Chapter I
AN UNUSUALLY SEVERE WINTER——LACK OF FODDER AND OTHER NECESSITIES——CONTINUED GROWTH OF THE SETTLEMENT——SWEDES AND NORWEGIANS——THE FATE OF SOME SWEDISH IMMIGRANTS

WINTER in the American Northwest, north of 42° latitude, is usually long and severe, and the ground freezes to a considerable depth. Sometimes it happens, however, that a January thaw makes all the snow disappear; the thick ice on rivers and lakes melts; and the frost leaves the ground. Thereupon a new, severe, and frequently lengthy winter sets in.

Wisconsin's late winter in 1843 was longer and more severe than anyone had experienced before. Again and again the thermometer dropped to 23° below zero, and deep snow covered the ground until the middle of April. As a result of that extraordinary winter there was much suffering among the new settlers, with their poorly built houses and still poorer shelter for their cattle. Many hogs and cattle died from exposure and from lack of food, but thanks to the barn we had constructed with more than ordinary care, we did not suffer any such losses. Still, our animals had a bad time of it, as did we ourselves.

One day when we went to the swamp to bring home some of our hay, we found that a big stack of swamp grass had disappeared. Roving Indian tribes had taken it. At a time when ordinary swamp grass was selling for as much as $16 a ton and wheat straw —for which there was normally no demand—brought $33 load, that loss was even more dangerous than the lack of food that threatened us. Now we had no more sheepskin coats to sell; those we still had were desperately needed to shelter us from the cold winds. Many a day we had no bread on our table. Our breakfast was wheat coffee, potatoes instead of toast, and instead of sugar a kind of ill-tasting brown syrup which well deserved the name of "nigger sweat." But in spite of all these privations, we had reason to thank God who provided for us and did not permit our want to turn into real suffering. When Sunday came, we cracked jokes about our extra dish which we named winter pancakes, baked without milk or eggs and with a very scant amount of butter. This we enjoyed as a great delicacy.

The straw of our mattresses had already been chopped up and fed

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to the cattle. The dry wheat straw with which the cracks in the walls of the barn had been filled instead of the usual mud and other chinking had shared the same fate. Then finally the woods began to turn green and one tree after another was chopped down and its buds and tender shoots fed to the cattle. With this treatment, it was a long time before our lean and half-starved draft animals could be used for working the ground.

A couple of miles from us there lived a well-to-do farmer who had forty acres under cultivation, from which he had reaped a goodly harvest of both grain and root crops. At the beginning of spring when our needs were the greatest, I went to him to see if I might secure some foodstuffs either as a loan or on deferred payments. But the high prices during the winter had induced him to sell more of his produce than had been prudent. Now he had barely enough for his own needs, and he was able to give me only a few half-frozen potatoes and turnips that had been left in the ground in the fall and which were now being turned up by the plow. Following behind, I picked up from the furrows as much as I could, putting it in a bag to carry home, for even that kind of food had become scarce in our house. With this the burden, physical as well as mental, grew unbearably heavy: I was not sufficiently inured to the burden of poverty which few learn to bear without growing weary. Both my outward and my inward strength failed, and for the first time in my life I burst into tears with a grief that for the moment seemed inconsolable. But when I returned home, faithful hands lifted the bag from my shoulders, self-forgetful love spoke words of hope and encouragement, two tender arms twined themselves around my neck—and the heavy burden on my heart immediately grew lighter.

While we were passing through these troubles, our friends the Schneidaus[1] were also in sad straits. Mr. Schneidau's bad health and the poor dwelling he lived in—even poorer than ours (he had not been able to get his new house done)—made their situation in certain respects even worse than ours. They, too, had had an addition to their family (Polman[2] was gaining more and more experience as an obstetrician), but the little newcomer was sickly and weak from birth, and did not stay long to cheer them. Soon a grave was dug at Pine Lake—the first in the community—and Schneidau himself laid his firstborn to rest.[3]

But springtime was bringing forth a wealth outdoors which, even though it did not banish our poverty, at least made it less severely felt.

