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A Mission Covenant Pastor writes his memoirs in his old age

His early life was not always easy

BY NILS JOHAN LINDQVIST

Introduction

Last year I got a surprise package in the mail – a book I did not know about, called *Livsrön* (Life observations), by Pastor Nils Johan Lindqvist of the Mission Covenant Church, which had been published in Swedish in the *Missions-Wänneren* of Chicago in 1946-1947, and later translated into English by Stina M. Dufour. It was published as a book in 2012. It was sent to SAG by grandson James E. Holst who hoped that an excerpt from *Livsrön* would be suitable for publication in SAG – and so it is.

Who was Nils Johan?

He was born 11 July 1859 in Böda parish on the north tip of the island of Öland, along the coast of Småland, belonging to Kalmar *län*. His parents were the sailor Anders Lindqvist and his wife Cajsa Andersdotter of Allvara 5 in Böda. Anders Lindqvist was born 18 Mar. 1819, and Cajsa was born 4 Nov. 1835, both in Böda. They had an older son, Anders Peter, born 10 Dec. 1857, also in Böda.¹ In 1860 they moved to Sandby in nearby Högby parish, and in 1864 to Munkegården in the same parish. Shortly after this move Anders Lindqvist disappears without his proper papers. His wife Cajsa died 7 Feb. 1871 of typhoid at Munkegården.

Nils Johan eventually came to America and became a pastor of the Mission Covenant Church, and died 9 Mar. 1952 in Alameda Co., CA.

By Elisabeth Thorsell

My Childhood.

I can recall as far back as to when I was two years old. That was when we moved to the Högby congregation; here my father had purchased a plot of land that was

sold immediately afterward. A large property was then purchased in Munkegård not too far away, and we moved onto it right away. I remember it well, for there were many things that gladdened a child's heart, both inside and outside.

At this time something disturbing happened. It happened one day in my mother's absence. For some reason now forgotten, I upset the babysitter, and, as a result, I received a good punishment. I wish that I could remember the reason for the argument. It is easy to remember the bad things to which one has contributed, but not so with that which others have brought about.

Therefore, I am certain I received that which was well deserved. I told mother immediately when she came home, what I had received, but not what I had done. The babysitter carefully saw to that. In that way, I won nothing by telling tales, though when the young girl was done with the story, I got more of the same type punishment as I had received before. But this time it was of a kinder sort. I regretted that I had told about the previous punishment, but I hoped for the lesson that the young girl was to receive. I hoped in vain.

My memory thinks back on a happier adventure from the earlier years. I had an extreme curiosity in beehives, which were placed on the sunny side of the house. Its inhabitants were really nice to me, when they were allowed to be undisturbed in their home and to sing their song in the notes which the Creator had determined by his own hand, and which they sang perfectly in their temple. But the friendship ended when I, with my long stick, came closer to their comb than they thought I had the right to do. I had to run for my life, for I was alone against their entire army. Their wings were faster than my short legs. They did not relent in their pursuit until their victim

was captured and hurt. Their weapon inflicted deeper sores and more bitter, smarting pain than the babysitter's. I had to find a doctor right away, while I could still see the way to the hospital. There it was confessed where I was from. There I was given medicine, soft drinks, and a break for the conquered and tired warrior, who had been consistently taken captive.

The memories from these innocent pranks persist even into twilight years, from heartfelt smiles that cause an old person to feel like a child again for a moment, while one wanders about through the beautiful realm of one's childhood.

Such visitors are welcome guests to the elderly, when they appear now and then, though they stir up the senses like the showers quench and soften the dry and hard land. Memory's flowers will not offer any sweet smells, though in one's memory one plucks cornflowers out in swaying rye, lilies in green meadows, and makes wreaths of long garlands; the elderly is freed like a child and lets his mind wander to the coming days.

The awakening

One day I followed mother to a home where good health had banished itself and where nothing was spared for relatives, who now came and were received with open arms. When it became evening, I reminded mother that it was time to go home, but the kind family encouraged mother to stay overnight. But this did not meet her son's satisfaction, which was inclined more toward going home.

He had no other bed than his own and he wanted to go there to rest even now. But I lost the fight. I had to stay. There was an awakening of the entire house, except it was not New Year's, but rather the middle of Lent. I would not quiet down until

fatigue overtook me, wherupon I fell asleep.

