Peter Kalm, Preceptor

America was a never-ending source of wonder to eighteenth-century Europeans, and no visitor of that period has written a clearer account of it than Peter Kalm. Although Kalm is well known for his extensive travels in North America and for his scientific papers on American subjects, little biographical material on him is available in English.¹

He was born in Ångermanland, Sweden, in March, 1716, the son of Gabriel Kalm, pastor of "Korsnäs Kapell." His early education, said to have been completed with great difficulty, was received at Vaasa, Finland, and in 1735 he became a student at the University of Åbo, where he planned to study theology. Professor Johan Brovallius, impressed with Kalm's interest in the natural sciences, recommended him to Baron Sten Carl Bjelke, who proved a generous patron, financing Kalm's trip through southern Finland in 1740. The following year, while in central Sweden, he became acquainted with Linnaeus, who persuaded him to enter the University of Uppsala where he soon won recognition as one of its outstanding students.² Kalm became a member of the Swedish Royal Academy in 1745, and in the following year was appointed lecturer in natural history and


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economics at the University of Åbo, although he had not yet received his doctorate. Promotion to a professorship of economics in 1747 made him Finland’s leading scholar in natural sciences and economics.

Kalm communicated with Linnaeus on the development of the economic aspects of the natural sciences, and through their combined efforts the funds necessary for a journey in North America were obtained, contributions being made by the Swedish Royal Academy and the Universities of Åbo and Uppsala. While in England on his way to America, Kalm met Peter Collinson, whose “arboretum” at Pecham included a large collection of American plants in cultivation. Collinson had many correspondents in the colonies, including Benjamin Franklin, to whom he addressed the following introduction on Kalm’s behalf:

To Ben. Franklin, Philadelphia

London, June 14, 1748

Friend Franklin:

The bearer, Mr. KALM, is an ingenious man, and comes over on a purpose to improve himself in all rational inquiries. He is a Swede per nation; and is, as I am informed, employed by the Academy of Upsal to make observations on the pts of the world. I recommend him to thy favour and notice. By him I send the first volume of the Voyage to Discover Northwest Passage. I hope the pacquet, &c., sent under the care of Hunt and Greenleaf is come safe to hand.

I am thy sincere friend,

P. Collinson

Kalm fully appreciated the helpfulness of such letters, noting in his journal, under entry of September 15, 1748:

Letters of recommendation are both useful and necessary for one who travels in a strange country. Through letters he soon becomes known, loved and believed. How can one establish confidence with those one has never before seen or heard of? . . . Mr. Benj. Franklin, to whom Pennsylvania is so highly indebted for its development and well being and to whom the scientific world is indebted for many new discoveries in electricity, was the first to introduce me. He gave me all necessary information and showed me many favours.

Kalm arrived in America on September 4, 1748, and remained until February 18, 1751. In October, 1748, he made a short trip to

4 Peter Kalm, Resa Till Norra Amerika (Helsingfors, 1910), 118.
New York, during his sojourn, from September of that year until the following June, in the vicinity of Philadelphia. He spent the greater part of his time, however, at Raccoon, a Swedish village in New Jersey which no longer exists, but whose name has been perpetuated in that of a nearby creek. During these months, Kalm became acquainted with John Bartram, the most prominent American naturalist of the time, from whom he gained much information and advice.

The Swedish naturalist's American visit included a trip to Canada where he was received as the guest of the French government, which had been instructed to help him in every possible way in return for the hospitality the Swedish king had recently shown to certain French scientists. In 1750 Kalm explored western Pennsylvania and penetrated to Niagara Falls where he visited Fort Niagara and the Iroquois, before returning to Philadelphia to marry the widow Anna Margaret Sjöman.6

Kalm's initial interest on his return to Sweden in May, 1751, was the distribution of seeds for experimental cultivation. He also prepared several agricultural articles for the Proceedings of the Swedish Royal Academy, and in 1753 began the publication of his famous journal, En Resa Till Norra Amerika (Travels in North America), published in three volumes in Stockholm, 1753–1761. The journal was later translated into Dutch, English, German, and in part into French. Kalm eventually returned to Finland, where he spent the rest of his life at the University of Åbo as Professor of Economics. There he put the arboretum in order and experimented with the culture of American plants. His Flora Fennica, published in 1765, is the product of his mastery of the flora of his adopted country. He died at Åbo on November 16, 1779.7

