Blake's debt was that of one who borrows to develop his own capital; the debt was increased by the fact that the capital was in itself in part "inherited" Swedenborgianism.

There remains one point upon which I feel it necessary to touch, for the sake of completeness. This is the question of how Blake's

conception of Christianity was influenced by Swedenborgianism. Naturally since both Blake and Swedenborg were religious mystics, this point would seem of prime importance to this discussion. The reason I have not so treated it is that Blake's statements with regard to his views on Christianity are so contradictory that they afford little definite evidence on which to base conclusions. Although there are numerous utterances of Blake, which, as we have seen, certainly would seem to prove him far from being an orthodox Christian, and although many of the passages in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' and 'There is no Natural Religion' <sup>(1)</sup> are unmistakable evidence of the influence of Paine and Godwin, there are other statements that prove him to have displayed at times the most orthodox belief. This element of contradiction is explicable both in the light of his times and by the fact that Blake was so much the mystic that it is entirely possible that he was content to leave his conception of Christianity at a stage where his own understanding of it was not entirely clear and exact. Certain it is, however, from both general and specific impressions conveyed by what he said and wrote, that he may be regarded as having here as elsewhere started from Swedenborg's extreme limit and as having gone far beyond it. He may well be called in many ways "a heretic of the heresy of Swedenborg". <sup>(2)</sup> In his conception of Christianity, and in his conception of all religion, his 'Poetic Genius' was the spirit which animated much of his understanding and belief. "Art and religion were passionately fused in his soul", <sup>(3)</sup> and the 'Poetic Genius' was the God who animated both.

(1) Printed by Ellis, 'Poetical Works', Vol. I, pp. 212 ff.

(2) Symons, 'Blake', pp. 90-91.

(3) Gardner, 'Vision and Vesture', Preface, p. X.

That Blake accepted Swedenborg's interpretation of the Scriptures as written in symbolical language we have seen. We can hardly fail to see how very near 'Poetic Genius' led him to an interpretation of Christianity itself as symbolism. The mystic theory in which his ideas came to rest was that of Unity. In his mystic conception of Christianity, God, Christ, and Man were one, as spiritual and natural, body and soul, were one. The idea of "atonement" was abhorrent to him because he could not reconcile it with forgiveness, which seemed to him the true divine quality. Perhaps the modern substitution of "at-one-ment" would have most happily described Blake's conception of what the Christ spirit meant to the world. Just what of the mysteries of Christianity Blake solved to his own satisfaction we cannot satisfactorily determine, but this we may feel sure of, that the first key he used, the great master key, was Swedenborg's symbolical interpretation of Scriptural language.

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