“And so there was peace upon the land.” Yes, so can one, through unnecessary persistence, create unrest and sadness for one’s self and for others, when it otherwise could have been sheer sunshine and happiness both day and night.

Still a secret.

After carrying on with farming for a time, our land was rented out and my father traveled to America for a short time, or so he thought. The time became long, for he never returned. The reason for his disappearance is still a secret. He no doubt became the subject of misfortune either at sea or on land.

Such things that happened almost one hundred years ago could not be conveyed as quickly as they are today, when they spring about the world at the speed of lightning. Our world is not as big now as it was before.

To wait in vain for the person one loves and to a great extent is dependent upon, year after year, is not pleasant. This was my mother’s bitter lot the remaining years of her life here on earth.

The long road

Up to this point, the distance between my brother and me hadn’t been long, for where he was, one could be sure to find me too. But now there was a separation, when it seemed different. The time had come to teach myself to read. It followed now that my fate was to stay every day at an old woman’s house in the neighborhood, to hold instruction in the “great” book that has a rooster on the first page.

To learn to read wasn’t difficult, for I did not lack for memory and the ability to compose. But to be in the lonely house, separated from my mother and friends – I did not do well with that. The hours were as long as days. The assignments were small, but it didn’t help. The rooster lay coins, caramels, and gingerbread cookies, but it didn’t make the hours go any faster. Nothing helped. All I wanted was to go home.

One day when I was permitted to go outside for a while I obeyed the tempter’s suggestion to run away from this “institution of learning.” Just as well, I used my



An old first reader from the 1800s.

hat as a box for food, swung my legs like wings of a lark away from the “work of learning,” and went toward home instead. But happiness did not come from this forbidden behavior; instead, it only brought sadness. After that day, the “professor” paid more careful attention to her student’s activities during recess.

Oh, how I have regretted, even to this ripe old age, that I was so impolite toward the woman who was so nice to me, most of all because my mother became teary-eyed and anxious on account of my insubordination. Oh, were that I could make up for that! But such wishes do not mend the heart of one who was broken down a long time ago.

This memory from the beginning of my school years does not coerce a smile, but rather sadness and shame.

Home life’s skies become cloudy

My father’s disappearance from the home caused great changes from the otherwise bright and hopeful future, starting from the time it was decided that he would not return. Our beautiful home was surrounded by pine forests, green meadows, rippling streams, fields of flowers, and swaying cornfields. These were lost because they were not – and could not – be paid for in time. We lost our land to our creditors’ rightful demands. These burdens became too heavy for a young woman to carry. She was not used to hearing the sound of the

steps of such visitors. She now had to open her door to scarcity and hardships of many kinds. She was weighted down by all this, which she did not have the reckoning to find her way through this delightful area. It’s no wonder that what was once clear became dim, her rosy cheeks became pale, and her light feet slowed down in their stride long, long before their time.

In this day and age where health, vitality, and comfort are the dominating force, more so than sickness and want, old age and long lives are normal. But the sun set on my mother’s life long before it had achieved its midday height in the sky. For me, the loss was indescribable and the longing was bitter; yes, more bitter than the pen can record. It is with these sorrows in life that it is as with the freedom in salvation. They can be learned but never be described. Yes, so can circumstances in life change our brightest days in the future to the darkest night. Joy in sorrow and longing. Abundance in want and in poverty. Oh, how empty and deserted life becomes for children, when the way to their mother’s embrace is strained and they no longer have the warm heart to rest against! It is well, therefore, that in this day and age one cannot fully fathom what it means to be without a father or apart from a mother’s care, and difficulty, temptation, and trials. I found myself in this position at the age of 10 years.

My delightful childhood, with its heartfelt laughter, and innocent play together with dear siblings and neighbors’ kind children, had now ended. Just a memory, but a dear one at that. A delightful, delightful time, now gone – you shall never, never return!

New experiences

That which usually happens to orphaned children happened to me, namely to be placed in strangers’ homes, where everything seems different than where one came from and where one needs to accept what one is given, and keep to one’s self all one’s desires pertaining to one’s upbringing and social development.

But the sun arose and new day began to dawn, where the sun both shone and was warming me. A wealthy uncle without male help with two grown daughters invited me to take a break out in his pleasant and serene home. Here, out in this luxurious home

with his friendly inhabitants and his naturally beautiful surroundings, I again heard motherly advice, and felt the breeze come to meet me from a forgotten childhood home with all of its advantages, which one looks for in vain other places in life, and where the house is small and the door is low.

