

Lewis

Journey

PER OLOV ENQUIST

*Translated from the Swedish by
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BOOK I

March 1901–July 1910

The Proletarian Writer

1.

THERE IS A BLACK HOLE IN THE *LEBENSLAUF* THAT EFRAIM FILLS in quite late.

It has to do with Lewi's childhood.

He would return to it, almost at the very end. This was during the events of Lewi's exile in 1941. That was the first time he seemed to discover his childhood.

Perhaps that's the way it is with national monuments cast all in one piece. People forget about the child who has been cast inside; he's screaming and wants to get out.

By the way, Lewi was given his own museum. It's in Kaggeholm Castle, which became the folk high school of the Pentecostal movement.

I visited it for the first time in the spring of 1999, seventeen years after Efraim was buried. The museum was very quiet. Faint sounds came from the soccer field, where the young Pentecostals were playing a game. Lewi's study had been restored. The activities at Kaggeholm were quite lively and productive. The Pentecostal movement now offered students courses in media and IT, as well as film technology including digital editing.

Time passes, after all. Attitudes change. Yet the battle for minds goes on; Lewi and Gramsci agreed about that.

The movement's newspapers reported that the question of an association was once again relevant: Should the movement become an association, contrary to the traditions of Lewi and Herrnhut? Lewi was

a vague but active reference point in the debate. Someone brought up what he had said in 1919 at the revivalist meeting in Kölingared. Representing 102 Pentecostal evangelists he had declared that "for purely spiritual reasons we consider it best to distance ourselves from the present association's organizational entity, and to make it our prayer to God that the free congregations in our country may remain untouched by all such organizational entities."

Yet now, eighty years later, they wanted to build an association, an organization like those of all the other churches. But some people objected, speaking of Lewi and the betrayal of his dream. Once there was even a popular movement that was transformed on God's great acre, and some people still dreamed about the tongues of fire of the first Pentecostal era, the tongues of fire that ought not to be organized away and die out.

Lewi was a museum. His glasses were there. His library. A vast selection of American literature from the 1930s. *Grapes of Wrath* in English.

Who was this Lewi, as he had taken shape in this museum? The curator, who was very young, little more than a boy, wasn't quite sure. An apostle, he thought. The creator of the Christian Democratic Party.

I said, "He was different right from the start."

"Did you know him?" asked the boy.

"No, certainly not. But I had a friend who knew him from the beginning."

"What was he like?"

"Well, he said that right from the start Lewi was different."

"Different?"

"Yes, different."

"Lewi purchased Kaggeholm Castle in 1942 and gave it to the Pentecostal movement," he told me.

"Did he have money for that?"

"Yes, he claimed to have bought it cheap; he said it was a good buy."

"The members of the movement were poor and had no money, but the money appeared, and Lewi said it was a miracle, as well as hard work," I said.

"Hard work? But didn't he give it away?"

"Yes, even though it was clearly inexpensive, and he said that it was a good buy. He himself had no money," I said, "so it must have been

both a miracle and hard work. Because if a miracle didn't occur, then Lewi usually worked even harder, and then it was a miracle after all."

The curator nodded, but I'm not sure that he understood.

I told him, "Well, for an empire-builder he was quite frugal." I could tell that my words fell flat, even though they were true. "Frugal like God's Per Albin," I added in explanation.

"Who?" said the boy as he placed a stack of scrapbooks filled with clippings on the desk.

Lewi's little museum was now completely silent. The sounds from the student soccer field had ceased.

"From the very beginning he was different," Efraim had written in his *Lebenslauf*.

Now that I think about it, whenever I went to see Efraim to talk about Uncle Aron and Nicanor, we frequently talked about the movement, meaning Lewi.

Efraim would often be lying in bed when I arrived.

He would get up with great effort and an apologetic smile. "God's peace," he would say. He uttered that fine old greeting almost defiantly, with a little embarrassed smile. It had gone out of fashion. The fault of a film in the '30s, as he explained. It had apparently starred Fridolf Rhudin and was very funny, although he had never seen it himself. Films were sinful. Well, he wasn't terribly strict back in the '30s, since he was an adult after all, but it had been deeply ingrained in him. It had been deeply ingrained that films were sinful, and so he had never seen it.

