

# DEATH IN A 19TH-CENTURY PEASANT SOCIETY – ANALYSED BY MEANS OF A PEASANT’S DIARIES FROM A RURAL COMMUNITY ON THE WESTERN COAST OF SWEDEN

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**Abstract:** Diaries can provide a micro-perspective on people’s way of life and the world of conceptualization in a local society, and also on the changes that took place in the years that the diaries were written. This can be considered micro-history. While conducting fieldwork for the research project “Cultural contacts in Bohuslän’s coastal rural communities” in the 1970s, I came across some detailed handwritten diaries. These had been written by Jakob Jonsson (21 July 1795 – 15 March 1879), owner of Prästbacka farm in Röra parish on Orust Island, Bohuslän province, and the preserved material covers a period from 1866 to a few weeks prior to Jonsson’s death in 1879. In this paper, I have chosen to present a special study and analysis of Jakob Jonsson’s notes with reference to death and funerals in Röra parish, and also to investigate if and how the general world outside this district manifested itself in Jonsson’s world of ideas.

**Key words:** death, diary, funeral, funerary tradition, Jakob Jonsson, peasant society

While conducting fieldwork for the research project “Cultural contacts in Bohuslän’s coastal rural communities” in the 1970s, I came across some detailed handwritten diaries. These had been written by Jakob Jonsson, owner of Prästbacka farm in Röra parish on Orust Island, Bohuslän province.<sup>1</sup> He was born on 21 July 1795 and had died on 15 March 1879. The material that has been preserved covers a period from 1866 to a few weeks prior to Jonsson’s death in 1879. The commentary for these years is fairly complete, excepting the portions of 1869 and the entire year of 1877. Jonsson’s wife died in 1854. Two of his three daughters were married to farmers on nearby farms. However, Anna Britta, his third daughter, lived on her father’s farm during this entire period. Jonsson was an active farmer for the whole of his life but shared the work between the years 1867 and 1873 with Olle Olsson, the *hälftenbrukaren*,<sup>2</sup> and



**Figure 1.** Map of the Orust Island in western Sweden.  
 Drawn by Kirsten Berrum, Oslo, Norway.

his family. Anna Britta married farmer Per Olausson in 1873, who then shared Prästbacka farm with his father-in-law.

A discovery of this kind is of great interest to a cultural historian, providing as it does information about lifestyles, social life, the conceptual world, and, at best, personal experiences and reflections on a small coastal farm. It relates to an age far earlier than the general beginning of fieldwork that was conducted in the form of interviews, observations, and photographing. Jonsson's sources of information consist first of his own visual and oral observations on the farm and its surroundings, and in the local church. Second, they involve oral narratives from his home parish and, to some extent, from the neighbouring parishes. A third source of information consists of what he had read in the regional newspaper, *Bohusläns Tidning*, and in *Svenska Weckobladet*, a journal

published in Stockholm between 1869 and 1895. This last source provided Jonsson with information about events in the world at large.

In 2007, Jonsson's diaries became public property after being presented to the Bohuslän Museum in Uddevalla. They have also been made available for future research in two volumes published in 1991 and 1997 (*Jakob Jonssons dagbok*, Vols. 1–2; 1991 and 1997).<sup>3</sup>

Diaries constitute a significant qualitative source for studying a previous age which other source materials, such as parish registers, tax rolls, etc. are predominantly quantitative. The quantitative source materials used in this paper consist of parish register for deaths and burials in Röra.

An extensive register and collection of 19th-century peasant diaries was compiled in Sweden in the late 1970s (Berg & Myrdal 1981; Larsson 1992). These diaries had been written by farmers and crofters. Jakob Jonsson's diaries are not, however, listed in this national register published in 1992. The peak period for writing such diaries was the 1860s, the very period that saw the beginning of most of Jonsson's diary. Swedish diaries are fairly evenly spread over the most of southern and central Sweden, with some examples also being found in the Norrland region (Larsson 1992: 12). Few of them have been published. Since a more thorough treatment of individual diaries in relation to the selected topics covered by the contents has not been published, it is of great importance that this is done.

The longer texts written by authors of the diaries were usually completed as the authors grew old (Svenske 1993: 180). This is also the case for Jonsson. Obviously, in the old age when farmwork no longer occupied most of their waking hours, peasants had more time available for writing. The writing of these 19th-century diaries had also been inspired by authors' reading, as was shown by Jonsson's activities. Regional and national newspapers made up one source of his information about the wider world, though he was also familiar with religious literature.

Such diaries can provide a micro-perspective on people's way of life and the world of conceptualization in a local society, and also on the changes that took place in the years that the diaries were written. This can be considered micro-history.

In this paper, I have chosen to present a *special study and analysis of Jakob Jonsson's notes with reference to death and funerals in Röra parish*, and also to investigate if and how the general world outside this district manifested itself in Jonsson's world of ideas.

## DEATH'S TANGIBLE PROXIMITY

Jonsson's encounters with death were quite special due to his living close to the parish church. This meant that he could easily hear whenever the bells were tolled to mark a death, and then note this down in his diaries. He wrote down the name of the deceased and often the age at death, as well as the farm or croft on which the person had lived.



**Figure 2.** A granite gravestone commemorating Jakob Jonsson. His farm *Prästbacka* can be seen in the background. Photo by Anders Gustavsson (2008).



Living near the church allowed Jonsson to personally observe and record all the funerals which took place in the parish on both weekdays and Sundays. As a general rule and in keeping with the customs of the time, the actual funeral service was conducted *at the grave* and not inside the church (Gustafsson 1950: 172). Especially distinguished persons were the only ones to be honoured with a funeral service inside the church. This never applied to ordinary farmers but was, however, accorded to a young surveyor

**Figure 3.** Johan Henriksson, Member of Parliament in 1865–1867. Photo privately owned.

who died while carrying out official duties in Tegneby parish in 1873 and also a 34-year-old farmer, Johan Henriksson, a Member of Parliament, who died in 1867 (Fig. 3). His funeral service was conducted on 30 December and took place “in the chancel of the church” (Vol. 1: 70).

Surveyor Uddman’s church funeral service on Sunday, 6 June 1873 is described in even greater detail in the diary. It was

conducted in great splendour and solemnity. The coffin had been painted black, flowers and wreaths had been arranged on Saturday evening on the porch where a spruce “forest” had been raised, with four or five [spruce trees] alongside the coffin and three more in the corner of the porch on the other side of the aisle. Within the temple itself, a slightly raised black podium, decorated with white and green flowers and branches, had been placed in front of the alter rails near the aisle in the chancel, on which the corpse was to be placed for the ceremonial sprinkling of the earth. (Vol. 1: 327)

This detailed description of a funeral is the only example found in the diarial material. The young surveyor had recently moved to the village of Henån in Röra parish. Therefore the deceased was not to be buried in Röra but transported to his home district in the town of Kungälv where “the deceased’s remains would be confined at last to moulder away in the earth“.

