

## RECOLLECTIONS OF THE SALVATION ARMY'S SCANDINAVIAN CORPS

EDWARD O. NELSON

For three quarters of a century, beginning in 1887 and up to 1965, a vigorous and vital part of the Salvation Army in America was the Scandinavian Department and its three divisions with headquarters in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. *Frälsningsarmén*—to use its Swedish name—was a wheel within the wheel of the international, globe-girdling army of salvationists that “invaded” the United States in 1880, when Commissioner Railton and his seven “hallelujah lassies” landed at Battery Park in New York to unfurl the “blood and fire” flag of William Booth’s army.

The history of *Frälsningsarmén* in America, or rather its first forty-five years is chronicled in Major Karl Walden’s *Genom 45 År* (Chicago, 1933). The author was one of the pioneer officers, a cousin to the renowned North Park Seminary theologian, David Nyvall, well-known as the corps officer in Chicago’s Lakeview district and from his time in St. Paul, Minnesota. The deeds of the years 1934 through 1965 are recorded in *Stridsropet*, which was published weekly, copies of which can be found in the archives of Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, as well as in the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society’s archives in Chicago.

*Primus motor*—the prime mover and organizer of the Scandinavian Corps in America—was without a doubt a man by the name of Benjamin Nelson, affectionately known as Ben. He emigrated to the United States from Kristianstad, Skåne, where he had met Booth’s army and heard a voice telling him, “Join yourself to this chariot,” which he did. He came to Minneapolis, where a Swedish-speaking corps had just opened near “Seven Corners”—Washington and Cedar Avenues. At once it became clear to his fellow soldiers and superiors that here was a born leader who could take command and lead his troops into battle against sin, Satan, the World, the flesh, and the devil.

At one's first encounter with this dynamic *skåning* it did not seem possible that he could be a spiritual leader and organizer. With his sand-gravel voice, tender though it could be, and his distinct Skåne dialect, how was this possible? But when one got to know him and watched him in action, beating his drum and blowing his trumpet and testifying, the voice of this rough-hewn "blood and fire" soldier was lost and instead one heard another voice—that of the spirit of God speaking through him. His compassion for men, his fervency, his honest, direct approach, his magnetism soon broke down all walls of hostility. When he became your friend—and who did not of those who met him—he became your friend and brother for life. He at once loved the people he met, permeated by God's love. "*Det blev kärlek som ej rostade med åren,*" a love that the years did not erode, but which became fuller, richer, deeper with the years.

Ben's Scanian fellow soldier, Lieutenant Colonel George V. Perry, looked to Colonel Ben Nelson—for he advanced to that rank—as his spiritual father and mentor. Perry penned the life history of *Frälsningsarméns* organizer in America in ten chapters under the title, "Blod- och eld-emigranten" ("The Blood and Fire Emigrant") published in the 1963 issues of *Stridsropet*, *Frälsningsarméns* official publication in America. Alas, it has never been published in English, but we are glad we have the Swedish version of the biography of the man who did more than any other to promote and organize the Salvation Army's Scandinavian work in the United States.

#### *A Tree Grew in Brooklyn*

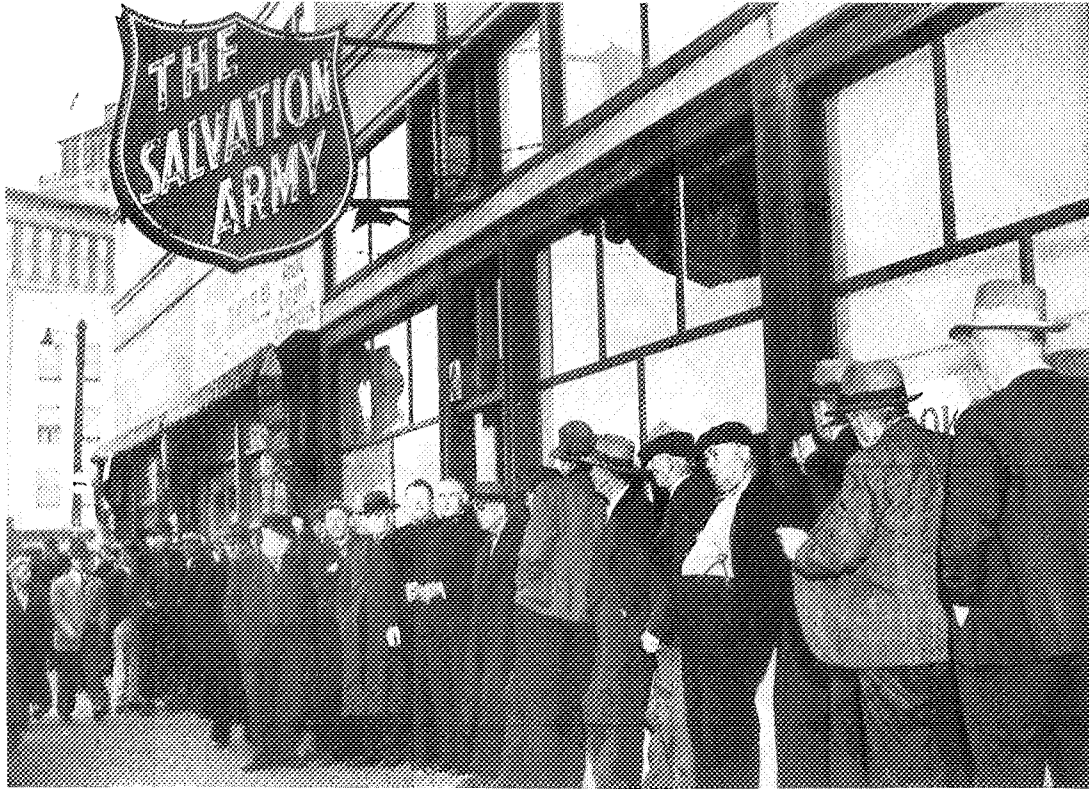
The humble beginning of *Frälsningsarmén* in America began "*da'n före doppareda'n*"—the day before Christmas Eve—December 23, 1877, in Brooklyn, New York. There were four washerwomen—Anna Larson, Mathilda Larson, Mina Edlund and Amalia Ljunggren—who were members or soldiers of an English-speaking corps in Brooklyn, who commenced holding services in Swedish after the regular Sunday evening meetings. They felt that here was a need to be met when they noted the many Swedish immigrants who had only a poor understanding of the language of the land. These Swedish-language "after-meetings" grew in attendance to such proportions that they felt

