

Ernst Breitholtz: ROTARY'S RENAISSANCE MAN

A man rooted in Swedish history, practical philosopher and industrialist, ambassador of international good will—that's RI's 1971-72 President, the first ever from Scandinavia.

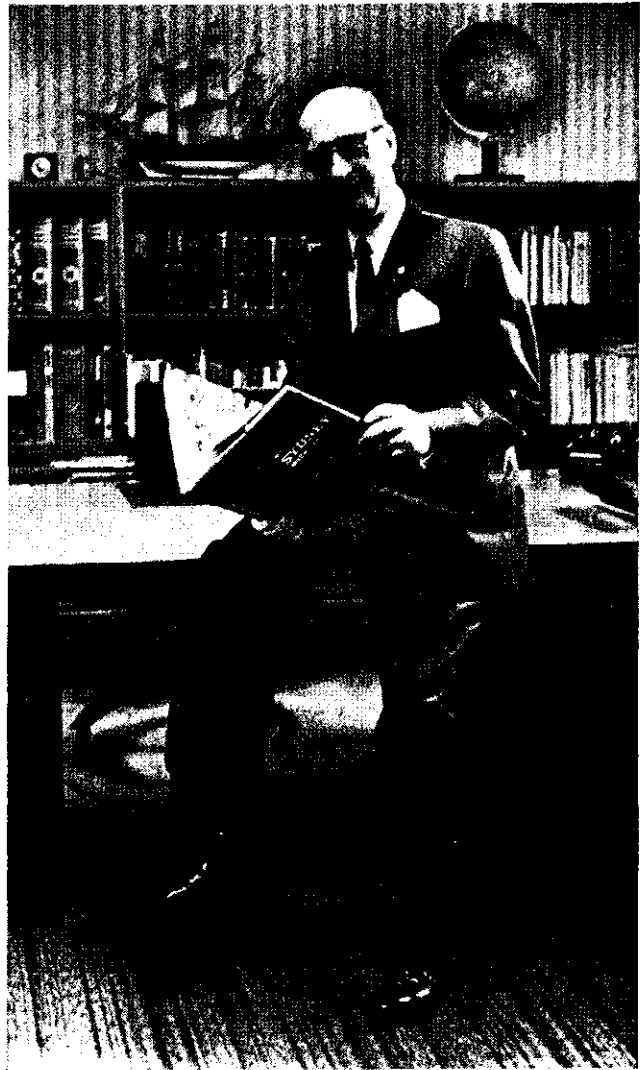
by Tage Forsberg

"I AM AFRAID you will not find very much in my life worth writing about. There is no drama, no glamour in my life history. And to crown it all—I am not a great personality. I have only tried, to the best of my ability, to be myself. The best way of achieving that aim is, I think, to try to understand other people."

That was how Ernst G. Breitholtz, the new President of Rotary International, expressed himself when I tried to make him speak about himself during a visit to his home, the beautiful 18th-Century mansion of Gunnabo in the heart of the Småland forest.

This almost self-effacing humility is perhaps the most outstanding feature in Ernst G. Breitholtz' character. And, paradoxically, it is what constitutes his strength. Humility, and a gracious dignity born of the realization that every man you meet is worthy of your serious consideration, that every human contact is enriching. His sense of the responsibility of serving, his ability to listen, his sensitivity to other people's motives have made him a practical philosopher striving to understand and grasp the manifold manifestations of different personalities.

All this has become clear to us, his Kalmar Rotarian colleagues, only gradually. For Ernst G. Breitholtz is not one of those who push themselves forward, basking in their own limelight. While his tasks in Rotary International have become more and more prominent, he has



Rotary's new man at the helm, Ernst Breitholtz likes ships, books.

remained one of us in the Kalmar Club. He has seldom risen to speak, but when he has we have suddenly found that his quiet and modest words have shed new light on the path staked out by Rotary. Therefore, we are not only proud and happy that one of our Club members has been entrusted with the supreme task of leading Rotary International during an important working year

