

Chapter 32 : School of Hard Knocks (III) (1856-1872).

As regent - Norwegian viceroy 1856/57, prince regent 1857/59 & crowned regent 1859/72 - Charles devoted himself with varying degrees of success to the constitution, foreign & Union policy, defence, communications, agriculture, forestry and the Norrland issue. The controversies surrounding the constitutional reforms and his foreign & Union policy are so extensive and the research on it so sprawling & partly contradictory that instead of making a summary, I depict how Charles legacy has changed over time. His other interests - defence, communications, agriculture, forestry and the Norrland issue - are not as controversial and can be summarized in point form.

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1. Popularity

Charles's motto for the coronation was that "Land shall be built by law". This was interpreted both as a defence of property rights and as not even the king being above the law. His immediate legacy was also gratitude for him behaving as a constitutional monarch, and not as the earlier Bernadotte considered the Constitution as a piece of paper to be circumvented. I have found 17 obituaries who all belabour this fact. At the time of his death, Charles was both popular and respected. I quote Aftonbladet:

[It] is an irrefutable fact that King Charles was very popular and that he was loved by the people, as only few kings before him have been. The basis for this immense, ever growing popularity undoubtedly was his personality. In addition to human errors and imperfections, King Carl had some personal qualities, which greatly appealed to the people. Above all, he was a true *Swede*, more Swedish than any king of the last 150 years. ... In addition he was renowned for the great simplicity, straightforwardness and bonhomie that was his being. He did not love etiquette, equivocation and fawning, and in that respect he rather resembled his late friend, King Frederick VII of Denmark. ... But apart from these personal qualities there is another, political and more lasting basis for this great popularity. King Carl was *the most constitutional king* our country has ever owned.¹

Charles's own view seems to have been that oaths are holy. At the coronation, he had sworn to defend the Constitution, and he did. As he put it in his competition entry to the Academy:

Not from His Word
Until Life is Over
Man may Part.

The criticism of Charles began with De Geer's memoirs (1892):

The king's long-awaited death notice [1872] suddenly arrived and aroused, if not consternation, a general sadness, which showed, how truly popular he was. I judged him during his life, as I found afterwards, not only severely but even unfairly. Even during the endless praise of the just passed away I experienced, as I wrote to Sibbern, a strange feeling, as I thought of how everything of any significance, which took place under his reign, took place against his will; might it be foreign policy, representation,

¹ Aftonbladet, 1872-09-19, sida 2.

criminal law reform or promotion; and when he conceded, not because he agreed, but for lack of willpower to fight or for an inability to adhere to a principle, I had difficulty in grasping his greatness, for as with his beloved friend, Frederick VII, it was in fact his weakness we loved, not his strength. But I can understand that he was loved for his personal qualities, for he had a basically gracious nature. In addition the general public does not like saints. On the contrary, it flatters them to see their own errors and vices shared by royals.

Honesty and openness, on the other hand, are loved by everyone, and no one has with greater talent than he played this role. His utter complacency to cover up, what one would think him most anxious to hide, made it almost impossible to believe him to hide anything else, and one would have to be very close in order to realize that; - but the public was not. Another thing, which won hearts, was that everything with him was personal – a meeting of souls across a void. That this was a person of flesh and blood with interests of his own meant nothing to him. If someone, for whom he had personal friendship, proposed something, it immediately won his sympathies, but not if it was proposed by someone else.