they must start their own Swedish corps. Two Swedish officers, the sisters Annie and Mary Hartelius, came to their help. They went to the leader of the Salvation Army in America, Commissioner Ballington Booth, William Booth's son, who later bolted from his father's army and formed his Volunteers of America. He readily gave his permission and blessing to start a Swedish corps. With the commissioner's approval they rented a store front at 268 Atlantic Avenue. This was in the spring of 1887.

It was not the intention of the instigators to make the corps a full-time venture as they were busy working in a laundry every day and had only the evenings at their disposal. It was a big task they had undertaken, motivated only by a desire to help their fellow Scandinavian immigrants. All four could witness and pray, and three of them played guitars. They came to the conclusion that their work must now be officially launched, which took place during Christmas week, 1887. Mary Hartelius became the first captain, but she and her sister Annie were announced incognito as "The Singing Pilgrims." A Captain Keppel served as watchman by the door and he made sure that only Scandinavians were admitted. All had to give the password. A few Irishmen learned some Swedish phrases, but a new doorman, a tall, strong Swede, could soon discern who were really entitled to admission.

Atlantic Avenue at that time was an almost completely Swedish street. All the business establishments, including taverns, were Swedish. Here was a fertile field for *Frälsningsarmén* and the work grew by leaps and bounds. The storefront hall soon became too small and plans were made to purchase a building of its own. This was done within a few years and the corps became known across the entire continent as *Österns stjärna* ("Star of the East")—the launching pad for an undertaking that was to spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific before the end of the nineteenth century.

Wherever the stream of Scandinavian immigrants flowed, through the New England states and westward through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Nebraska, Montana, and all the way to the Pacific Northwest, *Frälsningsarmén* followed them and established corps. In its halcyon days we had some eighty corps and our goal was one hundred, which



Unemployed Scandinavians waiting to be served a noon meal during the Depression.

was never reached when the flood of immigrants slowed down to a trickle. Most of the corps were Swedish, but Brooklyn, Chicago, and Minneapolis could boast of purely Norwegian-speaking units. Many of their soldiers had already been members of *Frelsearmeen* in Norway. We even had one or two Danish corps, whose soldiers were proud to be members of *Frelsens Hær* in America.

On the West Coast, especially in Washington, a number of corps were truly Scandinavian, with meetings held in both Swedish and Norwegian. The Swedes learned to *snakke norsk* and the Norwegians understood *svenska*. One Swede refused to budge from his pure native language. He would not stoop to learning Norwegian, to which his fellow soldier from Trondheim replied: "*Hvorledes tenker du greje dej ved Guds trone, hvis du ikke snakker norsk?*" ("How do you expect to manage at the throne of God if you don't speak Norwegian?") We even had a few Finnish-speaking corps, as in Brooklyn, Ashtabula, Ohio, and in upper Michigan. The signs on their halls read

*Pelastusarmeija*, and instead of selling *Stridsropet* they sold *Sootahuuto*.