Common farmers and crofters from Röra were merely recorded as having been “buried out in the churchyard”. Funeral sermon had not been preached outdoors since the Swedish Book of Common Prayer, published in 1811 (*Kyrko-Handbok* 1861: 95), established that this was only to be done inside the church. The official report issued in connection with an episcopal visitation in Tegneby parish in 1875 relates that funeral sermons only rarely occurred (GLA, GDA FII: 20).

Corpses were carried on a bier from the house of the deceased to churchyard; in 1872, an innovation occurred with the introduction of a hearse. Horse-drawn hearses came into general use in Sweden towards the end of the 1800s (Hagberg 1937: 363). In Röra, the hearse was used for the very first time on 23 October 1872 when a widow, Louisa Jakobsdotter, was buried. Her son, the lay assessor Jakob Torgersson, had constructed the hearse and donated it to the church (Fig. 4; Vol. 1: 294).

On 28 May 1874, Jonsson’s son-in-law Per Olausson was appointed to be in charge of this hearse and make it available to the people who used it for the funeral of their next-of-kin. The cost for using the hearse was set at 25 öre, which was to be collected by Olausson. The charge for each time it was lent to



**Figure 4.** *The horse-drawn hearse outside Röra church at a burial in 1921. Photo privately owned.*

another parish was no less than 3 *riksdalar* (Vol. 2: 41) [1 *riksdaler* = 100 *öre*]. On 20 June 1874, the hearse was borrowed for the first time by the neighbouring parish of Torp (Vol. 2: 47). On Whit Monday, 17 May 1875, there were two burials in the neighbouring parish of Tegneby; the hearse from Röra was borrowed for use at one of them (Vol. 2: 113).

Although Jonsson noted what took place in connection with the tolling of bells and funerals in almost the entire parish, he mentions ‘funeral repast’ only in connection with these of his closest relatives and neighbours. This is a natural consequence of these being the only occasions on which he participated in the gathering held in the house of the deceased. Before the day of the funeral, it was necessary to have everything baked and cleaned and arranged for the meal. Fish appears to have been an especially important item of food among farmers in this coastal community. Procuring fish often involved having to travel several miles. Several of the half-owner Olle Olsson’s children died: on 18 January 1868, a baby girl aged 4 months and 10 days died and on 20 January

Olle went out to the islands to buy fish for the burial of his dead daughter Inger Christina. Not much fish was to be had, and what could be bought was expensive. He had to walk across ice over Ellös Fjord to Gullholmen. (Vol. 1: 73)

Since this happened in mid-winter, fish was scarce and this greatly raised the price. Fish still had to be purchased because it was seen as an essential component of the funeral observance. On 20 August 1870, two of Olle Olsson’s children, aged two and six, died in the scarlet fever epidemic that had struck the parish (see below). On 24 August the father went out to Gullholmen to purchase “burial fish” (Vol. 1: 166). On 26 August he travelled to Henån in order to procure schnapps which also had to be served at the funeral observance. Pre-

paring for the funeral party (Jonsson here uses the word *kalas*, 'party') took so much time that harvest work, then in full swing, was affected. Jonsson was concerned about the harvesting but he realized that preparations for the funeral observance took precedence.

The weather is now fairly dry and good for harvesting but we cannot do much work because so much harvesting time must be used for the many tasks to prepare for the funeral meal next Sunday. (Vol. 1: 166)

This not only involved the purchase and preparation of food and beverages but also the making of two coffins by the children's father at this time in 1870. It was not usual to prepare for the death of children by having coffins made ahead of time as was the case when older people died (Hagberg 1937: 168). The same Olle Olsson was also made to arrange a funeral for another child in the following summer. He was once again obliged to go to the fishing village of Grundsund in order to "buy fish for the funeral" (Vol. 1: 220). After the funeral repast on 3 August 1871, the funeral guests actually helped him with hay-making. "Scythes were obtained and after an hour, almost three loads of hay were cut and the first of the natural meadows to be reaped this year was almost cut and harvested". Despite the feelings of grief, ordinary farm work still had to be carried out. The next day, on 4 August, Olle Olsson began spreading manure on the fallow field. This was hard work seeing that more than 60 cartloads were spread in two days (Vol. 1: 221). A similar precedence given to farm work, despite the death of one of the family's children, is also noted in Danish peasant diaries dated to the 1800s (Schousboe 1980: 27).

## **CAUSES OF DEATH**

The details noted in Jonsson's diaries provide a good overview of the different causes of death that occurred. These actually contain more facts than the parish registers for deaths and funerals kept by the local clergyman. 29 people died in Röra parish in 1866, but in only three cases were the causes of death noted down in the register (GLA Röra F 1) despite there being a separate column for this information. During the famine year of 1868, no less than 54 people died, among them 24 children, but we learn something about the cause of death in only 11 cases. Jonsson was much better informed. In many instances, he also wrote down the circumstances concerning the death, especially when it was caused by accidents or serious epidemics. Such information cannot be found in the parish registers.

## Epidemic diseases

Contagious diseases often developed into epidemics before vaccinations became common. One such serious epidemic occurred in the summer of 1870. This was scarlet fever, a problematic infection of the throat caused by an exotoxin released by a *Streptococcus* (www.ne.se 'Scharlakansfeber'). Scarlet fever caused in fact the most deaths in Sweden in the latter half of the 1800s. The mortality rate was more than 30% of those infected. According to the parish records of deaths and funerals, 67 people died in Röra in 1870, 33 of whom died of scarlet fever between 10 May and 6 October. These were children ranging in age from three months to 14 years (Fig. 5). Only three of them were more than 10 years old (GLA Röra F 1). No cause of death was listed for the other 34 persons who died in this same year.

Several parents lost more than one child in this epidemic. On 31 August, Jonsson mentions the farmer Anders Larsson from Rämmedalen "whose two [youngest] children have died and will be placed in the same grave next Sunday" (Vol. 1: 167). On 10 and 12 September, two of the parish clerk Fredriksson's children died. This family also lived on Rämmedalen farm. The half-owner Olle Olsson lost three children in the weeks between 20 August and 11 September. It is almost impossible to conceive of the anxiety and grief that people



**Figure 5.** A dead child lying in its coffin, photographed in Röra parish at the beginning of the 20th century. Photo privately owned.

everywhere in the countryside must have felt during these dramatic months. Jonsson gives us glimpses of his feelings of grief at the same time as he describes difficult and quite lengthy incidents of the disease. Several of his grandchildren were among those who were affected by extreme suffering and later died. On Sunday, 24 July, prayers were offered in the church “both before and after the services for [his son-in-law] Abraham’s eldest daughter from Göksäter farm who had lain abed for a long time”. She died two days later on 26 July (Vol. 1: 160). Jonsson noted that she “had suffered a great swelling on each side of her head near her ears that then burst open on the surface of the left side and inside the head on the right” (Vol. 1: 162). On 6 August he wrote that

nearly all the children in my half-owner Olle’s family are sick; sickness began for them and in other cases with a swelling of throat – Olle’s youngest boy is now so sick that his survival is in doubt, it is the worst and most difficult with the smallest ones, as they won’t swallow any medicine because they don’t understand that it will make them well, though it has helped those who tried it (Vol. 1: 163).

