

Fredrika Bremer



*The Homes
of the New World*

Fredrika Bremer

The Homes of the New World



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BY

FREDRIKA BREMER.

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TRANSLATED BY MARY HOWITT.

"SING UNTO THE LORD A NEW SONG."—*Psalms* xcvi.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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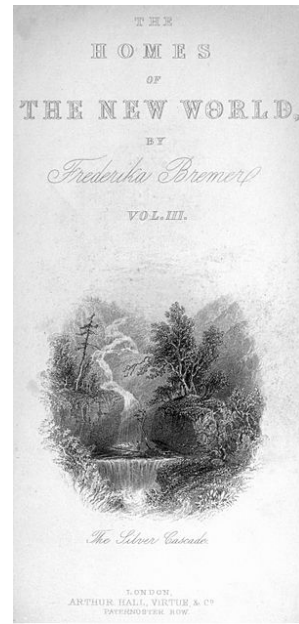
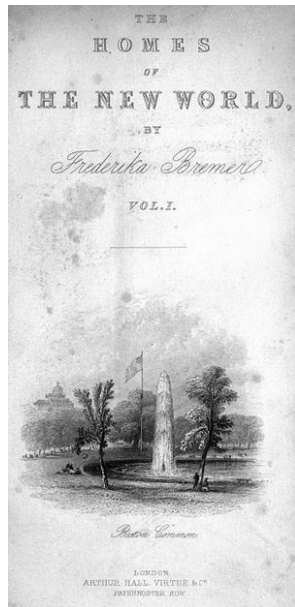
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To the Reader

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TO THE READER.

THE only excuse for troubling thee with so long a correspondence is, that if it had not been published in this manner, it would not have been published at all. And my excuse for publishing it at all is that, for many reasons—I would not abstain from doing so.

In placing these letters in thy hand, dear reader, I should wish that thy mind might be favourably disposed toward them, or at least, might not be in opposition to the spirit in which these letters were first written. They need it more than anything which I have yet written, because, I cannot conceal it from myself, they suffer from—egotism—the offence of all autobiography. This, whilst it may not offend the sympathetic feelings of a brother or sister, may easily offend the stranger who does not partake in them. Much therefore in the letters which referred to myself, and which was personally agreeable to me, has been omitted in their transcription for the press, but not all, otherwise the ingenuous character of the letters must have been sacrificed, together with the peculiar colouring of my life and its circumstances in America. Much remains of that which individually pleased or annoyed me—perhaps more than should have remained. Whilst transcribing these letters

I have often been unable to realise to myself that I was then preparing them for the public, and not writing them merely to my sister, "my innermost," to whom even the innermost might be revealed, and the most childish things be spoken. As soon as I began to write, that sister always stood before me, with her mild, heavenly eyes, her indulgent smile, intercepting the view of my unknown readers. I saw only her, I forgot them. I know that I have often erred in this way, and especially, in the earlier portion of these collected letters, during a time when illness rendered me weak, and weakness strengthened egotism. If I have allowed this illness to remain too prominent in this portion of the letters, there is, however, this excuse for it, that it is a malady, which is very prevalent in America, which is caused by the climate, the general diet and mode of life, and against which both natives and emigrants cannot be sufficiently cautioned. And if I have said too much about this malady and its causes, other authors, on the contrary, have said too little. It is the most dangerous monster of the New World. In extreme cases it leads to the madhouse or to death. Happy they who know how to avoid it, or who, at the commencement, find, as I did, a good physician, who, by the united powers of diet and medicine, is able to avert the malady before it gains too much ascendancy.

I have in the letters to my sister preserved the endearing epithets as they were originally written, and which we in Sweden make use of among relatives or dear friends; although many readers may think them somewhat childish. I cannot help it. I have attempted to exclude them and to substitute others more *befitting*, but I could not succeed;

such appeared stiff, unnatural and prosaic. Better the childish than the prosaic, thought I; and the little words will, I trust, be overlooked for the sake of the great matter, which, without any merit of mine, is yet contained in these letters.

And if, dear reader, thou hast now and then patience with the letter-writer when she speaks in sickness of body, or in the foolishness of affection, thou wilt be rewarded by being led, in her healthier and stronger moments, as by a sisterly hand, into a more familiar and cordial intimacy with that great country beyond the Atlantic, with its people, its homes, and its inner life, than might otherwise have been the case; and this thou wilt find is worth all the trouble.