As a rule *Frälsningsarmén* only opened centers in larger cities where a number of Swedes and other Scandinavians could be found. In such cities as Worcester and Boston, Massachusetts, Jamestown, New York, Rockford, Moline, Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Duluth, Superior, Detroit, Escanaba, Des Moines, Omaha, and the West Coast cities, the Salvation Army Scandinavian Corps was to be found. But even in smaller communities, such as Ashtabula, Ohio, Ridgeway, Pennsylvania, Gladstone, Michigan, Two Harbors, Minnesota, Red Oak, Iowa, and Holdrege, Nebraska, we once had thriving corps. From the horse-and-buggy days to the jet age, *Frälsningsarmén* had active and vigorous corps. Many are still going strong, although now amalgamated with the national organization. The early soldiers have long since "moved up higher"—laid down their swords and gone to receive the victor's crown. But their descendants unto the third and fourth generations are still marching to the drum-beat of their predecessors.

The leaders of those early days were men of valor, courage, daring and vision. Theirs were sacrificial lives, receiving only small remuneration for their hard and arduous labor. "*Korset först, kronan sedan*" ("First the cross, then the crown"). Their joy was to follow the Master all the way, wherever He would lead. Sometimes it could be all the way from Portland, Oregon, to Boston, Massachusetts. And they moved often in those days, always reminded that "we have here no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

By the side of these gallant men in *Frälsningsarmén* stood their wonderful wives. A coal miner, an electrician, a carpenter, or mason can work alone, but not so in the Army of the Lord. Officers always work as a team, and the better half is almost always the wife. "My best men are women," William Booth used to say. The writer can wholeheartedly say Amen to the Founder's statement.

#### *The Top Leaders*

*Frälsningsarmén*, as an army within an army, had its own leaders who carried out their own program and work among the Scandinavians in the United States. They enjoyed their own

independence, with the approval of the power structure. We have mentioned Colonel Ben Nelson as the number-one organizer of the Scandinavian work. There were others beside him, such as the Christopherson brothers, but I will refer only to those I met or worked under.

When Ben Nelson moved from New York to Chicago, the "Sunshine colonel," Olof Nilson, was transferred from Sweden to take command of the Eastern States. Colonel Olof was indeed a man of sunshine, sanctified wit, and the sweet singer in Israel. When he arrived in New York with his family on the *M/S Helig Olav*, a tugboat loaded with Salvationists went out to greet him with trumpet sounding and flags waving. In his young days as a captain he was stationed in Vaxholm, a military garrison town outside Stockholm. Consequently the Salvation Army meetings were attended by a large number of officers and enlisted men. Some of the officers sought to test Nilson's Bible knowledge with some thorny questions. For instance: "Was it not strange that Balaam's ass could speak with a human voice?" "No-no-no," Nilson stammered delightly. "But the strange thing is," he continued, "that it is still speaking."

Colonel and Mrs. Sven Wiberg were also among the early



leaders. The colonel had served for a while as principal of the Salvation Army school for officers in Japan, as well as in Sweden, so he found his international experience a great asset when he took command of the work in New York. Like his colleague Ben Nelson, he was a native of Skåne, but his varied career had smoothed away his once distinct *skånsk* dialect.

In Boston, where the meetings were so stormy that the Salvationists had to have a policeman at the door to keep order Sunday nights, Tom Gabrielsen, the son of a Norwegian sea captain was one of the young attenders. He had an encounter with the Lord who can still all tempests and he found the army music, drumbeat, testimonies, and lively, spirited singing so to his liking that he decided to make it his life's melody. A good singer and mandolin player himself, he was tailor-made—*klippt och skuren*—to become a leader. He abandoned his Norwegian language and plunged into Swedish, which he came to speak so fluently one would think he had come from Sweden rather than Norway. He, with his Maria, commanded the work among the Scandinavians on the Pacific Coast, in New England, and Minnesota, and ended up in retirement in Chicago. He was always the colorful commanding officer on the platform, with his ringing "Hallelujah, comrades!" the call to action. At over ninety he is still hale and hearty, tall and erect with a smart military salute as in the days of active service. The writer visited him at Christmas 1976 in his home in Florida, where he was full of vim, vigor, and vitality. And still playing his mandolin and shouting "Hallelujah, comrades!"

Colonel Axel Beckman, who ended his active service as the Salvation Army's territorial commander with the rank of Lieutenant Commissioner in Sweden, was the perfect Christian gentleman. His military training in his homeland made him a natural drumbeater. To hear him play his snare drum in a congress brass band was indeed a thrill. He was the ideal chairman for any Army gathering, whether a *midsommarfest* or a congress music festival. I often saw him in action at the annual camp congress meetings on Belmont Hill in Worcester, Massachusetts. His enthusiastic comment after a favorite string-band selection was always, "*Va' inte de' najst?*" ("Wasn't that nice?").

