



OUR LOWER NATURE

by Julian Duckworth

Everybody has a lower nature; people do and even angels do too, which is something Swedenborg often points out. Animals don't; they are what they are, and nothing else in Divine creation than people have this lower nature. We'll look into what it is later on.

By definition, having a lower nature implies that we have – or can have – a higher nature. And again, I understand that only people and angels have this. A higher nature, whether actual or potential, is that part of us which acknowledges the Divine, lives wanting to serve the purposes of the Divine, and makes this the main focal point of existence and life.

Using the idea that we are – or we become – what we love, it seems right to think that concentrating on the growth and use of their higher nature becomes stronger and fuller in people who set their spiritual sights on that and practise it. This suggests that the interference of such a person's lower nature on their love and life will diminish by getting pushed out of the way or turned against. Yet, as we will see later, it never finally disappears.

Lower nature is our love and life used for our own sake and advantage. Swedenborg has a lot to say about it but perhaps the most important thing he says is that our lower nature is the first love into which we are born. That sounds very damning perhaps, but it isn't; it is simply a fact of life. It has its place because we need to survive our birth, and we do that by yelling 'Feed me! Love me! Clothe me! Protect me! Thinking anything else about anyone else comes a good deal later.

Another aspect of lower nature that is always there with us and becomes more pressing as we grow up is that we live with the sense of having life as our own and that we are free agents. So as we grow up we usually find that flaunting ourselves, for

example, brings good feelings and results. People like us; we're successful. We may enjoy that kind of thing so much that we move into contriving situations and begin to control outcomes and even people.

This is where lower nature moves from being just a fact of life into being harmful. We manipulate it to suit us and, so Swedenborg tells us, evil spirits in turn, who love such things as dominating, deception, bad feelings and many other insane pleasures, find that we are an open door for their bad barracking when we let our lower nature take hold of us.

If this sounds a dismal prospect, be aware that we can't be harmed by such spirits unless we have seen and felt that there is a totally different way to live our life than by doing this self-seeking, and yet we have deliberately turned away from taking it up. Choices, in adult life, become critical for us and we face them all the time. In making choices we draw on many 'higher nature' provisions such as good memories, early teaching, innate beliefs, observation of people around us, conscience, reason, and a whole stack of experiences.

All of these become our defences if we are prepared to make use of them. And, just as evil spirits rush in to our love of feeling resentful, angry or even self-pitying, so, angels and good spirits come near and encourage us when we make good choices

for our higher nature. Even the thought that anyone in their right mind would want to do what is fair is probably an impulse from them, saying 'Yes, keep that, keep going, build on it, you've got it...'

Lower nature or selfishness becomes regulated when, as adults, we actively take part in making such choices for good. In a real way, we feel that our lower nature is beginning to lose its hold on us, perhaps we feel that it is diminishing or less frequent and intense. Sure, we may find that having dealt with some parts of our lower nature, other previously unseen unknown parts of it come up, but we have also become equipped to recognise the causes and to manage them.

