

Selma Lagerløf



**GÖSTA
BERLING SAGA**

Novel

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GOSTA BERLING'S SAGA

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH

BY LILLIE TUDEER

PART I

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Editorial Preface

NO series of SCANDINAVIAN CLASSICS would be complete without a romance representing the genius of Selma Lagerlöf. Two chief reasons have influenced the Committee on Publications of the American Scandinavian Foundation in choosing *Gosta Berling's Saga* for whatever distinction may accrue from its inclusion in the CLASSICS. In the first place, it is the author's earliest work. If she had written no other, her place in Swedish letters would have been assured for all time. In *Gösta* are consummated the story-telling aspirations of her youth and a literary ambition which for thirty-three years found no outlet. In the second place, whatever may be the judgment of posterity, *Gösta Berling's Saga*, in the popular estimate of Swedes to-day, is Selma Lagerlöf's masterpiece. On this point, to be sure, the critics are divided. It is justly held that *The Emperor of Portugallia* is a more skilfully constructed book, and *Jerusalem* more profoundly inspired, while other novels are found to excel in particular features. *Gosta* is in truth loosely put together, and sometimes as prolix as Arthurian romance, the very prototype of this long narrative of twelve vagrant Swedish cavaliers. But here per-

sonality combines with art to create a rhapsodic prose possessing the fervor of verse and a style new in world literature. Some paragraphs one hesitates whether to print as prose or *vers libre*. One could rewrite in metrical form, for example, the description of the beautiful Marianne Sinclaire, in "The Ball at Ekeby:"

*Her presence gave inspiration to the speeches
And life to the wine.
She gave speed to the violin bows,
And the dancing went gayer than ever
Over the boards that she touched
With her slender feet.
She shone in the tableaux
And in the acting.*

It is a good test of the national character of a story when public demand, as in the case of Mark Twain's *Bull Frog*, requires the author to write a second narrative to tell how the first came into existence. In *A Story of a Story*, one may read of the long, quiet years that went into the making of *Gösta*; how the frail Värmland girl, destined to renown, in her pastoral home at Marbacka listened to spinners and travelling fiddlers reciting the mad old days after the Napoleonic wars, when gay soldiers of fortune, by their pranks and romantic behavior, made the bright-eyed maidens and pleasure-loving

gentlemen of Varmland forget their poverty; how for years she experimented silently with these tales, put them into verse, tried dramatic form, and failing to find an audience for romantic prose, essayed in vain the popular realistic then style. At last a prize contest brought the romance to the light of day in its present form. The unfrocked clergyman, Gosta Berling, became chief and hero among the twelve uncertain gentlemen to whom the efficient Major's wife gave shelter under her generous roof at Ekeby.

Gösta Berling's Saga, in the Swedish original, was my introduction to the life and temperament of modern Sweden. Like many another, after reading it, I was overtaken by a consuming desire to see the children of the people whom this romance presented, a longing which impelled me, when occasion offered, to visit Varmland and that Lake Fryken whose name the author has changed and whose shores she has made immortal. While on my pilgrimage I sat for a time in the seat of the scornful, among a group of realists and disciples of Strindberg in Copenhagen. By them I was told that no such people existed in reality as those day-dreamers of the novel. But the Varmlanders of to-day are true to their forebears, as I found on a walking trip which I have described elsewhere. I well recall, as I drew

near the Lake, a group of women carding flax by the roadside, laughing and chatting, a generous family that included a grandmother and many granddaughters. As I stopped for a moment to look at their task, one of them, a sprightly maid, seizing a handful of chaff, ran up and administered it to my neck. I had scarcely time to dodge this assailant when I was attacked by a sister with a similar weapon. The older women went on with their work, laughing merrily at the discomfiture of the stranger. Such was my introduction to the gay fellowship of Varmland, as blithe to-day, though not so romantic, as in the period, now nearly a century ago, described in the saga.

As to geography, the tourist can readily satisfy himself by visiting and identifying most of the homesteads and villages of the story. Selma Lagerlöf has rechristened them, to be sure, but fact and fiction can be differentiated by the aid of local guide-books or with the help of the map prefaced to the present edition.

The excellent translation of Lillie Tudeer, first published in 1894, hitherto inaccessible in America and out of print in England, is here reprinted by permission of the English publishers, Chapman & Hall. The text, however, has been carefully edited and a few passages corrected by Hanna

Astrup **Larsen**, the translator of **Jacobsen's** *Marie Grubbe*, published by the Foundation. Eight chapters that were silently omitted in the British edition have been restored in a new translation by **Velma Swanston Howard**, translator of other works of **Selma Lagerlof** published by **Doubleday, Page and Company**. These sections are indicated in the table of contents. At the end of the second volume will be found a Lagerlof bibliography compiled by **Vice-Consul G. N. Swan**. It is necessarily incomplete because of imperfect war-time communication, but will serve to indicate the chronology of the literature of romance of which *Gösta Berling's Saga* is but a beginning.