But people had talked about how it happened that the peace greeting ended up being ruined. In any case, it had to do with a film starring Fridolf Rhudin. And he was terribly funny and entertaining, after a fashion. He played a Pentecostal pastor in the film. The audience laughed and laughed, and he kept saying "peace" all the time, both when it was appropriate and mostly when it wasn't. Then people sat in the movie theater and practically roared with laughter every time he said "peace." And when they left the theater after seeing the film, it began to spread. Boys started walking around saying "Peace!" to each other, and then everyone would laugh and make fun of it. So that's how the peace greeting ended up being ruined. But Efraim had grown rather stubborn in his old age, so he said "peace" or "God's peace," even

though the greeting had been ruined. In some sense it proved to us that it was true: Films were sinful.

Yes, well, there were plenty of other things that were sinful. Plenty of things. Almost everything in the end.

Were there lots of rules?

More and more of them. Playing marbles and card games and even chess, and definitely theater and what kind of clothes you wore. In the end it was even hard to breathe. It was like a second book of laws, and it contained the strangest rules about sins. It was more like an etiquette book. We called it the sin catalogue. That's what people said. It got thicker and thicker. It seemed as if we had tossed the Bible on the trash heap and taken to our hearts *Manners and Etiquette in the Pentecostal Life*. There were rules for everything, especially for women: how they should dress, how they should wear their hair, and whether they were allowed to wear jewelry. People actually started longing for a Jesus who would drive this out of the temple. In fact, Efraim could grow quite furious when he thought about it.

That was later. But peace. Peace. And later Efraim believed that toward the end Lewi came to share this opinion.

And Lewi? What was he like?

Well, in the beginning he was very different. Back then he was not like anyone else. At first he was quite seriously saved, but then later he was about to abandon his faith. He was going to be something else entirely. I think it was actually the great goal of his life, even though he gave it up.

Gave it up? Do you mean Lewi?

Yes, gave up what he truly dreamed of becoming. And he actually never changed. I think that was his secret. Later he was almost ashamed of it. But that explains things.

Efraim asked me, "What was the first film you ever saw?"

"*Call the Doctor*," I told him.

"And how old were you back then?"

"Fifteen."

"That was young," said Efraim. "To be going to the movies."

2.

In the margin of a text that talks about "how Lewi became a human being" Efraim has added two words, heavily underlined twice.

It says: "Traveling Companion!"

Respect per No further explanation. It's apparently not an allusion to himself.

Or to Sven.

Simply: "Traveling Companion!"

Efraim writes in his *Lebenslauf* that he met Lewi for the first time during the winter of 1901. That was when both of them were working at the A. F. Carlsson shoe factory in Vänersborg, and three years before Efraim went back to Bureå and the dealings with Nicanor took place.

What he remembers about Lewi and their first encounter was related to a trade union meeting. And it came toward the end of it. There were fourteen people present, and they were all sitting on straight-backed chairs. "I remember that it was a basement room, and I noticed at once that a newcomer was among us; we were all experienced young men and workers." The previous speaker had finished his long presentation with a "harangue," which more or less boiled down to "there damn well better be agreement on this, and thanks for listening, comrades," and then the new person raised his hand and asked to speak.

The youth was very short, with a round face and pale complexion; quite insignificant, not someone you'd even notice. He had dark hair with a lock falling over his forehead, and he seemed quite endearing, although insignificant. He may have come to the union meetings before, but if so Efraim hadn't noticed him. Normally those who were new would be quite shy the first few times. And there were strict rules at the union meetings. The new people didn't know the rules or how to behave when votes were taken or motions were passed. Or about the procedures. And there were plenty of those. Anyway, now he had raised his hand to make his voice heard for the first time.

When Efraim thought about it, this may have been the first time that Lewi ever made his voice heard in a public forum.

"Comrade Jonsson has the floor," the chairman then said.

That was the proper thing to say. Things were run very formally in the trade union, so you had the feeling that you were a small part of a great organization that had strictly established rules, which signified an overwhelming power. And the fact that it was all so precise seemed to elevate the proceedings above the ordinary. In fact, it was almost like a church service.

But then this new person promptly corrected the chairman.

"Johansson."

"All right then: Comrade Johansson."