At the same time, as I wrote this, I added however, that one may not judge a king strictly as a man, since no one is subject to greater temptations than a king; and most people succumb. ... Over the image of Charles XV will always fall the beautiful light of a good heart, friendly being and artistic spirit. He is more dear to me as a memory than he was during his life; and I hold this to be his true legacy.²

The 1901 essay by Lorentz Dietrichson on Charles's gifts of understanding and friendship is in the same spirit:

Did Charles XV have a particularly good head? I really do not think so; it was considered lacking from the beginning, and his two younger brothers, Gustaf and Oscar, were certainly intellectually far superior; But Charles had the rare trait of not overestimating himself. "You think I am stupid," he once said, "but at least I am not so stupid, that I interfere in details that I do not understand," and he added a little maliciously: "as Dad does." The notion that he was mediocre or not wired right probably stems from a pun during his Uppsala stay. It was the story of "farality". [If one could talk about mor-ality (mother-ality), one could also talk about far-ality (father-ality)] There was a lot of fuss over this pun for a long period of time - and even today in some places in Sweden a bad pun is called a "faryl".

No, King Charles was far from what they thought he was - he had the *bon sen* of an honest and straightforward character, and it carried the day where wiser, more calculating natures, would have foundered. Perhaps greater prudence would have saved him some bitter experiences; but it would never have made him the beloved king he became, for prudence is rarely a winning quality. Anyone who has seen King Charles in his family circle or followed him in the crowd during the Christmas market at Stortorget in Stockholm, when he made his purchases from the poorest of the vendors and saved their Christmas, in the manner of the sun scattering the clouds - will never forget his friendliness.

His contempt for all empty formality so dearly matched his being. I remember the day of tribute after the coronation - I had just seen him in crown and purples receive the homage of the Estates on Slottsbacken, when I a while later I discovered a gentleman in a gray coat walking up Drottninggatan in the company of a companion, like he was anybody, and to my amazement recognized Charles XV, who was in a

² De Geer 1892: del 2, ss. 137-138; Bååth-Holmberg 1892.

hurry had shake his royal glory. When I later came to see the king at closer quarters, I discovered many additional features of his straightforward, completely non formal manner, which, however, never made him forget his royal dignity.³

By 1923, the historical research had reached Charles' reign. Carl Hallendorff summarized him in Sweden's History until Today:

[One could] easily be tempted to divide the time of Charles XV into the first 8-9 years [the Estate based Parliament] to be part of Oskar I's reign and the later six years [the bicameral parliament] to be part of Oscar II's reign. Surely, such a division could be reasonably justified, but, apart from the fact that it would not be in accordance with the rules applied at the time, it will easily overlook some of the most characteristic features of the years concerned. For there was a real epoch of Charles XV with a distinctive character, both good and evil. The nature of this epoch were very much influenced by the person of the reigning king, his desires and aspirations, his sympathies and antipathies. The period is perhaps best characterized as the initial days of juvenile high spirits meeting life, but later with crushed illusions retreating into isolation. ...

Between these images, between the new-born jubilant Italy [1858] and the reign of terror of the communes in the capital of France [1871], despite the short years, the distance is almost immeasurable. ... It is therefore not surprising, that the judgment of then and now differ with respects to the prince, who was then at the centre of events. Few monarchs have been as popular, as has Charles XV, but neither have they been so sharply criticized by people in their immediate surroundings. There are good reasons for both. ...

After the death of Charles XV, he was described as the paragon of a constitutional monarch, who allowed his advisers to handle current affairs of government without interfering in the details. To the extent that this is correct - the following presentation would show, that the truth of this is debatable - one should maintain, that Charles developed in this direction essentially against his will. ... During his last years of government, however, Charles seems increasingly to have tired of the ungrateful efforts of personal rule and resigned himself to actually leaving the decisions to the Cabinet.⁴

Viz. the same judgment as De Geer. Hallendorff also published a biography (1924) with a similar tendency. The schizophrenia of De Geer's characterization - that Charles left a mark on the 1860s through his art, populism & loves, but was uninterested in his office - reaches a climax with Edvard Thormøen (1943):

It is difficult to pin down in what way – you can call it superficial – that Charles XV made an impression on his time and has come to symbolize it. Although Charles XV is no longer relevant, he is not forgotten. ... And why? The answer is both easy and difficult; easiest, if you use a particularly well worn phrase: History is personal.