On 29 August, Olle Olsson visited the doctor to get help for his eldest daughter Matilda. She nevertheless died on 11 September after having been bedridden for two months.

Another serious disease that afflicted many people in Röra was typhoid fever (obsolete Swedish name: *nervfeber* ‘nerve fever’), which was caused by an aggressive salmonella bacterium. It causes inflammation in the walls of the small intestine before spreading through the body and the blood ([www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se) ‘Nervfeber’). Unlike scarlet fever, it is not a childhood disease. The aforementioned Member of Parliament Johan Henriksson died of typhoid fever in 1867. In early July of 1871, Jonsson’s daughter Anna Britta, who lived with him at home, caught this disease. He realized that there was an immediate danger to her life since he wrote that it is

such a grave illness that it will either end her mortal life, or otherwise, as has been the case with other such patients, cause her to lie abed for a very long time and also be very weak for the whole of her lifetime.

He notes that he feels “great distress” because of this occurrence of the disease and that “it is almost more than I can bear” (Vol. 1: 217). His half-owner Olle Olsson was sent three times to Henån to fetch the district medical officer and then to the apothecary to get medicine. The farm’s servant girl Maria Larsdotter had also been infected with this disease. On 23 June, Jonsson noted down that his daughter Anna Britta’s serious illness continued “and does not seem to show the least sign of betterment nor of worsening, but she is not, praise God,

so seriously tormented that she either raves or is in anguish, but yet cannot sleep or eat” (Vol. 1: 218). Olle Olsson’s servant girl Maria had made a quicker recovery and had left her bed by late July. It was, however, not until 16 August that Jonsson could declare that his daughter Anna Britta, after her six-week-long illness, had become “so much better that she will try to manage without having extra help at the house” (Vol. 1: 223). On Sunday, 27 August, he was able to rejoice and to praise God because his daughter was again able to take part in the church service after having been prevented from doing so for eight Sundays (Vol. 1: 225).

According to the parish registers for deaths and funerals, this disease had killed a number of people. Jonsson does not, however, discuss what happened elsewhere in the parish but concentrates instead on his daughter’s illness. The result could just as well have been her death as could have been the recovery which later gave him happiness.

### **Long-term illnesses that resulted in death**

Although Jonsson was especially concerned with the epidemic diseases that ravaged his community, he also described some cases of people dying after a long and gruelling period of illness. On 16 July 1878, the church bells were tolled for a crofter’s daughter “who had been plagued with epilepsy for a period of twenty years” (Vol. 2: 271). The obsolete Swedish name for epilepsy is *Fallandesot* or ‘falling sickness’ ([www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se)). On 2 February 1879, the bells were tolled for “a dead needy woman”, 39 years of age. She had become blind as a result of smallpox, an epidemic disease characterized by blisters on skin and mucous membranes ([www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se) ‘Smittkoppor’). After recovering from this disease, she became a pauper forced to wander from farm to farm and had been nicknamed “Blind Johanna” (Vol. 2: 328). A woman was buried on 1 March 1878 after having been bedridden for about seven years due to “a quite strange indisposition”. This illness made her “so vexed by shivering or shaking that she could not eat or drink without help from others”. Jonsson comments that “her unrest is now completely stilled”. Death had freed her from this dreadful misery. He had heard that “her shivering had ceased towards the end” (Vol. 2: 248, 250).

### **Accidents**

Accidents are one category of causes of death that are often mentioned in Jonsson’s memorandums. **Deaths by drowning** have deserved special mention. Such accidents could occur in ponds or rivers near the victim’s home just

as well as out on the open sea. Fatal accidents close to home often happened to children who drowned in a nearby pond. Peat-holes were a danger to both humans and animals. On 28 July, “the fourteen-year-old daughter to Johannes Samuelsson of Granbua was buried. The girl had drowned accidentally in a peat-hole” (Vol. 1: 333).

With Röra being a coastal parish, sea bathing in the summer was just as hazardous as ice-fishing in the winter. In early August of 1868 it was noted that “the youth Calle Jonasson” had “drowned near Morlanda mill’s dock while swimming or bathing in the open sea” (Vol. 1: 101). This happened in a very warm summer when drought caused crop failure, as Jonsson painstakingly described. On 1 April 1876, the church bells were tolled for a 15-year-old boy who “had sunk through the ice and drowned quite close to land as he was walking to or back from fishing” (Vol. 2: 176). In the parish registers for deaths and funerals, these two youths were mentioned only as having drowned with no additional information being given.

In Jonsson’s day there were over a hundred registered seamen working on various cargo vessels (GLA Röra kyrkoarkiv). Several of them died at sea. Jonsson was especially concerned about one of them, a young man who had previously worked on his farm at Prästbacka. On 24 April 1878, he recorded the following detailed and emotional description.

To-day the bells have tolled for a young man from Röra parish called Isak Johansson, who worked for us a few years ago and who was well-behaved and respectable, loyal and hard-working. He decided to go out to the sea despite the fact that his then living mother and relatives tried to dissuade him. He said his strongest motive for doing this was that he could thus evade the hard military training at Backamo, but what happened? He signed on with a captain from Skaftö, but on the third day after sailing from home port to England he was washed overboard and could not be saved. (Vol. 2: 265)

The parish death and funeral registers note that the farmhand Isak Johansson, 21 years old, had drowned, but gives no further details (GLA Röra F 1).

Other causes of fatal accidents were those in which a person **had been killed**. On 3 January 1879 “the bells were tolled for the widower Mattias Andersson from Rämmedalen who had died in the evening of the same day after falling from the stairs of the room onto the stone floor of the kitchen” (Vol. 2: 323). The register for deaths and funerals informs that Andersson was a widower and 70 years of age, but provides no additional information as to how he died.

**Traffic accidents** could occur even before the automobile age. On 3 July 1873, the bells were tolled for the wife of the crofter Johan Svensson who worked on Röd farm, “whose death appears to have been caused by being run over as she walked from church on Midsummer Day”. On 6 July 1873, “a victim was buried who had been so badly injured after being run over that death followed 10 days after the incident”(Vol. 1: 329). In the parish registers, this woman is noted as having been 64 years old and having died “as a result of a collision?” The question mark actually appears in the registers for deaths, something that seems to indicate that the clergyman did not know the exact facts of the fatal accident. Jonsson had heard rumours that the “man responsible, Abraham Samuelsson from Museröd, had given in settlement” a considerable economic compensation to the victim’s husband and children (Vol. 1: 329). An oral tradition concerning this serious accident lived on in the parish for many years. The local historian Torvald Johansson, born in 1928 and residing on Röd farm, has written about what has been re-told. The widower Johan Svensson had been supposedly extremely distressed by this accident and begun to doubt the righteousness of God about which he previously had been so confident (Johansson 2004: 172ff).

