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## Letter from Per Ersson Högman

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# Letter from Per Ersson Högman

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When we heard that sicknesses were spread across the entire country, I said to my wife: "If God gives me health and time for tomorrow, we'll make the trip to New York and travel home to Sweden." "Yes, dear, do it," she said.

But on the morning of 12 October, as the day began and we awakened, my wife had been stricken by cholera so badly that her skin was black, all her extremities were pulled together, and her pulse stopped for five hours. I became so overwhelmed by sorrow and fear that I was about to faint in my despair; but the Lord's Grace and almighty hand, which always bears us up, strengthened me to care for her. I immediately went for a doctor. He recommended that we use various means to cure her. On the third day, she began to sit up in bed and hungered after food, but at the end of that day she was attacked by a type of fever that accompanies cholera, and the following evening she became sicker, and my servant woman also, but not as much. Then, the doctor had to get a nurse who stayed with us as long as the illness continued. A man by the name of Wikström from Sollefteå who came at the same time was also stricken by the illness. Erik Trolin, his wife, and Nils Unger from Gäcksätter also became sick. There were 7 of us in our party, and all became sick except me. As soon as I let my wife understand my fear that the Lord might call her soul from her and my side, she answered me, do not be afraid: before the next day is over, I believe it will be better for me. But when the morning came, she was worse. When I in tears grieved over her difficult suffering, she answered me: "Dear! Don't cry over it! It may well be better with me, rather let us thank God that you are

healthy and sound so that here in this foreign country you can care for us." Her words lightened my sorrowing life until the last morning of her life. When I asked her where the sickness was felt worst, she answered: in my chest. I expressed my fear that the Lord should take her from here and from my side. "Yes" she said, "I think the same way. Do you want to be separated from me and this troubled world and come to your God and Savior in heaven?" "Yes" she said. "Do you believe that God, for the sake of a bleeding Jesus Christ will forgive you all your sins and take you into His heavenly Kingdom?" "Yes," she said, "I believe and hope for my Savior, that I am a child of God." Then I said to her, "Keep yourself in a childlike trust in Him and he will take you into His grace"; and that was our last farewell talk we had on the last morning, 22 October, at 6:00; and we were all distressed and deepened in our prayers before God over the departure of my friend from this world until the last moment, 10:00 a.m. the same day. Then she slept away quietly in the Lord, after a sickness of 10 days. "Oh, death has taken away," etc. (See the Swedish Hymnal nr. 344:1-4.)

Oh, now I am alone here in a foreign and sickly land, like a little bird in the fields and green groves, sitting on its branch and calling after its departed spouse; he cries, but no one knows why he cries. That's the way it is for me among the Americans. They do not know about whom I sorrow. O, burdensome and miserable life! The Lord gave her to me, and has taken her from me. Blessed be the name of the Lord. All the previously-mentioned persons who were in my party remained healthy, except my wife and Trolin's infant son.

Now I will tell you how little the Swedish Crown is respected here in America. When I was going to pay the doctor, he took 80 *Riksdaler riksgälds*. I had followed him to the apothecary and paid for all the medicines myself. No accounting was kept of them, but they certainly totaled a similar amount. The nurse was paid 12 *Riksdaler* per day, plus 20 *Riksdaler* for the casket, and the hearse 4 *Riksdaler*, and housing during the illness 60 *Riksdaler*, many other expenses uncounted.

Now I will turn to another subject and tell you about the nature of the land. I still do not know anyone who has written home to Sweden about it truthfully. The Snygg (ed. Anders Snygg) letter to us last year, that there had not yet come any letter from America which described the land as well as that it actually is.

But this land does not have, as far as I know, any advantage over southern Sweden. I have been up into the country to the Swedes living there, and asked them if it cost less money to live there than in the city. That it was, to the contrary, more, was their answer. When I asked them about the fruitfulness of the land, if it namely gave the rich yields of seed grain described in all the letters, they answered, that the earth did not yield half the described yield. You have, however, the advantage, I said, of not having to fertilize it? Far from it, they said. We fallow and fertilize every third and fourth year; there is no land in all of America where one avoids fertilizing. All said the same thing. When I asked them how much 40 acres of uncultivated land costs in Swedish money, they answered 8,000 *Riksdaler*, and that is without any other buildings than a little cabin, similar to a hayshed in Sweden.