Peter Kalm's writings contain a wealth of material for both the scientist and the historian. In addition to his own publications, moreover, Kalm, who frequently served as praeses at the University of Åbo, was the chief source of information for a large number of theses by his student respondents. As presiding officer, he should definitely be given credit for those which deal with American subjects, for as

6 The story of Kalm's marriage is pleasingly told by Rebecca Harding Davis in "An Old-Time Love Story," Century Magazine, LXXVII (1908), 219–221.
Professor of Economics, he quite naturally directed the attention of his students to the economic significance of America to the colonial powers.

Two papers dealing with this subject were issued in small octavo pamphlets. One of these, "Nyttan som England kan hafva af sina Nybyggen i Norra America" (The Benefits which England could derive from her Colonies in North America), was presented by Sven Gowinius on June 20, 1763. This thesis is twenty-two pages long and bears the imprint, "Åbo, Tryckt hos [printed by] Johan Christopher Frenckell."

Gowinius attempts to present the gains realized by England by the Peace of 1763 which strengthened her power not only through an increase in empire, but also through the goods she now commanded from her colonies. The full benefits of her position, Gowinius points out, could be attained only through wise government and economic exchanges.

The paper follows generally the pattern of most of the foreign comments on America, discussing the physical characteristics of the country, its natural resources, and the opportunity for cultivating certain products advantageous to English consumption and trade. The problem of populating the New World empire is given some thought, and elicits the suggestion of incorporating the Indian population with the white settlements. The sparseness of their villages, the constant bickering among tribes, and the ungoverned use of "brandy," he feels, had so weakened the Indians as to make them ineffectual as enemies.

Gowinius admits his reliance on Kalm for much of his knowledge of the American colonies, but he also makes frequent references to the Pennsylvania Gazette and, on one occasion, cites statistics from Poor Richard's Almanack. He concludes his paper with the question: might not the colonies, under this new and beneficial system, become powerful enough to separate from England and establish their own kingdom? Kalm earlier had reported great dissatisfaction in America arising largely from the curtailment by England of colonial manufactures. Gowinius notes that such an act of separation would destroy the present advantages enjoyed by the colonies, but wisely leaves the solution of the problem to England.
The second of the theses, which is printed here in translation, is the earlier in point of time, having been presented by Daniel And. Backman on July 13, 1754. Entitled "Nyttan som kunnat tilfalla wart Kjåra Fåderneseland, af Des Nybygge i America fordom Nya Swerige kalladt" (The Benefits which our Dear Fatherland might have derived from the Colonies in America formerly called New Sweden), it is fifteen pages in length and bears the imprint, "Åbo Tryckt, hos Direkteuren och Kongl. Boktr. i [printed by the director and royal publisher in] . . . Finland, Jacob Merckel." Backman’s paper is not as comprehensive as that of Gowinius, but his argument—the lost opportunities of Sweden in America—tends to make it the more interesting.

Crown Point, Ind.  

ESTHER LOUISE LARSEN

The Benefits which our Dear Fatherland might have derived from the Colonies in America formerly called New Sweden

(1)

The Almighty God has in His great wisdom created all things to the glorification of His name. There is an end to which holy Providence and divine guidance leads the living and the dead. Rational beings must ask God’s blessing and seek guidance according to the laws of His infinite wisdom.

We will now ask the Creator’s indulgence in order that we may show His goodness and wisdom in nature. If we look about this globe on which we live, we will be aware that each and every part has benefits which it possesses above all others. One country or one region abounds in treasures which are lacking elsewhere. Thus, nature hides her treasures by scattering them through all parts of the world. So unequally are her products distributed that something seems to be lacking everywhere. No place in the world is so rich that it does not have to seek goods from other regions. Therefore, the world’s inhabitants are obliged to seek what they lack in their own countries and in return they must sell to others that which they have

Both theses have been translated from the Swedish by Miss Larsen. Each paper cites Kalm as the supervisor of the study.
in abundance. It is only reasonable, that one nation serve others with the riches with which nature has endowed her. Incontrovertible evidence proves the benefit of such mutual service. Shrewd nations have gained riches through the establishment of colonies which supplement their needs. Colonies established by Europeans during the last three centuries in Asia, Africa, and America attest to this fact. It is obvious everywhere that these colonies have contributed to the growth and strength of the mother country. Lucky the government that considers the future as well as the present! I shall take into consideration only the outstanding benefits, when on these pages I shall present some simple ideas on the benefits our dear fatherland might have derived from the colonies in America, formerly called New Sweden, and to what extent they might have been useful, had they remained under the Swedish crown. Limited time prevents adequate examination of the material; therefore, kind reader, give these hastily uttered thoughts your indulgent consideration.