Here, out in this calm and serene nest, all of my wishes were cared for without the slightest hint of me needing to repay them. Here there was given time for play, reading, and schooling. Here, out in this pleasing and warming sunshine, the young plant was rooted anew.

Trying out my wings

The time had now come for the bird to try out its wings by lifting them to flight. I was just a boy of nearly fifteen years with good health and a healthy spirit, full of longing for getting a grasp on what the world was like. So, with the church's demands completed, and with a certificate to prove it, Bible stories in my memory as well as the New Testament in my luggage, always an honorable resource, I left the Earth's dearest neighborhood in April 1874 in my brother's company, as well as some others, with the city of Oskarshamn as my destination.

Floating icebergs prevented us from reaching our destination, so we had to land on the island of Jungfrun and stay overnight until the following morning, when the obstacle was cleared out of our way. That morning, the destination could be reached without a problem on that same day. We rejoiced over this.

Many vessels, great and small, set sail on the sea hoping for sufficient wind to raise anchor and to make their way to their destination without any obstructions. I thought of these flowing abodes with great delight; in my eyes they looked grand. I purchased a spot on one of these and hurried aboard. This was a happy day for me, for my wish was granted.

Not too many days afterward we raised anchor, set sail, left the port and set sail for a more spacious place.

After a while, the northern cape of my childhood home had been passed and we were out in the deep water, where ice and waves tried to prevent our progress. The sun set. The darkness overcame us, the

wind picked up, and "it was evening on the first day." Now I had really come to the place where I had longed to be, when I saw these sloops swim on the sea's surface like swans out in space.

Nevertheless, that which I wanted so much seemed to not be so far out on Östersjön's restless waves on that stormy and starless night, which the childish fantasy had painted there on the sandy shore, and made clean those which were grazing so pleased on the green plain. In that way, we could, in all of life's areas, wish that we were in circumstances that became anything but pleasant when they were to be practically lived out. They looked so enchanting from afar. One waited patiently but it became stormy when one intended for the future's skies to be clear and sprinkled with stars. Instead, it became covered with black clouds, which at times looked quite menacing. Yes, such is life.

During the winter, I was home with relatives in a peaceful, beautiful area that reminded me of my childhood home, which I had enjoyed at one time, but had been cut short.

The following spring I traveled to Stockholm, where I found work at a Norwegian company, which cut boards in Skutskär, where the country's largest sawmill was based.

With this security we traveled to Vigo in Spain. On this fun trip I camped the whole summer until we decided to pass the

winter in our own hometown of Arendal. Over time, I had become quite conversant in the neighboring country's beautiful language, which both came in handy and was an enjoyment.

From Norway we steered the course to Hamburg, Germany, where I was going to become German, or so I thought, for I enjoyed myself there better than anywhere else I'd been in foreign lands. I would have well stayed there if gainful employment could have been found. But it was just as well not God's will for me to become German.

After a time I was hired on a German ship, which was docked in Hull, England, bound for Hong Kong, China, something that I had never planned.

This journey was therefore both lucky and full of lessons, but toward the end it became a bit slow and tiring, for the wind was against us. At times there was no wind at all. The crew had nothing against those conditions, but the captain and the shipping company did not like it, for it didn't fill their pockets.

For me, it was no loss that the trip took a long time, for it gave me more time to learn their native language.

And to that end, I had no one on the home shore who was waiting for my return. Everyone on board was German, with the exception of two. The Captain was an older man, friendly and nice, but such beautiful words cannot be used to describe



Maybe it was on a ship like this that Nils sailed in around Cape Horn.

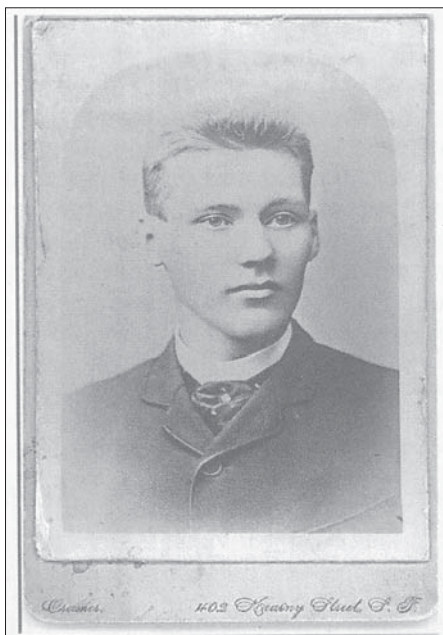
the first mate. Of him, it is better to say as Pastor Lidman said when he gave his farewell sermon to a certain congregation: “I don’t have anything good to say about you, and I don’t want to say anything hurtful.” So would one provide a just description of that man.