The leader who followed Beckman in New York was *Fräls-*

*ningsarmén's* best *folktalare*—a man who always captivated his audience and kept it hanging on his every word. Colonel Carl Soderstrom's forebears were Walloons whom Sweden imported when it needed artificers and smiths. His dark hair made him distinctive and handsome. In his early years in the Empire City he was a labor rally speaker until he encountered *Frälsningsarmén* and became a spokesman for the Lord. His first wife was the daughter of Colonel Nilson, whom the Lord took home to glory shortly after the wedding. Years later the Lord gave him Ruth, a beautiful, dimpled, charming girl from Motala, who at the time of writing still lives on Long Island and takes part in meetings of the renowned and still Swedish "*Tvåan*" (No. 2 Corps) in Manhattan. The Soderstroms were my closest personal friends, as in a sense the colonel became my spiritual father when he served here in Chicago during the later twenties and early thirties. Then, too, he saved me from leaving *Frälsningsarmén*, when on a blue Monday I whispered to Elijah, "Move over, I am coming in under the juniper tree with you."

These were the top leaders of *Frälsningsarmén* in America. There were others, of course, who helped build the edifice. And time would fail me if I were to mention all the seconds-in-command, general secretaries, and divisional officers—such as the *värmlänning* Emmanuel Roos and his Nathalie, the *skåning* Oscar Blomgren, in whose home Fred Bloom wrote his famous song, "*Han skall öppna pärlporten*" ("He the Pearly Gates Will Open"), a hymn that has winged its way around the world and is usually sung at every Swedish funeral here in America. And how about the *smälänning* Henry Rostett, a colonel who for the past twenty years he spent his retirement winters as a missionary with hammer and saw in Haiti, preaching on Sundays and building army schools and corps chapels on weekdays? And raising single-handedly the money needed. Now past eighty he is at the time this article is written still hammering away in Haiti. "Hammering Hank" is a delightful fellow officer, who as a young people's secretary in *Frälsningsarmén* was a great help to me when he was my departmental leader. His wife, Elsie, is a native of the Englewood District of Chicago, who with her banjo has been Colonel Rostett's song leader during their life-long ministry.



On of the West Coast one of our most dynamic and colorful leaders was the late Colonel Harold Madsen, a Danish spiritual giant, who became a "Swede" in thought, word and deed. He heard the call to *Frälsningsarmén* when as a young lad living in Chicago's Roseland he heard Captain Tom Gabrielsen blowing his cornet at 5:00 a.m. one Easter Sunday, calling the people to *Påskotta* (the early Easter morning service). Young Harold was awakened from his slumber and asked himself how as a good church member he could sleep on the morning when His Master arose from the grave. He quickly got up and joined Captain Gabrielsen's corps. And it was a fruitful Easter for *Frälsningsarmén* when one of our most dynamic leaders joined our ranks. The colonel ended his career as a flaming evangelist, who stirred things up and put new life into jaded corps wherever he preached. At times he spoke so much his voice grew hoarse and husky. But he comforted his listeners: "Today my voice sounds like a foghorn, but tomorrow it will be clear as a silver bell."

Clara Sundgaard, who directed the Scandinavian work in the West after Colonel Madsen's retirement, was God's charming handmaiden. She was schooled by the *värmlandska*, Major Emma Skoog, who was perhaps the most outstanding and successful woman corps officer. Ask the old timers in Lakeview and St. Paul or Moline! Not to forget her friends at home in Lönnskog, Värmland, where she lived in active retirement as minister of a church until she "moved up higher."

Lieutenant-Colonel John Y. Erickson, still very much alive in sunny California, was the "last Mohican" of the Salvation Army's Scandinavian work in the western states. A native of Hartford, Connecticut, he speaks Swedish as fluently as any Stockholmer. John Y. and his Edith were always extra kind to me, inviting me several times to camp meetings, anniversaries, and congress gatherings. He never believed that rank qualified you as the main speaker. A captain aflame with Gospel fire could serve just as well as a colonel, who stood on his rank and position.

There were other leaders, those who served in the final years of the Scandinavian work, such as Colonels G. Johanson, J. Franzen, G. Nilson, S. Franzen, and O. Lundgren. These men and

their wives captained *Frälsningsarmén* prior to the amalgamation. I shall return to them later.

#### *Annual Congresses*

The highlights for the Scandinavian Salvationists were always the annual congress gatherings, usually held in New York, Chicago, Seattle or Minneapolis-St. Paul. At first they were termed anniversary congresses, but after the first decade anniversary was dropped, it seems, and they were simply called congresses. These gatherings were usually held during the winter or early spring, except for the "big one"—the Worcester Camp congress meeting (*sommarkongressen*) on Belmont Hill. This began in a tent out in the woods on the hill shortly after the turn of the century and moved into its own wooden tabernacle shortly thereafter. Worcester, Massachusetts, was the Salvationists' spiritual Mecca, a pilgrimage all officers and soldiers in the Eastern states must make to polish up their shields and climb Mount Tabor for a yearly spiritual renewal.