### **Childbirth and confinement**

Childbirth was a life-threatening occurrence in the 19th-century society and could prove immensely hazardous for both mother and child. Jonsson has noted down several cases of lives being lost in connection with this.

It was not unusual for women **to die in childbirth**. Jonsson recorded the extremely difficult social situations that could occur in homes where this took place. On 9 September 1874, the bells were tolled for a woman who had borne two living children who were christened on 6 September. Jonsson writes of the challenging social conditions for the surviving family, which was “even more serious because the husband is a sailor far off in foreign lands and the children must be cared for by relatives” (Vol. 2: 65). In the 1870s there were several cases of women having died after medical procedures in connection with childbirth. On 31 August 1875, the bells were tolled for a wife who had died “after the assistant district doctor had pulled the child out with the help of an instrument”. Jonsson comments on this by using the words “quite sad” (Vol. 2: 136). A similar case is mentioned in June of 1875 and another in March of 1878, but the parish registers for deaths and funerals only notes that these two women died in connection with childbirth.

The medical profession was highly esteemed by Jonsson as is clearly indicated by his description of a doctor’s unexpected death in Henån on 7 February

1875. This was some months before the aforementioned women so tragically died in childbirth. Jonsson writes of this doctor named Dalen as “one who had long aided the hand of the Almighty in curing and relieving sickness among others” (Vol. 2: 92). The medical profession is thus seen in a religious context, something that typifies Jonsson’s outlook on life. Dalen, who was not buried in Röra but instead in his original home district of Stockholm, was succeeded by Doctor Phil who carried out the deliveries that had ended so tragically (*Från vår bygd* 1973: 64).

There were a number of cases of **stillborn children**. On 17 March 1872, “the third stillborn child this year was buried in Röra churchyard”, and Jonsson characterizes this with the word “unusual” (Vol. 1: 253). He even experienced the birth of a stillborn child in his own family. His eldest daughter Inger Christina from the neighbouring farm of Kärra bore a stillborn child on 11 February 1876 when she was 45 years old (Fig. 6). Jonsson was, however, able to report with joy and satisfaction that “the birth was over very quickly, thanks be to God, and before the midwife arrived, although she had been sent for in good time – the mother is not markedly weak, according to what I have been told” (Vol. 2: 164). In connection with the child’s burial, a gathering was held in the home. On 18 February, the child’s father came to Prästbacka to invite them to the funeral on the following Sunday. Jonsson’s servant girl, Fina, was sent to the house of mourning at Kärra on 19 February “to help with the scrubbing and other cleaning for the next day’s burial of the stillborn child”.

According to the Swedish Book of Common Prayer published in 1811, the funeral service for stillborn children was conducted in a simpler form (*Kyrko-Handbok* 1861: 99). The ceremonial sprinkling of the earth as well as the Lord’s Prayer and the Benediction were maintained but not the tolling of the bells or other prayers and biblical quotations which were read at ordinary funerals (Pleijel 1983: 113). Swedish canonical law differentiated between stillborn children whose funeral followed form and “imperfect or aborted foetus” which were not to have any form of funeral ceremony at all but were to



**Figure 6.** Jakob Jonsson’s oldest daughter Inger Christina born in 1831. She gave birth to a stillborn child in 1876 when she was 45 years old. Photo privately owned.



**Figure 7.** The folklife artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson has portrayed the carrying of the body of his stillborn brother by his father to the churchyard in 1923. Photo by Bohuslän's Museum, Uddevalla.

be buried in secret in the churchyard (Wählin 1841: 138). Funeral services for stillborn children ceased after Jonsson's day and are not commented upon in Louise Hagberg's comprehensive study from 1937 on popular customs in connection with death and interment (Hagberg 1937: 510). The stillborn were instead secretly buried by the child's father in a family grave in the churchyard. The portrayer of folk life Carl Gustaf Bernhardson (1915–1998) from the coastal community of Grundsund used this as the subject of a painting based on childhood memories of when the body of his stillborn brother, encased in a tiny wooden coffin, was carried to the churchyard one evening in 1923 (Fig. 7).

## Suicide

Although diseases, accidents and childbirth were the most frequent causes of death, a number of suicides also occurred. One incidence which filled Jonsson with deep commiseration occurred on 12 September 1867. Just after the happy celebration of the christening of the half-owner Olle Olsson's daughter, Jonsson was called on by one of his crofters. This man gave him "the mournful and heartbreaking news that his spinster housekeeper, Christina Olsdotter, had taken her own life by choking or hanging herself with a cloth wrapped around a beam in the kitchen" (Vol. 1: 57). In this case, Jonsson does not merely communicate narratives about events but also allows for an obvious expression of his sentiments. This is not customary in peasant diaries from the 1800s.

In other instances of suicide in the parish Jonsson also expressed his emotions. He used the words "how tragic it is" when reporting that the former boatswain Abraham Strömberg had taken his life on 23 December 1871 "by hanging himself in his barn at Museröd farm" (Vol. 1: 239). On 10 July of the following year, Jonsson had another opportunity to ponder and lament because it is "both very grievous and strange that during a short period of time, no less than four persons, one man and three women, in Röra parish have taken their own lives by hanging themselves" (Vol. 1: 278). On this particular

day one of these three women, a 25-year-old housewife living in Henån community was buried “like a stillborn child”. According to the Swedish Book of Common Prayer from 1811, this indicates a simpler form for burial service, in silence and without the tolling of the church bells (see Hagberg 1937: 503). This was also prescribed in the canonical law, the latest version of which had been stipulated in a royal ordinance on 14 June 1864 (Rydén 1864: 135ff; Pleijel 1983: 22). “That whosoever shall have slain himself shall be interred in silence in the churchyard”. The parish registers for deaths and funerals note that the deceased was “buried in silence”.

### PREPARATIONS PRIOR TO DEATH

One way in which relatives and friends could prepare themselves for an approaching death was to visit the seriously ill persons. Jonsson did this even after he himself had become aged and found it difficult to walk towards the end of his life. On 4 June 1871 he visited “those two old people Berndt Hansson and his wife Kjerstin at Lilla Röra who are both so frail, especially the husband, that I do not believe I will ever again see him alive” (Vol. 1: 210). This man, who had been confirmed on the same day as Jonsson, died some days later on 13 June.

Another preparation for death was that the local parson was summoned to the afflicted person’s home to administer the Holy Communion (Fig. 8). The



**Figure 8.** *The parson on a visit to a sick man lying in the bed. Painting by the folklife artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson. Photo by Bohuslän’s Museum, Uddevalla.*

traditional term for such visitation was *sockenbud* (Fallberg-Sundmark 2008). One did not have to be approaching death in order to send for the parson; it was enough that one had difficulty in reaching the church, especially in one's old age. Jonsson was himself the recipient of Holy Communion at his home more than once during the last years of his life. In an official report from Tegneby parish for 1875, visitations were stated to have been made primarily to the elderly who were unable to come to church (GLA FII: 20). This applied to people from every social class, including the most poverty-stricken. On 29 November 1874, the pauper Mallena Andersdotter was buried. She had lodged with the farmer Johannes Andersson at Rämmedalen and had been visited by the parson three days before she died (Vol. 2: 78).

## THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH

Jonsson noted down all the deaths that occurred in the parish regardless of the **social status** of the deceased. This applied to farmers and crofters as well as to the paupers who were sent from farm to farm for lodging. The death of the mother or father of a large family caused a social problem for their relatives, something that Jonsson usually commented on in exactly the same way than he did about pregnant women who had died in childbirth (see above). On 21 February 1868 the bells were tolled for

a young man, namely the crofter Johannes Samuelsson from Kallemyr under Lilla Röra, who left a family of five already living children in addition to a wife in the last stages of pregnancy, so that it now seems likely that the parish will have to take on the full support of seven persons. (Vol. 1: 76)

A family thus affected would experience both profound grief and an extremely difficult economic situation. When the bells were tolled on 29 January 1871 for a girl from a poverty-stricken home at the farm Brattås, Jonsson was moved to express his sympathy with the situation that such people were exposed to. "It is quite sad to think of the many paupers who live in their tiny huts with a lack or want of the bare necessities. May God help them." (Vol. 1: 188) The only help Jonsson could give were his prayers.

Jonsson's sympathies did not only go out to paupers but also to other social categories of people who were struck with grief, such as parents who had lost children either in infancy or as grown persons. On 30 June 1878, the bells were tolled for a young 21-year-old man from the farm Nedre Häröd. He was "his father's only son and died of consumption, as had his two sisters" (Vol. 2:

282). After his funeral on 7 July, Jonsson wrote the words “great regret and grief” (Vol. 2: 283).

Epidemic diseases, accidents and stillborn children, resulted in a **high rate of child mortality**. Many parents suffered from the loss of more than one child, often within a short space of time. On 20 January 1876, the bells were tolled for a crofter’s child who was “the third child who has been borne from this house in a short time” (Vol. 2: 160). On 28 May, the bells were tolled for the second child of Anton Olsson at Skredseröd farm “so now the two are as close together in the grave as they were in life” (Vol. 1: 151ff). Jonsson also marked down when grown persons from the same family, for example spouses or parents and children, died shortly after one another. On 19 December 1870, the bells were tolled for a boy “whose father was buried yesterday – great and deeply felt sorrow for the surviving wife who so quickly has lost both husband and son (Vol. 1: 180). One cannot underrate the value of Jonsson’s sympathy for the widow who met with such grief in so short a period of time. The frequency of deaths can be comprehended quantitatively in the parish registers for deaths and funerals; in Jonsson’s notes, however, one can also find comments on social consequences and emotions.

At the time when the rate of child mortality was high, **many new children were born** to parents who had lost one or more children to an illness or accident. On 21 May 1871, Jonsson’s eldest daughter Inger Christina bore a healthy little girl (Vol. 1: 207). The girl died, however, on 6 March of the following year of 1872 (Vol. 1: 251). On 5 June 1873, the same daughter of Jonsson’s gave birth to “a healthy lad” (Vol. 1: 326). The farm’s half-owner Olle Olsson and his wife lost two children to scarlet fever on the same day, 20 August 1870, and an additional child on 11 September 1870 (see above). On 28 July 1871, the bells were tolled for their little girl born on 12 June (Vol. 1: 219). The next year, too, on 23 November 1873, Olle Olsson’s wife gave birth to a little boy (Vol. 1: 296).

## **THE DEATH OF FARM ANIMALS**

Jonsson did not extend his sympathy only to members of his family and other parishioners, but also concerned the animals that he owned and was responsible for. He obviously felt a deep solidarity with them as is shown in his descriptions of their deaths. On 8 April 1878, Jonsson’s son-in-law Per Olausson was forced to slaughter a ewe that had borne a living lamb but whose “afterbirth had fastened itself to the guts and could not be removed”. Jonsson commented on this as being “fairly odd” because he had lost a newborn lamb the day before

although the ewe had survived. He noted with sorrow and loss that “for my part I now own no living creatures other than a lamb-less sheep and a mother-less lamb” (Vol. 2: 261). This lamb was taught to drink milk from a cup and it was healthy and grew well until 5 May when it suddenly and unexpectedly died. Jonsson speaks of this as “my loss of a sheep” when he noted that “the suckling lamb that we had fostered for a while” had died. It had been “plump and good-sized and friendly” (Vol. 2: 268). The word ‘friendly’ indicates that Jonsson did not think first of all of the economic aspect but rather of a psychological experience of the loss of something he himself was fond of. Only a few days later, on 20 May, he received word that one of the two ewes that he had sent to pasture with a boatswain in Stala parish, had drowned in a peat-hole, something that caused him great sorrow. He then had the other ewe brought back home along with the two lambs that the ewes had borne (Vol. 2: 272).

In September of that same year, 1878, a new problem arose for Jonsson. This time it concerned a young boar about six months old. Until then it had been “healthy and happy” but had suddenly stopped eating and drinking. It simply lay quietly for the most part while Jonsson observed with a certain satisfaction that it “did not seem to be in much pain”. His son-in-law Per Olausson tried to pour warm milk into its mouth without success. Jonsson then decided that the boar “seems content to die”. He believed that he could interpret its emotions, and therefore it was decided to slaughter the boar. Its blood had been thrown away but the meat was used for consumption (Vol. 2: 306).

When an old mare had to be slaughtered in 1876, his son-in-law Per Olausson contacted a horse knacker, Anders Trana, who lived at a croft on the Fundeskärr farm, to have this done. The knacker had his son lead the horse to his croft while it was still alive because he wanted to save the meat for his own use. Horsemeat was not eaten by farmers at that time (see Egardt 1962). In the afternoon of the same day, 25 November 1876, the knacker himself came back with the horsehide and the bones and “asked for one *riksdaler* as a fee for his work” (Vol. 2: 229ff). Animal and fish bones were ground up in Jonsson’s mill for use as fertilizer, a fact that Jonsson often refers to in his notes. Jonsson tells of the slaughtering of the horse but does not express any emotion or personal commentary. This can be due to the horse being simply an “old nag” that was no longer viable or fit for work. Nor did Jonsson drive a horse in his old age; this was done by his son-in-law Per. He did, however, have a close contact with smaller animals such as sheep and pigs whose death he described more emotionally.

Jonsson also expressed remorse when other farmers lost animals because of an accident. In connection with the burning down of a cowshed at Dandalen farm on the night between 14 and 15 January 1873, he wrote: “Alas, many

animals, four horses, several cows and seven sheep were lost and not one single animal was saved” (Vol. 1: 304). He was obviously thinking about both the animals’ terrible fate and the owner’s economic loss.

