

## Chapter 19 : “The Reformprince“ (II) (1824-1844).

*“A great and true idea, once pronounced, is immortal.“*  
Oscar, Crown Prince of Sweden-Norway.

Oscar's Crown Prince period formally began February 5, 1818, on the death of Charles XIII, effectively on February 1, 1824, when he was appointed viceroy of Norway. The appointment only lasted six months. It was expected that he would receive his own policy area, but that did not happen. Throughout his Crown Prince period Oscar struggled to establish himself as somebody of consequence, not only as his father's loyal helper. It only partly succeeded. At the 1844 coronation<sup>1</sup> the newspapers described his honorary posts, travels, representation, health, charity; interest in literature, music, painting, natural sciences & social issues; his soothing influence on his father and his period as Norwegian viceroy & regent. A sample:

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Oscar & Josephine's conjugal life seems to have begun on her 18th birthday March 14, 1825, in accordance with the marriage contract. Until then Oscar held a mistress lady Gustava Björklund (1794-1862) because abstinence was considered harmful to health. In 1826-1831 Josephine bore him five children. The family life had a reputation of solid bourgeoisie and took much of Oscar's time. His 1836-1842 relationship with actress Emelie Högqvist (1812-1846) didn't go down well, however.

Oscar devoted much of his time to painting, music and debating social issues. He was chancellor of the Academy of Arts & 1<sup>st</sup> Honorary Member of the Academy of Music, involved with court theatrics - direction, games & costumes, member of Harmoniska sällskapet (the harmonic society), Sällskapet för sångövningar (the society for singing), Jägarförbundet's musiksektion (the hunting associations section for singing) & took music lessons from Adolf Fredrik Lindblad. Since he remained an amateur, one should probably not put too much emphasis on his paintings. Two are mentioned: The monument of Döbeln in Karlberg's Park (1828) & the frigate Eurydice in distress at sea (1830).<sup>2</sup> He seems to have shared his teacher Westin's love for details and realism. Oscar's music, about twenty works in different genres, has a better reputation: A march of mourning to the funeral of Charles XIII (1818). A setting of Hugo's poem “Le pirate“. The opera “Ryno or, the knight errant“, which Oscar completed after the death of composer Eduard Brendler under the supervision of his music teacher Lindblad. Oscar seems to have completed the task to Lindblad's satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> Oscar is otherwise at his best in his debating books & articles where his detailed knowledge & ability to structure the subject comes into its own:

- In 1840 Oscar published an orphan work “Om Straff och Straff-anstalter“<sup>4</sup> (on punishment and prisons; the yellow book called) which caused a great stir both in Sweden and abroad. It was translated into Norwegian, German, French, English, Dutch, and Italian. It was a plea for a liberal criminal law - the abolition of corporal punishment and single instead of communal imprisonment - and came to play a role in the shaping of public opinion. The book does not contain a reference list, but cites

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<sup>1</sup> N.N. 1844; N.N. 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Lindwall 1994: s. 154.

<sup>3</sup> Wiklund 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Prins Oscar 1840.

extensively from contemporary literature. Posterity has mainly been interested in whether it was Oscar's own work or if he had help. The most likely candidate has been Clas Levijrn, 1835-1844 chairman in the "Board of Prisons and Labour Institutions", and with similar views. A memo from his hand is preserved in Oscar's archives.<sup>5</sup>

- Other debates at this time dealt with public schools<sup>6</sup>, municipal laws<sup>7</sup>, cereal laws<sup>8</sup> & military training<sup>9</sup>.

Oscar was also interested in temperance work and from 1837 1<sup>st</sup> Honorary member of the umbrella organization "The Swedish society for temperance and public education". He attended meetings and wanted to set an example. Historian Carl Grimberg attributes him the statement: "I have renounced spirits. But that one may not say, that such things for princes mean nothing, when they can replace it with wine, I would like to explain that I also want to refrain from wine except at supper, at the possible prescription of a doctor and at toasts."<sup>10</sup> Oscar's interest seems to have been aroused by the American temperance preacher Robert Baird who in 1835 visited Sweden, was granted an audience & even awarded the medal of merit *Illis quorum*. A strong contrast with Baird's reception in St. Petersburg & Copenhagen where he was regarded as a dangerous agitator.<sup>11</sup>

Since Oscar's liberal reversal occurred during the same period 1836-42 as he socialized with his mistress Emilie Höggqvist, she possibly played some part. She knew a lot of liberal journalists and theatre people and held a salon. It seems unlikely that Oscar discussed politics with them, but perhaps he attended incognito.

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It has been assumed that the reason Oscar was not more involved in government work was because of his liberal values and popularity hunting. It's hard to make a convincing case. Both father & son were of their time. The father was a despot of the Napoleonic type. The son a 19<sup>th</sup> century enlightened monarch. Think Napoleon III. The father wanted to subjugate his ministers. The son to use them. What can be proved is that the father was suspicious of all competitors, of whom the son was definitely one, but that they considered it important to keep a united front. Oscar made a short appearance as Norwegian viceroy & regent, represented and visited Russia & Germany. His main contribution is considered to have been the quarantine work during the cholera epidemic of 1834. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any details. During the period, discontent with the father's politics grew and during the Parliament of 1840 & -41 it was rumoured that he would be forced to abdicate in favour of his son. In order to refute all such rumours, Father and son enacted a public reconciliation drama in the first days of February 1840. His father offered to leave all government work to his son and settle in Norway. Oscar confessed his undying love and reverence, fell on his knees and implored the father to undo his decision. There wasn't a dry eye.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hafström 1969.

