

George Edward Bergwall Letters:  
Excerpts Concerning the United States Civil War  
And its Aftermath

Note: The U.S. Civil War began April 12, 1861

2<sup>nd</sup> Letter, January 22, 1859

period. Possibly I may be elected to the first office again the ensuing year. I want you to know that I have many friends - both among Americans and Scandinavians. Among the latter are many Danes who bought from Swedes and Norwegians. We are all Republicans and against slavery which cannot exist much longer. This shameful thing must be blotted out from Freedom's Star-Spangled Banner if need be with the most precious and holy on earth our brother's blood.

4<sup>th</sup> Letter, August 12, 1862

here - work from sunrise to sunset. We surely have a devastating war in the country, but so far we have not felt the real effect of it. The time will come when the war tax must be paid in order to continue the conflict, which at present costs us \$2,000,000 a day. My crops looked fine this year, until a few days before har-

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

2-1/2 years, and shouldn't wonder if he becomes president sometime. It would be interesting to know what the people in Sweden think of the war in America. Since I do not know your opinion of it, I will let you know mine. It is as all other undertakings in America: magnificent. This is a war of life or death for what is most precious to humanity - Freedom. This rebellion has developed because the mighty ones in the South or the big and small slave owners could no longer keep the government in their hands due to the increase in population in the North and in the West. As a result we people of sound mind, free will and divided wealth became the stronger party at the elections and put into office the president and others. In the South all were Democrats and would not have dared to rebel except as they depended on the Northern Democrats for support. These no doubt would have helped them all they could or dared, but praise to a Higher power for the strength, we Republicans had not only to whip the South, but also to keep the Democrats in our own states in chastisement, and the admonition of the Lord. The rebels are now on their last legs. The 300,000 men we have are for the most part volunteers not conscripted, no. people realize the value of freedom and



promptly enlist - that is what my brother-in-law, Sten, has done. He left wife and children also the farm, and shouldered a gun. God help the rebel who comes within the range of his gun. Of this 48th of Wisconsin's Regiments, 2/3 are well-to-do men with families. There are soldiers worth over \$50,000 and many of considerable wealth. Our war debts are large and no country except ours could stand such expenditures - only a country whose foundation is liberty. Vanderbilt gave \$5,000,000 to the government when it was in need of money at the beginning of the war, also many of his fine big steamboats were equipped for the states service. He stated that it was not more than right that he do this for the country that had enabled him to acquire wealth, as a result of its free constitution. Much is lost during this war, but also much won. In the first place the United States now has the right to be called "Free States" as slavery has received its death blow. In the second place the people learned how to fight, something heretofore neglected and thirdly, we now have a fleet so large that we can call ourselves masters of the sea. We could, if need be, this moment whip both England and France, thanks to our countryman Erickson. In the last fight we had to take Wilmington with its Fort Fisher, the strongest fortification in the world, and there it was proved that our Monitors could withstand severe rifled English cannon all along the line, anchored at only 1000 rods (1 rod 16-1/2 ft.) away, without damage and without the loss of a man. According to the latest report from the War Department we had lost not less than 200,000 men through fighting and illness. This is, however, not many more than are replaced by emigrants, so when the war ends our populations will not be decreased as would be the case in countries of the old world. In the South where there is no emigration and where slaves make up half the population they feel now and will continue to feel for a long time the lack of men. The slaves they dare not take as soldiers for they know, as well as I, which way they will take. We had in this war, a regiment made up of Scandinavians that took part in many bloody conflicts. This regiment returned a few days ago, its flag in tatters and only 2 companies strong after 3 years of service. When they left there were more than 1000 men. Among other things which prove the patriotism in our country, I wish to mention that the wealthy in New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have proposed that when the war is over all of the war debt estimated to be 2,000,000,000 be paid the cities to assume 2/3 leaving only 1/3 never before heard of in the world. I shouldn't wonder but what we may use our army after we are through with the South, to whip Maximilian out of Mexico, for the United States cannot tolerate a Crowned head by its side. That would be a small matter hardly worth mentioning. I, for my part, believe it was the most foolish thing Napoleon withdrew his minister from Washington. That seems to be significant. There is great excitement here regarding the finding of petroleum. Large companies have been formed to drill the earth, and its interior in many places has been examined. A short time ago in Chicago, they drilled 700 feet but did not find petroleum. They, however, found some of the most wonderful water. They tried again a few rods from this place and found what they were looking for. The well produces not more than 12 barrels a day, but even this is not considered a bad find. There are oil wells, however, that produce 7000 barrels a day. It seems to me that they should drill for oil in Noganas, Sweden. It is to be found where there are salt or coal mines.