That which first and foremost caught our attention in the Chinese waters was that the rivers were almost as heavily populated as the towns, though our stately ship had a difficult time making its way through the countless number of ships or sloops which overcame us when we arrived in the area of the distant land. Out in Hong Kong’s floating suburbs were an unusual motion, just as lively as on the big city’s street. Everything one wished for could be bought here from these animated businessmen, who exerted themselves to the utmost to shout over one another in the offering of their Oriental wares.

In the end, we found the dock where our ship – shining on “the outside but black as coal on the inside” – should be rid of its heavy burden. The cargo was unloaded and allowed us to meet our obligations. And it became peaceful among us so that we could hear each other’s voices. Now when our cargo ship had released its wares, it had to be subjected to a thorough cleaning before it could be filled with silk and cinnamon, which was to be taken back to the market in London, England.

We continued carefully on the return trip, though we had the same benefits on the way home as we’d had on the trip out, headwind and stillness. Sails had no driving power during that time. It became necessary to completely rely upon God and to learn that it was He who could both lengthen and shorten our trip by letting the winds loose and telling them to hinder as well as to help our progress, for they are His obedient servants.

During this trip, I was transformed from Swede to German by and large, which caused me to “babble.” I mixed languages rather liberally, so that I could have almost made the ignorant to think that I was a real German. But such an attempt would be completely unsuccessful, for one does not practice it over the course of nearly seventy years; it is not so easy to do. Therefore, it is wisest for the Germans in my proximity to keep quiet about such things that they do not wish to be brought to light, for they



Nils J. Lindqvist around 1880, photo from San Francisco.

might mistakenly happen upon some problems, of which he knows full well. Poor Germans!

I didn’t stay long in London, where we brought our valuable cargo, for a large steamer lay as if it were waiting for me, ready to depart for Canada. I found a job on this ship and traveled there where I had never thought to go. It was certainly of God’s wonderful leading, of which I was unaware. Wonderful honor be to the Lord’s ways!

When I had now, so unexpectedly continued so closely toward the great land in the West, it was of course reason to at least put my foot on its shore and to take a look in that direction. And so it was. My prejudices were far too great to give even a thought to staying there, for in my childhood I had heard that America was only a land for people that other countries didn’t want to accommodate.

Therefore I found myself with a great desire to make use of the opportunity, which had so unexpectedly been placed at my disposal, to see for myself at close proximity how awful the infamous country looked, and to hear for myself how it sounded in there. The boat left and I went through the door to the “criminal’s homeland” in the company of two friends.

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Editor’s note: References for the church records of Böda and Högby:

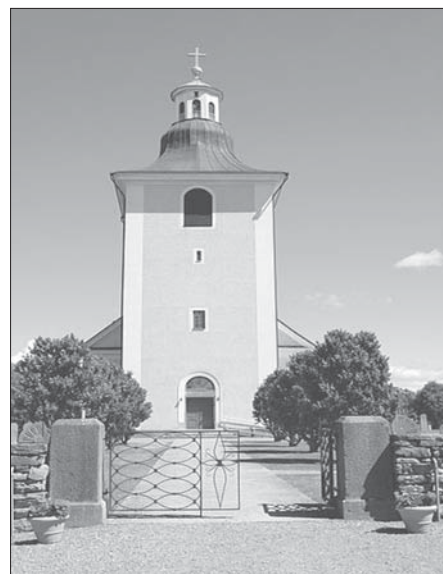
- 1) Böda (H) AI:10 (1853-1860) Image 28 / page 40;
- Högby (H) AI:9 (1861-1871) Image 110 / page 406;
- Högby (H) AI:9 (1861-1871) Image 44 / page 340;
- Högby (H) F:1 (1861-1895) Image 25.



Böda church on Öland.



Interior of Böda church.



Högby church on Öland.