



# A Frenchman in Stockholm 1844-45

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**François Rouel**  
Authentic illustrations



# A Frenchman in Stockholm

1844 - 45

By FRANÇOIS ROUEL



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# PREFACE.

A Frenchman, François Rouel (pseudonym), visits Stockholm at the time of the coronation of Oscar I in 1844. With the help of his insightful and often humorous stories, the reader is led through many of Stockholm's halls and allies. The times the author's reflections become too fictional or unclear, the translator A.O. intervenes.

A.O. is an alias for the Swedish author Karl Kullberg that supports with corrections and clarifications. The illustrations in the book are produced by a friend of Kullberg, the author and artist G.H. Mellin and some other contemporary artists.

The book was first published in 1847. For further insights about life in Stockholm in this time, this new edition has included Karl Kullberg's own reflection: *About different ways to make yourself famous – Studies on the market of vanity.*

LarsGoran Bostrom. November 2020.

# ORIGINAL PREFACE.

The translator hereby takes the liberty of handing over in the hands of public a work that here and there can be swarming by mistakes. However, the translator has searched by his best judgement and in the footnotes corrected errors. Nevertheless, most parts can be read without worry. Especially the depiction of customs and social relationships seems to be made with more knowledge than is usual for tourists of our time.

The author, who originally made the trip to Stockholm to visit king Oscar's coronation, came to stay there out of affection for this beautifully located capital and its interesting inhabitants. As the reader already of the book's first chapter will understand: He was able to gain access to most social communities of interest. He made acquaintance with some of the capital's litterateurs. About media, he leaves, in the fourth chapter of the book, an almost completely correct description. He shows a less common observatory ability and has intercepted several scattered odd features from Stockholm city life.

Those he often deals with from the point of view of comparison with customs within his country of birth. However, it must not be denied that he sometimes attacks with a lot of French perkiness. On subjects he sometimes not at all, sometimes only partial, has understood. He, nevertheless, may be forgiven for his mistakes because of difficulties with the Swedish language. And that he occasionally seems to have retrieved his information from the whispering source of conversational talk and sometimes even pure gossip. However, for readers, it cannot be denied that he has the ability to amuse from time to time through his remarks,

sometimes by his mistakes, to provoke a, if only short-lived, laughter.

The translator has therefore, in addition to all the local descriptions, brought together the chapters which actually include the social life, the pleasures, the conditions of the time in Stockholm. At the same time, the translator has given himself the liberty to exclude all of the French original's descriptions of the royal palace, churches, museums, libraries, and art, which, without containing anything for most readers actually new, would only give the book a twice as many pages, as it in its current form contains.

Skenninge in December 1846.

A. O.

# CHAPTER I. THE JOURNEY TO SWEDEN.

A beautiful September evening in 1844, I sat by my open window at the Streits Hotel in Hamburg. The many rainy days had finally left room for a few hours of uninterrupted sunshine. The elegant world of Hamburg was on the move to enjoy the pleasant evening, where a calmness enfolded the otherwise so busy city of business and its noise. Ladies in prosperous, in some cases magnificent clothes and with feet like water skis, were led by gentlemen with delicately cut suits. In whose forehead office-worker was written in readable letters. Discussions, laughter and flirts was soaring all around. A few beautiful women offered flower bouquets in the street corner.

The gentlemen bought them and handed them over to the ladies of their hearts with the same seriousness, as if it were a jewel worth a hundred thousand franks. One of the ladies pulled off her glove to not soil it, when she received the still moist bouquet. That's the German!

At the same time, my travel companion to Hamburg, a fellow citizen and old friend, passed by outside my window. "Do you want ...," he asked, "to travel to Stockholm, to king Oscar's coronation? The steamship leaves the day after tomorrow from Travemünde."

As I had fulfilled all my duties in the worthy Hansa city. I had the next half a year to my freely disposal. More than once I had played with the possibility of a visit to Sweden, to the Nordic country, that is most similar to France. I therefore replied without much reflection: "Yes."

We decided to depart for Lübeck the following day, and then continue our journey towards the homeland of Charles XII, Linnaeus and Taglioni.

