

Chapter 41 : Princess Sophie of Nassau (1836-1913).

1851 & 1852 Crown Princess Louise bore Charles two children - Princess Louise & the following year Prince Oscar Fredrik. When the prince 1854 died in pneumonia, and Crown Princess Louise due to a genital infection could not bear more children, it fell on Oscar to secure the succession. His parents did not want to force a decision, but they arranged a series of visits. While touring England-Holland-France he July 19-24, 1856, made a detour to the castle of Monrepos near Ludwigsburg in southern Germany, where he met the late Duke of Nassau's youngest daughter, Sophie. The date was unfortunately ill chosen because Sophie's mother had died 10 days earlier and she was in mourning. Visits were common, and the other guests did at first not understand why he was there. In the evening Sophie accompanied him on an aria from *Adelaide*, an Italian opera in which Adelaide is forced by her father to marry Adalbert. Oscar put such feeling into the performance that dawned on the audience that they actually listened to a courtship.¹ Oscar agreed on a new visit in September. On his return the Swedish court was ordered eight days of mourning in memory of Sophie's mother.

On September 20, Oscar returned to Nassau and on September 26, they were engaged. No details are known. Oscar wrote to his friend Viktor Ankarcróna:

I have taken this step after mature consideration of my duties and of my state of mind. My duty done, I feel a peace and satisfaction that I have not often experienced on this earth, where my youth has been a struggle on stormy seas. [- - -] As always I have been sincere - that is my consolation and hope. I believe in the future, God will not disappoint me. But I wish I could feel like 18 in the presence of my bride to be!!! However, it is not worth complaining, but thanking, humbly thanking God, who allowed me to find a good, calm, serious slow but surely appealing fiancée, who can be and will remain something for a man, who once half suffered shipwreck on the ocean of emotions as - most have done.²

The event was commemorated by Oscar cutting their initials in the family oak and getting some glans to plant at Drottningholm Castle. The engagement was leaked to the press on October 1 & came as a complete surprise. On October 6, his fathers envoys submitted an official request to the Grand Duke – Sophie's uncle. On October 8, the engagement was official. On October 11, Oscar returned to Sweden. The marriage contract was signed on October 23. On the turn of October/November, Sophie's Swedish teacher Emanuel Olde arrived, who found a bright and ambitious student. Oscar & Sophie exchanged letters. On June 6 the following year at 18:30, the couple married at Bieberich Castle. All of the city's houses were for the day adorned with flowers, wreaths and flags. Sophie wore a myrtle crown strewn with diamonds. Some Swedish dignitaries were there, but none from the royal house. As usual there was no official information about the bride beyond her looks & brilliant ancestry, but Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning in fact made a valiant attempt to interview the surroundings: “Sophie, 20 years of age, was a wise & kind-hearted woman, serious & mature beyond her years and not lacking insight into art, music & religion.”³

Alternative marriages were: (1) Oscar's cousin Princess Maria Amélia of Brazil (1831-1853) but she died of tuberculosis. In addition she was secretly engaged to Archduke Maximilian of Austria. (2) Princess Mary Adelaide of Cambridge (1833-1897), who

¹ Carmen Sylva 1911; Ulfsäter-Troell 1996: s. 223.

² Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning, 1857-06-06, bihang, sida 5.

³ Melander 1914: s. 27.

due to her obesity and insignificant wealth long looked like ending life as a spinster. (3) Princess Charlotte of Belgium (1840-1927), who was both rich and beautiful but who declined. (4) Princess Louise of Prussia (1838-1923), future mother of Princess Victoria of Baden, but she too engaged to another.

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Princess Sophie Vilhelmina Marina Henriett of Nassau was the daughter of William I, Duke of Nassau (1792-1839) and his consort in the 2nd marriage Princess Pauline of Württemberg (1810-1856). She was born at the castle of Biebrich, Nassau on July 9, 1836, the youngest of eight siblings. She spent her youth in nearby Wiesbaden. There is an anecdote:

At the time it was considered good for your health, if you every morning had a significant quantity of oatmeal gruel, which the princess intensely disliked. This always took place at 8 a.m., and she always protested it. The good burghers in Wiesbaden knew that even princesses are not spared the sufferings of this world. When the clock hit 8, they used to say: 'Es ist acht Uhr. Jetzt schreit die Prinzessin! (It's 8 o'clock. Now screams the princess!)'⁴

