Chapter 14 : English legacy (VI) – ”Muddling Through”.

As must now be evident, after the Vienna Congress, Charles John was considered odd man out in the European orchestra & and a recluse. As Julius Caesar put it, “I would rather be the first in Gaul than the second in Rome.” The English newspaper The Spectator:

> 1839
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> Through the kindness of a friend, we are supplied with some interesting information concerning Sweden; a country whose affairs attract little attention in England at present, but which on the death of its present sovereign will probably become the theatre of important events.
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> Bernadotte, at the age of seventy-five, with wonderful vigour of mind and body for such an age, is still ruling the country almost absolutely according to his own whims. He has hitherto managed the Representative Assembly such as it is, with little difficulty; and when a difference has arisen, he has disregarded their opinions. He has gradually formed a Ministry of most insignificant persons; and being really the cleverest man in his Council, he pays not the slightest attention to their opinion or advice. The nation is becoming very much dissatisfied with the management of affairs; but, on account of Bernadotte's military fame, the extreme kindness of his manners in private, as well as his old age, the Swedes will probably as long as he lives refrain from taking any violent measures to obtain greatly needed reforms in the representation, in criminal and civil legislation, in education, and in trade. For a quarter of a century no system has been followed—nothing but patching up and getting rid of difficulties for the moment; in which respect, Swedish legislation and government very much resemble our own. Disturbances broke out last year at Stockholm, in consequence chiefly of some Ministerial tampering with the administration of justice; and the result was so far good, that it is likely to deter men in power from again meddling with juries and judges. [Crusenstolpe-kravallerna 1838.] The Prince Royal, too, from that time seems to have taken his part. Till then, Prince OSCAR was known only as a good husband, a veracious man, of pleasing manners, and accomplished in literature and the arts. Few had any idea of his public principles. He avoided political discussions, and had surrounded himself with persons as insignificant as his father's Ministers; so the nation could not tell what to expect. Serious alarm arose among the friends of the BERNADOTTE dynasty; for it was evident that the Swedes would not endure from a young man the misgovernment which they tolerate in the present King. Prince OSCAR, however, is now known as the author of two very liberal articles in the Government paper—the only liberal ones which could have been inserted there. One relates to national education, the other to a municipal law for the whole country. When the King was absent last winter for six months in Norway, OSCAR, at the head of the Government, exhibited much assiduity and good principle. He declared himself strongly against all exceptional laws, the punishment of death, corporal punishment, and restrictions on commerce. He has discarded most of his insignificant courtiers, and replaced them by men of good reputation and influence in society. The two last Chamberlains are Baron WREDE and Count SPARRE, men of great learning and unblemished character. Sweden therefore indulges in pleasing anticipation of benefit from the reign of BERNADOTTE's successor; and the only fear arises from the knowledge that the fair promises of a prince heir-apparent are seldom fulfilled by a king.[1]

[1] [Om Jean Baptiste Bernadotte.] The Spectater, 1839-09-07, s. 2.

1844

BERNADOTTE is gone. The adventurer who, from a private soldier in the armies of France, raised himself to the throne of Sweden, has gone to the tomb; one of the long-reigning sovereigns of history whose lives have been a benefit and a safeguard to their country. Had he lived in earlier times, he might have ranked with the greatest among those who have been fathers to their people. He lived in a critical age, when not only broad results but all petty details are studied; his military predilections have been scanned; his little squabbles with newspapers, arbitrarily conceived but pursued in no very bitter or tyrannical spirit, have been made the most of; his ”ingratitude” to NAPOLEON—that is, his withholding blind and dishonest submission from the man who made others great only that they might the better serve him and he be greatest—has been magnified; but still the truth remains, that CHARLES JOHN found Sweden revolutionized, in jeopardy, with an expiring dynasty; and he leaves her tranquil, enriched, safe, with a young dynasty growing strong in the growing strength of the country. Is as much often said of monarchs? Of all NAPOLEON's General-Kings, he is the only one whose power survived his master; he is the only one whose elevation happened in spite of NAPOLEON. The two men, indeed, may be said to have properly belonged to different times. Without accounting BERNADOTTE ”in advance of his age,” according to the venal meaning of that cant term, we see that he was literally in advance. Less brilliant in his military successes and regal parades than others of the Imperial adventurers, he passed for second-rate among them; they have gone long ago, with the fêtes and follies of the day; with his shrewdness, discretion, respectable intentions, and strong worldly sense, he belonged rather to the age of Louis Philippe [of France] and Leopold [of Belgium], of [François] Guizot and [Robert] Peel; he alone survived his company, to be still a ruler in 1844.[2]

[2] [Om Jean Baptiste Bernadotte.] The Spectater, 1844-03-23, s. 2.