So: First and foremost Charles XV was a personality, "a man of flesh and blood without any abstractions", as De Geer writes in his obituary. Secondly, because he and his time have been the subject of a most vigorous slogan: Charles XV's Happy Days. Many historical personalities have been perpetuated mainly because of the power of a slogan (e. g. "the enlightened peasant") [Nils Månsson (1776-1837)], and Charles XV

³ Dietrichson 1901: del 2, ss. 25-27.

⁴ Hallendorff 1923: ss. 219-232.

is among those who profited greatly from it. Thirdly, like Bellman, Carl XV lives in the anecdotes. In addition, it may be that he has gone to posterity in a more substantial way, in a not insignificant number of illegitimate descendants; something that was well known and accepted as a not particularly reprehensible fact. Finally: around this king more than most Swedes – akin to the very greatest - has arisen what is now called a myth.⁵

The talk about The King's happy days when King & People lived in harmony has been passed on by anecdotes, collections of letters, diaries, memoirs & "memories": Rydberg (1872), Caroliana (1889), Berättelser (1897), Nilsson (1898), Edholm (1906), Dardel (1911), Edholm (1919), Wrangel (1924), Areen (1926), Selander & Selander (1927), af Edholm (1944), Lagercrantz & Rehnberg (1954), Hentzel & Sahlberg (1954: ss. 74-79), Michanek (1990), et al. 1872-1968 there are also eight literary depictions. In the final chapter of his legacy (see next chapter 33), I try to sort out the background of all this.

Charles's being a "man of flesh and blood" was also due to the newly developed photography. His portraits were spread in large editions through lithographs, postcards, porcelain & everything else possible. Charles was Sweden's first media monarch.

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2. Scandinavia, the Union & the King

Charles tried to be his own foreign minister but his Scandinavian policy foundered on quadruple resistance. He had the same ambition as his father to create a Nordic Great Union of Sweden-Norway-Denmark-Finland. The Great Powers, however, wanted differently.

Frederik VII was childless and had offered to adopt Oscar, but he declined. The plan to put Oscar on Denmark's throne seems to have been based on Charles' private "Bäckaskog Diplomacy". He & Frederik got on very well. Oscar has described the relationship between the two as: "King Frederik, who with [my brother] has now entered into a perfect Old Norse foster-brotherhood and loves him with a romantic fervour, I have rarely seen between two males."⁶ July 22, 1863, he promised Frederik to come to his aid if ever he needed it. However, the Swedes could only provide 12 thousand infantry armed with muzzle loaders & the artillery was smooth-bore front-loaders from the days of the Napoleonic Wars.⁷ Nothing came out of it.

November 15, Frederick VII was succeeded by Christian IX. February 1, 1864, the 2nd German-Danish War broke out. Charles tried to save his original plan by further private diplomacy. This would be done through a family treaty consisting of a defence & attack league and a dynastic union with alternating Swedish & Danish regents. Nothing came out of that either. Charles also attempted to introduce cognate succession so that his daughter, who 1869 married the Danish Crown Prince Frederick (VIII), could become Swedish Union Queen.

⁵ Thermanius 1943: ss. 34-35.

⁶ Oscar II 1960: del 3, s. 22.

⁷ Holm 1942.

Another setback was that the Swedish nobility resisted Charles's attempts to make the union more appetizing for the Norwegians through concessions, and that Swedish and Norwegian liberals resisted anything that could strengthen royal power, which included both the union & Charles's attempts to strengthen ties with Denmark. After 1864, political Scandinavianism was dead, but cultural Scandinavianism flourished.

In addition to the battle over foreign policy, there was a battle over the Swedish constitution. The Estates were no longer an adequate political base. They were not homogenous enough. Several decades of "patching & mending" culminated in the 1865/66 Parliament's decision on a two-chamber system. Chamber 1 selected by electors; Chamber 2 by direct election. Charles wanted the French system that the government (i.e. he himself) appointed the members of the 1st chamber but had to give in. Much of the nobility had opposed the reform, but it in fact increased their influence. In 1867/69, the nobility had 1/3 of the members, the priests were virtually wiped, the burghers dropped to 1/6 and the peasants remained at 1/4. The peasants were more homogeneous as a group and had easier to organize. However, this was left to his brother Oscar to deal with.