(2)

It seems feasible to discuss briefly the circumstances which caused our ancestors to go to these distant places. First, a short account will be given of the advantages to be found in New Sweden. Finally, the real benefits Sweden might have derived will be discussed. His Majesty, Gustav Adolph, was king of Sweden at the time European nations were vying with each other in search of gold and precious stones, in the quarter of the world to which Columbus had sailed in 1492 and Amerigo Vespucci in 1502. The continent received the name of the latter. Our monarch was indefatigable in doing all that the then powerless institutions of the fatherland would permit. Because of the prudence of His Majesty, sailors and traders were permitted to extend their trade to the most profitable regions. Mutual distrust and real neglect of trade were the reasons why Sweden appeared to be sleeping, while shrewder European nations obtained valuable lands in other parts of the world. However, a wise king and a crown supported by earnest lords brought about an awakening. A Hollander by the name of Willem Usselinx suggested to the king the need of establishing a West India Company, under royal jurisdiction with subsidies for outfitting ships to carry on trade. This plan would show the Swedes that they too could carry on trade in America when they
had the same advantages as other Europeans. Savages known to inhabit the land were not skilled in trade, partly because of ignorance and idleness and partly because of untrustworthiness and godlessness. They made no effort to enrich themselves by utilizing the natural resources. It was necessary to supply the country with intelligent Christian inhabitants before trade could develop. The king in an open letter offered his subjects permission to go to this country, try their luck and then return to Sweden, if they so desired. Because of this arrangement, quite a number of Swedes and Finns left for the unknown land. They landed safely at a place called Virginia, which the English had previously visited and deserted. Savage Americans occupied the land and they sold some of it to our colony. Because the English had first visited the region, they wished to lay claim to it, but negotiations by his excellency Count Joh. Oxenstierna caused the English crown to relinquish its claim in 1631. The Dutch living around that area got the same fever as the English, and because they had arrived in the country first, wished to usurp the right of ownership. The savages had been driven out before the arrival of the Swedes, but our colonists were so fair-dealing that they payed the hereditary claims on the acquired land to their unreasonable neighbors, who, like the dog in the manger, begrudged others that which they could neither own nor occupy. I know of no group in America with better right to its claims than our colonies. These rights were obtained by purchase and settlement and not by force of arms, which might have prevailed, since the Swedish nation was at that time the terror of the whole world. The colony remained under Swedish rule from 1630 to 1655, when the Swedish inhabitants were suddenly attacked by the Dutch who subjugated the region. They did not enjoy their illegal gains long and in 1664 were forced to give both New Sweden and New Holland to England, under whom they still remain.

(3)

Now I will discuss the country itself. It is quite large lying along the de la Ware River at about 30° 40' latitude. The climate is milder than ours. The winters are neither as long nor as cold. The weather of the summer is temperate. It is considered the most desirable of all the English colonies in North America. It is neither as cold as those to the north nor as hot as those to the south. It is far more productive
than all others. For example, if there is a crop failure and food prices are high, the farmer can, because of the length of the summer, sow different grains at different times. Thus if one fails the other succeeds; weather unfavorable to one favors the other. This region is justly called the American granary. There are two kinds of mulberry trees in the forest and several kinds of walnut trees, some of which surpass the European in beauty and value, and still other trees which are fine for cabinet work. There are many medicinal plants which have been introduced elsewhere, such as Polygala, Aristolochia virg., Wormseed, Lobelia, Diervilla and Sassafras. Wild grapes climb the trees. The entire country is traversed by navigable streams. The air is healthful. The inhabitants carry on a lively trade with the neighboring Americans, from whom they receive all kinds of valuable furs for a very low price, in exchange for brandy, coarse cloth, ribbons, brassware, hatchets, knives, chains, kettles, guns, gunpowder, shells, buckshot, etc. A large amount of grain and lumber is shipped south, for these products real gold and silver money is obtained, in addition to all kinds of dyes, indigo, brazilwood, sugar,

9 The red mulberry is the only mulberry native to eastern North America. Kalm’s comprehensive discussion of the species (1776) has been translated: Esther Louise Larsen, “A Description of the North American Mulberry Tree called Morus rubra,” Agricultural History (in proof).