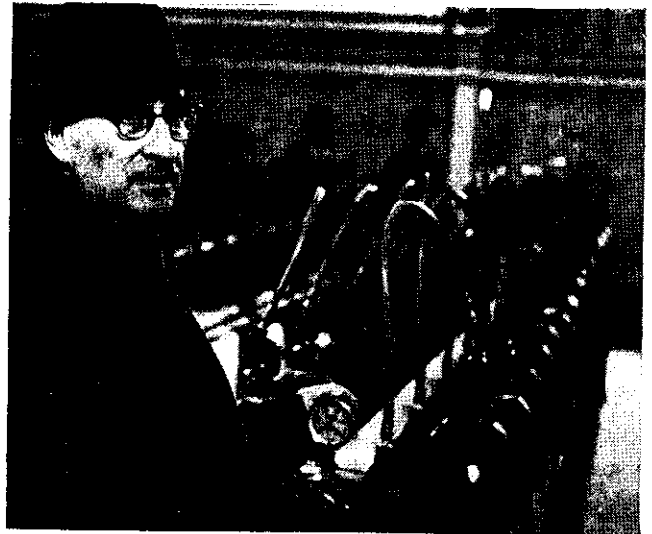


Gunnabo at Kalmar is home to Ernst and Brita Breitholtz. The 18th-Century mansion is set on a country estate in the Småland forest. Brita lavishes care on its gardens and interior decoration.

—we are also convinced that Rotarians all over the world will find that he has something to offer.

For the first time in the history of Rotary, a North European, a Scandinavian, will serve as President of Rotary International. This fact may presumably be reason enough for trying to outline his background with a certain care, since every human being is a product of heredity and environment. But the crucial point can often be the directing of one's will, influenced by profound emotional experiences.

Ernst G. Breitholtz' life can be said to have been shaped alike by Swedish tradition and international views. The Breitholtz family traces its ancestry back to the year 1391, which coincides almost exactly with the conception of the Kalmar Union, when for a few decades the now rather insignificant provincial town of Kalmar on the east coast of Sweden played the role of capital of the three kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, united under the Danish Queen Margareta. Those were also the palmy days of Hanseatic dominion, this early North European predecessor of the Common Market which—according to the testimony of Mr. J.M.A.H. Luns, the Dutch Foreign Minister—was a much more strictly organized trading association than the European Common Market of today. The Breitholtz family had established themselves on the other side of the Baltic, in Reval, the capital of Estonia, which a few



Ernst rose to top management in his 40-year association with the AGA Concern, a diversified Swedish firm which operates worldwide. Here, he inspects a factory where acetylene gas is made.

hundred years later became a Swedish possession. In Reval the members of the Breitholtz family played an important part as Hanseatic merchants, as mayors, as seafarers, and in the Swedish times they contributed significantly as military men, diplomats, and politicians. Three hundred years ago, a few decades before the Swedish dominion in the Baltic area broke up, the first Breitholtz moved over to the Swedish motherland. He was Major General Claes Breitholtz, who, as a reward for bravery and competence was given the estate of Margretholm on the Småland border. Although the big estate afterwards fell into other hands, the Breitholtz family has remained faithful to Småland.

Ernst G. Breitholtz is indeed chairman of the family association of this ancient noble family of Småland, a family which this year celebrates its 580th anniversary.

This background is, I hope, not without interest, since it gives you an idea of the achievements of his ancestors during the centuries that are generally called Sweden's Age of Greatness.

But it is our Rotarian friend I really want to talk about. It is no less fascinating to discover that Ernst, this



A distinguished journalist, Tage Forsberg is chief editor and managing director of the newspaper Barometern in Kalmar, Sweden. He is also chairman of TT, the news agency owned coöperatively by all Swedish dailies. A Rotarian since 1936, he is a past president of the Kalmar Rotary Club.

present-day descendant of Major General Claes Breitholtz, who will now take over the responsibility of President of Rotary International, has almost all his working life been attached to a Swedish enterprise with important international ramifications . . . such significance for international communication that its manifestations give a deeper dimension to greatness, this time not the conquests of the sword but those of genius.

To be sure, Ernst Breitholtz has a very small part in that work; he has only been a cog in the great machinery. But he is happy to remember that even as a little boy he met Gustaf Dalén, the Nobel Prize winner, and sitting on his lap, listened to his confident voice. The first meeting took place in the house of Ernst's father, and one can easily imagine the boy listening, wide-eyed but not understanding very much, when Gustaf Dalén talked about his newly invented sun valve, which could regulate unmanned lighthouses on the wide seas for the benefit of seafarers. It was certainly not only admiration for the great physicist that decided young Ernst's choice of career. His attachment to the world-embracing AGA Concern, whose original production was entirely geared to Gustaf Dalén's invention, was equally due to the fact that his father, Ernst Oscar Breitholtz, was managing director of AGA's first affiliated company, founded in 1907. Today, AGA is an international firm manufacturing industrial and medical gases, and equipment for their production and utilization; and optical and electronic apparatus for communications.