Her mother gave her a, for the times, thorough schooling with emphasis on language, history, music, drawing & painting. She particularly appreciated travelogues. To be alone, she used to hide in the library or climb a tree. Her governess, Miss Hessel, was German but had spent several years in England. Sophie spent time with some English families, which aroused her interested in the English language and culture. In addition, she was drilled in the necessary conduct of princesses such as good posture, good language & avoiding controversial subjects. Here's how it sounded in Sophie's 1850 paper on the subject "The importance of being careful when you speak":

"Although," it says, "we shall not let fear or other reasons dissuade us from speaking, on what pertains to the general good or the good of our friends, but we must not give our tongue a free run, for however important the truth, there are considerations:

1:o *for ourselves*: 1. We shall avoid regrets; 2. We shall avoid the bad habit of speaking ill of others; 3. We shall keep our good name and reputation; 4. We shall avoid untruths.

2:o *for others*: 1. We shall preserve other peoples good name and reputation; 2. We shall not harm other peoples plans and interests."⁵

Another essay that year had the topic "About Truth":

"Truth," she says, "is a virtue granted us by heaven, and it is our supreme duty to pursue it. But if we want truth, we must also learn to be true to ourselves and let the light of reason enter our spirit, neither to be deceived from within or from without. Let truth come from the heart. Fear & duplicity is the enemy. Let truth prevail, but also love and kindness."⁶

⁴ Melander 1914: s. 30; Knagg 1932: s. 107; Riiber 1959: s. 5; Ulfsäter-Troell 1999; ss. 223-224.

⁵ Melander 1914: s. 27.

⁶ Melander 1914: s. 101.

Sophie had difficulty finding a balance in a court environment, where it was a question of socializing with 3-, 5- or 800 thin-skinned underlings, without losing your soul. In such an environment wisdom was rather “Truth is a weapon. Use it with discretion”. In fact, everything that Sophie was taught seems intended to armour her against the vicissitudes of life. Her Christianity was not to teach her humility but for support: In prosperity wisdom, in adversity strength. The gymnastics was of the military kind: Long walks, riding & fencing. Fear was banned. Her habits simple.

The troubles of 1848 she studied from the balcony, but was too young to understand what was going on. In 1853 she was confirmed and then spent six months at the Russian court in Saint Petersburg, at the invitation of her aunt. During her stay her piano performance greatly improved by the teaching of none other than Anton Rubenstein. She also received riding lessons. The idea seems to have been to get any of Tsar Nicholas I's sons interested in her but the Crimean War got in the way. Little is known about the next two years. Her mother had tuberculosis, spent time in spas, but died on July 7, 1856. Sophie stayed with her half-sister Marie of Nassau-Weilburg, Princess of Wied. The home was a liberal waterhole where guests discussed the politics & life issues of the time: Parliamentaryism, the cultural struggle between Catholics & Protestants, press censorship, etc. Sophie was full of liberal reform ideas. The siblings jokingly called her “our democratic sister”.⁷ A digression:

The Duchy of Nassau was created in 1806 by Napoleon as part of the Rhine Confederation and 1815-1866 belonged to the German Confederation. It consisted of nine enclaves, former mini-states, who all jealously guarded what remained of self-government. A Swedish description at the time of the wedding: “Since 1815, the Nassau constitution is based on the old Estates, now divided into two chambers, which initially sought to oppose the duke, but now are complete nullities. Because the duke's government declared the states the private property of the ruling family, the Estates refused to grant some of the taxes and continued so stubbornly until the government, by increasing the number of votes of the Lords, and by prosecuting the recalcitrants, enforced its will. [In 1849, Nassau was granted a liberal constitution with a single chamber, elected by universal suffrage, but this was revoked as early as 1851 by the Duke, who then continued his reactionary politics.] Since then, subservience has been the rule, or as the present Duke at one point during the marriage ceremony expressed it, “the faithful German heart has returned to the fold.”⁸

As Sophie's father was dead, her half-brother Adolf Wilhelm, then Grand Duke of Nassau, was her guardian. He was eager to rid himself of his “democratic sister”. Not easy though. She is said to have rejected several perfectly acceptable suitors, but sources are missing. Nothing is known about her feelings for Oscar, but they had similar political inclinations – reform rather than putting the lid on. Apparently it was also a marriage of convenience on her side. The alternative was, like her mother, to ambulate between the regional courts. She didn't have enough money of her own.