The officers and soldiers looked forward with great expectations and preparations to these annual spiritual feasts, when they could sing, "*Det är kongress igen!*" ("Once more it's congress time"), say "*Tack för sist*" and ask, "*Hur går striden?*" ("How goes the battle?"). The leaders challenged the officers with the Biblical admonition that the prophet Elisha used when he commanded the hungry sons of the prophets at Gilgal, "*Sätt på den stora grytan.*" It was a challenge to "put on the great pot": to attempt great things for God, to expect great things from God. If things did not go so well at some corps, when the spiritual winds did not blow and the living waters did not flow, the reply was the Biblical answer culled from the Elisha incident, "*Det är döden i grytan*" ("Oh, thou man of God, there is death in the pot!"). In *Frälsningsarmén*, as in the days of the man of God Elisha, some always accused the Devil of getting someone to throw a poisonous wild gourd into the spiritual stew with the result: "*Döden i grytan!*" I recall one fellow officer who always rode a hobbyhorse on this phrase. But can any other sentence be more descriptive of a jaded corps?

Still, congresses were where poisonous stews, if there were such, were cured. "*Vid nådastolen blir allting väl!*" ("At the mercy seat all things are healed") was the song that had heal-



Scandinavian women officers in national costumes, singing at a Congress meeting, Twin Cities, Minnesota

ing in its stanzas. And at an old-fashioned *botbänk* ("mercy seat") at the altar, the healing stream flowed, renewals were made, the promises of God were laid hold of and commitments that might have been half-hearted were made full.

Reports from the various corps were part of the congress gatherings, which usually lasted three or four days at least. Stories of victory, trophies won for the Lord, always brought forth fervent "Amens" and "Praise the Lord." Not to forget the Salvationists' favorite word: "Hallelujah!" At congress time you always saw *Frälsningsarmén* at its best. It was a mountaintop experience for officers and soldiers alike. They went away from the congresses feeling that they could lick the world and solve all its problems, with God's help. The difficult would be done right away, the impossible would take a little longer.

A special, extra congress blessing were the meals served by the ladies of the corps where the gatherings were held. All tried to excel in serving the most savory lunches and suppers. It was *kalas*—a feast—every day! And the different corps compared menus so we would not be served ham every day.

The only fly in the ointment could be when the marching orders for new corps appointments were read. This was usually the procedure in the early years. As it might disturb the joy,

this farewell procedure was later changed and orders were sent by mail. This was a safer method for the leaders and after they mailed the orders they might find it convenient to take their vacations, to make sure the appointments would stand.

At one early congress, when moving orders had been read, the colonel proceed with his spiritual exhortation of the morning. It was based on the work of the priests in the Old Testament tabernacle, one of whose duties was to "snuff the candles," to snip off the burnt part of the wick, so it would burn with a clear, bright light. The sermon was, of course, in Swedish and the word "to snuff" is *att snyta*, which also means "to blow your nose." In the case of youngsters parents had to perform this unpleasant chore, when they did not heed the Swedish-American command: "*Fräs, kid.*" Anyway, the congress leader belabored his text *att snyta ljusen* and repeated his challenge throughout the sermon. (The modern Swedish translation is *att snoppa*, to snip,, the candles, which is more euphemistic. But the old text was used.) At the conclusion of the meeting, one of the outspoken officers, who had that morning received an assignment to a "hard go," went up to the leader and said: "*Om det är någon, som behöver snytas, så är det översten!*" ("If any one needs to have his nose blown for him, it is you, Colonel!"). The beauties of bilingualism, as practiced by Swedish-Americans! What double portions of humor and sanctified wit!

#### *Humor in Frälsningsarmén*

Few people realize how much joy and laughter there is within *Frälsningsarmén*. As a boy I could never understand how there could be so much natural happiness among God's people. I thought that if you were religious you must go through life with a face like a mule. As the boy said to his grandfather, as they watched a horse, "Poor Dobbin! He's got religion, just like you, *Farfar!*"

In *Frälsningsarmén* there have been plenty of good, clean stories and laughter. We Scandinavians often got a double dose of merriment if stories were told in Swedish, Norwegian, or Danish. Scandinavian congresses with their joys, "Hallelujahs" and "Praise the Lord" proved the ideal millieu for triggering amusing incidents. I recall a congress at "*Tvåan*" on West 52nd



A corps songster brigade, singing at an outdoor park meeting.

Street in New York. It was a Thursday evening, which was always reserved for the Swedish temple corps in Manhattan. It was the big night—“*den stora kvällen i högtiden*.” The program for the meeting was all typed out with a corps officer slated to give the opening prayer. He was all smiles and mulled over some choice words to bring down the blessings from above. This was also to be his own big night, as he was to be seated in the front row reserved for the participating guests. Just before the meeting hour, however, a prominent member of the Army power structure arrived. So the major’s name as invoker was scratched without his being informed. When he came to take his front-row seat the colonel’s aide thumbed him three rows back: “Third row, major. Third row!”