# Hudikswalls Weckoblad.

Everyone can now understand how this compares to the previous letters received at home in Sweden. (ed. Olof) Stenberg spoke completely differently to me, when I was with him last year during his visit to Sweden. I asked him if there was in his new place any land for sale that was both cultivated and built up. "Yes," he said, "and for a very good price." "How much does 40 *tunnland* (acres) of land and buildings cost," I then asked. The answer was this: "Last year a stone building of 8 rooms, cellar and stall, orchard and 40 *tunnland* of land, for 2,000 *Riksdalers*." Then his father says: "Good price! Such a stone house here in Sweden costs at least 20,000 *Riksdalers*. The price of uncultivated land is 5 *Riksdalers* per acre."

This is an especially good price, you say, [for him] who plans to come here to farm. But, my friend! With what shall you work it, when you have become poverty-stricken before arriving here? Yes, here there are many difficulties, which no one can imagine. You think of coming here to earn a dollar per day in pay. This is certainly possible, but not for a longer time than at most 2 months, or as long as the harvest continues. On what will one survive the remaining 10 months' time?

The reason that pay for labor in this country is so minimal comes from the fact that laborers have neither means or possibilities to build a house or hire out for other than harvest work. And here in the city of Milwaukee, which is a large city with a population of 20,000 and 20 churches, there is no work for other than craftsmen. Even an American who is a craftsman and lived in the same house with us sold his tools in his need to leave here. What should we then say about those who do not understand the language of the country and other conditions. What can happen to them except misery. Ship-

loads arrive nearly every day with people who are in large part poor and miserable. What can the result be, other than that they have to go and wring their hands in despair and misery over their idiotic journey?

I had some fellow travelers in my party who had never before lost their confidence, but who now say: if our nature were not stronger, we would lose our minds. So unfortunate can a person become in this world. Here there is an ever present difficulty to live – renting a bare room, without stove or heating, costs 8 *Riksdaler* a month; and yet that price is considered cheap. If one thinks the price is better in the countryside, I can state that I myself once went out to the countryside a Swedish mile from here, and there found that a bed for one night cost 1 *Riksdaler*, a meal as much, a pound of butter 40 *skillings*, a pound of cheese 20 *skillings*, a bottle of milk 32 *skillings*, a pound of coffee 32 *skillings*. It is said to be better to buy a cow and milk it yourself. That will certainly work, but with what will one buy a barn when one is impoverished and poor. Here, a cow costs 120 *Riksdaler*, a pair of horses with wagon cost 1,000 *Riksdalers*, in Swedish money.

The reason they did not write the truth about conditions in this land is this; one is an Erik Janssonist, the other a Methodist; all are out to secure so-called religious freedom or a better outcome. They have slandered and despised the clergy and others, thus they suffer rather than let their deplorable and miserable situation become known in their fatherland.

But about completely different things, such as those that appear enviable, they praise. As an example, one might mention (ed. Anders) Snygg's letter, which arrived from there last summer. In it he spoke grandly of the great soup kettles they got to taste among the Americans;

but what those great kettles cost, he left unsaid. It might have been for him as it was for the remaining Swedes in general, that he became a beggar when he came to America.

These soup kettles he described for his countrymen at home, with knife and fork, with the intent it would work out for them as it did the Israelites who, when they recalled their great soup kettles in Egypt, developed a great desire to enjoy them. By this story, Snygg hopes to ease and encourage emigration or lure unknowing immigrants here who put faith in such stories. When Sandman came to New York last summer, he wrote about conditions in the country without himself having seen any of them.

The writing came after Pastor Hedström's story, and that man is as unaware of conditions in the land as the immigrants themselves. That's the way it is with their writings home to Sweden. They fire up and encourage one and another in the so-called "America sickness," which many have experienced, to their misfortune. Thus I have wished to write to you about what I myself have seen and experienced. You certainly remember, dear friends, what I said during the last days of my time at home, when some asked me why I was going to America. Since they write and report that it is a remarkably good land in every way, I wanted to go there. You then object, there is certainly something lacking in America? "It may well be," I answered, "but if what they wrote is not true, I will return home to Sweden immediately," which I will also do.