The process has been explored from every possible angle and Charles has alternately been regarded as a wise strategist, monarchist hawk, pitiful loser, incompetent & impossible to understand. A selection of books & articles on the wsubject: Hatton (1866), Lilliehöök (1867: ss. 4-73), Adlersparre (1893: ss. 5-68), Koht (1908), Hallendorff (1914), Boëthius (1918), Holmberg (1946), Lundh (1946), von Felitzen (1949), Lundh (1950), Eriksson (1954b), Ekman (1966), Nilsson (1969; Lagerroth 1972, Postén (1981), Jansson (2006) & Berggren (2012: ss. 63-84).

In connection with the publication of Eriksson's biography, a mini-debate took place, which seems to have resulted in the hypothesis that Charles by supporting the reform expected the Liberal opposition to support Scandinavianism. This did not happen, however. The situation finally got out of hand.⁸ The confusion of posterity about Charles's intentions seems to have been due to his double dealing. Charles could appear simple and straightforward, but that was only a pose. Like his father, he was a schemer and arch manipulator.

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As Mr. De Geer's political system guaranteed only the richest 5-6% of the population political influence, one could think that the Socialists would be negative in retrospect. In Social Democratic history, however, it was regarded as progress because according to Marxist theory the bourgeois class society was a precursor to the coming proletarian people's state. As the first "bourgeois king" of Sweden, Charles XV was very popular:

"As a curiosity, it is worth mentioning that Hjalmar Branting liked the reign of Charles XV better than the reign of Oscar II. He praises Charles XV, but only to emphasize how deeply reactionary he considers Oscar II and his epoch. On the occasion of Oscar's 25th anniversary, Branting puts it that the time of Charles XV was the time of youth and exuberance. During the spire of Charles XV they still moved upwards. Yes, then the great breakthrough took place, when the reign of money, hidden behind the cloak of civil equality, took precedence over the old feudal social order. With the representation reform, Sweden became a modern

⁸ Eriksson 1954b, Lönnroth 1954, Hammar 1955.

bourgeois state. And we, says Branting, who an age later want to continue forward and on the basis of universal suffrage build the democratic society that leads to the still higher development of social democracy, we have the right, and dare I say duty, to remember with gratitude those who fought the battles of their time and guided our old, sluggish people to a new milestone in its history.”⁹

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3. Other policies

The last governor of Norway was Severin Løvenskiold (1777-1856). When he resigned in 1855, he was replaced February 7, 1856, with Charles as viceroy. Charles and his family arrived on May 25, during the summer he made a tour north along the coast to Listerfjorden and returned inland to Kristiania. Charles was celebrated wherever he visited. Many places were difficult to reach and Charles wished for railway connections. In the autumn he was occupied with military matters. Charles both drilled troops & investigated their efficiency. From October 11, 1856, to January 12, 1857, he was in Stockholm. On his return, he was tasked with persuading Norway to accept some Union decisions to harmonize the countries' legislation, including that sentences would have legal force in both countries & to abolish trade barriers, which he did not succeed in doing. The joint defence policy was also opposed. The Norwegian method was to "wave their paragraphs" which irritated Charles immensely. He avoided interfering in the work of the Norwegian Cabinet, except for the appointments necessary to ensure a loyal cadre of officials. However, the long tenures and the lack of alternative candidates made it difficult. On May 30, due to his father's illness, Charles was forced to return to Sweden. On September 25, he took over the government.