10 Kalm wrote two papers on walnut trees: the first (1767) discussed the black walnut, Juglans nigra L., the second (1769) the butternut, Juglans cinerea L. These have been translated: Esther Louise Larsen, “Pehr Kalm’s Observations on the Black Walnut and Butternut Trees,” Agricultural History, XVI (1942), 149-157. A third paper (1778), discussing several species of Carya, has also been translated: Esther Louise Larsen, “Pehr Kalm’s Report on the Characteristics and Uses of the American Walnut Tree Which is Called Hickory,” Agricultural History, XIX (1945), 58-64.

11 Probably Polygala Senega L.

12 Aristolochia Serpentaria L., the Virginia snakeroot, is well known in medicine.

13 Chenopodium ambrosioides L. var. anthelminticum (L.) Gray.

14 Probably Lobelia siphilitica L. In 1750, Kalm published an article on this plant which has been translated: Esther Louise Larsen, “Lobelia as a Sure Cure for Venereal Disease,” American Journal of Syphilis, Gonorrhea and Venereal Disease, XXIV (1940), 13-22.

15 Probably Diervilla Lonicera Mill., which is considered of medicinal value. It is plant number 40 in the translation of “Peter Kalm’s Short Account of the Natural Position, Use, and Care of Some Plants, of which the Seeds were Recently Brought Home from North America for the Service of Those who Take Pleasure in Experimenting with the Cultivation of the Same in Our Climate,” by Esther Louise Larsen, in Agricultural History, XIII (1939), 33-64. This pamphlet was published by Kalm in 1751, and constitutes a comprehensive summary of his observations on American plants which he considered had economic importance.

16 Sassafras varifolium (Salisb.) Ktze.
coffee, chocolate, expensive woods, and in fact everything of value produced in the West Indies. Cotton has been planted in several places and seems to be doing well. Incomparable in its class, Virginia tobacco is planted here and grows well. Pehr Lindstrom, engineer, in his Campanium in describing New Sweden on p. 35, writes of an American savage, who told the Swedish governor that he knew of a mountain of gold. However, no European has succeeded in finding it. No precious metals or stones have been found, but more iron has been discovered than might have been expected.

We will now consider the profit Sweden might have derived from what was formerly New Sweden, had it not been so shamefully lost. The reason the Swedish government scarcely bothered to inquire about these provinces, after they were taken by the enemy, is to be found in the fact that the area did not abound in gold and silver mines like Mexico and Peru. Sweden's great misfortune was that she considered only immediate profits and not future advantages. What, we may ask, are the profits from an American colony which does not produce silver and gold? Exactly the same question was asked by members of the French ministry a few years ago in relation to Canada which lies much further north in America. English privateers took nearly all of Canada in 1629. Some members of the French ministry were then of the opinion that France should not bother to get it back since it was a burden to the French crown. However, the more thoughtful officials were of a different opinion. We read with great satisfaction the ideas of these enlightened gentlemen in Charlevoix, Histoire de la nouvelle France T. 1. p. 269. Here the excellence of a great administrator is recognized. He not only has his eyes on the present and works for it, but is actively building a foundation on which the fatherland can continue to grow and prosper for centuries to come. Since France derives great profit from Canada, which lies so far north, what might we not have gained from the heart of North America? We will consider a few of the useful products of this region.