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[1] Johan Carl Fredrik Polycarpus von Schneidau (1812-59). See Vol. I, Chapter 19, note 2.
[2] Carl Wilhelm Pålman or Polman (1809-61). See Vol. I, Chapter I, note 39.
[3] A baby boy was born seven weeks prematurely to the Schneidaus December 16, 1842. He died ten days later. (Unonius' diary, manuscript in the possession of Fru Anna Tamm, Unonius' granddaughter, henceforth abbreviated as *UD*).

Grass and flowers supplied the cattle with abundant food; once more the forest was swarming with doves and flocks of ducks were swimming on Pine Lake. The *Ellida* was launched on new fishing ventures; a fresh cow gave us plenty of milk; the chickens laid their eggs in bushes and hollows, and the eggs were sold in Milwaukee or exchanged for other goods. Both men and beasts began to revive and to labor with renewed energy.

Toward the end of summer the settlement was increased by several more Swedish and more than fifty Norwegian families. Most of the latter were from the neighborhood of Skien[4] and, with few exceptions, poor in worldly goods. They settled on canal land or took small parcels of land on pre-emption, built their small cottages almost without financial means, and began by working for other farmers who had already got a start. The wives helped with laundry work and other occasional jobs; the daughters secured employment in Milwaukee where they earned a dollar or two a week. In this way they soon improved their condition, so that in a couple of years their plowed fields and the cows and oxen grazing in their pastures testified to the fact that America can offer great opportunities to the poor immigrant. But he must be a workman, and he must work. The great problems he has to face besides his ignorance of the language are malaria and other diseases. If he succeeds in leaping these hurdles and if circumstances are not too much against him, he will be able, by industry and due care, to make a livelihood and will soon be more independent than he could ever have hoped for in his homeland. I am speaking here of the poorer laboring class, and among them there are few indeed who possess enough means to make emigration possible. But in the case of the property-owning farmers in Sweden and Norway, the situation is entirely different. Here it may well be questioned whether in the majority of cases they are wise to exchange land that affords them a living in their fatherland for the uncertain fortunes of a foreign country.

Among the Norwegians there was a gentleman farmer, Gasmann,[5] a man with a big family and a considerable fortune, as fortunes are reckoned among new settlers. He settled farther up in the woods by a small river, the Ashipun, where at great cost he bought a couple of sections of land and built a sawmill. The soil was good, but the location was bad. With the means at his disposal he would no doubt have done better to select more easily tilled land instead of forest land with a heavy growth of timber. He was one of the many who come to America with a good deal of money, but who, being unacquainted with the conditions in

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[4] Skien, ancient city in southeastern Norway, the birthplace of Henrick Ibsen (1828-1906), famed Norwegian playwright.

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the country, are unable to use it properly and therefore, after a few years, are on a par with an industrious and energetic workingman who, when he fells the first tree on his claim, hasn't a cent in his pockets. Often I have heard such persons—with the exception of real farmers and workers—afterwards wish they had left their money behind, in order that after having had a hard time for a couple of years, they might have known better how to use it. As a rule, the only benefit they derive from their greater possessions is that these make their first pioneer days easier; but when these days are past, the moneyed immigrants are no better off than those who were forced to labor for their daily bread from the very beginning. It frequently happens that because of certain mistakes and unwise speculations they get into a worse financial state than their neighbors who had a more difficult start.

Gasmann, with his many grown and growing children, became a valuable addition to our restricted social circle. We always enjoyed kindness and Nordic hospitality in his home, and we have many precious memories of him and his family.

In the same section as ourselves our friend Petterson[6] built a cottage for himself and his family which had now been reunited with him. We had learned to love and esteem this splendid man, and it was with real regret that we saw him move his cobbler's tools from our attic to his own. But though he ceased to be a member of our family, he never ceased to be a friend, and rarely has there been a more genuine neighborly harmony than that which developed between his family and ours.