Also in the Swedish government, Charles avoided interfering in the daily grind & the ministers - possibly even himself - did not have to attend the handling of matters outside their area of competence and routine matters were fast tracked. However, he expected that what was decided would bear some resemblance to his directives. There is an anecdote about the goings on at the Cabinet meetings:

Beskow tells us, not without satisfaction, that he [Charles], at a meeting, struck his fist in the table with the words: "I'll be damned if this doesn't happen!" whereupon De Geer with his usual calm respectfulness rebutted: "Against such striking reasons I have no objection but ask that my opinion be noted".¹⁰

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1858, Charles made a new inland trip. This time to Norrland & Lappland accompanied by an industry delegation. As the Norwegian tour (Dardell 1911b: ss. 101-132), the depictions of this Norrland & Lappland tour (Åslund 1879; Dardell 1911b: ss. 175-190; Lindgren 1934; Westerlund 1943; Hentzel & Sahlberg 1954: ss. 67-73; Beskow 1958: ss. 146-160; Boström 1961) is more travelogue than reporting on the state utility of the tour. After returning to Stockholm, Norrbotten's Colonization Committee was formed in January 1859 with Charles as chairman. The committee thought that Norrland would best be colonized by croft soldiers. Charles conducted his own experimental work on suitable cultivation methods at his summer palace Bäckaskog & at his Norrland residency Åminne.

⁹ Segerstedt 1986: s. 21.

¹⁰ Erikson 1954: s. 276.

Charles was also interested in horse breeding, forestry, mining and communications. Sweden's first railway with a steam locomotive was inaugurated in 1856. The Stockholm-Oslo link was completed in 1872. In between, Charles inaugurated a large number of branch lines. The success was largely due to him backing his finance minister J.A. Gripenstedt. Charles and his confidant Henning Hamilton, also he a railway enthusiast, decided on which lines should be prioritized.

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As Swedish regent, Charles 1857-72 tried to reform the Swedish defence. The proposals followed the tide of war on the continent - first French reforms, then Prussian. To gather support, he published military pamphlets:

The Consolidation of Stockholm (1860)

A few words about the organization of the Swedish Allotment system (1860)

Condensed military thoughts (1863)

Some thoughts regarding the organization of the Swedish Army (1865)

Thoughts on contemporary tactics (1867)

Observations regarding the infantry dedicated to the Swedish infantry officer (1868)

The pamphlets tell you that Charles preferred a small but well-trained army. He wanted to keep the Croft soldiers supplement them with conscripts. The sharpshooters could form a kind of home guard. The response was lack lustre. In addition, the pamphlets gave practical advice, such as permitting looting, but in an orderly manner, etc. Posterity has been most positive to Charles's leadership philosophy: "No commander can hope for success, unless he makes himself respected and liked by the troupes. Love is the foundation of obedience." - "The army suffers, be certain you too; The soldier is sad, cheer him up. See the man and share his burdens."¹¹ Not self-evident then, nor later.

Charles's passion for Garibaldi, Victor Emanuel II & Italy's unification has aroused a great deal of ridicule. Charles saw himself as a Swedish counterpart with the same problems, had his photograph taken in the red shirt and copied the uniforms of the Italian rangers with a plume in the hat - "the bersaglieri uniform" - to drive home the points. The uniform was worn by the Värmland rangers & the Norwegian guard. The Norwegian Guard still wears it. Their history is different, however - that it was Queen Lovisa who insisted on the plume.

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Since the spring of 1867 Charles had sensations of something ill that in 1869 turned malignant. On top of this, Queen Lovisa contracted pneumonia and died on March 30, 1871. Charles died on September 18, 1872. The diagnosis was unclear: intestinal syphilis, intestinal tuberculosis or something else.¹² Charles had in connection with his wife's death written an instruction to be laid to rest in an unmarked grave but it was not followed. His papers were destroyed. The judgment that Charles the last years of his reign had tired of his office can probably be explained by his illness.¹³

¹¹ Karl XV 1863; Eriksson 1954: s. 110-111; Wolke 2007: s. 99.

¹² Kock 1963: ss. 138-146; Henschen 1974; Sjöstrand 2010.

¹³ Kock 1963.