“No, I am scheduled to pray, so I should sit up front.”

“Third row, brother, third row,” the aide-de-camp continued, using his thumb like a baseball umpire.

“*Ja, ja*, I can move up when I pray,” he replied as he joined the “third rowers.”

Just a moment before prayer time the congress leader leaned over toward the third row and whispered, “*Broder, du behöver ej bedja. Jag har en storgubbe här, som skall göra det i stället*” (“Major, you don’t have to pray. I have a big wig here, who will do it instead.”) The face of the original invoker fell as he was

heard muttering, "*Och tänk, jag som hade en sån fin kongressbön uppgjord. Nu gick den åt skogen*" ("And I that had prepared such a beautiful congress prayer, but now it is gone with the wind").

Colonel Gabrielsen, the spiritual leader and father of all of us Scandinavian officers in the Central states, was in his finest fettle when he led congress meetings or conducted "Two Days with God" in remote corners of his far-flung division. With banners flying, trumpets sounding, drums beating, and string-band songs ringing, usually written by our own poet laureate and composer, the *västgöte* Kaleb Johnson, who composed over a thousand songs, they were spiritual feasts for the Salvationists.

One such mini-congress was held in Duluth, the city "by the shores of Gitchee Goomee." We held forth in a store-front hall on the far west side of the city. Before the evening service, we marched out to drum up some candidates for salvation among the non-churchgoers. We caught a couple of slightly inebriated fishermen in our net and hauled them into the hall. As the hall was crowded to capacity, there were only a couple of vacant seats right up front. The ushers had no choice but to place the boys with their bottles right in the "firing line." Gabrielsen's Bible exhortation was followed by an invitation to the *botbänk* (the penitent's bench). As the brethren with the aroma of whisky strong on their breath were seated next to it, they became the first candidates for prayer. They tarried long at the altar without gaining victory. An alert officer on the platform spotted the whisky bottle protruding from the hip pocket of one of the seeker's, went down, pulled it out, and plunked it down beside him on the altar. "Maybe this is your problem for not getting through to God?" he suggested. And continued, "Are you willing to surrender this, brother?"

"Must I give up *that*?" He was flabbergasted. What a price for spiritual victory!

"Yes, you must surrender your whisky, if you are to be delivered from alcohol," he was informed.

"All right, then. But can I please have it back right after my prayer?"

"No, it must remain on the altar," he was told.

"But what are *you* going to do with it?" He was really concerned about his joy bottle.

"We will pour it down the drain," the captain declared.

The two fishermen hauled in from the street carried the last persons left the hall, keeping an eye on the whisky bottle. As they passed through the door, one of them muttered, "What a waste of good stuff." To which his partner replied, "Let's make sure that's the last time we are fooled."

Making sober men of *fyllbultar* has been the Salvation Army's business from the beginning. Today we have special Harbor Light "detox" centers in most major cities in America, but before that the Scandinavian corps had their own clients that instead of whisky needed a drink from the fountain of the water of life. Every corps had its share of drinkers that we sought to help spiritually and materially. Many trophies were won, those who quit their imbibing ways and became solid citizens both of America and Heaven. If they came to us sober, we would give them a coin for a cup of coffee. If under the influence, they were told to come back tomorrow and we would help.

One of the corps officers in the Lakeview district of Chicago had his share of customers, and one in particular, who always seemed to be short of cash but never of smell of liquor. He rang the doorbell at historic 3256 North Wilton Avenue, now the corps parking lot, almost daily. One day when he was under the influence, he was rebuffed by the major. "Come back tomorrow, when you have spent the night in drydock. Good day, sir!"

Just as the inebriate was about to walk down the steps, he spied the officer's wife standing in the hallway entrance. "Shay, major," he continued, pursuing a new approach for aid. "How can you who have such a lovely, charming, beautiful, wonderful wife, be so hard-boiled?"

The wife, hearing the alms-seeker's amenities, shouted to her husband, "*Helge, ge gubben två daler!*" ("Helge, give the man two dollars").

A few minutes later the happy Swede was seen walking down School Street on the way to Gustafson's tavern, gleefully rubbing two crisp dollar bills between his hands.

"It woiks, it woiks, it woiks every time," he mumbled as he entered the tavern.

Well, if we err, it is on the side of kindness, as Lincoln used to say.