In this way there grew up in our region a small Scandinavia with Pine Lake rather than the Dovre Mountains as its center.[7] The Swedes lived on the east side of the lake and the Norwegians on the west side. But the lake became no more of a unifying force than the mountains were. It was either too small or too big, whichever you prefer. Every so often there arose minor differences of opinion and brotherly spats. The two nationalities no more there than later in Chicago and other places came to a perfectly friendly and fraternal relation with each other. Those who look more deeply into the relations between Scandinavian nationals would find in America an interesting field for a careful study of the peculiarities of the two so-called brother nations. Here, where it was a question neither of flags nor government, there was, at least on one side, a seed of dissension which no union seemed able to eradicate.[8]

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[6] Bengt Petterson (1797-1845) See Vol. I, Chapter 18, note 8.

[7] The Dovre Mountains run east and west and do not separate Norway from Sweden. Unonius may have been thinking of the Kjölen mountain range.

[8] The political union of Norway and Sweden under one king was dissolved in 1905.

The Norwegian farmer folk that had settled here were, as I have already suggested, generally a vigorous, robust, and industrious people who made speedy progress; while the Swedes (belonging as a rule to a social class which had hardly fitted them for the life of farmers and laboring men) were far behind them in enterprise and industry. Norwegian pride and independence therefore became more obvious, since there was here no Swedish superiority which must be acknowledged and which might nourish the natural tendency toward small-minded envy. The Norwegians were superior in numbers and otherwise, and it was not hard to see how such a superiority would have been used had it been given them under other national conditions than in America.

For myself, however, I must confess that in my later relationship to the Scandinavian settlements around Pine Lake, I generally enjoyed far greater affection and stronger support for my work among the Norwegians than among the Swedes. Some of the Norwegian families consisted of farm people in every respect worthy of high regard. I shall always recall with deep gratitude the genuine friendship with which they received me and the faithful support they gave me—support and friendship which never failed amid the bitter and often disheartening worries that were later to be my destiny and which to a great extent were caused by the ungratefulness and lack of decent consideration on the part of others of their countrymen.

Of the Swedes that settled around Pine Lake at that time only three or four families remain. Most of them stayed only a short time, and then departed to try their luck elsewhere. Some were former military officers and other persons not at all fitted for American farming life. Many might be pointed out as warnings to all who claim to belong to a higher social class or such as are unaccustomed to manual labor to think carefully before going to America.

Others were mechanics or artisans, and though it has been said that such persons do well in the new country, that is not always the case. Often they find it hard to earn enough to live on. In the first place they face the language barrier. It is natural for an employer or a foreman in a factory to prefer a person with whom he is able to converse to one who, to begin with, does not understand a word of English. In the second place, the Swedish and Norwegian artisans are unaccustomed to American tools, and a master of a trade frequently has to start afresh as an apprentice. Furthermore, so many machines are now used in every trade in place of hand labor that many of those who learned a trade in the old country find that their skill is entirely useless. Blacksmiths and carpenters are the only ones who have good prospects of employment, though even they cannot

always be sure of success. Watchmakers, bookbinders, hatmakers, tailors, even shoemakers and other workmen generally find that the work in their trades is carried on by factory methods and on such a large scale that they are frequently forced to give up their trades and resort to something else for which they are totally unprepared.

But even if the Swedish, Norwegian, and other European immigrants in general succeed in getting jobs, they are rarely capable of starting businesses of their own. If they try, they will often be put in the shade by native competitors who are superior to them in certain respects—who know better how to put up a good front. The artistically decorated office of the American shop, where the work is being done in a brisker manner and where the manager, who himself perhaps knows nothing of the trade, looks more like a polished businessman than a common tradesman, generally inspires greater confidence and gains more customers than does the small unpretentious shop of the European tradesman, where he himself is the principal or perhaps even the only workman, doing his work more slowly and without the outward polish which often hides the flaws in the goods his American competitor manufactures or repairs. Whereas in all the trades goods are manufactured in America that surpass those made in Europe both in beauty and utility, in general more attention is paid to getting the work done fast than well, and the artisan who has learned to go ahead, even though his work should prove somewhat shoddy, can always expect to earn more than one who, like the Swede, lingers too long over his job, and finally completes it in a more honest though perhaps clumsier fashion.