<sup>6</sup> N.N. (1839.) Om folkskolor. Post- och Inrikes Tidningar, 1839-02-15.

<sup>7</sup> N.N. (1839) Några ord om Municipalstyrelser, i anledning af norska lagen om Förmanskapet, med tillämpning på Sverige. Post- och Inrikes Tidningar, 1839-03-23.

<sup>8</sup> N.N. (1840.) Några ord om spannmålslagarna. Stockholm: Norstedt.

<sup>9</sup> N.N. (1842.) Om fättjänsten. [Skrift. Ej lokaliserad.]; N.N. (1844.) P.M. rörande infanteri exercis-reglementet år 1844. Stockholm: Norstedt; N.N. (1854.) Soldat-undervisning för svenska armén.

<sup>10</sup> Grimberg 1913: del 9, s. 109.

<sup>11</sup> Jansson, 2009 : ss. 103-104.

<sup>12</sup> Sjövall 1943: ss. 84-85; I: Söderhjelm & Palmstierna 1944: s. 299.

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During Oscar's Crown Prince period, his history teacher Erik Geijer's so-called liberal reversal occurred. The name is misleading. Geijer considered it a change in scientific stance. In a letter dated February 24, 1838, to *Aftonbladet's* editor Hans Järta he formulated it as: "My defection is from the *Historical School* - because I have become increasingly convinced, that history cannot provide, but well modify the principle of action, and that on the contrary this action must be the contribution of each time." The course of history could not be commanded but was created by - "grew out of" - the unique traditions of each country. Sweden's history was not their kings, but the people's. Geijer's 1844 lecture in this spirit, "On the social conditions of our time", accordingly interpreted the political conflicts of the 1830s as meaning that the people (=bourgeoisie) in the spirit of the Enlightenment had become aware of their rights. Property & personal merit was now more important than birth.

Geijer's reversal was of his time in the sense that it was obvious that social change was no longer driven from the top by the monarchy but from below through the Parliament. This insight included a compromise view of the Sovereign's role as mediator between special interests rather than driving force. The most famous advocate of this view, political scientist Benjamin Constant, in fact for a time belonged to Charles John's circle of friends, but it is difficult to discern any influence of his ideas either in Charles John's or the son's practice. However, Constant's ideas are said to have been popular in the Parliament, but I have not been able to locate any source. The research I have found points in the opposite direction - that Oscar perceived the monarch as the people's "representative". Rather natural in an elective monarchy. Eriksson (1954) summarizes Oscar's practice as follows:

The research has shown that Oscar I had no intention of implementing some version of parliamentarianism; His dream was instead to regain the power and prestige of the king during Charles John's early years, and he wanted to do this by reconciling Estates and parties and inspiring them to selfless collaboration for the good of the whole kingdom. ... Although the political conditions in Norway brought together the king and the liberals in fear of a pure peasantry rule, they still differed on the important point of parliamentarianism. This became dramatically obvious to a wider audience at the beginning of 1847. King Oscar then discovered that the State Counciller Wærn behind his back had agitated for a proposal put forward by the Committee of Representation that all power should be assembled in the second chamber of the planned parliament, which in reality meant that the personal kingship was abolished. ... It was a Council, which reminded those present of the days of Charles John, and in substance it meant that the break between Oscar I and the Liberals was definitive, although for a time hushed up. ... The aim of the King and the Liberals was not the same. For him, the economic and humanitarian reforms were important, for them a reorganization of the system of government.<sup>13</sup>

After the February Revolution [1848], two tasks were felt important: to uphold the laws and property rights and to improve the conditions of the workers. The former seemed only possible, if the king held power, not a social class – it did not matter what class: bourgeoisie, bureaucracy or peasants – it was detrimental to the social

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<sup>13</sup> Eriksson 1954: ss. 182-184.

calm... All things considered, the king representing the whole people was felt to be the best solution.<sup>14</sup>

Like his father, Oscar distrusted his surroundings and seems to have entrusted himself only to his wife. The knowledge of his political motives and insight is therefore poor. His Minister Henrik Reuterdaahl describes Oscar's own liberal reversal as follows: "He had convinced himself that what was dear to him, popular favour, praise in the newspapers, could not be won by concessions, as what he feared most, popular disfavour, mockery, could not be avoided by kind words." Expressed otherwise: Oscar while Crown Prince believed it possible to manipulate opinion in the desired direction by conciliatory speeches. During his reign, he found that there were political conflicts that could not be avoided, but had to be dealt with. Somewhat late in the day me thinks.

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<sup>14</sup> Eriksson 1954: s. 200.