Ernst Breitholtz was to walk in his father's footsteps, attracted not only by the genius of Gustaf Dalén but also by the patriarchal atmosphere of the AGA Concern. But his path did not lead straight to AGA. There were both sailors and merchants in the family. His mother, Jane Ellen Georgina, was granddaughter to Joseph Jennings, the English ship owner. In the 1830's the Englishman had happened to run his ship aground in the Straits of Kalmar. He was received by the English Consul at that time, Pehr Edvard Kreuger of Kalmar, in such a hospitable way that not only did he establish himself in the town but he also married the consul's daughter. Later, Jennings and Kreuger started a match factory together, the embryo of what was to become more or less a financial empire, the life work—and also the undoing—of Ivar Kreuger, well-known in international stock market circles.

This seafaring heritage might explain Ernst's preference for the sea. During a few sunny Summer vacations while he was still at school, young Ernst heartily enjoyed attending courses in navigation along the coasts of the Baltic, calling in at ports in Finland and Estonia, and finding that in Reval the Breitholtz house was still intact. He planned to become a naval officer but instead enrolled as a cadet at Kalmar Infantry Regiment, which during his boyhood was stationed at Hultsfred, the home town of the family. During further training at Karlberg, the Swedish Military Academy, he developed tuberculosis and was forced to spend a whole year at a sanitarium. This meant the end of his plans for a military

career. But it was also the beginning of a basically changed attitude of life. Thoughts of death and of the meaning and responsibility of life led to a religious crisis. His grandmother's English Bible gave him comfort and consolation, but also a challenge. Time and time again he returned to a verse in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (5:22): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith."

"These words burnt in my heart," says Ernst today. "They gave a new substance and a new significance to my life. I felt that I had to drive myself to a deeper spiritual life, but during the decade that I studied philosophy and metaphysics it was borne in upon me that the words in the Epistle to the Galatians actually constitute all good will. They are above religious differences, being universal, commanding principles. They express our longing for understanding, they exhort us to be tolerant. And more than anything else they have increased my respect for people who, with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, in their efforts to comprehend the divine have come to adopt similar moral values. We westerners must not forget that in 510 B. C. Konfut-se coined the maxim: 'Do not do unto others what you would not have them do to you.'"

But a young man full of energy will not allow himself to be submerged in philosophical speculations. After recovering from his serious illness, Ernst Breitholtz immediately found his way back to the AGA Concern, convinced that he would find there some sort of family community. His admiration for Gustaf Dalén had been intensified over the years. Although quite blind after an accident in connection with one of his experiments, the great scientist had continued his work with undiminished power. Young Ernst was not alone in his sympathy for the man whose lighthouse light now guided all the sailors of the world but who himself was doomed to darkness.

In the years to come, however, Ernst Breitholtz did not come into close personal contact with his idol. He was given tasks in marketing and spent his spare time pursuing special studies at the Stockholm School of Economics. But he soon found that he had to broaden his outlook, obtained leave, and left for the U.S.A. in order to learn more about modern advertising. By then he had reached the age of 30 and thus it was a mature student who, in 1935, entered Columbia University.

It is evident that his student years in America tended to shape his ever deepening commitment to international coöperation. He gained confidence and popularity among his fellow students, and at International House in New York he was elected chairman of the Students' Council for 700 students from some 60 countries, an early and useful apprenticeship for the task he now takes over in Rotary International. Bonds of friendship from those days are still intact.

After supplementing his economic studies at the University of California at Berkeley he was awarded a Master of Science degree at Columbia University.

He cherishes the memory of his student days in Amer-



Ernst, age 1 1/2 with mother, was born two weeks before Rotary. . . . In Vimmerby school, 13-year-old Ernst is in right row, second seat. Behind him is Uno Hernroth, now police commissioner of Göteborg and also a Rotarian.



The family circle, above, includes three grown sons. From left: Stefan, Claes, and Berndt. Claes' wife Ann-Cathrin helps Brita hold the four grandchildren. . . . In 1965, right, the Swedish Order of the Vasa was bestowed on Ernst.



Brita, Rotary's winsome "first lady," is trained in languages and as a medical librarian. . . . At Atlantic City in 1965, where he was RI Convention chairman, Ernst chats with Adlai Stevenson, the late U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and Luther H. Hodges, Rotary International President in 1967-68.



ica with gratitude and joy. It was—so he has told me—as if an invigorating breeze of frankness and candor had wafted over him, as refreshing as the salty tang of San Francisco Bay, where in the hazy sun and the silvery glitter of the sea he could follow day by day the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge—a technological dream, he thought, and also a symbol of the unfathomed possibilities to develop good will among all people.