I know the faults of my work, a knowledge often painful to me, better than my reader, or any one else. And this knowledge would depress me, if I did not know at the same time, that all which is best in this work will contribute in bringing nearer to each other the good homes of the New World, and the good homes of Europe, and above all those of my native land; in bringing the noble, warm hearts there, nearer to those which beat here, and thus, as far as I am able, aid in knitting together the beautiful bonds of brotherhood between widely-sundered nations.

Mayst thou, dear reader, feel the same, and let this reconcile thee to the—

LETTER-WRITER.

To my American Friends

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TO MY AMERICAN FRIENDS.

STOCKHOLM, *May*, 1853.

THESE letters were written in your homes whilst I lived there with you, as a sister with her brothers and sisters; in the North, in the West, in the South, of your great country. They were written during familiar intercourse with you. And without you they would not have been what they now are, for without you I could not have become acquainted with the Homes of the New World, nor have been able from your sacred peaceful hearths to contemplate social life beyond. To you, therefore, I inscribe these Letters. They will bear witness to you of me, and of my life among you. You said to me,—

“We hope that you will tell us the truth.”

You wished nothing else from me. I have endeavoured to fulfil your wishes. Be you my judges!

That which I saw and found in the New World has been set down in these letters. They are, for the most part, outpourings from heart to heart; from your homes to my home in Sweden. When I wrote, I little thought of committing them to the press, little thought of writing a book in America, least of all in these letters, and of that they bear internal evidence. Had such a thought been present

with me, they would have been different to what they are; they would have been less straightforward and natural; more polished, more attired for company, but whether better—I cannot say. My mind in America was too much occupied by thoughts of living, to think of writing about life. Life was overpowering.

The idea of writing letters on America did not occur to me until I was about to leave the great land of the West, and the feeling became more and more strong in me, that what I had seen and experienced during these two years journeyings was not my own property alone, but that I had a duty to fulfil as regarded it. I had, it is true, a presentiment from the first that the great New World would supply me with many subjects for thought, to be made use of at some future time, perhaps even in books, but in what manner, in what books—of that I had no distinct idea. I confess to you that I went about in America with the thought of metamorphosing the whole of America in—a novel; and you, my friends, into its heroes and heroines: but that with such subtle delicacy, that none of you should be able to recognise either America or yourselves.

But the realities of your great country could not be compressed into a novel. The novel faded away like a rainbow in the clouds, and the reality stood only the stronger forward, in all its largeness, littleness, pleasantness, sorrow, beauty, completeness, manifold and simple, in one word, in all its truth; and I felt that my best work would be merely a faithful transcript of that truth. But how that was to be accomplished I did not clearly know when I left America.

“You will understand, you will know it all when you are at home!” frequently said that precious friend who first met me on the shore of the New World, whose home was the first into which I was received, whom I loved to call my American brother, and who beautified my life more than I can tell by the charm of his friendship, by the guidance of his keen intellect and his brotherly kindness and care; whose image is for ever pictured in my soul in connection with its most beautiful scenes, its romantic life, its Indian summer, and, above all, its highland scenery on that magnificent river, where he had built his delightful home, and now—has his grave! Yet no, not alone in connection with these pictures does he live before me; time and space do not contain a character such as his. To-day, as yesterday, and in eternity, shall I perceive his glance, his voice, his words, as they were once present with me; they are united with all that is beautiful and noble in the great realm of creation. His words are a guide to me as well in Sweden as they were in America. I love to recal every one of them.

“You will know it all when you come into your own country,” said he with reference to many questions, many inquiries, which at my departure from America were dark to my understanding.