The next morning, we found ourselves packed into a stagecoach. For the one that is not familiar with this vehicle, you should know that inside a stagecoach, the passengers cannot be regarded as a human being. You are only a trunk, placed underneath, instead of on top of the roof. You no longer own your free will. You blindly obey a Tyrant called Conductor. You cannot eat when you are hungry, but only when the stagecoach stops. Sleeping is the only personal rights that you are not rejected after you have touched the step of a stagecoach. But the carriage rattles, such as the bells of an old German church, a couple of old women talking sharper and more voluble than parrots in a café. Then you have lost even the last claim to this last retained human right and is merely a grain on a wide ocean of sand, where over the stagecoach incredibly slowly emerges.

Lübeck is a semi-large town in old German style. Where travellers will not stay for a long time unless the shackles of business keep him on this hanseatic origin and ground. The half day we stayed there, was good enough to visit churches and town halls and to walk around the city's collapsed, now to beautiful walking places, transformed fortifications.

The following morning a new stagecoach carried us the short distance between Lübeck to Travemünde, where the steamship Swithiod already laid impatiently snorting, ready to enter the return route to its homeland.

We immediately boarded the ship. The other passengers were already gathered, and soon the signal sounded for departure. The ship set off majestically, and Travemünde's small, pleasant, white-painted houses had faded away by the horizon. The weather was quite pleasant, and a mild tailwind wined in the strung-up sails. While the passengers began to group themselves into different camps on chairs and benches. The cigar smell

mingled with the fresh sea air, and the women's motley parasols gleamed, shifting, in the sunshine. The conversation took off, after the first, introductory words, and I obtained, during my conversations, rather interesting insights about Sweden and Swedish conditions. I found myself noticing that king Karl Johan, that was so badly anticipated in France, also had no warm sympathies among the Swedes. It was pointed out, without much hesitation, his suspiciousness and fear of shadows to utterly imagined dangers. My acquaintances seemed almost to suggest that the bloody events of 1838, which our newspapers described as a rebellion, to their main part, were a royal fiction, an imagined idea of the old king. While this so-called *uprising* burned at its hottest, the Grand Duke of Russia is said to have walked the streets and asked, where the uprising actually took place. No one could provide any satisfactory information on this. But in the meantime, a brilliant lunch was arranged at the castle for several servicing military officers, from the king's adjutant- and ordonnance-officers-squad. "Buvez, messieurs! buvez!" the sociable Karl Johan tirelessly repeated. However, it seemed to generally be placed hopes on the new king, who is said to be liked and valued by the nation. It was believed that the old opposition would increasingly join up around Oscar, who behaved with noticeable intentions to be a king of the Swedish majority.

From politics, the conversation fell on other, more lighter subjects, of which I, among other things, gathered, that the grief after Karl XIV Johan, for half a year, had been observed with the most unscrupulous accuracy. Stockholm's shop owners, who were not allowed to sell anything but mourning things, and whose other stocks, at the end of the mourning period, had become completely out of fashion, therefore suffered extremely significant losses. As a result of this situation, some had gone bankrupt. We Frenchman, anyhow, are not that ceremonial. On the Duke of Orleans funeral day, you only could see a few mourners beyond

the official- or diplomatic corps. In the Nordic countries, ceremonies are a power, in the south we only obey fashion. It is in Paris too important to want to leave the first step of a sorrow after a king. Therefore, this is not being turned into an entire society with one rule, and clothes in one colour.



Figure 1 The Swedish Costume

When I expressed my amazement about this phenomenon of obedience to rules, they answered that king Gustaf III throughout Sweden allowed only one single costume, under the name of the Swedish Costume, consisting of jacket, shorts, socks and shoes

and a small Spanish mantle. Even the beggar, as best he could in his rags, was allowed to dress in such costume. Men with calf's invisible to the unarmed eye, must poke them into the silk stocking to let the world laugh at his weak covering. Men with a belly to wear a well-tailored suit, they must snap it into a short jacket, looking like half a monster. Such tyrannical legislation would perhaps, rather than the 1830 events, have brought the French to rebellion. Ten thousand people with big stomachs or thin legs would have shouted loudly: "Down with the national suit!" But the Swede never said a word, but dressed only after the set drawing, walked in the snow with silk stockings and shoes, froze and suffered.