When I was the corps officer at Chicago's West 59th Street, I had my own exciting, and often humorous, encounters with Englewood's not always sober Swedes. When my friend from Stockholm, Sweden's perhaps most colorful preacher, the Reverend C. G. Hjelm, came to us for a week's Swedish meetings, I related to him some of my unusual happenings. He exclaimed: "*Det här låter precis som 'Den fiskande kattens gata i Paris.'*" ("It sounds exactly as if it could have happened on the Street of the Fishing Cat [Rue du Chat qui Pêche] in Paris.") When my colleagues got wind of this, I was always asked, "*Hur går striden på den fiskande kattens gata?*" ("How goes the fight on the Street of the Fishing Cat?") I have enough stories to fill a booklet, but I will relate only one.

My good friend, "Kalle Småland," was a former soldier of the corps, but was now back with his former companions. However, "*klockarkärleken till Frälsningsarmén*" (first love for the Army) was still there, burning like a pilot light. He often called me up when some Swede was sick, dying or in need of spiritual or material help. Often I was aroused at midnight and had to rush with him at once. When I suggested that we might wait until the morning he always replied, "*Nej, då dör gubben.*" ("No, by morning the fellow will be dead"). So many nights I lumbered down 59th Street, praying, while passing howling dogs and scampering cats.

It was another midnight. The phone rang and it was "Kalle Småland" on the line. "Captain, you must come at once and pray for Johan—*Johan med näsa*—so nicknamed because of his big, red whisky nose. "He is dying and we need your help to ferry him across the great divide." I knew what Kalle would have said if I had suggested I would come tomorrow morning. So I dressed hurriedly and rushed over to where Johan lived, next to Bowman's saloon, the famous watering hole for the Swedes on the avenue. It was around the first of the month and the gang always met at Johan's small apartment to celebrate the arrival of his pension check. About six or seven of Johan's *stallbröder* (companions) were on deck to greet me. Johan was moaning in his bed and Kalle announced my arrival and reason for coming.



"Johan," he began, "we have sent for Captain Nelson to come and pray for you, for you are a sinner and need to repent." "*Syndare? Va' tror Ni pojkar att Ni är för nånting? Kyrkohelgon?*" ("Sinner? What do you boys think you are? Church saints?")

"Yes, we are all sinners," Kalle continued, "but we are alive sinners, while you are a dying one, so we must begin with you, Johan. Now go ahead and pray for him, captain."

I pulled out my Bible and began to read Psalm 51, which I deemed an appropriate scripture passage for the occasion. I had just read the two first verses when one *supbroder* (drinking companion) began to snicker and mock. "Stop, Captain," Kalle shouted. "*Vi har en hädare här, som måste köras ut innan du beder. Skriften säger ju, 'Driv ut den som är ond.'*" ("We have a blasphemer in our midst that we must throw out before you pray. For the Bible says, 'Put out the evil one'").

"Bert, open the door," Kalle commanded. Bert, my friend, a bricklayer from Skåre in Värmland, was assigned the role as keeper of the portals and opened the door full tilt. Kalle applied his right sole to the cynic's rear end and out he flew into the alley, after which Bert closed the door.

"*Nu kan du fortsätta med bönen, kapten*" ("Now you may proceed with your prayer, Captain"). It took all my composure to pray, but somehow I made a successful transition from the humorous to the serious. After which I called for an ambulance and the next day followed up my prayers with Johan in the hospital.

That is another story. I got an honest and pathetic reply mixed with humor, when I urged Johan to pray himself and seek God's forgiveness and mercy. If Johan prayed it was his last "*Fader vår*" (Lord's prayer) as he crossed the frontier from this life to the next during the night. The gang took up an offering and with the help of a friendly mortician we saved him from the potter's field. Bowman's saloon lost a customer, Fifty-Ninth Street a colorful Swedish cement-mixer, and the gang a meeting place.

This will suffice for serious events with a silver-lining of humor to prove the point that there is "joy in the Salvation Army, joy in the Army of the Lord. And that a merry heart doeth good like medicine, while a broken spirit dryeth up the bones."

### *The Depression Years*

The sudden stock market crash in 1929, followed by the Great Depression, was especially hard on the younger Scandinavian immigrants. The bank closings tied up what funds they might have had. To find a job was almost out of the question. But *Frälsningsarmén* mobilized quickly and we turned our corps from New York to San Francisco into feeding places. Free dinners were served daily to our fellow countrymen caught without funds. And we did it without any federal hand-outs or community grants. Scandinavian businessmen, churches, clubs, friends, heard about our noonday meals and came to our assistance. We depended on them and the Lord to "give us this day our daily bread." And like the manna of old we had a fresh supply every day. So in faith we announced to the hungry, "Come back tomorrow and find out what we have to serve."

