

## Black Sheep and Golden Son

Within the *Letters of Georg Edward Bergwall 1858-1891* is one side of a subtle exchange between a prominent Gothenburg family's "black sheep," which is Georg—suspected by the Crown of embezzlement, and their family's "golden son," Anton—knighted by the Crown for his service to the Swedish Military.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Letter (April 8, 1858)

Except for asking Anton to greet "all who belong to me" in the valediction at the end of his letter, Georg doesn't mention his son or his sister who cared for his son. It is a short letter. Georg's main purpose in writing it seems to be to ask Anton for money.

Georg's 2nd letter indicates that Anton either did not receive the letter, or, more likely, he decided not to respond for the letter's abruptness.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter (January 22, 1859)

Anton's lack of response seems to have jogged Georg's conscience, for this letter includes a complete paragraph asking,

"How is my son, Johan Edward?" and goes on with a *cri de Coeur* that rues the loss of contact with this son and his ancestral home. Moreover, he writes another paragraph beginning with "How is Hedda to whom I feel so much indebted for all the sacrifice she has made for me?," and continues with his concern for her. (*Hedda is the sister who cared for his son.*) This letter ends with "Kiss John and Hedda."

This letter hints at Georg's legal issues in Sweden by including,

"Now I must let you know that even here I am trusted with public funds." And goes on to tell Anton of two treasurer positions Georg holds for his township. It includes yet another plea for money; "Do you have plenty of money, or in other words, are you in a position to help a far-away brother?"

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Letter (April 10, 1859)

Georg hints at his legal problem in Sweden;

"I have not altogether given up the idea of going back to Sweden, therefore, it would be kind of you to send me a report of my affairs." Having none of Anton's letters, we have no such report, nor does Georg mention one in his responses to Anton.

At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter, George asks Anton to greet several people, among these is Wenberg. Of Wenberg Georg adds to his requests, "...perhaps he would like to do something for me." Might Wenberg have been involved in the activity that prompted the Royal subpoena that was sent to Georg?

5<sup>th</sup> Letter (March 13, 1865)

Georg admits to his lack of money but does not ask for financial help from Anton,  
"Were I in better circumstance, I would send her (Hedda) something that would be a joy and of usefulness to her, but I am poor and poor I remain; but since it does not take wealth or money to make me happy, I am perfectly content with my lot in the world. If I and mine remain well I'll have all that I can wish for in this world and gold magnetic power shall not make my departure difficult."

8<sup>th</sup> Letter (March 15, 1866)

Georg, having severely injured his leg and unable to work as a farmer tells Anton,  
"I shall try to get a town office, the same as I held last time before. It will be a little help—bringing in 600 Rex Swedish or more, equal to two months wages. At the same time I will try for another office, county, which would offer 1500 dollars a year for two years. This would be alright. It is where the purchase and sale of property is registered, also mortgages. We shall see what friends and friend's friends also rother Masons will do. I have many who stand ready to help me, so it is possible that I may get it."

*(Though Georg was hoping for the position of Register of Deeds, he would actually be nominated for the County Treasurer position which paid 1000 dollars a year for two years.)*

9<sup>th</sup> Letter (January 10, 1867)

Georg announces to Anton,  
"...I was fortunate to be elected County Treasurer of Waukesha County with a large majority. I am now sitting in my office (*in the city of Waukesha*) writing these lines to you. My salary is 1000 dollars a year with this office. There is not much to do, so I can go home to my family every now and then and see to things and caress my wife and children."

"All the money that I handle I deposit at the bank. When an expenditure is to be made I make out an order for the sum to be paid. This is the regular procedure in this country. I had to give a bond for 100,000 dollars and these bondsmen must be accepted by a committee. I had not the slightest difficulty getting my bondsmen. Three of the wealthiest men in our town came to sign for me, but the amount has already been offered."

10<sup>th</sup> Letter (June 21, 1867)

“Before I left my office for home I balanced my accounts and found them accurate to the cent, but I was owing to the treasury \$3.00 and a few cents which cannot be accounted for. I think this is good enough in as much as between 50 and 60 thousand dollars have traveled through my stiff and unbending fingers.”

“...I must be here to receive about 6,000 dollars school money from the state of Wisconsin to distribute among 16 sub town treasurers who in turn divide the same among school treasurers. Finally the school teachers—men and women—the latter in the majority, are properly paid.”

12<sup>th</sup> Letter (February 14, 1871)

Georg comes to fully settle into a peaceful existence.

“Now I must tell you a piece of news that is, I had an offer of \$4500 and accepted it. ...With this sum I paid all my debts, bought a neat little house and eight acres of land from my brother-in-law Sten Peterson, for \$1300 and put the rest out at interest at 10% to be paid every 6 months.

On this place I can feed three cows, 1 horse, 3 or 4 pigs, also 100 chickens. It is only a stone's throw from the lake where I may sit in peace and haul in pickerel and bass. I won't need to hire a man year around who not only eats up the profits of my property but by his carelessness destroys the same—the destruction equal to a greater sum than the yearly salary I pay him. It wasn't easy to leave the place which I had created out of wild woods—dating back to the days of creation, but I am now completely satisfied with the deal as the place I now own will make a suitable home for wife and children after I am gone. In 10 years it will be worth at least \$5,000. I didn't care to have far to move, and I didn't—only 160 rods and am nearer to church, school, mill and store.”

13<sup>th</sup> Letter (September 26, 1872)

Georg tells Anton of his poor health, U.S. politics, his brother-in-law's enterprise in Chicago, and his daughters' careers in teaching. Then, he elegiacally asks Anton to send him “seeds of all kinds” from his homeland.

In the letter's Post Script, Georg, in what I detect as a casual and egalitarian tone, acknowledges Anton having received “an appointment to Knighthood” and adds “and allow us to congratulate you on receipt of this honor.”

This is Georg's last letter to Anton. He died six months later on March 24, 1873.