The thought of publishing the letters which I had written home from America, as they first flowed from my pen on the paper, or as nearly so as possible, did not occur to me until several months after my return, when with a feeble and half-unwilling hand I opened these letters to a beloved sister who was now no longer on earth. I confess that the life which they contained reanimated me, caused my heart to

throb as it had done when they were written, and I could not but say to myself, "These, the offspring of the moment, and warm feeling, are, spite of all their failings, a more pure expression of the truth which my friends desire from me, and which I wish to express, than any which I could write with calm reflection and cool hand." And I resolved to publish the letters as they had been inspired by the impression of the moment, and have on their transcription merely made some omissions and occasional additions. The additions have reference principally to historical and statistical facts which I found passingly touched upon in the letters or in my notes, and which are now amplified. The omissions are of such passages as refer to my own affairs or those of others, and which I considered as of too private or too delicate a nature to bear publicity. I have endeavoured in my communications from private life not to overstep the bounds which a sense of honour and delicacy prescribed; nor to introduce anything which it would be undesirable to publish, either as regarded confidential communication or the names of individuals. I am deeply sensible of the requirements of delicacy in this respect; and nothing would be more painful to me than to feel that from want of due circumspection I had failed herein.

I fear, nevertheless, that some of my friends may feel their delicacy wounded by the praise which I could not always withhold. They must forgive me for my love's sake!

I have lived in your country and your homes with no ordinary affection;—your homes received me there in no ordinary manner. If the heaped-up measure sometimes ran over, it was less my fault than—yours. Ah! The deeds of

selfishness and of hatred ring every day in our ears with the names of those who practise them. Let us preserve then other names to be conveyed round the world on the wings of spring and love, that like a heavenly seed they may take root in the earth, and cause all the best feelings of the soul to blossom. The heart sometimes is ready to doubt of goodness and its power on earth,—it must *see* before it can *believe*. I would hereby aid it in this respect. I have spoken of you.^[1]

The best, the most beautiful, in your hearts and in your homes has, after all, not been revealed. I know that within the human heart and home, as in the old temple of the older covenant, there is a holy of holies upon whose golden ark the countenances of the cherubim may alone gaze and read the tables of the covenant.

I have followed my own convictions in that which I have censured or criticised in your country and your people. That which I myself have seen, heard, experienced, felt, thought, that have I written, without fearing anything, excepting any error as regards truth and justice.

But when you read these letters, my friends, have patience, if possible, till the end; and remember that these are often the impression of the moment, which later impressions mature or change.

Consider them as digits, which you must go through before you are able to combine them into a whole. Four of the letters, those, namely, to H. C. Ørsted, to I. P. Böcklin, to Her Majesty the Queen Dowager of Denmark, and to H. Martensen, are to be regarded as resting-places by the way, from which the ground which has been passed over is

reviewed, and the path and the goal reflected upon. Some repetitions occur in these, which it was not possible to avoid. I fear that some repetition may also be found in the other letters, and it might have been avoided. But

From you, my friends, I hope for that truth before which it is pleasant to bow even when it is painful. Wherever I have erred, wherever I have formed a wrong judgment, I hope that you will freely correct me. I know that you will acknowledge all that which is good and true in what I have written. I fear from you no unjust judgment. It seems to me that I have found among you the gentlest human beings, without weakness; therefore I love to be judged by you.

I here return to your beautiful homes as a spirit, reminding you of the stranger whom you received as a guest, and who became a friend, to converse with you of former days spent on your hearths, to thank and to bless you, and not merely you, whose guest I was, but the many who benefited me in word or deed, the warm-hearted, noble-minded, all those who let me drink the morning dew of a new, a more beautiful creation, that elixir of life which gives new, youthful life to heart and mind. Words are poor, and can only feebly express the feelings of the soul. May, however, somewhat of the life's joy which you afforded me, again breathe forth from these letters to you, and convey to you a better expression of thanks than that which can here be uttered by,—

Your guest and friend,
FREDRIKA BREMER.

1. [↑](#) In the English and American editions the initials of the names are merely given, where the names belong to private individuals. I have however considered this veiling of my friends to be superfluous in the

Swedish, where in any case their names merely sound as a remote echo.

Letter I.

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LETTER I.

ON THE SEA.

Sept. 23rd, 1849.

