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Gustavus Adolphus and the Struggle for Power during the Reformation

Charles Fletcher

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IN the year in which Sigismund was first conditionally recognised as King of Sweden, 1594, on the 9th of December, Gustavus Adolphus was born in the Palace in Stockholm. Duke Charles, as he still was, had by his first wife (a daughter of the Elector Palatine) only one daughter who survived infancy; she was called Catherine, and became in after years her half-brother's most trusted friend and adviser. By his second wife, Christina of Sleswick Holstein, he had two sons and one daughter. The eldest was our hero; the second, Charles Philip, became at one time a claimant for the crown of the Czar, but died childless in 1622. The daughter, Mary Elizabeth, married her cousin John, the only one of Sigismund's brothers who took the Swedish side in the succession wars, and who honourably refused himself to trouble the existing entail of the crown.

When the grandfather of the new-born Crown Prince had seized the throne, Sweden was a barbarous country. Gustavus I. used to complain that his people understood civilisation so little, that they invariably robbed the merchants who came to trade with them. Their culture was perhaps about on a level with that of Poland and Russia. With the lapse of eighty years all this was changed. Sweden was a civilised country, if not to the extent of the England of Elizabeth or the France of the days before the League wars, yet so far that it might at least compare favourably with the neighbouring German and Scandinavian states. We know what an impetus to literature and especially to theological study was given by the Lutheran Reformation in Germany; Lutheranism was essentially in its early days a scholarly faith, and when engrafted upon the rugged Swedish stock it did produce very rich, if not very enduring, fruit. That there is something in "national character" is a doctrine which will probably survive the destructive efforts of modern historians. And the character of the Swedish people seems to have been actually new-created by the Reformation. The same was the case in Scotland, but one difference is readily perceptible : Scotland became Calvinist and learnt only the sterner lessons of Protestantism; Sweden took in all that was brilliant, attractive, and progressive from her Lutheranism, while her fresh Northern blood prevented her from relapsing, as the German Lutherans so easily did, into an indolent fatalism. By the end of the sixteenth century the Swedish nobles were by far the most cultivated aristocracy of the North...

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