HENRY GODDARD LEACH

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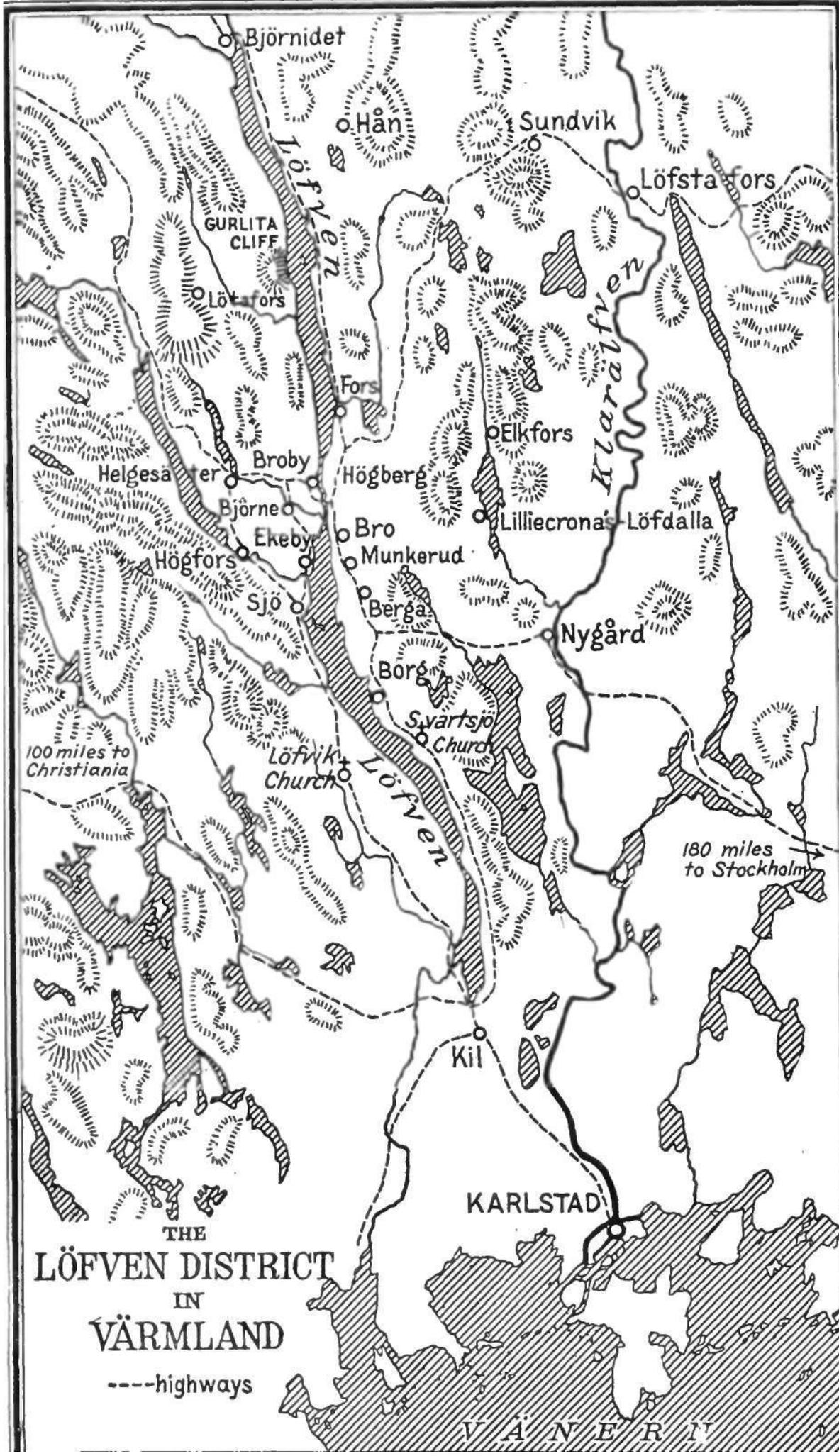
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* Translated by **Velma** Swanston Howard.

GOSTA BERLING'S SAGA
BY
SELMA LAGERLOF



THE
LÖFVEN DISTRICT
 IN
VÄRMLAND

---highways

V Ä R M L A N D

The Tartar

THE pastor was mounting the pulpit steps. The bowed heads of the congregation rose—he was there, then, after all, and there would be service that Sunday, though for many Sundays there had been none.

How tall and slight and how strikingly beautiful he was! In helmet and coat of mail he might have stood as model for a statue of an ancient Athenian. He had the unfathomable eyes of a poet, but the lower part of his face was that of a conqueror, his whole being was instinct with genius and refinement and warm poetic feeling, and the congregation were awed to see him thus.