On the day of the marriage vows, a long poem was distributed by one of Oscar's Uppsala acquaintances, Herman Bjursten, listing what was required of a Swedish-Norwegian princess in these “temps du loupe”. Stanza eight of the 12 is often quoted:

Weak must not be this Nordic woman,

⁷ Barometern, 1887-01-26, s. 2.

⁸ Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning, 1857-06-06, bihang, sida 5.

a plaything or frisky child,
nor decked in purple garlands
vainglorious or faint of heart.
She must not fade, she must not fold
but Stures widow follow
in danger is no time for play,
but vigorous action, manly deeds.⁹

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There are four longer biographies (Melander 1914; Nyström 1943; Riiber 1959; Eimer 2003) and 28 obituaries, short biographies, memories & the like (Almén 1893; NFB 1891; Tschudi 1898: ss. 169-182; Beyer 1901: ss. 135-145; Segerström 1914; Åkerman 1914; NFB 1917; Cronstedt 1939; Olsson 1939; Raw lamb 1939; Lande & Gran 1945: ss. 244-245; Nerman m.fl. 1952: ss. 361-363; Jansen 1962; Ohlmarks 1973: ss. 144-145; Elgklou 1978: ss. 69...136; Lagerqvist 1979: ss. 68-89; Sehlstedt 1981: ss. 44-65; Elgklou 1995: ss. 140-142; Heymovski 1995: Page 41; Ulfsäter-Troell 1996: ss. 219-284; Dahlberg 1999: ss. 128-130; Grundberg 1999: ss. 128-130; Nevéus 2003; Sundberg 2004: ss. 234-236; Bratberg 2005; Lindqvist 2006: ss. 436-456; Bloom 2009: ss. 102-105; Norlin 2015: ss. 104-109). Adds some special studies (Knagg 1932: ss. 94-120; Österlin 1947: ss. 59-63; Nilbratt 2005; Dahlström 2006: ss. 76-121; Rangström 2010: ss. 334-345). Of course she also appears in letters, diaries & memories (Dardel 1911; af Edholm 1944). Since Sophie had her archives burned, the information about her person is predominantly from her later years. The early biographies are written by fellow religious believers and are arranged as legends of saints - 1. life, 2. virtues, 3. miracles. The later biographies are modernized equivalents: Upbringing (1836/57), family life (1857/72), religion, sickness, suffering, good deeds & death (1872/13). This biography has more of her person, ideology & career.

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June 19, 1857, Sophie arrived in Stockholm and was accommodated in Oscar's palace at Gustaf Adolf's torg. Then followed a whole summer of bigger and smaller parties. Sophie impressed with her piano playing and her Swedish. Fritz von Dardel noted her "blue, easily veiled and somewhat phlegmatic eyes". Sophie was rather short-sighted. As a junior princess, she was expected to comply with Dowager Queen Desirée, Queen Josephine and Crown Princess Louise in that order. Sophie had difficulties adapting to Oscar I's French-Swedish court culture, but she socialized with Louisa, who shared her dislike. "When you hear them speaking, you might almost think that there was not a single lady at court, whose reputation is spotless, except for Queen Josephine, Princess Eugenie and a couple more."¹⁰ The first two years the etiquette was supervised by lady of the robe Countess Wilhelmina "Myna" Bonde (1817-1899), who may well be regarded as Sophie's court mentor. She cultivated her political interests through Oscar, dinner discussions with politicians, reading newspapers and attending the Parliamentary debates. Sophie has later been presented as humble & pliable but not in the beginning. In June 1860 she joined Louise for a spa visit in Ems, Nassau, where Louise was to meet her parents & Sophie her family – the Grand Duke Adolf, half-sister Marie (Princess of Wied) & their daughter Elisabeth (later Queen of Romania).¹¹ Her intimate acquaintances

⁹ Bjursten 1857.

¹⁰ Riiber 1959: s. 41.

¹¹ Eimer 2003: s. 70.

were mainly her German family & her childhood friends, but they died away. Melander 1914 refers to a later acquaintance Bertha von Preen (1863-1945).