Among my fellow countrymen who settled in our neighborhood or merely tarried there for a time were several military officers who had come to America as a refuge from their creditors. The fate of some of them may show how hard it is for persons of that social class to make their way in the new country where, on the whole, the only capital needed for real success is work experience and the strength to labor. Others have demonstrated how easy it is to leave one occupation and enter another in America, and how a person may unexpectedly and suddenly engage in an occupation which he had least of all expected to enter on leaving the homeland—and one that differs radically from his former social sphere and mode of living.

Lieutenant P[9] belonged to the first class. What he had actually

[9] Presumably Lieutenant Adolf Frederic von Proschwitz, born in Göteborgg on July 20, 1819. He was commissioned an officer in the Värmland Regiment but resigned his commission in 1842. He arrived in New York on August 16, 1843, aboard the Swedish brig *Swea* and enlisted as a private in the Seventh U.S. Infantry Regiment in New Orleans

expected to do for a living in America I do not know; perhaps he did not know himself. Like many another man he drifted with the current, expecting like Micawber in *David Copperfield* that something would turn up. Unfortunately, however, he was soon to realize that in his position and without the ability to accomplish anything, he had slim prospects of getting on in the world. The nobleman found it too hard and humiliating to resort to the axe or the spade like a common laborer. After his small supply of ready cash had been exhausted there was only one avenue open to him to earn his bread: that of returning to his old honorable trade—however much it might hurt his pride, to exchange his officer's epaulets for the tunic of a common soldier. He enlisted. The Mexican War broke out, and whether or not the former lieutenant, who had been accustomed only to peacetime ease and the sham fights of military life, was now disinclined to smell gunpowder in good earnest, I am unable to say. In any event, while the regiment was encamped in Louisiana, he deserted; was unfortunately—for himself—caught; and hanged—the usual punishment for an offense of that nature.

Another lieutenant, D,[10] tried his hand at farming for a time. For lack of better lodgings, and before he was able to build a cottage for himself, he lived for several months in a hollow tree. Finally, however, he forsook the dryad as well as his claim, on which he had been unable to make any improvements. Then he moved to a Norwegian settlement on the heavily wooded shore of a river and undertook to cut saw logs, planning to float them clear down to New Orleans, where he expected to make a fortune on his venture. No doubt he would have made a considerable profit had he been able to get his logs there. But Lieutenant D, unacquainted as he was with the geography of the country, did not take into consideration all the natural barriers and dams that made such a venture quite out of the question. The spring freshet came and broke up his raft, out of which most likely not a single log reached its destination. To make things worse, D himself had not been able to fell any trees, but had hired some Norwegian workmen who now demanded their pay. Unable to

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on March 31, 1845. He deserted on May 14, 1845, and was never heard from again. There is no record in the Army files of his being hanged for desertion. (C.O. Nordensvan, *Värmlands regementes historia* [Stockholm, 1904], Vol. II, p. 151; Axel Ahlström, *Matrikel öfver Göteborgs Handelsinstituts elever 1826-85* [Göteborg, 1918], Vol. I, p. 26; "U.S. Army Register of Enlistments" [Manuscript in the Adjutant General's Office], Vol. XLIV, p. 201, and *New York Port Passenger Manifests* [Microfilmed copies], both in National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

[10] One of Unonius' Milwaukee diaries, now in the archives of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee, mentions a Swede by the name of De la Walle, who had come to Pine Lake in 1844.

pay them, he fled to a small town not far away, where his creditors left him in peace, well knowing that he was unable to pay.