To this purpose I bought a ticket the first day I spent here; but the Lord punished us with sickness, by which we see how he dislikes our thoughts and ways. I sorrow greatly for my fatherland, but mostly over the fact that my wife was taken from me by death. It is something awful

# Hudikswalls Weckoblad.

for he who has lost a faithful friend and spouse, and has no one else to lean upon; but not so that I sorrow for the home of my fathers; no, far from it. It was no place to sorrow over; but I miss my friends and acquaintances and the solemn Swedish religious service, God's church and congregation; these are something worthy of sorrowing for. Here there is no Swedish clergyman; here one cannot go to church or communion, however much one longs for it. When the Sabbath comes, it is awful for me. Then, you can hear God's Word preached for you. Then I remember my singing friends, how they stand and join in four-part harmony, together in the Lord. What shall I do?

Well, I must certainly thank God that I may join with you in our Father's name, namely in spirit. Now it is my wise decision to go home to you and sing with you, if it be the Lord's will. But we know neither the time nor place when the Lord is pleased with us. Thus, let us continuously include each other in our prayers before God and our Savior in Heaven, who hears every sinner's prayers who seeks betterment. Then, then, may we be finally joined with new tongues in an eternal halleluja! May the Lord's peace be with you and upon you.

Now I will finish, now I will journey and come to the land I am used to. However it is, high or low, poor or rich, I advise you to buy gold from me. What do you mean "buy gold?" Well, if you do not follow my advice, but in your stubbornness move to America, you will find with time, that the advice of a man is much better than gold. I have experienced it during this year, my friends! When we came to New York, a Swedish clergyman [translator's note: Gustav Unonius?] from Chicago came aboard to us and said: I advise you to buy gold from me; for here you can be sure than no one tempts fried sparrows

to fly into anyone's mouth. I myself have wished, he said, that I had access to money so I could get home to Sweden; but in vain. I thus advise you to turn back.

Oh, that I then had obeyed his advice! Now I would value his advice much more than gold; then we would have avoided the sickness and misery that struck us. Then, my wife would have been alive, then I would have retained many thousands of *Riksdalers*. Thus, I wish to advise you out of a righteous heart, to stay at home in your country.

Now, I must finish my writing, for my paper is insufficient; but excuse my simple, unlearned writing.

Finally I wish to extend my heartiest greeting to my parents, siblings, relatives, and friends, no one named and no one forgotten. God's and our Lord Jesus Christ's grace and peace with you and upon you all!

I am, and will remain, your faithful friend and Christian brother until my death,

Pehr Högman

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This Högman, under the name of Pehr Ersson was the owner of the homestead Åsak nr. 4 in Högs parish of northern Hälsingland, a homestead he sold before his immigration to America to Strömsbacka Ironworks for 5,000 *Riksdaler riksgälds*.

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Translator's note: Ms. Gun Marie Swessar of *Migranternas Hus*, Alfta, Sweden provided photocopies of *Hudikswalls weckoblad*, while researcher Maude Nyberg Jonsson of the Edsbyn Library provided additional information as follows:

Per Ersson Högman was born at Hög 12 September 1811, and married Brita Månsdotter, born 1 March 1820 at Hög. They left their farm, Åsak nr.

4, on 4 April 1850, to emigrate with the Jonas Olsson party aboard the ship *Primus*.

Following the death of his wife in Milwaukee on 21 October 1850, he returned to Sweden and settled at Forsa on 4 October 1851. He remarried 9 November 1851 to Anna Wahlund, born 25 May 1832, and they later lived at Hög, Arbrå, Skog, Bergsjö, Delsbo, and other locations. He was listed as farmer, hotel host, homeowner, spinner, and finally miller. Per Högman died 23 May 1877 at Wenås, Delsbo. His widow and 6 children moved back to Forsa that year. Anna remarried to Corporal Jakob Flodin, born 1827 at Norrbo. She died 3 January 1905 at Hamre, Forsa. Many relatives of Pehr Ersson Högman remain in the area.

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## The Kensington Stone again

In SAG 3/11, there was an article by Dr. Henrik Williams, who discussed the book *The Hooked X*, by Scott Wolter, and nothing else.

I unfortunately drew too far-flung conclusions from the article, and wrote a sub-headline that claimed that Dr. Williams had expressed views on the question on Swedes in Minnesota in the 1300s, which he had not.

My apologies to Dr. Williams for this mistake!

Elisabeth Thorsell