At the dinner table I had the opportunity to make acquaintance with the Swedish, so-called appetite drink, and it does not taste bad. It teases the appetite at the same time as it spices up the food. I kept this in my mind without difficulty as a Swedish national tradition, well aware, that you should take the custom of where you come. However, I was told that a bright, but somewhat manic priest, named Wisselgren, had wandered from province to province, preaching crusades against this, as I was told, harmful practices. Almost like king Gustaf Vasa who, much earlier, from these church walls, had spoken for Sweden's liberation. Wisselgren also has had such an impact that, according to what was said, the liquor bottle has disappeared from many of the richly equipped small tables, around which the Swedes have always, before the beginning of a dinner used to gather, and that the nobler port wine there has taken the place of the liquor. However, this is exclusively on the countryside. In Stockholm, the brandy was still warmly kept, and it was even taken in the evenings at all major suppers. Yes! On the steamship I saw passengers, who began their day with a large drink of liquor. It is true that it cannot be disputed that the enjoyment of

this drink within Sweden has been exaggerated. Where the description of this exaggeration has often used paint of bright colours, that the real relationship has difficulty, behind these colour masses, to assert itself.



Figure 2 Scanian folk costumes. The painting is signed C.W. (perhaps the signature could stand for the Danish artist and Professor C.W. Eckersberg (1783-1853)). Printer of the graphic paper was Gjöthström & Magnusson

The first place where we landed on Swedish soil was in Ystad. It is a small, rather insignificant town, with one single elegant, almost palatial residence, belonging to one of the city's richest traders.

The locals stared at me, almost like a unicorn, while small kids ran screaming into the gateways, when, I in a motley robe made a walk in the city. After this I decided to dress only in a tailcoat from now on, when I entered a small Swedish town.

The following night had its own little adventure. I had made myself at home in my cabin, in the full conviction, that the bed above me was empty like during the previous night. As I laid there, I suddenly woke up by a violent barking from the bed above me. I thought that some dog sneaked up there and I used the usual commands to reprimand dogs. But the barking continued without interruption with fairly short intervals. With a curse I threw up my boots on the bed above me, to possibly make the barking animal silent after this hostile act. No reaction!

For a while I tried to arm myself with patience, but finally I became furious at the stubbornness that my tormentor continued his growling music. I ran up and got a hold of a cane. At the same time, I saw a human being, dizzily awoken, scattered up from the bed above me.

"Have you heard anyone barking," he asked with a curious emphasis on the words.

"Yes! sure hell I've heard someone barking, and it has continued almost an hour," I replied frustrated, "now you just have to catch the damned dog and make him shut up."

"Oh sorry, my lord, it's me," the stranger replied, "it's me, who has the unfortunate habit of barking in my sleep. I would have had the honour of informing you of this if I had not, when I climbed up into my bed, found you asleep. Excuse me, sir, but it has become a real natural habit for me to bark in my sleep."

This passenger, as it later was informed, had boarded the ship in Ystad, and had been assigned a bed in the same cabin as I.

Without further adventure we arrived in Kalmar. In the city's half-gravelled Kalmar Castle, the infamous union between Sweden, Norway and Denmark was signed.



Figure 3 Kalmar castle. Drawing by Carl Svante Hallbeck (1826-1897), Swedish illustrator and artist.

Many senses are currently working on its reinvention. Especially the Scandinavian students, with Tegnér and Oelenschläger in the lead, have declared themselves highly in favour of such a union. It has been proven in verse and prose its workability. Groups have evolved throughout the three kingdoms to promote with advice and deed, as the term reads, *the idea of Scandinavism*. In favour of such a union the great poet Atterbom leads the way in the old university city of Uppsala. He is the group's Tyrtæus and sings of courage and power in the struggles for a good cause.

Hundreds of people tend to go over and visit other Scandinavian country's citizens during recurring festivities, that include tributes and speeches, as well as the so-called lifts. That is a custom where the hosts carry their guests on their shoulders and thereby bring out a nine-fold cheer. Such visits are also carried out by less fortunate members of the community, including

servants and craft apprentices. Whose masters do not dare to deny this patriotic pleasure.

I was told that a daytaler from Malmö had been the head of such a march on a smaller scale. When several hundred Scanians went over to Seeland, and there celebrated the May Pole feast, which in the Nordic countries corresponds to the summer festivals of the south.

While the ship was loading water and passengers, I hurried ashore, and had me shown the way to the old castle ruins. In the still remaining vaults, there are stored a lot of prisoners. In Sweden, according to what I was told, one can be put in custody only for not having a passport or lack of bail for tax debts. Most of the poor are thus in custody for a large part of their lives. This cruel legislation is said to originate from king Charles IX, whose bloody deeds still live on today in one of Sweden's oldest epic national poems, with the title: "Duke Charles Butcher's Bench." It is a remarkable monument of the poetry of its time, and is said to contain brilliant elements of genius, which are, admittedly, made in a raw and yet unprocessed language.