There he lived for some time in deep poverty, then speculated again in saw logs, this time with a better scheme. Once again, he needed hands other than his own, unused as they were to handling the axe. In addition, he lacked a team of draft animals. A Danish businessman had a team of fine oxen for which he had no use during the winter, and he lent them to D. Unfortunately, one of the oxen died. D never mentioned the mishap but appeared one day before the businessman and offered for sale an excellent oxhide, which he said he had been commissioned to sell. In order that D might have some profit on the deal the Dane paid him a good price for it. A few years later I met D again, ill and lacking any means of making a living. The only one who tried to take care of him was the Danish businessman. I heard that he later died in abject misery.

The Swedish settler at Pine Lake whose fortunes were the most remarkable was a man rather well known in Sweden, a lieutenant and chamberlain, Mr. L,[11] the man who had caused me to make my disappointing trip to Milwaukee. On a piece of land which adjoined Schneidau's and our own farms, he built a roomy log house which was kept more in the style of a country estate than those of the rest of the Swedes, though an unfinished veranda and a couple of rooms that forever remained without floors testified to the fact that his plans ran beyond his power of accomplishment. This former landed proprietor, who in Sweden had had a number of crofters and peasants to work his broad fields, sought now and then to handle the plow and spade; but work of that kind was generally relegated to the one servant who remained out of his former retainers—until that man finally decided to exchange; a position where his wages were *promised* in a certain number of *riksdalers* for another where he was actually *paid* more than twice as many American dollars. Later,

[11] Adolf Fredrik Lindsfelt was born in Göteborg on May 9, 1806. He entered the Swedish army and seems to have been commissioned a lieutenant in 1833. In 1840 he was made chamberlain to the Swedish Court. In 1835 he married Elizabeth Concordia von Krassow, by whom he had eight children, five of them born in Sweden. In 1842 he fled Sweden with his family and two servants, apparently because of some financial irregularity. In 1850 his wife returned to Sweden with four of the children and lived during that year in Hasslöv. She seems to have returned to the United States, for the Federal Census of 1860 shows that the whole family was then living in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, where Lindsfelt's name is listed as St. S[ure] Lindsfelt. Much research is needed to straighten out the tangled web of Lindsfelt's amazing career. Where did he add the French-sounding St. Sure to his name? None of the Swedish sources mentions it. (Information supplied by Lieutenant Colonel Sven Granlund, Halmstad, Sweden; Gustav Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska ättartavlor* [Stockholm, 1925-36], Vol. V, p. 37b.) See also Vol. I, Chapter 18, note 19.

one could see in Mr. L's field now one, now another man in a Swedish officer's coat, leaning against his axe or his hoe, as if more concerned with the transitoriness of all worldly things than with his daily drudgery.

With such management, his farming did not prosper. But the noble pair always assumed an aristocratic air and bearing. Their home was the gathering place of the elite of Pine Lake. Of a Sunday the gentleman would appear in his chamberlain's pantaloons adorned with gold braid to be admired by the ordinary backwoodsmen who had never before beheld such finery. Once when her grace went visiting, I was courteously requested to serve as her coachman—that is, to manage her equipage, consisting of a farm wagon drawn by a team of oxen—since the chamberlain had not as yet acquired any experience in that kind of driving. To be sure, the distance was no greater than would have been more comfortable, and would have required less time, to walk; but ride she must and never before or since have I witnessed a situation in which the old adage has been better exemplified: "The style must be maintained even on a wheelbarrow." It excited my risibility to see Mrs. L sit behind me on a plank in the oxcart, decked out in an elegant dress dating from the time when she rode behind a team of spirited steeds between the various estates in Skåne.[12] It may seem wrong to poke fun at a change which really ought to arouse our sympathy, but there are things in this life both pitiable and ridiculous, and the education our noble neighbors received at Pine Lake will no doubt make them regard their curious behavior with a smile rather than with tears for their lost estate.