My colleague and fellow graduate from William Booth's college, Stig Franzen (well known to members of the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society) served with me as "armour bearer" to the then Captain George Perry in Evanston, Illinois. All three of us decided something must be done for the scores of unemployed Swedish boys. One of our soldiers, a former coal miner from Des Moines, volunteered to do the cooking if we would supply the ingredients. We ventured forth in faith and during our entire stay in Evanston some 60-70 Swedish lads were served daily meals. Besides serving meals we also ran a couple of shelters for those who could not afford to rent rooms. It was an enjoyable labor of love. And a strengthening of our faith to see how the Lord could provide a bountyful table. "And the barrel of meal wasted not," as in the days of Elijah.

The corps in Chicago, Lakeview, Humboldt Park, Englewood, and Roseland did likewise on an even larger scale. John Franzen, then corps officer in Lakeview, also took up special offerings each Sunday evening to buy tickets for those who wanted to return to Sweden but lacked transportation money. The chamber maids were the ones with the dollars during the Depression days. How generous they were when the offering plate was passed! Every Thursday on their day off there was a parade to the corps. *Svenska töser, tack*. You helped us out in many a pinch! Not only at our services, but also during the days

when we were out selling *Stridsropet* and, if convenient, you invited us to "raid the ice box." And what happened in Chicagoland was also true in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Worcester, Jamestown, New York City, and San Francisco, as well as many other cities.

*Final Leaders of Frälsningsarmén in America*

When the immigration ceased, there came a change-over from the Scandinavian languages to English. In some corps there arose vociferous debate over what language to use in the services. "For the sake of the young people, use English!" argued some. "Stick to Swedish!" countered the old-timers. "But don't you think the Lord understands English?" suggested one. "Yes, He does," came the reply. "But He doesn't like it." However, we switched most of our services to the language of the land, except for occasional meetings such as *midsommarfester*, Lucia festivals, *Julottor*, and *kaffestuga* parties. And since all now spoke English, was there still a need for this Scandinavian branch within the Salvation Army?

The top leadership broached this question. We affirmed that we still had a mission. To us it was a matter of traditions, customs, an ethnic heritage that should be preserved. Besides, you do not chop down a fruit-bearing tree. And *Frälsningsarmén*, the tree planted in Brooklyn in 1887, was still growing strong and bearing fruit. If our leaders prior to the in-grafting into the big oak of the land saw any handwriting on the wall, they never revealed their night visions. "*Dragen vidare*" ("go forward") was their motto. "Occupy until the Lord comes!"

I had the privilege to be the associate of these last Swedish Salvation Army "Mohicans" in Chicago. There were Colonel and Mrs. Georg Nilson, former chief secretary in Sweden, who had also served in the Baltic countries. They came to Chicago from New York. The Nilsons were wonderful superiors. Karin was the perfect hostess and Georg the man of wit and humor with a Swedish slant. Colonel Georg cautioned the general in London: "Woodsman, spare that tree, touch not a single bow, for years it has protected me, and I'll protect it now!" (The well-known verses are by George Pope Morris.) Well, it was spared during Nilson's tenure in office and during that of his successor, Colonel John Franzen and his "flower," Linnea. John, the ever

smiling colonel, who always gave me a free hand, is now the senior retired Salvation Army "bishop" in Minnesota, where at past eighty he is still active in Swedish gatherings.

My former fellow lieutenant from Evanston years, Colonel Stig Franzen (with his Elsie), was the last leader of *Frälsningsarmén* in the Central states. He, too, has now joined the ranks of the retired and lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. He began his Army career as an alto player in the famous Tranås brass band—Sweden's finest. He entered the vineyard from Rockford, Illinois, and ended up as divisional commander in Detroit. His motto was: "Do something big!"—"Sätt på stora grytan!" This he always did. In Chicago he started the Salvation Army Scandinavian Gospel Hour, when many said it could not be done. It is still aired today as are Swedish Salvation Army radio programs in Rockord, Duluth, and Jamestown, New York.

To Colonel Stig was assigned in 1964 the task of hauling down the Scandinavian banners from our corps buildings, to let the "Blood and Fire" tricolor wave beside the "Stars and Stripes." An assignment that tore at his Småland heart, but as a good soldier he bowed to orders. In New York the same job was given to Colonel Gustav Johanson, the man with the tender heart and sensitive spirit. Together with his Hjördis they wept nights. An era of glory had come to an end—too soon for sure.

The effervescent, youthful, happy warrior, the "king of the keyboard" and trumpet player, the Huskvarna-born Colonel Olof Lundgren, with his Karin, was given the duty of carrying on with the Scandinavian Army functions to the extent possible. This he does with all his youthful vitality, having purged the word retirement from his vocabulary. His annual "Scandinavian Night at the Temple" is still the big *frälsningsarménskväll* in Manhattan. And each July the annual Scandinavian congress camp meetings, formerly held in Worcester, still convene on the shores of Lake Seneca in New York State.

The wheel within a wheel that started to roll in Brooklyn in the horse-and-buggy days came to a halt in the jet age. But in our memories the chariot will always roll on.