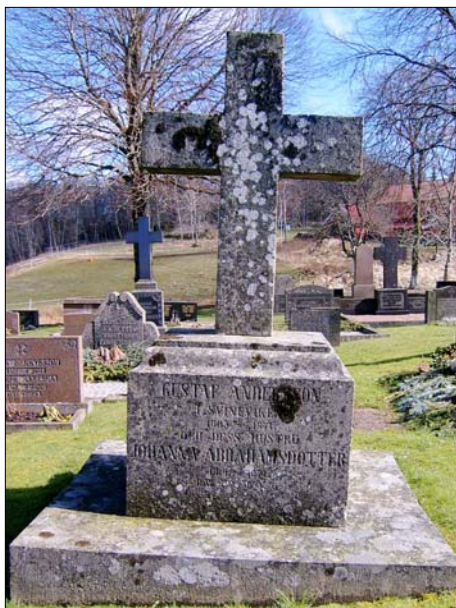
## THE CHURCHYARD

**Grass cut from churchyard was also to be preserved** and used as fodder for the animals. The grass was sold at auction every summer. Each year, Jonsson noted down the names of the persons who bought the uncut grass and what price was paid for it. Being a very cost-conscious person, he noted down whether the price could be considered high, reasonable or low. On 19 July 1870, Jonsson’s crofter Andreas Backman bought the grass that was auctioned off for a price that was considered low but “was still no bargain because the grass in the churchyard was badly trampled down due to the many funeral ceremonies” held there (Vol. 1: 159). This was the summer when the scarlet fever epidemic was especially severe in Röra. This led to many deaths among children and, consequently, to many burials (see above).

**Memorial monuments set up** to commemorate the deceased in the churchyard were wooden crosses, iron crosses or stones. The earliest grave-stones were made of limestone, few of these dating from the mid-1800s can still be found in Röra churchyard. One of the preserved iron crosses was raised to commemorate Johannes Henriks-son, the Member of Parliament who died in 1867 (Fig. 9). The Swedish text inscribed on the cross was taken from Psalms 144: 4 which was also used by the parson as the basis for his funeral sermon, and reads in English as: “Man is like to vanity, his days are as a shadow that passeth away”. This refers only to the transitoriness of life and not to the bliss of life after death. At the very bottom of the cross, however, an angel is depicted holding a



**Figure 9.** An iron cross commemorating the Member of Parliament Johan Henriksson who died in 1867. Photo by Anders Gustavsson (2008).



**Figure 10.** A granite gravestone commemorating Gustav Andersson and his wife Johanna, who both died in 1871 without any children. Photo by Anders Gustavsson (2008).

triumphal wreath, probably to symbolize life after death. The same can be said about the old Christian symbol of belief, hope and charity pictured as a cross, an anchor, and a heart intermingled in each other. This symbol can be seen at the top of the iron-cross.

The first granite gravestones began appearing in the 1870s, a period marking the very beginning of stonemasonry in Bohuslän (Lönnroth 1963: 405ff). Jonsson noted in June of 1972

that his half-owner Olle Olsson had reached an agreement with the heirs of a married couple who had both died in 1871, to “set up a costly memorial stone of granite” (Vol. 1: 271). This gravestone is still standing in the churchyard (Fig. 10). The text from Psalms 39: 5 to which reference is made on the stone is as follows: “Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.” Again we perceive an equally dark and transitory image as that was evoked by the iron cross raised over the Member of Parliament Johannes Henriksson, both lacking all hope of a better existence after death. Thoughts of transitoriness seem to diverge from the heirs’ erecting such a large and costly gravestone, something that was completely modern in that day. The deceased would at least be remembered by posterity thanks to the magnificent gravestone that was raised in their honour.

## DEATHS OUTSIDE THE LOCAL DISTRICT

### Deaths in fishing villages

Even though Jonsson lived in an inland community on the island of Orust, it was located only a few miles to the fishing villages on western Orust and Skaftö islands. Regular contacts were necessary so that the peasant populace could acquire the fish that was an important part of their subsistence. This provides

a background for understanding Jonsson's concern for and anxiety about the fishermen who were exposed to great peril during fierce storms out on the open sea. On 28 March 1878, he informs us that a severe storm has raged all day and night. However difficult it was for the people of Röra, it was worse

on the sea for our poor coastal people, since they are usually out at sea to carry out their fishing. Oh, that it might end well for them, at least no worse than that they might lay at anchor and thus be saved [...] Future will show or tell those living what the outcome would be, we commend them with heartfelt prayers unto the mild mercy of Providence, we can do no more to aid them. (Vol. 2: 256ff)

Religion is thus shown to be an obvious element in the principles of daily life. A trust in God provides security for Jonsson and also a counterweight to his anxiety.

A strong easterly wind continued to blow on 30 March in that year of 1878, leading Jonsson to write: "It is most worrying to think of those wretched fishermen who have gone out to sea" (Vol. 2: 257). Such anxiety was in fact very logical because many boats were lost during the deep-sea fishing that had started in around 1860. Conditions did not improve until the early 1890s when the fishermen of Bohuslän acquired British cutters outfitted with motors instead of sails (Hasslöf 1949). On the eve of Holy Saturday, 20 April 1878, Jonsson received word that

the deep-sea fishing boats from Grundsund and Gullholmen have luckily arrived home safely with large catches of fish, and without suffering from the bad weather on the fishing grounds caused by the strong easterly winds that lasted for several weeks and led to great anxiety, because the boats and their crews had found safe harbour in Norway where they had stayed for all of 5 weeks, but well that they were there because otherwise they would have perished on the fishing grounds. (Vol. 2: 264)

Jonsson could heave a sigh of relief and feel that the mercy of Providence had manifested itself in a way he could not have foretold, but which he had indeed hoped for.

During the summer and fall of 1866 an epidemic of cholera raged in Sweden. This is a bacterial stomach disease with diarrhoea and vomiting, and with a mortality rate of about 50% (www.ne.se 'Kolera'). Röra was relatively untouched by this epidemic but the disease raged fiercely in Gothenburg (Fredberg 1921: 475). It spread there on 25 June 1866 from foreign ships. 1,237 people became ill and 638 died. On 9 October, the epidemic was considered to have ended (Arvidsson 1972: 87). The disease had also ravaged several coastal dis-

tricts of Bohuslän, among these the fishing village of Gullholmen, which Jonsson's family frequently visited for buying fish (see above). In Rönnäng, a fishing village on Tjörn Island close to Orust, 55 people died during September.<sup>4</sup> The author Olof Hansson, who was born in 1914, relates in his book *Min barndom på Gullholmen* ['My Childhood on Gullholmen'] the tales told by his maternal grandparents, who were about 13 years old in 1866. They

spoke of how terrible it was; about how frightened everyone was. No-one knew in the morning just what had happened during the night. People lay sick in nearly every house, and 36 of them lost their lives. Many were panic-stricken, and in one house a woman had locked herself in for fear of being infected [...]. She was still one of the first victims. (Hansson 1983: 45)

Jonsson reported towards the end of August the same year that cholera was "very severe in some places, especially in the fishing village of Gullholmen". The infection was believed to have been brought there by village people who had visited the St Laurentius' Mass market in Gothenburg on 10 August (Vol. 1: 25).<sup>5</sup> It should be pointed out that women from Gullholmen were famous for travelling by boat to Gothenburg during the summer to sell the fish caught by their husbands. The St Laurentius' Mass market was an important occasion for the sale of fish (Hasslöf 1949: 396).