The pregnancies came in quick succession: Gustaf (1858-1950), Oscar (1859-1953), Carl (1861-1951) & Eugene (1865-1947). At least Gustaf was breastfed, which caused a certain amount of attention. She is said to have suffered from anemia due to her pregnancies, but it has not been possible to verify. Between the autumn of 1861 and August 1862, she and Oscar spent a year in Nice. Oscar held court & so probably did Sophie. She and her friends met each year in spas around Europe. In the summer of 1863, she left her children to her half-sister Marie and continued to a spa in Kreuth, Bavaria. In 1864, she and Oscar with her money acquired a summer residence in Scania, renamed Sofiero, which the following years - as it seems on her initiative - was rebuilt into a small castle in Dutch Renaissance style.¹² Sophie was very active in the work:

It is now a completely established fact, that Skabbelycke by purchase passed to H.R.H. The Duke of Ostrogothia (or formally correct: to H.H.R. The Duchess). ... The Duchess of Ostrogothia as the future chatelaine of Skabbelycke, supposedly shows much interest in her new possession and is responsible for much of the building's transformation and expansion. She has even been seen climbing the scaffolds to get a better look at the surroundings.¹³

By its proximity to Denmark Sofiero competed brother Charles Bäckaskog - which perhaps was the idea - and the Danish royals often visited. Sophie spent most of her time with the children. Most talked about was that from 1869 she let them switch between individual teaching at the castle & class teaching at the Beskow school. This has been interpreted as a sign of Sophie's democratic spirit, but seems to have been due to her pedagogical adviser Carl Erik Johan Rogberg (1829-1905), who was worried about the social development of the children.¹⁴ For the rest, Sophie followed Oscar in his representation. She is said to have influenced his view of Germany during these years, but it is not clear how, in addition to his marriage, it gave him the opportunity to meet with and exchange letters with politicians of the German Confederation on a first name basis. When Prussia intervened in the Dano-German War in 1864, Oscar was very upset. But when it annexed Nassau in 1866, he had no objection. Sophie, however, was loyal to her family. Sture Waller has compiled the available information:

Although his marriage to Princess Sophie of Nassau in 1857 may not have been decisive in his attitude to Germany and the German problems, it should have helped to consolidate and deepen the relationship he already had, by him acquiring personal relationships which he previously lacked. The marriage brought him straight into the German Moderate National camp.

The bride belonged to a politically divided family. The reigning half-brother Duke Adolf was conservative and remained faithful to Austria until the end. The uncle Prince Niklas, on the other hand, is said to have been a supporter of the so-called little German idea [the unification of Germany under Prussia] and at least had more liberal views on internal political issues than the half brother. More important was, that Sophies half sister, the princess of Wied, with whom she had stayed after the death of

¹² Gierow 1965; Donelius 2005.

¹³ Orvar Odd. En lite utflyckt till "Skabbelycke". Aftonbladet, 1864-09-29, ss. 2-3.

¹⁴ Söderberg 1951.

her mother, also had liberal, little Germany views. Apparently, Sophie shared the political views of the foster home.

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As much as Princess Sophie may have sympathized with German Unity, she was still extremely upset about the Prussian annexation of Nassau. According to Prince Eugene, she could never overcome this bitterness. For the time immediately after the event, it is fully corroborated by a previously unknown correspondence between her consort and [Foreign Minister] Manderström in the summer of 1867.

The Duke and Duchess then planned a trip abroad, and a visit to Berlin, but the princess did not want to meet the Prussian royals after what happened. Oskar, who had already a year earlier stated that it was impossible to bring the politically dead to life, apparently found his consort's attitude questionable, but Manderström believed that no reasonable objection could be raised if the journey continued after only one night's break. »The fact that a princess, whose loved ones have fallen victim to circumstances, does not wish to worship such divinities is only Devine justice.« The quote should adequately clarify both the princess' and Manderström's conception of Prussian politics in 1866. It is therefore true that the change in Oskar's opinion may not have been due to Sophie. But contrary to her views.¹⁵

Sophie, despite her dislike of Prussia, had no sympathy for France during the war of 1870/71, nor did she wish to see the independence of Nassau returned. The unification of Germany was for her the most important thing, but she would have preferred it to have take place peacefully. She hoped that over time Prussia would be absorbed into a larger whole.