THIS is, dearest Agatha, my second day on the great ocean! And if the voyage goes on as it has begun I shall not soon long for land. The most glorious weather, the heaven and the sea full of light, and for a habitation on my voyage to the new world a cabin large and splendid as a little castle, and besides that, convenient in the highest degree. And how I enjoy my quiet uninterrupted life here on board, after the exciting days in England, where the soul felt itself as on a rack, whilst the body hurried hither and thither in order to see and accomplish that which must be seen and accomplished before I was ready for my journey! For it was requisite to see a little of England, and especially of London, before I saw America and New York. I did not wish to be too much overcome by New York, therefore I would know something of the mother before I made acquaintance with the daughter, in order to have a point and rule of comparison, that I might correctly understand the type. I knew that Sweden and Stockholm were of another race, unlike the English country, and towns, people, manners, mode of building, and so on. But England had in the place given population, laws, and tone of mind to the people of the new world. It was the old world in England which must become my standard of judgment as regarded the new. For

that reason I came first to England, and to England I shall, please God, return when I have finished my pilgrimage on the other side of the ocean, in order to obtain a more decided impression, to form a conclusive judgment before I return home. We will expound together the runes in the native land of runic lore.

Now, however, I know what London looks like, and I shall not be amazed by the buildings of New York.

To-day, Sunday, has been to me really a festival day. We have had divine service on board, and that was good and beautiful. The passengers, about sixty in number, together with the crew of the vessel, all in their best attire, assembled in the great saloon on deck. The captain, a brisk, good-looking, young officer, read the sermon and prayers, and read them remarkably well. The whole assembly joined in the prayers and responses, as is customary in the English episcopal church. The sun shone in upon that gay assembly composed of so many different nations.

To be so solitary, so without countrymen, kindred or friends, in this assembly, and yet to know myself so profoundly united with all these in the same life and the same prayer,—“Our Father, which art in Heaven!”—it affected me so much that I wept (my usual outlet, as you know, for an overflowing heart, in joy as in grief). The captain thought that I needed cheering, and came to me very kindly after the service. But it was not so. I was happy.

Since then I have walked on deck, and read a poem called “Evangeline,” a tale of Acadia, by the American poet, Henry Longfellow. The poem belongs to America, to its history and natural scenery. There is much dramatic interest

and life in it. The end, however, strikes me as melo-dramatic and somewhat laboured. The beginning, the descriptions of the primeval forests of the new world, the tall trees which stand like the old druids with long descending beards and harps, which sound and lament in the wind, is glorious, and is a chord of that fresh minor key, which pervades the whole song, about the peaceful persecuted people of Acadia—a beautiful but mournful romance, and founded upon history. This little book was given to me by William Howitt on my departure from England; and thus I have to thank him for this my first taste of American literature, in which I fancy I can perceive a flavour of the life of the New World.

How pleasant it is to be able to read a little, and to be able to lie and think a little also! People here show me every possible attention; first one and then another comes and speaks a few words to me. I answer politely, but I do not continue the conversation; I have no inclination for it. Among the somewhat above fifty gentlemen, who are passengers on board, there is only one—a handsome old gentleman—whose countenance promises anything of more than ordinary interest. Nor among the twelve or thirteen ladies either is there anything remarkably promising or attractive, although some are very pretty and clever. I am very solitary. I have an excellent cabin to myself alone. In the day I can read there by the light from the glass window in the roof. In the evening and at night it is lighted by a lamp through a ground glass window in one corner.

People eat and drink here the whole day long; table is covered after table; one meal-time relieves another. Everything is rich and splendid. Yes, here we live really

magnificently; but I do not like this superabundance, and the eternally long dinners are detestable to me; all the more so sitting against a wall between two gentlemen, who are as still as mice, and do nothing but eat, although one of them, an Englishman, might converse very well if he would. My passage-money is thirty-five sovereigns, which includes everything. Somewhat less in price, and somewhat less to eat and drink, would be more to my taste.

Later.—I have just seen the sun go down in the sea, and the new moon and stars come forth. The North Star and Charles's Wain have now gone farther from me; but just above my head I see the cross and the lyre, and near them the eagle which we also see at home; and with these companions by the way I cannot be other than cheerful. We have the wind in our favour, and drive on our thundering career with all sails set. If we continue to proceed in this way we shall make the voyage in from twelve to thirteen days.

I hope, my sweet Agatha, that you regularly received my two letters from England; I sent the last from Liverpool on the morning before I went on board. I was quite alone there, and had to do and arrange everything for myself: but all went on right. I had the sun with me, and my little travelling fairy, and the last dear letters of my beloved, my passport to the new world, and—to the better world, if so be, for they are to me like a good conscience. I say nothing about my good spirits, but you know me, my darling: “Long live Hakon Jarl!”