They had grown accustomed to see him staggering out of the tavern, with his boon companions, Colonel Beerencrutz and Kristian Bergh, "the strong captain."

He had been drinking so heavily that for several weeks he had been unable to perform the duties of his office, and the parish had been forced to lodge a complaint against him, first to the rector, and then to the Bishop and Council. The Bishop had come to investigate the matter and was sitting in the choir, wearing his gold cross of office upon his breast, and was surrounded by the clergy from Karlstad and from the immediate parishes.

There was no doubt that the preacher's conduct had exceeded all bounds. People were lenient in those days—between 1820 and 1830—in the matter of drink; but this man had utterly neglected his sacred duties for its sake, and he was now to be deprived of his office.

He stood in the pulpit as the last verse of the hymn was being sung.

A certainty grew upon him, as he stood there, that every one in the church was an enemy. The gentry in the gallery, the peasants filling the nave, the confirmation candidates in the choir, all were his enemies, and so were the organ-blower and the organist. The vestry-men's pew was full of enemies. They all hated and despised him, from the babies in arms to the stiff arid rigid sexton who had fought at Leipzig. He longed to throw himself on his knees before them and beg for mercy. But a moment later, a silent storm of rage took possession of him. He remembered only too well what he had been but a short year ago, when he had stood in that pulpit for the first time. He gave no cause for reproach then. Now he stood there again and saw before him the man with the gold cross, who had come to condemn him.

While he read the introductory prayer, the blood surged to his face in waves of anger.

He could not deny the charge—he had been drinking. But who could blame him? Had they seen

the parsonage where he lived? The pine forest stood dark and gloomy round his very windows; the moisture soaked through the black rafters and ran down the fungus-covered walls. Surely a man required the help of strong spirits to keep up his courage, when rain and driving snow rushed through the broken window-panes, when the ill-tilled soil hardly gave him enough to keep hunger from the door!

He thought he had been the very pastor for them; for they all drank. Why should he alone control himself? If a man buried his wife, he was dead drunk at the funeral; the man who christened his child gave a drinking bout after the christening; the people returning from church drank all the way home—a drunken pastor was the very man for them.

It was on his parochial rounds, when driving in his thin coat for miles over the frozen lakes, where the cold winds held high revel, or battling in his boat in storm and driving rain; when in whirling snowstorms he must leave his sledge, and lead his horse through mighty snowdrifts; when tramping through forest marshes—it was then he had learned to love strong drink.

The days dragged along in heavy gloom. Peasant and lord went their way with thoughts tied to earth—till the evening brought freedom, when, loosened by wine, their spirits rose and cast aside their bonds'. Inspiration came to them, their hearts glowed, and

life grew beautiful—full of music and the scent of roses. To the young preacher, the tap-room of the tavern became transformed to a southern pleasure-garden; olives and grapes hung above him, marble columns gleamed through thick foliage, poets and philosophers strolled and conversed under the palm trees.

No!—the preacher in that pulpit knew that life without drink was unbearable in that isolated part of the world. All his hearers knew it too, yet they had come to condemn him.

They meant to tear away his priestly gown, because he had come a drunkard to the house of their God. Oh, the hypocrites, had they, did they really think they had, any other God than their **drink**!

He had finished the opening prayer, and now knelt to say "Our **Father.**"

There was breathless silence in the church. Suddenly he clutched with both hands the band that held his gown in place; for it seemed to him that all the congregation, with the Bishop at their head, were creeping silently up the pulpit steps, intent on tearing it from his shoulders. He was on his knees and did not turn his head, but it seemed to him that he felt them pulling, and he saw them so distinctly—the Bishop and the dean, all the rectors and the vestry-men, pressing forward, and he pictured how they would all fall, one over the other, when the clasp gave **way**—**even** those who had not reached

him but had been pulling at the coats of those before them.

He saw it so clearly, he could not help smiling, though the cold sweat broke out on his forehead. It was horrible.

He, to be an outcast on account of **drink**—a disgraced **clergyman**! Was there any one on earth more despicable?

He, to be a wayside beggar, to lie drunk in the ditches, go clad in rags, and consort with vagabonds!

The prayer was over, and he was about to read his sermon, when a thought struck him and checked the words on his lips. He remembered that this would be the last time he would stand in a pulpit and proclaim the glory of God.

The last **time**—**that** touched him. He forgot the Bishop and the drinking; he only felt that he must take the opportunity and bear witness to the glory of his God.

The nave of the church, with all his hearers, seemed to sink deep, deep **down**: the roof was raised, and he could see right into heaven. He stood alone, his soul soaring to the opening heavens, and his voice grew strong and joyous as he spoke of the glory of God.

He was inspired, and forgot his written text; while thoughts descended upon him like a flight of tame doves, and **he** felt that it was not he who spoke.