also tobacco so as time goes on we'll soon have our own supply. I believe there will be much immigration from the East to the South when the war is over and slavery is abolished. Then the southern states will become America's richest provinces. Under the slave whip not so much could be done for the masses, only the individual. I wish you would get P.V. Lijestroms travels in the U.S.A. published in Stockholm in 1852. In this book you will find that this countryman already at that time predicated this rebellion. He also predicated that it would have a happy ending. You will also find in it something of America's enormous resources. You may think when I am praising America so highly that I have forgotten my Fatherland, but this is not so. I love it with all my heart and search the papers for news therefrom and happy to learn of progress and improvements made. Nothing would make me happier than to once again set my foot on that -

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I just received a message from one of my brothers-in-law, Ebbe. He has enlisted in the Artillery as a substitute for another for 600 dollars. He is a funny passenger. He has been in the service over 6 months and not one of his folks knew anything about him until now.

6<sup>th</sup> Letter, April 15, 1865 (Lincoln assassinated April 14, 1865)

in good health. Since my last lines to you there have been both glad and sad happenings. Greater and shall I say no more insane delight could be demonstrated than that in the free states when victory was won; the rebel army under Lee was completely destroyed, and Petersburg and Richmond were taken by our troops - the first to enter the city - place the old Star-Spangled Banner on the city hall and on other public buildings. This took place in Charleston also - hot-bed of rebellion. It seems as if Fate would have them punished for their sin against this race. Two and a half million dollars worth of property was destroyed by rebel troops in this place before they left and our troops - to the contrary - instead of plundering the city worked hard to save it - an unheard of thing in all history - taking into consideration that our soldiers occupied these cities almost a year besides losing 50,000 men or comrades. I mention this fact as a proof of the general enlightenment of the people of the North as compared to that of the South. Now to the sad part of my story. Our very gentle and generally beloved President Abraham Lincoln while attending a theatre in Washington was shot through the head by an assassin named Booth, and because of this infamous deed, millions of fairminded citizens have been plunged into the deepest grief. Yes, many million eyes have not been dry nor will be dry for a long time, because of the loss of this fatherly patriotic president. He stood as a mediator between the victorious North and the defeated South.

Vice-president Johnson was immediately sworn in and now holds the reigns of government in his hands. I think, he will do well, but I do believe that many a rebel, who would otherwise have gone free, will be hung. Perhaps it was Fate that Lincoln should no longer rule since coming through so successfully thus far. He was too kind a person for the continuance of the great work. A stricter master was needed and to be sure Johnson will bring them up in chastisement and the admonition of the Lord.

For my part, I wish the people of the South would be dealt with kindly since they will be united to the North with the strongest of bands; but the leaders of this unnatural rebellion in my estimation should hang until they die.



7<sup>th</sup> Letter, September 25, 1865

The American Nation has just come through its hardest test and showed the world what a people prompted by a love of freedom can do. Not enough that we had to fight rebels with weapon in hand, but we had to combat thousands upon thousands who among us favored the rebels. We had to fight foreign sympathizers and keep them at bay as they stood by watching the great spectacle. We had to fight against the press which was free during the war to spread its high-to-heaven lies gladly received by England and sent around the world. This nation's ennobling cost the North 1,000,000 men and 3,000,000,000 dollars. Most of this unheard of sum belongs to the people. Has the loss been great, so has the gain, for its people have learned their strength. No more slaves in America. That shame has been blotted out with blood. Nevertheless much is still undone to bring everything into good order. That must be left to Congress. 4,000,000 blacks of which half are nearly as white as you and I were under a more burning sun, and must have the right to vote, but before that can be accomplished I would not give much for the sympathy of the South for the North. No, the Negro shall receive a necessary education equal to that of a Swedish farmer who can read and write. Then things will be different. The southern states will then become the richest provinces in the world with a loyal people of all colors and languages. Then the overlords will feel better about paying for work done than, as formerly, steal work from their brothers in Christ.