The mulberry mentioned in chapter 3. grows wild in great abundance in the forests. There is much evidence to confirm the fact that silk worms fed on the leaves of these American mulberry trees produce the very best silk. Could not the Swedes have used a large part
of the province for silk production? Think what money might thus have been saved! Cotton does well here; plantations could be established to advantage. As previously mentioned, this province is the granary of America. In exchange for grain and lumber the inhabitants receive products from the West Indies, such as sugar, coffee, etc. Trade with the neighboring Indians gives them valuable furs and hides. Might Sweden not have expected much good from such a rich land? The country gave its business to the Swedish subject. The great need was wise regulations for the use of the products of New Sweden in order to strengthen the old country. Our dear fatherland might have husbanded the colony as England now does. The colonists are permitted to run plantations and carry on trade, but it is understood that they will not manufacture that which the fatherland can produce. For example, the colony should buy all manufactured goods from Sweden, such as linen, cotton and iron goods and not attempt to manufacture them. All other countries would be forbidden, under threat of confiscation, to trade with the colony, unless the products passed through Swedish trade. Trade could have been so regulated between Old and New Sweden that the inhabitants on both sides would have been equally well satisfied. At that time it would have been easy for Sweden to obtain colonies in South and Central America. New Sweden could have furnished them grain and in return received from them what she otherwise received by foreign trade. How many people could have earned a living by this trade? How much greater would our trade and navigation have become? A strong and active navy would have resulted. The king's revenue would have increased and finances improved. An indirect benefit would have been the elimination of various heavy expenditures which we now have.

Since Sweden did not attain her goal in this country, I can not see why she did not do like the Dutch. She might have traded with the English for some piece of land in South America where sugar, chocolate, and other products which we can not do without are to be found. Thus it was that Holland obtained Surinam in place of New Sweden. You may be sure that England would have exchanged land in South America for New Sweden in order that all her colonies in North America might form a chain unbroken by a foreign power. At that time a great harmony existed between the two crowns, so such
treaties and exchanges could have taken place. Not to make the slightest effort to enjoy advantages to which one has every right and to allow them to be taken away without a struggle seems hardly reasonable.

(5)

The previous chapter discussed the large holdings lost by the transfer of our American colonies. The necessity for this loss was never questioned. Significant contemporary statements undoubtedly were made to the effect that he who visits this splendid land, with freedom for all, is so impressed that he never returns to his bleak fatherland, a danger so great that it threatens the kingdom. It would appear that there was real reason for this fear, since we know that countless masses of people left Europe to settle in America. Documents show that in 1680 there were between 1,000 and 1,500 inhabitants in Pennsylvania, which is part of what was formerly New Sweden. European immigration so increased the population, that at the end of the last war the same area had 80,000 men of military age. Of all the European powers, Spain should have profited most from America, but she is now completely impoverished. The fabulous quantities of silver and gold taken from Peru and Mexico never fostered a desire for colonization among the Spaniards.

Colonies, because of rapid growth, quickly become stronger than the mother country. Because of their strength it would clearly be difficult to get them to submit to any overlord.

I do not deny that this tendency might have been a factor in preventing the establishment of colonies in America, if it could not have been so readily overcome by wise regulations. Growth of population in the colonies is largely due to wise regulations, and has not been a drain on the controlling power. All kinds of people are attracted because freedom is granted to all. Wise regulations make law-abiding a privilege rather than a penalty. I might mention other objections which might have been raised to the establishment of colonies, but each and every one could easily be refuted, and I must shun prolixity. I have now submitted my ideas on the benefits which our dear fatherland might have derived from the colony in America, formerly called New Sweden. It is impossible to derive satisfaction from what has devolved, since all clear thinking individuals are
grieved at the loss. It is no longer possible for Sweden to regain the lost territory even if we grant the impossible, that England might be willing to return it. The inhabitants would never consent. They have obtained such a degree of freedom through shrewd arrangements of the wise Penn, that it would be almost impossible to improve their lot. Members of all creeds, so long as they recognize one God and do not oppose the government, have religious freedom and equal rights. Each and every man is a king in his own house. Taxes, in proportion to those of other countries, are so low that they hardly merit the name. The inhabitants would therefore readily defend their freedom and oppose any change. Now that the country is teeming with people and an army of 10,000 men could readily be raised, it is doubtful that force would be attempted. Sweden could still obtain another area in America, which would be just as desirable and profitable for trade as New Sweden, if only she comes to her senses in time. Much more could have been expected of the Swedes who would generally have benefited by the profits of colonization. It is my earnest desire that my dear fatherland may enjoy these benefits and blessings.