At Berkeley, with its architecture in a severely stark Spanish style, his studies took up most of his time. On the other hand, during his stay at Columbia University he had time to devote to people with whom he had spiritual affinity. On several Sundays he sat in Riverside Church listening to the sermons of Harry Emerson Fosdick, the great orator and thinker. Already the inscription over the portal of International House—"That brotherhood may prevail"—gave him in all its expressive succinctness an impetus to meet people from various parts of the world with sympathy and without prejudice, people from widely differing environments but united in the general cause of world understanding.

IN 1937 Ernst returned to Sweden, well trained for the commissions waiting for him in the AGA Concern. In the first stage of the Second World War he was active in Stockholm but was soon moved to Kalmar, his own native place where, for more than 20 years, he attended to the interests of the AGA Concern as production manager and administrator at some dozen industrial plants in the region. The customer relations, the commercial as well as the service-technical ones, brought him into direct contact with almost all the industrial companies within that wide field. The ledger comprised nearly 5,000 enterprises. The geographical extension of the field of work demanded plenty of travelling. All these contacts also made it natural that his particular knowledge should be utilized. For more than ten years he was chairman of the Småland branch of the Welding Association and was on the board of the national organization; for many years he was also vice chairman of the Board of the Småland-Blekinge Chamber of Commerce.

To a certain extent his abruptly interrupted military training turned out to be useful. The impending threat of war necessitated a radical reorganization and reinforcement of the Civil Defence, a military home guard. Ernst took his part of the responsibility in the regional field and was appointed commander with the rank of captain. But he also found time for his cultural interests. He became a member of the Alliance Française and was actively engaged in the Anglo-Swedish Society, whose chairman he became. He also gave his whole-hearted support to the Scouting movement. In 1965, Ernst received the Royal Order of Vasa, an honor bestowed for well-performed civic services. Among his other cherished decorations are the Order of St. John in Sweden, and the Royal Patriotic Society's gold medal for long and meritorious service within the AGA Concern.

All this gives us the picture of a very active man with

a wide range of interests who, when he can find the time, enjoys hunting, fishing, sailing, and motorboating.

How is it, then, that Ernst with his international outlook, developed so early in life, and his flair for languages—he has an excellent command of English, naturally, but also of French, German, and is studying Spanish for better performance of his duties—was satisfied with a relatively obscure position in the Swedish countryside. The AGA Concern had of course found that his education and organizing ability qualified him for greater tasks. He was offered managerial posts both in France and South America. Why did he refuse? The explanation is simple: all his personal connections held him deeply rooted in his native place. Moreover, through inheritance both on his father's side and his wife's he had received two Småland forest properties to run. They may not be very large according to American standards, to say nothing about Canadian ones, but their 1,400 acres of coniferous woodland with good site quality demanded a great deal of care and supervision.

And in this evergreen wooded country Ernst and his wife Brita have their home, Gunnabo, where idyll and comfort are pleasantly blended. The main building with its some 15 rooms is built in the rustic, well-proportioned style of the 18th-Century mansion. Round the house there is a wide area of parkland, encompassed by a murmuring brook and a gently flowing river. Ancient oaks border the area. Yes, this is indeed "far from the madding crowd."

HIS WIFE BRITA, so Swedishly blonde, has managed to furnish the house in such complete harmony with the character of the 18th Century as to fulfill the dreams of a professional interior decorator, and it is easy to see that Ernst had valid reasons for resisting offers of permanent posts abroad. Hardly a chair can be discovered in this sunny, light home which is not contemporary with the house; the furniture is beautiful not because of its antiquity but for its own timeless grace. Carpets and curtains in matching colors, family treasures of every kind—not least portraits of ancestors from many generations past—complete the impression of an atmosphere of tradition and comfort. No wonder that children and grandchildren also make their way to Gunnabo, whenever an opportunity arises.

In addition to her domestic interests of interior decorating and gardening, Brita serves as medical librarian at the central county hospital in Kalmar. She holds a master of arts degree in modern languages and library science.

There are three sons: Stefan, 25, is a student of economics at Stockholm University. Berndt, 29, holds the advanced degree of licentiate in physical sciences at Sweden's Uppsala University and specializes in flash X-ray research. Claes, 30, a city planning architect, is associated with a nationwide consultative firm in that field serving the northern part of Sweden.

And now Ernst and Brita [*Continued on page 51*]

Rotary's Renaissance Man

[Continued from page 26] will abandon this abode of peace for a presumably intensely arduous year in the service of Rotary International.

Well, both Ernst and Brita have had their time of apprenticeship. In Scandinavian Rotary there is nobody who has had such a splendid and rapid career as Ernst.