L was a person who gradually learned to adjust to the conditions in which he found himself, and to turn his hand to a little of everything except where great physical strength and endurance were required. Without question he became more at home at the kitchen stove than his wife. He helped her with the dressing and undressing of the little misses, mixed concoctions for men and beasts, and finally, in his house, which was located close to the public road, fitted out a kind of apothecary shop and general store where he sold both liquors and vinegar of his own making. He was destined, however, for something entirely different from dabbling in farming, storekeeping, and quack doctoring around Pine Lake. After a couple of years he sold his farm and moved away, and for a time I lost track of him. Finally I met him under entirely different conditions.

A few years after I had settled in Chicago I met my friend the chamberlain quite unexpectedly, and he surprised me by informing me that he was studying in a medical college and expected to secure his

[12] Skåne, southernmost province in Sweden, known because of its many estates and manors as Sweden's chateau country.

degree in a few months. It seems that he had a natural talent for the healing art. While living in Sweden he had acquired a reputation among the common folk for being a sort of healer, and with the aid of Hartman's *The Home Physician*[13] he had continued even among the settlers at Pine Lake, to prescribe cures for agues and other mild ailments. But lately he had attacked the problem from a more scientific point of view. After leaving Pine Lake he had spent four years studying under a skillful physician, had followed him on his sickcalls, and received from him both theoretical and practical training. With this experience behind him, it was not necessary for the future physician to spend a very long time in college. Only a couple of terms completed his education, as the expression is, concentrating on work in the chemistry laboratories and dissections, in which he had previously had no experience. After this, examinations before the medical faculty were to follow, and if everything went well L believed that he would receive his diploma at the end of the term.

He told me that he had once come near giving up his medical studies because, like thousands of others, he had been seized by the California fever and had started out for the land of gold. But when he arrived in New Orleans he found himself destitute. Possessing a rare ability to manage somehow, even under the most difficult circumstances, he found a way in that strange city to secure help. He had in some manner become acquainted with the governor of Louisiana, who was suffering from an ailment which L offered to cure. His treatment was successful and the governor showed his gratitude by making him a lieutenant colonel and supplying him with traveling funds. But his success had awakened in L a new interest in the study of medical science. Turning his back on the golden land of California he returned and continued his medical studies.

When I went calling on LI found him living in a German apothecary shop, the entire stock of which—boxes and medicines and all—might have been packed away in a common traveling trunk. Behind the shop was a small closet, just big enough for a double bed and a small writing desk, at which L, dressed in a ragged greatcoat, a remnant of more affluent days, sat working on his doctor's thesis, his teeth chattering with cold. The winter was unusually chilly, but neither the druggist nor the doctor could afford to buy any wood. L complained that the ink froze in the inkstand, and as he feared that even his thought might congeal from cold, I was happy to be able to offer him better and warmer living quarters.

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[13] Popular book on medicine in Sweden during the nineteenth century, written by Dr. Carl Johan Hartman (1790-1849), district medical officer in Gävle.

With real persistence and industry he continued his studies. One of the professors at the Chicago Medical College—an able physician with whom I chanced to be acquainted—told me that L's medical knowledge might not be very deep and thorough, but on the other hand he had a real gift for healing and he combined a sure eye with an almost unbelievable daring. These qualities gave him a great reputation in the small community where he settled down to practice after he took his degree. People traveled for miles to consult him. I heard it told that when he was amputating a leg he displayed an unusual ease and skill, while his face reflected real enjoyment and absorbing interest in the successful operation.

Almost all the land around Pine Lake was now settled. Small houses were situated close to each other everywhere among the oaks that grew along the shore. Better and more carefully constructed boats than the *Ellida* now plowed the waters of the lake. In the small community many events happened and many intrigues were carried out, things that might have given a novelist plenty of stuff for absorbing word-pictures from real life—paintings in which love, as usual and in accordance with nature, played the principal part. There may not have been many young folk who might claim a high standing in society, but there was no lack of young ladies and gentlemen who were brought together by the idyllic life. It was too bad, as a little Norwegian beauty expressed it, that the young cavaliers were so busy driving oxen that they were sometimes infected rather too much by the animals' lubberliness.