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To Mrs Vera Semichoff
with kindest regards

Bayley

London
Aug 19/80.

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OUTLINES

OF THE

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

OF

SWEDENBORG.

BY

THEOPHILUS PARSONS, LL.D.



JAMES SPEIRS,

36 BLOOMSBURY STREET, LONDON.

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NOTE.

THIS book is a reprint of an American work. The author, now nearly eighty years of age, was, for many years, Professor of Law in the University at Cambridge, in the United States; and has published many Treatises on legal subjects, which are well known to the profession in this country. He has also published books illustrative of the truths of the New-Church; as, "Deus Homo," "The Infinite and the Finite," "Essays," &c., &c. This work, lately published in America, is republished here in the belief that it is well adapted to satisfy the growing desire to know something of the system of Emanuel Swedenborg.

JAMES SPEIRS.

36 BLOOMSBURY STREET.

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OUTLINES OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE NEW CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

A CHURCH may be defined as the collective body of those who agree together in faith and in worship.

There have been, and there are, many churches; differing from each other in their systems of faith and modes of worship.

All churches, so far as their religious tenets or doctrines have any truth, are founded upon revelation. The reason of this is, that religious doctrines relate necessarily to God and a life after death; and the human mind is incapable of forming the first or simplest idea, or having any thought whatever concerning these topics by the exercise of the senses, or of sensuous thought concerning what the senses discover. By this phrase I mean thinking, by the exercise of any or all the intellectual faculties, only on what the senses teach; drawing inferential instruction from the direct instruction

which the senses give; and thus continually enlarging the knowledge which a right use of the senses enables us to acquire, but with no reference to any thing higher. It is certain that, without the senses, we could not know any thing or think any thing about the material world, or the life we pass upon this world. It is equally certain, although not so obvious, that without revelation, or information received from the other world, we could not know any thing or think any thing about that world, or an infinite Creator of that world and this.

If men did not think about what the senses acquaint them with, they would be but little better for their senses. They would not gain so much from them as the lower animals do, for these have a kind and measure of sensuous thought. Men have a far greater power of sensuous thought, that they may profit far more by their senses. This power is, indeed, far larger and higher than the analogous power which the lower animals have; for, with them, this power exists at once in the highest development it can reach, as soon as the animals are old enough to make use of it; and with but little difference among animals of the same species, or among successive generations. It stops where it begins. No animal grows much more knowing by experience, nor can the individual or the race transmit what they have learned to their successors so as to permit

an accumulation or a growth of knowledge. Recently, the doctrine of "Evolution" has come into great prominence. It may be that sufficient reasons will be found for holding this process of evolution, under some form or modification, as one of the laws or methods of Divine Providence in creation. But if an animal of a new kind, a new species, may thus have come into existence from or through the agency of a lower,—a better from a worse, a higher from a lower,—it will still be true and certain that no animal below man, however he may have been formed, has the power of consciously and intentionally helping the future to know more than the past.

In all these particulars, the power of sensuous thought in men differs from that in the lower animals. In men, this power is nearly nothing in the beginning of life, but grows afterwards, or may grow, to the end of life. All that a man learns, he may teach. All that a generation acquires, it may transmit to a succeeding generation. This is done imperfectly, because of the imperfect exercise of this power of sensuous thought. Nevertheless, there is constantly much teaching of the knowledge acquired by the exercise of this power, and a large accumulation of this knowledge and a great advancement in it, from generation to generation.

There is no limit to the possible progress of this