Thursday.—Five days at sea! and we are already more than half-way to New York. We have had fair wind without

intermission, and if all goes on as it has begun we shall make one of the most rapid and most prosperous voyages which has ever been made from Europe to America. "But one must not boast till one has crossed the brook." To-day when the wind blew and the sea heaved somewhat roughly, my style of writing became somewhat like Charles XII.'s in his letter to "mon cœur." I get on capitally, my little heart, and do not wish myself away, so comfortable am I here, and so animating and elevating appears to me the spectacle of heaven and earth. Yes, the soul obtains wings therefrom and raises herself upwards, high above the roaring deep.

For several days we have seen no other object than heaven and sea, and circling sea-birds; not a sail, nor the smoke of a steamer. All is vacancy in that immense circle of space. But the billows, and the sunbeams, and the wandering clouds are sufficient company; these and my own thoughts. I stand and walk whole hours alone on deck and inhale the fresh soft sea-air, watch one leviathan dive down and rise again from the roaring waves, and let my thoughts dive down also, and circle round like the sea-birds in the unknown distance. There was always something of the life and joy of the Viking in me, and it is so even now. Yesterday was a glorious day, it was throughout a festival of beauty which I enjoyed unspeakably.

In my early youth, when we were many in family, and it was difficult to be alone, I used sometimes to go and lock myself in that dark little room at Årsta, where mamma keeps her keys, merely that I might feel myself alone, because as soon as I was quite alone in that pitch darkness, I experienced an extraordinary sensation—a sensation as if I

had wings and was lifted up by them out of my own being, and that was an unspeakable enjoyment to me. That half-spiritual, half-bodily feeling is inexplicable to me; but it always returns when I am quite alone and altogether undisturbed by agitating thoughts; as is the case at this time. I experience a secret, wonderful joy as I stand thus alone among strangers, in the midst of the world's sea, and feel myself to be free and light as a bird upon the bough.

Yet it is not this feeling alone which gives me here calmness and, as it were, wings, but another which I well understand, and which is common to all alike as to me. For whoever when alone in the world, or in heart, can from his heart say—*Our Father!* Mine and all men's! To him will be given rest and strength, sufficient and immortal, merely through this consciousness.

Out of the chaotic group of human countenances, which at first met my eyes here, a few figures have come nearer to me, and have acquired an interest for me through glances, expression or words. Among these is a tall respectable clergyman from New York, by name *John Knox*; and who seems to me to have a little of the historical Knox-nature of stern Puritanism, although united to much benevolence. Besides him, a family from New York, also, consisting of an old lady, the mother, with her daughter and son-in-law—a handsome young couple, who have for their bridal-tour visited, during eleven months, Egypt, Greece, Italy, France, etc., without having, in the first instance, seen Niagara, or any of the natural wonders of their own country, which I do not quite forgive in them. They are now on their return, the old lady having gained the knowledge “that all

human nature is very much alike throughout the world." This family, as well as Mr. Knox, are Presbyterian, and will not concede that Unitarians are Christians.

There is also a couple of young ladies from Georgia. One of them a handsome, married lady; the other a very pale young girl with delicate features, Hanna L—, clever, sensible, and charming, with whom it is a pleasure for me to converse. Although belonging to a slave-holding family, she condemns slavery, and labours at home to make the slaves better and happier. She is consumptive, and does not expect to live long; but goes forward to meet death with the most contented mind. One sees the future angel gleam forth from her eyes, but the suffering mortal is seen in the delicate features.

Besides these, there are some elderly gentlemen, with respectable and trustworthy countenances, who assure me that I shall find much pleasure in my journey through the United States; and lastly, a couple of slave-holders, handsome, energetic figures, who invite me to the South, and assure me that I shall find the slaves there to be "the most happy and most enviable population!!"

The days pass on calmly and agreeably. The only objection I have to the life on board the "Canada," is the excess of eating and drinking.

Monday, October 1.—The tenth day on board. It has been somewhat less agreeable during the last few days: stormy and rough. We had yesterday what they call "a gale." I endeavoured, but in vain, to stand on deck. I was not made to be a sailor. We are near Newfoundland. We steer so far northward to avoid the equinoctial storms on the more