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Stig Jägerskiöld

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Who Was Lewis Gustavi?

Stig Jägerskiöld*

In September 1851 Carl Jonas Love Almquist arrived in New York City. He was the well-known Swedish author, damned and praised for his radical writings. He was now escaping from some of the reactionary forces in Sweden, who had accused him, among other things, of financial malfeasance and of attempts at a murder by poison. In the United States he found asylum, first in Cincinnati, later in Texas, and in 1854 in Philadelphia. There he resided sporadically until he, at the end of the Civil War, returned to Europe in 1865, dying in Bremen, Germany shortly thereafter.

Today it is still quite difficult to determine what Almquist really did during his sojourn in America. We don't even know which name or names he used while here. In the beginning of his stay he earned his living as a clerk in a bookstore in Cincinnati, where a friend from his youth in Sweden, Jacob Otto Natt och Dag, was then living under the assumed name of Frederic Franks. After six months in Cincinnati Almquist went south to St. Louis, MO and Belleville, IL, and then later to Texas, where he assisted a fellow Swede, Abraham Jacobsson, in the latter's efforts to develop some silver mines. Jacobsson had become an American citizen in New York in September 1851. He seems to have given Almquist permission to use his name as a postal address when Almquist corresponded with his wife and children in Stockholm. The letters carried the name of Jacobsson as well as his address, but were handed over to Almquist. He spoke of this method in his letters home, the reason being that since he was wanted by the police in Sweden as well as in other countries, he did not wish to reveal his place of residence.

When Almquist arrived in Philadelphia in February 1854 Jacobson had died in St. Louis. Almquist now took up residence in a boardinghouse operated by Emma Nugent on Market Street, and stayed there for some time. During these years his mail was forwarded to the address of Lewis Gustavi, c/o Boericke & Tafel with a street address in Philadelphia. The firm was a drugstore, combined with a bookstore and a publishing house. The owners of this emporium were followers of the Swedenborg religion, as was Almquist. My understanding of this arrangement is that it served the same identical purpose as when he had had his mail sent c/o Jacobsson. In other words, Lewis Gustavi was another Swede, residing in Philadelphia, and not identical with Almquist.

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When scholars in 1928 came upon the fact that Lewis Gustavi had married Emma Nugent 11 June 1854 it was generally believed that Almquist was the bridegroom and thereby had committed bigamy, since he had left his wife and children in Stockholm when he had been forced to flee to America three years earlier. The proof for the acceptance of this theory rested on the name of Gustavi and a memorandum found in Almquist's effects, written in English by Almquist, and which had been assumed to have dealt with his American marriage. The memorandum, however, probably does not refer to a marriage but to an agreement between Almquist and the Gustavi couple, by which Almquist was to assume certain responsibilities for the running of the boarding-house. Almquist states that the agreement had not been adhered to, and for that reason he was departing from Philadelphia. This contract must have been signed shortly after 1854.

The assertion that Almquist had entered into a marriage contract with Emma Nugent has therefore not been proven and in addition it seems highly unlikely. Almquist was a deeply religious man, well known by the Swedenborgians in Philadelphia. Why should he risk all by committing this crime? Neither was he in financial difficulties during the year of 1854.

During the following years Almquist resided long periods of time in other places, both in Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. When he departed from America in 1865, at the end of the Civil War, Emma Nugent did not advertise that he was missing. She died later than Almquist, who using the name of Carl Westermann, had died in Bremen 1866, which was as far as he got on his journey back to Sweden. Emma Nugent is referred to as a widow in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, but a widow after whom? She could not have known of Almquist's death in Bremen. No one in Bremen knew at that time who he really was and could therefore not have notified her of his death. Neither did anyone in Bremen or Sweden know of the relationship between Emma Nugent and the dead Almquist. All of this seem to be evidence for the fact that Lewis Gustavi, just like Abraham Jacobsson, was just another Swede—but who? The name of Gustavi is not too uncommon in Sweden. Someone by that name may very well have settled in Philadelphia. In the U.S. Federal Census for 1860 for Philadelphia Lewis Gustavi is listed as a Swede, born ca. 1800. Almquist was born in 1793. Gustavi is cited as being a teacher and a professor of music and languages. This is a very general term which could be applied to many people who dabble in music and the linguistic arts.

Thus far it has not been possible to arrive at more complete data on Emma Nugent and her family. She was married three times before she married Lewis Gustavi, which marriage took place in 1854, as mentioned earlier. Some of the children are known by their Christian names—a son George, a grandson and a brother-in-law named Jester.

During eleven years Almquist, with all of his aliases, lived and worked in Philadelphia and other places in the United States, such as St. Louis, the Allegheny Mountains, Baltimore, Boston and Richmond, VA as a shadowy figure, a phantom individual, who so far has defied efforts to concretize his existence.

I should be very pleased to hear of additional facts which can clarify the life of this remarkable man in the United States, during one of the most interesting periods of American growth and development. He was a steadfast friend of the Union, he was an admirer of Abraham Lincoln, and a devoted propagandist for the elimination of slavery. Still the enigmatic question remains—what has he done, what has he accomplished, what has he written during these very dramatic years? *And—who was Lewis Gustavi?*

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