The young man stood up. His hair had been plastered down with water, although one lock was still sticking up. He was wearing a serge suit and looked quite endearing. He spoke in a voice that sounded tense at first but soon grew confident; it was surprising how quickly his confidence grew even though he was so new.

"Comrades," he said, "I have only one thing to say."

Then he paused, as if he wanted to create some kind of anticipation or reflection with his words, or as if he wanted the others to be curious. Then he repeated what he had said.

"I have only one thing to say. I think that those of us in the workers' union . . ."

"The trade union," the chairman corrected him. And then, for a moment, the youth seemed slightly flustered, but he pulled himself together and continued, in an even more confident voice.

"The trade union. I just wanted to say that I refuse to be a member of the trade union if people are going to swear. Then I don't want to belong. I don't think we should take God's name in vain in the union. I object, and I want it to be entered in the minutes. I'm a socialist, but I'm also saved. Thank you for listening."

For a moment no one said a word.

"I see," said the chairman in astonishment. "I see. So Comrade Johansson is saved?"

"Yes, I am."

There was some murmuring, followed by bewildered silence. People began to fidget.

"Is that a motion?"

"Yes, it's a motion." And the newcomer faltered for a moment as he looked around uncertainly, but then he gathered his courage. "It's a motion, and I want it to be entered in the minutes!"

The chairman cleared his throat but looked as if he didn't for the life of him know what to do. He looked around, but everyone was staring at the floor without saying a word.

"Well . . ." he went on, when the silence began to feel uncomfortable. "I'm certain that . . . that . . . that everyone present will respect Comrade Johansson's feelings regarding this matter. The motion is that we . . . won't swear?"

"Or curse."

Respect per "Swear or curse. During the meetings. Shall we put the motion to a vote?"

A faint murmuring.

"Perhaps we don't need a show of hands?"

General murmuring that could be interpreted as agreement.

"Is it hereby resolved that we will not swear?"

Faint assent.

"Anyone opposed?"

No one opposed. Sharp rap of the gavel.

"The motion is passed. Unanimously. Item eight, guidelines for the fight against international capitalism: passed. Item nine, the right to place your lunch box under the workbench, also passed. Item ten, other business: the floor is open."

That was how Efraim met Lewi.

Together they had strolled through Vänersborg to the lodgings where Efraim lived. They walked along, talking, side by side. It was foggy, and they kept each other company all the way to his door.

"No," Efraim told Lewi, "you're not the only one who's saved in the union. But there aren't many of us."

"Two isn't bad," said Lewi. "By the time this century ends, we'll be many in number, no doubt the majority. By the dawn of the next millennium, human beings will have risen up from their sin and oblivion. And we'll be able to look around at a white-clad army of socialist believers."

"We won't be alive then," replied Efraim.

"If God is willing," said Lewi. "His is the Power."

"But we'll be over a hundred years old," countered Efraim.

"His is the Power!"

After this exchange they had wandered through the deserted streets for a long time, silent but thoughtful. Then Lewi may have realized that his new friend and ally might not have a faith strong enough to imagine that they could live to be over a hundred, so he added:

"Two isn't bad. A spark can ignite a prairie fire, as they say in the great land to the west."

Then Efraim asked in astonishment, "Are the two of us going to ignite . . . a prairie fire?"

"The two of us," replied Lewi.

3.

The dates in the *Lebenslauf* are often unreliable.

Early one summer, several years after the day when Lewi had compelled the motion of no swearing to be entered into the minutes, he joined up as a soldier in the standing army at Axevalla Heath.

By then something has happened to Efraim. Yet he seems unwilling to discuss his own life. He leaves gaps. "There were many who went to America, but I stayed behind in Sweden." He writes nothing about why he stayed behind.

This was also several years before the incident with Uncle Aron took place, and Efraim gathered the potatoes Aron left on the ice of Bure Fjord.

They had met regularly, not just at union meetings, and "they were now the best and most loyal of friends."

Lewi was the one who came up with the idea of handing out brochures in the evenings to the soldiers.

Efraim had reluctantly gone along. "Socialists weren't very popular at the time. We were regarded as lice, but Lewi thought it was of utmost importance to widen the organization and awaken the young soldiers to the cause of the labor movement. He was very keen on organizing, and thought it wasn't enough to hold meetings at the shoe factory, because a movement also had to reach those who were not believers."