He became a member of the Rotary Club of Kalmar fairly late, at the age of 42, with the classification: compressed and liquefied gases manufacturing. Six years later he was elected Governor of the 85th District and was even persuaded to remain in office for two consecutive years (which the present rules would hardly tolerate: his wry comment). And then followed in rapid succession membership on a number of important committees in RI and on the Board of Directors. All these commissions have given both Ernst, now 66 years old, and his ever faithful and willing companion and wife Brita, a foretaste of what can be expected. Of the 149 Rotary countries some 40 already have been visited by Rotary's "first couple." And we are not unconscious of the fact that the name of Kalmar, thanks to Ernst, has perhaps become better known all over the world than it was even in the 17th-Century Age of Greatness.

I asked Ernst, "How did you feel when you got the message that you had been nominated President of Rotary International?"

"I was awakened by a telephone call in my home at half past twelve on the night of January 13th last year. I only remember that I was extremely surprised, pleasantly of course. But a different feeling soon took its place, a mixed feeling of awe and delight. I asked them to hold on while I talked to Brita.

"Of course you should accept," said Brita.

"And so I did. Not only because I trust in Brita's judgement very much but also because I felt so honored by this confidence. How could I shun my duty?"

"But," he adds, "even if my alarm and my feeling of inadequacy remains, I suppose I shall have to seek support in the advice that an old and experienced Rotarian once gave me: 'Step aside and let God use you.' I see it as a reminder that in the task now in store for me—and in fact also for Brita who will have her share of duties and joys—we must forget ourselves. The essential thing is to convey a living message."

Ernst ends up by telling me about an experience in 1953, when he called on Dag Hammarskjöld in his private apartment in the United Nations building. The Secretary General, by nature very modest and almost shy, was perhaps less reserved than usual, since they were related, although distantly. The subject of the conversation began with common ancestors but changed over to present-day world problems.

Then there was a pause.

Dag Hammarskjöld looked out of the window, but his gaze went far beyond the Manhattan skyscrapers. And then he exclaimed:

"What gives the U.N. its biggest headlines is our failures. Yet it is only the froth on the surface. Underneath there are men and women working constructively towards solving the problems of the world."

That meeting sowed yet another seed in Ernst's mind. It has contributed to giving him an inspiring belief that Rotary International, too, will prove able to fulfill its part of the aim of "putting good will to work through service."

THE CLUBS IN ACTION [Continued from page 49]

dera); Eden, N.S.W. (Merimbula); Kwinana, W.A. (Rockingham); Strathfield, N.S.W. (Burwood); Port Macquarie West, N.S.W. (Port Macquarie). BELGIUM: Mons-Sud (Mons). BRAZIL: Cubatão (Santos-Praia); Icoaraci (Belém); Várzea Grande (Cuiabá); Vitória-Praia Comprida (Vitória). CANADA: Black Creek, Ont. (Willowdale); Kitchener-Conestoga, Ont. (Kitchener). CHINA, REPUBLIC OF: Lotung (Ilan); Taichung Harbor (Taichung Southeast). DENMARK: Egtved (Give); Holstebro Vestre (Holstebro). ENGLAND: Hall Green; Isles of Scilly; Ivybridge; Westgate and Birchington. FINLAND: Ähtäri (Alavus); Nurmijärvi (Espoo-Esbo); Tikkurila-Dickursby (Vantaa-Vanda). GERMANY, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF: Bremerhaven-

Nordsee (Bremerhaven); Koblenz-Ehrenbreitstein (Koblenz); Kusel (Idar-Oberstein). INDIA: Gurdaspur (Batala); Junnar (Poona North); Lucknow West (Lucknow); Mudhol (Jamkhandi); Periyapatna (Hunsur); Ranchi South (Ranchi); Santhebennur (Davangere); Shirva (Udipi); Pilibhit (Bareilly). ISRAEL: Ramat Hasharon (Sharon). ITALY: Ancona-Riviera Del Conero (Ancona); Conegliano-Vittorio Veneto (Treviso); Fasano (Brindisi). JAPAN: Fukushima South (Fukushima); Moriyama (Omi-Hachiman); Nomi (Komatsu); Sagami-hara Minami (Sagami-hara); Sugito (Kasukabe); Teshio (Wakkanai); Tobata-Higashi (Tobata); Tokyo-Komae (Chofu); Wakayama Southeast (Wakayama-South); Yoshikawa (Soka). KOREA: Eumsung

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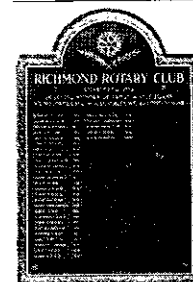
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