A man from Röra, then in Gothenburg, died in late August 1866 (Vol. 1: 26). On 28 August, a 23-year-old crofter's daughter from Röra died of cholera on Gullholmen, according to a certificate issued by the parish clerk of the district (GLA F 1 Röra). On 1 September the first and only death occurred in Röra parish. This was a crofter's wife aged 72, and Jonsson noted that the "infection was brought by a person who came there from Gullholmen" (Vol. 1: 27). In early September Jonsson reported on "double sorrow and unrest, not only because of unsuitable and hopeless harvest weather" in the local Röra area but also because "the raging sickness cholera is now so widespread that all trading journeys between the towns, especially Gothenburg and the coast, must cease almost entirely – in some place completely" (Vol. 1: 27). On Gullholmen "three deadly fevers now rage".

Jonsson observed the situation of the coastal population outside his own district with unease and deep concern. He wrote:

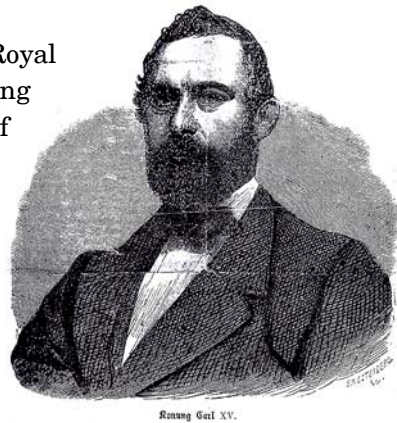
It seems as if all these unfortunate or pitiful coastal dwellers are to keep one another company in eternity at one and the same time – we must see how long the murdering angel is allowed to harry or how wide-ranging and far-reaching are his orders to slay.

This is the only occasion in which Jonsson uses the word ‘eternity’ as a perspective on death, which is to say as a conception of an existence after death. He also uses a religious interpretation in speaking of a murdering angel that is sent out to slay. This conception goes back to accounts in the Old Testament concerning the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt (www.ne.se ‘Mordängel’). On 26 October, Jonsson was gratefully able to verify: “Thanks be to God that the cholera sickness has generally and clearly lessened in the towns and fishing villages where it has been most serious” (Vol. 1: 30). The religious interpretation of situations concerning diseases and their cure makes itself clearly felt here as a lodestar of Jonsson’s world of ideas. He was not only a diligent churchgoer on Sundays – providing he was not hindered by illness or bad weather – but the Christian ideas also characterized his daily life and aided him by providing mental resources in the face of various crisis situations.

### **The deaths of royal personages**

Jonsson made notes of the burials of kings and queens. The first occasion was the death of Queen Wilhelmina-Lovisa at 43 years of age in 1871. All farms in Röra parish were then obliged to take their turn at tolling the bells for eight days. Jonsson reported in 1871 that it was the neighbouring farm of Kärra which was responsible for the tolling, and that the next time it would be the turn of his Prästbacka farm (Vol. 1: 201). When the 70-year-old Queen Mother Josephina Maximiliana Eugenia died in 1876 it was, however, officially decreed that the bells throughout the realm would toll for only four days. This was because she was not a reigning queen (Bringéus 1958: 233ff).

The greatest attention Jonsson paid to the Royal family was connected with the demise of King Carl XV on 18 September 1872 at 46 years of age. For the King the bells were to be tolled for 20 days until the day of the funeral ceremony on 9 October. His death was announced in Röra church on Sunday 20 September. The sermon held by rector Johan Sörman that day was based on the text “How (or reflections) Christian subjects should behave (or reflect) when confronted with the grave of their Monarch” (Vol. 1: 294). In addition to the announcement in the church, Jonsson based his accounts on what he read



**Figure 11.** King Carl XV as shown in an illustration in Svenska Weckobladet from 16 October 1872.

in the journal *Svenska Weckobladet*. Among details reported in the journal, according to his notes, approximately 30,000 people had viewed the King as he lay in state. On 9 October 1872, it was written in this journal: “Nearly 30000 persons are thought to have availed themselves of the permission to view the Royal corpse”. As a final commentary on 1872, Jonsson copied the entire funeral sermon held by Bishop Bring at the King’s funeral ceremony (Vol. 1: 301ff) and which is cited in *Svenska Weckobladet* for 16 October 1872 (See Fig. 11).

## War and death

Among foreign affairs marked by death, Jonsson noted down what he had read in *Svenska Weckobladet* about various stages of war. He was especially concerned with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 ([www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se) ‘Fransk-tyska kriget’) in which an unprecedented number of lives were lost. He wrote about this war with great sympathy, and also expressed his disgust over the immense suffering it had caused for the afflicted people. He appears to be an obvious advocate of peace who was absorbed by events taking place in the greater world and for the well-being of other people there. He was obviously happy when peace was negotiated between Prussia and France in the early spring of 1871, just as he was because Sweden had enjoyed a long period of invaluable peace compared to other nations. In late October 1870, he composed a lengthy account of the terrible Franco-Prussian War which he termed “barbaric”. He stressed the fact that France, Prussia and Germany “had long fought with and plundered each other in a most barbaric way and still continue to do so, and do not appear able to think of peace until they have destroyed one another (Vol. 1: 176). A peace treaty was eventually negotiated, however, “after they first had plundered each other’s property, namely towns, forests and countryside, etc. and killed countless numbers of people, only then did they decide to declare peace”. France was to pay an enormous war indemnity and also relinquish areas of land. In order to meet the hardships in France, donations were collected at the altar of Röra church immediately after the signing of peace on mid-Lent Sunday, 19 March 1871, “to aid in providing seed corn for the deprived, because such a destructive war raged in France that they lack both foodstuff and especially seed corn for the next spring” (Vol. 1: 197). Solidarity was expressed in this way throughout the parish as Jonsson was able to show to his satisfaction. He had not, however, learned the amount of money this call for donations had brought in.

In this connection, one can make comparisons with the information given by the itinerant primary school teacher, Anna Edman, who taught at various

farms in Röra parish from 1865 to 1876. She wrote about her experiences during this period when she was the only primary school teacher in Röra. In 1870, she travelled to Kungsbacka and reported that “it was at this time that the war between Germany and France broke out, an event that was talked about wherever one came. Everyone believed that France would triumph”. When she later participated in the first Nordic school teachers’ conference in Gothenburg, she reported from there: “The war was discussed here, too, and the Danish were so happy that those nasty Germans were going to get a thrashing, but things turned out differently than was expected” (manuscript in Erik Askland’s collection, Röra). It should be remembered that in 1864 Denmark had lost a major portion of southern Jutland to the Germans as the result of a peace treaty following a short war. These areas were not returned to Denmark until after the plebiscite of 1920 (Bekker-Christensen 1995).