To my question, what work the prisoners used to do, I was told that they were making horse-hair whips. These pale figures looked terrible and deserted as they crowded by the bars to see the stranger entering. While their only crime in many cases was that no one wanted to bail out their tax debts. Their poverty, alone, condemned them to the shackle.

The former Union Hall is currently a cereal warehouse. With this in mind, it almost seems like that the Swedes are an industrial developing people. Where there of all of the castle's former household items, now is only one old bed maintained. Tradition proclaims that it is Gustaf the Great's bridal bed.

Among the many names which have been painted on the walls of the old castle the past centuries, I also read madam Staels.

I returned to the ship in time to not be left behind in the old union city.



Figure 4 Waxholm. Drawing by G.H. Mellin.

After one more day of joyful journey, we reached the entrance to the large archipelago that on the lake side forms a natural wall for the Swedish capital. During the night we passed the small stronghold Waxholm, which with its cannons covers the inlet. Here Sweden's Royer-Collard, the high-minded but stormy and volcanic Crusenstolpe, was imprisoned for many of years. With all the genuine Swedish affinity for their religious practices and habits, he had dared to publish an accusation against the king as a sabbath offender.

With all the flowing articulacy of his pen, with all the strength of his representation, he had made this kingly abuse the subject of one of his notorious letters.

Crusenstolpe united in the same person the Aristocrat and the Democrat. Still, Crusenstolpe was sentenced by a jury to a three-year prison sentence. Whereafter half of Stockholm in feast-clothes came to follow him when he left the capital, to be subjected to the sentence imposed for him. They cheered for him, and threw flowers, where he continued along his way. The Stockholmers thus dropped their protest against the jury's verdict.



Figure 5 The city's inlet from the south. Drawing by G.H. Mellin.

Shouts: Stockholm! Stockholm! woke us up from our night slumber, and in the first dawn of a clear September day we saw the Swedish capital theatrically rise out of the wave. We went between varied beautiful beaches, here and there a beautiful summer house had taken hold and mirrored its image in the clear water mirror. Small fishing boats swarmed back and forth in the straits, and diligent windmills turned their wings in the morning

wind. The sound of the Swedish iron, noisy and loaded in the harbour, met us already far out in the inlet.

Eventually, the noble, architecturally beautiful contours of Stockholm Castle clearly came towards us. We saw the trails of smoke, which were flowing out of the chimneys, and were able to detect a dark, packed human mass, which, at the landing site, was waiting for the arrival of the steamship. The telegraph, which, at a height above the city, noticeable even to us, brought its sign language, had long ago signalled our arrival.

Barely had we come ashore until the customs officials put themselves in possession of the steamship, and began, with sensitive precision to examine our belongings. After happily departed from this unpleasant establishment, we still had one further purgatory to undergo, before we could get a solid foot on Stockholm's soil. Since a lot of serving commissioners began to take a hold of our things. One wanted to take care of my bag, while another took my night bag. Several others had the goodness to engage with me personally. They grabbed my coat, legs and arms, and all recommended their hotel. "Don't go there, my lord." called Number 1, "there you are completely flooded with bed bugs. There are travellers who have not been allowed to sleep there at all in a fourteen-night visit." "Follow, by no means him," shouted Number 2, "they have their mattresses stuffed with nutshells, and clean no more than twice a year." "In confidence said," whispered Number 3, "all hotels in this city, except ours, are soon to be compare with outhouses."

In this way the Swedish envy came to meet me immediately the moment I had set foot on Swedish soil. However, I had already on the steamship chosen a hotel recommended to me by one of the passengers. I thus dismissed my compulsive followers, with the assurance that I would neither follow any of their compassionate

advice but enter the path of the most utter injustice. Then I started my walk to a hotel that on the wharf had no advocate at all. I was greeted after these words by a disapproving muttering from all the commissioners' lips.

Within an hour I was an established lodger in the good city of Stockholm. When I received the book in which the travellers write their names, I read next to the name: *Conte Camillo Marazzani Visconte* the names *Erik Eriksson, Erik Pehrsson, Olof Ersson, farmers from Östergötland*. Farmers in the same hotel as the Count! Such an experience is difficult to find in any country other than Sweden. Where the farmer from ancient times has had a specific place in the representation, and where his voice, in legislative matters, weighed equal to that of aristocracy.

On the first day of my stay in the capital of Charles and Gustaf, I could not imagine that I would stay for half a year that turned out to be the case.

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