

Fältskärens Berättelser I

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It may not be a good idea to reread the books which excited you as a child as an adult. Invariably you will wonder what you saw in them, and the fond memories will feel hollow and as a result even crumble. I remember when I got the first volume published in the 'Saga bibliotek', a collection of books edited (and no doubt to some extent bowdlerized) for the benefit of young innocent readers to satisfy their curiosity. The basis was the collection of books chronicling the fictional family Bertenskild as their lives reflected that of Swedish history, starting with Gustavus II Adolphus and ending, I no longer remember when, sometime in the early 19th century I believe. The book was written by the Finnish writer Topelius, but in Swedish as was common at the time in Finland. The original books were more voluminous and arranged in a cover story, the 'Ftskrn' (army surgeon) of the title. Of that nothing remained in the children's edition.

Anyway I remember still very vividly the first book I got as a Christmas present. I recall the location in an apartment on Prinsgatan 21 C on the third floor where we lived from June 1958 to November 1961. Thus the Christmas must have been 1959 and I was nine and had already a fairly firm grasp of Swedish history, at least its heroic aspects. The book in fact starts with the battle of Breitenfeld in September 1631 in which the Habsburgian general Tilly (an old man by the standards of the time) was trashed. How proud was I not of my distant fellow Swedes, and with what excitement did I not read about the battle. Children are not only innocent, but they are also cold blooded, (as Kapucinski warns about infant soldiers, with no empathy), and indeed that people got killed in battle did not bother me at all at that time, it only made it more exciting, although of course it was a big shame that Our hero Gustav II Adolf got killed in the next engagement a year later.

How much do I really remember from that first book. Not very much on particular snatch of dialogue which has stuck in my mind is the following

- Is that you?

- yes (how can such a stupid question have any other answer?)

But that exchange I cannot find in the first volume, which goes up to 1635 or so, involving not only the Battle at Breitenfeldt, the interlude in Würzburg with the beautiful Regina¹, the tragedy at Lützen, and the disaster at Nrdlingen. The first part concerns the adventures of the young Bertila who not only distinguished himself at Breitenfeldt earning the attention of the Swedish king promising him promotion to the nobility, except for knowing his fathers aversion for such distinctions, but has opportunities en masse to do so as follows. Anyway after some further adventures he gets it, and on his visit to his elderly father up north, he is rejected as a son for being a nobleman. He also, in spite of

¹ When on my first continental trip back in the summer of 1963 we stayed over at a hotel at Würzburg, this was still in vivid memory

irreconcilable religious differences, he marries the beautiful but fervently Catholic Regina, although that will have to wait for the subsequent volume.

As a child I was mesmerized, and in particular I enjoyed the illustrations supplied by Carl Larsson²; as an adult I have less patience for the often stereotyped plot designed to keep, or rather titillate, the attention of the simple minded reader.

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² In the more unabbreviated version, there are two artists as work, in addition to Larsson also Albert Edelfelt