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

It would not surprise me if there were changes in the government, owing to the attitude taken toward slavery. The slaves have been freed, but the people especially in the South do not want to give them a free man's right to vote, and heap upon them all sorts of accusations. This is what I and millions of others cannot tolerate. I think if they are not permitted to vote after having learned to read and write that we shall have to play that great drama over again. At present we have in Congress the nation's best men as speakers and patriots, so however dark it may look at times, I believe that things will work out for the best of the Union. A big mistake was made at the end of the war, for it was then decisions should have been made once and for all, or more beating up. My son, Knut does

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

The war is over and there is peace in the land, but thus far we have not been able to regulate the southern states, but they must meet our demands in the North. If not, we'll have a spectacle again. We have paid a large amount for our national debt already, and 25 years hence the whole debt will be paid. I am sending you a



10th Letter, June 21, 1867

There is not much political argument at present, but November will show the result of the votes of those made free and I think it will be for our party's as well as for the whole country's best. The South has acknowledged that the Republican Party is patriotic and wants to do right. Many of their best men are going over to our side, declaring they stood for principles, but since they lost, they do not wish to miss the opportunity of gaining the name patriot, even at the 12th hour.

Jefferson Davis is free upon a 10,000 dollar bond and as I see by the papers there is talk of executing Maximilian. The person accused of high treason goes free and the tool who lusted for honor will probably be put to death.

11th Letter, June 25, 1867 (This letter written to Georges' brother-in-law in Sweden)

P.S. I wrote Anton a few days ago in Lund and Norra Landwes. Everything seems to go on well with our Reconstruction of the Southern States, despite the fact that Pres. Johnson is a rascal; and our railroad to the Pacific progresses wonderfully. It will eventually pay for itself. This was a bold undertaking, right during the war and with our enormous expenditures. The whole thing is an honor to Americans, their extraordinary enterprise and endurance.

12th Letter, September 26, 1872

I am not much interested in politics at present, but it hurts me to think of poor France, but the drama has not yet ended. It is certain that the Germans have planted seeds of discord that will grow through future generations, and the suffering France of the present endures, will sometime be paid back with interest to Germany. We on this side of the ocean sit in peace and deliver to the struggling parties weapons, ammunition and food. America's policy is: that the power of kings in the Old World shall weaken, so the free spirit of the people will have more and more opportunity to unfold and this be sure of; that America will not help any nation in the Old World with exception of an established and recognized republic. Now farewell for this time. Greet wife and children so much from us

Our presidential election is rapidly approaching and President Grant will be re-elected with a bigger majority than any president has ever had. The democrats have put Greeley on their ballot and this man who formerly had much influence on the people has seen his glory vanish never to again appear. Such is also the case of other great men, who because of greed help Greeley and down Grant - they too are forever defeated and our party want nothing more to do with them. I sent you two illustrated newspapers both dated the 14th of this month - let me know whether or not you received them. They will give you a fair insight into our political policy, etc. at the present time. I am enclosing a few small newspaper clippings which you may scan. Chicago is growing with such speed as to amaze even Americans. The new buildings are magnificent and more substantial than the old. My brother-in-law, Nils, is putting up two buildings, one 4 stories high, on a lot leased for 90 years at a cost if I remember rightly of 1500 dollars a year. Good rent for a few feet (square).

My daughter, Charlotte has taught school three terms - is now in Whitewater studying - not only to receive the necessary knowledge for teaching, but to learn how to manage a large school which is the purpose of this academy. A few days ago I had the pleasure of reading an article in the newspaper that our state ranks highest in America in quality of teachers and instruction and that is saying a lot. My Hedda, next to Charlotte, attends high school in Chicago. She also wishes to try her luck in the teaching profession. When Charlotte shall have finished her courses she wants to teach in Milwaukee at a salary of perhaps \$600 per year that is two terms of 4 months each.