By the second evening, disaster struck.

The first evening everything had gone well, but on the second evening, a Saturday, there was a party going on in the officers' quarters. Great roars could be heard from inside. It was a dark and hot August night, the windows were open, and inside the barracks they had obviously been boozing. The expression was Efraim's. People boozed or hit the booze or got mixed up in boozing. He himself had never hit the booze, though he had played cards, but only for a short period.

Dancing, the third deadly sin, was never mentioned in the same way. You couldn't say that someone had "gotten mixed up" in dancing. The term mostly applied to liquor and card games.

That evening a loud commotion could be heard from the officers'

quarters. They were officers from Stockholm and not under anyone's jurisdiction, so they were boozing without restraint. But shrill women's voices could also be heard. "They were whores."

It was early evening, and fornication was in the air. Efraim and Lewi paused for a moment outside the officers' quarters, then continued on to one of the troops' barracks to distribute brochures.

An hour later they were arrested.

That peculiar word "fornication."

What was it about this puritanical country that made fornication so enticing? Why could fornication be found running like a secret, dark current deep beneath the revivalist movement, when at the same time fornication was the greatest enemy? The child of revivalism and the child of fornication—weren't they twins before the throne of God and the Lamb? Efraim, who was also a child of revivalism, must have known.

We all knew, though we seldom admitted it.

Desire and ecstasy and faith and sexuality. What was the dark, deep-running current if not sexuality? And yet it was the most forbidden. To partake of Holy Communion without faith, to falsely receive His Holy Body and Blood with doubt in your heart, was not the only deadly sin. There was something much worse. It was to show before the Lord! before the Lord and His Holy Scriptures! a particular desire for the female body—that was the linchpin of the deadly sin.

The female body was, of course, the source of all sin.

Naturally everyone knew that the revivalist children, the young adolescents, would take the Åhlén & Holm catalogue out to the privy under the pretense that those old catalogues could be used in place of the much too sharp shithouse sticks. But there they would sit and look at the pages with advertisements for bras, at the photos of the headless torsos in which the almost sheet metal-like, armored brassieres concealed the enticing images of sin—but not entirely, because the pages were used for something, though they were never torn out.

The fantasy was there in the power of fornication.

The adolescents touched themselves before these images of fornication and spilled their seed. But that was in the shithouse, and only before the Åhlén & Holm catalogue. What was worse was when the adolescents sometimes used the Holy Scriptures.

Respect pentru

That was the ultimate deadly sin.

The family Bible contained pictures by Doré. And some of the large illustrations showed the naked female body. And this Doré was a talented artist, he was truly a man of skill. Every single body seemed alive. The worst sin of all, the one that no one talked about, was when a young man, someone who had perhaps come through and been baptized in the Spirit, still felt tempted. And so he opened the Holy Scriptures. The family Bible. And perhaps he studied one of Doré's pictures, perhaps the one depicting the Deluge in which the flood waters are washing over the desperate and despairing souls. Including women, who are being flung around naked in the surging waters. And their bodies are depicted exactly as they were. And if the young man then exposed his member and touched it, to give himself pleasure, and if he did this before the Holy Scriptures—was there anything worse? No, there was not.

It was said that a young man in Klutmark had been caught in this act, and afterward he felt such despair that he went out and hanged himself from the rafters in the stable without receiving redemption.

Efraim and Lewi had paused, very briefly, outside the officers' quarters and listened to the laughter. "They were whores."

What is it about that tone of voice?

Some of the soldiers must have slipped away and reported what was going on to their superiors.

Efraim and Lewi were taken to the hall where the party was in progress.

Four reserve officers had come out while two scantily clad women stood in the window watching until they were hauled back inside. Then Lewi and Efraim were taken to a remote, empty barracks to be interrogated.

The four reserve officers were wearing uniforms, yet they appeared to be scantily clad, perhaps because of the women. It was possible that they had just risen from the bed of lust and hadn't quite managed to dress properly. That's how things were in the vipers' nest. Doré had made a drawing of that too, when the vipers, in mortal terror, wrapped themselves around the naked women in the roiling swells of the deluge.

You could just imagine.

But the reserve officers seemed to liven up at the sight of their