### **JAKOB JONSSON’S DEATH**

In view of the fact that Jakob Jonsson wrote so much about other people’s deaths, one might wonder about his thoughts concerning his own death. He passed away on 15 March 1879, nearly 84 years of age. In a letter dated to year before, he writes that “the state of my health is fairly good”, but also realizes that he can be nearing the end of his life as he is now in his 83rd year. This is something he has never referred to previously, despite having shown great interest in other people’s deaths both in his own parish and elsewhere. Nonetheless, he feels great faith when facing this fact. “In this as in all my other affairs, I deliver myself into the hands of the Blessed Father. He shall dispose of me as He pleases”. The moment of death is whenever God, “the Blessed One”, decides. No fear of death is indicated.

A handwritten memorandum describing the father’s deathbed has been preserved. It was probably written by Jonsson’s daughter Anna Britta. As written in this text, “he showed no fear of death during his lengthy ordeal”. He suffered patiently, “even when distressed by strange thoughts”. What these latter may have involved is not known. His physical pain was apparent, but he obviously also felt a mental anxiety. Then he turned to God in his prayers, as he had done all his life, and with experienced confidence. His daughter wrote that “he appealed to God for deliverance to his fulfilment with heartfelt prayer”. This is the same belief that Jonsson himself had expressed earlier. The daughter ends her text with “he was able to feel that the righteous shall be the blessed”.

A pair of handwritten memorial tablets was set up in the home after Jonsson's death, as was the common practice for a time after death. The one tablet notes the birth- and death-dates of both Jonsson and his wife, with a reference to Psalms 47:8 stressing God's sublimity: He "sitteth upon the Throne of his holiness", but does not allude in any way to human death. This is shown on the other tablet, however, with Job 19:26, in which it is said "and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God". There is, in other words, an evident conception of a meeting with God after death.

### **CONCLUDING LINE OF REASONING**

This analysis of Jonsson's observations and reflections connected with death and burials has revealed several interesting features. With regard to funeral customs, we have been able to register not only newer customs, that is, innovations, but also such customs as have disappeared, that is, regressions, since Jonsson's day. Replacement of the bier by the hearse was among noticeable innovations. The material reveals the exact date on which this occurred in Röra in 1872. The same year also marked the occurrence of the first granite gravestone in Röra churchyard. Among regressions are the special funeral ceremony and also the subsequent funeral meal that was held in the home for stillborn children. At the same time, these are unknown in the folk traditions of the 1900s. A specific ceremony of this kind for suicides was also something that later ceased to be practised. Funeral services for the common people were still usually held outdoors in the churchyard and not in the church itself as became the norm during the 1900s. Services inside the church were held only for the most notable persons in Jonsson's day. An obvious social equalization in this regard has taken place over time.

The grass in the churchyard grew unhampered and was not cared for by the caretakers of the churchyard such as we have been accustomed to in later years. Churchyards were not well-scythed in the 1800s or even during the early 1900s. Memorials in the churchyard were for the most part wooden crosses along with some iron crosses and a few limestone memorials. The remembrance of the deceased was not maintained by physical monuments in the way we have become accustomed to since our gravestones are often made of granite. These came into gradual use during the final years of Jonsson's life.

Jonsson was a man of obvious sentiments and reflections which he did not subdue but instead recorded, allowing posterity to have access to them. He did not merely describe events, as was characteristic of other peasant diaries dated

to the 1800s, but also wrote about his thoughts and emotions. He engaged himself not only emotionally but also economically in connection with charitable fund-raising for the most vulnerable in the community or the surrounding world.

Death was not something about which one remained silent but was always a very real part of personal narratives. For Jonsson, this was emphasized by his living near the church and being able to hear the tolling of the bells and the funeral ceremonies out in the churchyard. Epidemics and the many deaths in childbirth contributed to the fact that people could not escape the mention of death but had it as an element in their daily lives and as a cause of unease and despair. Nor were suicides suppressed but were brought out into full daylight as is shown in the reports that he had heard in the community.

Jonsson also showed an obvious interest for and involvement in events taking place in the greater world outside the local district. He must have been an early subscriber to the *Svenska Weckobladet* after this journal began to be published in Stockholm in 1869. The deaths of royal personages were among the events that were accorded great attention in the kingdom. War was also an event that the journal readers were informed about and which made them shocked.

All such expressions of sentiment found in Jonsson's written material show that he differs from the norm in other Swedish peasant diaries that have been dated to the late 1800s. The historian Britt Liljewall, who has studied this source material, expresses it thus:

In contrast to the bourgeois diary, peasant diaries are not a medium for reflection on occurrences or an outlet for emotions. [...] The almost absolute lack of reflections, emotions and thoughts also limits opportunities for clarifying, for instance, attitudes and evaluations. (Liljewall 1995: 31ff)

Jonsson's experiences and reflections are, conversely, often impossible to misunderstand. This applies not only in relation to death. His solicitude for other people's circumstances, regardless of social and economic status, is very apparent. The fact that women are very visible in these Jonsson's writings is also a distinctive element when compared to other Swedish peasant diaries. This gives his diaries special importance.

Some 19th-century Danish peasant diaries are more in harmony with Jonsson's writings in that they include reflections and do not merely register events. This shows an influence from religious revivalist movements (Schousboe 1980: 18). This type of influence can also be a factor in Jonsson's case. A basic reli-

gious point of view was always obvious in all his interpretations of contemporary events or thoughts about the future. Intercession by prayer was experienced as an adequate response whenever he felt anxiety for others' well-being. He surrendered developments into the hands of God, and that gave him comfort even in times of deep distress. Whenever he experienced success or whenever his prayers were answered, he painstakingly praised God for these benevolent actions.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The population of Röra, which was 1,663 inhabitants in 1860, had grown to 1,769 in 1870 and to 1,777 in 1880 (Lönnroth 1963: 324). Agriculture was the main source of income. A lot of men were also employed in the shipping trade.
- <sup>2</sup> 'Half-owner' or lessee, who received half of the profits from the farm.
- <sup>3</sup> When citing these sources, I have indicated volume 1 or 2, followed by page number(s).
- <sup>4</sup> Information available at [www.tjsf.org](http://www.tjsf.org), based on Rönnäng's parish registers for deaths and funerals.
- <sup>5</sup> See Skarin-Frykman 1993 for more information on this market.

## MANUSCRIPTS

Gothenburg:

GLA = Göteborgs landsarkiv (GLA) [Göteborg's provincial archives]

GDA = Göteborgs domkapitels arkiv (GDA) [Göteborg's Cathedral Chapter Archives]

F II = Ämbetsberättelser [Official reports] 1875, F II

Röra kyrkoarkiv [Röra parish archives]

F 1 = Död- och begravningsböcker [Death and funeral registers] 1861–1880, F 1

Register över sjömän [Register of mariners]

Henån

Henån församlingshem [Henån Parish House]

Erik Asklands samling [Erik Askland's collection]

Anna Edmans beskrivning från lärarinnetiden i Röra 1865–1876 [Anna Edman's recollections of her years as a teacher in Röra]

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