In Nassau Sophie was interested in religious issues but primarily from an ecumenical angle. In Sweden she was assumed to be a pietistic reader in the spirit of Carl Olof Rosenius (1816-1868) since she sympathized with his creation the Evangelical Fatherland Foundation (EFS). Founded in 1856, it was based on the same Evangelical Lutheran foundation as the State Church, but emphasized layman commitment, an individual position on faith and that this should have consequences in daily life. For Sophie, this meant simplicity & charity. The chronology of her involvement is difficult to unravel, but in 1858 she founded a protective society according to the German model, in 1859 an orphanage & in 1860 a home for the reintegration of female prisoners. The protective association was most talked about. It consisted of "protective wives" making house visits and in the process determining the needs of the poor, primarily of clothing. The association then bought them at the cheapest possible price and allowed the poor to use them while paying in instalments. Until 1866, the system was extended so that each parish had its own protective society, which were coordinated through the General Protective Association with Sophie in the lead.

Sophie's pietistic sympathies were given an outlet in the association "Friends of Simplicity". The association never got over the planning stage but some of the statutes were:

1. Simple dresses, especially outdoors; Swedish goods; If they are beautiful and tasteful enough, reuse the dresses; Avoid extremes of fashion;
2. At dinner parties never serve more than six dishes;
3. Avoid down payment; Always pay cash;
4. Be a role model for simplicity as a way of life;¹⁶

¹⁵ Waller 1959: ss. 14,29-30.

¹⁶ Melander 1914: s. 85.

She also supported EFS. In 1859, after the Conventicle Act was repealed, member of EFS Gustaf Beskow applied to build a church. In 1864 he bought the land for what was to become the Blasieholm Church. This was no an architectural masterpiece, rather reminiscent of Tegnér's barns, but could accommodate 3,000 people. The first service was held on January 12, 1868. The church was not attached to any particular congregation, but was literally ecumenical. Sophie is said to have contributed a considerable sum. Although she put her children in Beskow's school, she seems to have had no personal contact with him until much later. Neither did she visit his church.

Oscar was not a religious man but kept his cool even when Sophie considered balls & theatres unduly worldly pursuits. When she did not appear, the surroundings suspected it was because Oscar was unfaithful with any of these society ladies & actresses who surrounded him but that has never been proven. The conflict between Charles XV and Oscar also isolated her from the rest of the court. The depictions 1866-1872 are quite hostile. For example: "Often [Oscar during his walks] was accompanied by the little duchess – sporting a half-open mouth, pincené and a very large crinoline - hanging by the arm of her consort, not unlike an embroidered bag or *réticule*. A miserable sight."¹⁷

Sophie's charity through proxy was not very popular, despite its effectiveness. The receiving side would have liked to a more motherly, empathic & sociable queen: "For example, this Christmas the Duchess of Dalarna invited a number of charity cases to a coffee party; She participated herself, bringing whole baskets of coffee bread, to the unspeakable delight of the invited women. It is her way of exercising charity, as well as the deceased queen's [Louise]; but each to his own, even royals."¹⁸

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After the coronation, Sophie's health took a turn for the worse. The reason is disputed. According to Sophie, her troubles began in 1874 and first manifested itself as a growing weakness. In the summer of 1875 she visited a spa in Marienbad. Her evil "is considered to consist in a fat formation around the heart, which is associated with swelling and already forces her to be carried in the stairs. She will stay indoors this winter and take her walks indoors in the White sea, which will previously be aerated."¹⁹ In the spring of 1876, the symptoms worsened and she had intense headaches. A German specialist Nikolaus Friedrich (1825-1882) was employed who, after a lengthy examination, "with the utmost firmness [claimed] that there was nothing wrong with the Queen's heart, but the whole evil consists of wrecked nerves, which will slowly improve, and he demands that she be outdoors starting in December, which is also the intention."²⁰ Come Autumn 1876 Sophie was said to be "decidedly better. It is now said to appear small knots on all the muscles, which Friedrich considers as proof of his assertion that the evil is in the nerves and not in the heart; while Malmsten and Abelin still just as firmly state, that the fault is in the heart."²¹ 1877 she was on the mend. "I seems now established that the Swedish doctors are mistaken in their assertion that she suffers from a heart condition."²²

¹⁷ Wrangel 1927: s. 258.

¹⁸ Svenska Medborgaren, okänt datum; Dalpilen 1872-11-09, s 2.

¹⁹ De Geer 1929: s. 134. [Brev från De Geer till Sibbern 1875-11-22.]

²⁰ De Geer 1929: s. 145. [Brev från De Geer till Sibbern 1876-09-03.]

²¹ De Geer 1929: ss. 149-150. [Brev från De Geer till Sibbern 1876-10-10.]

²² De Geer 1929: s. 164. [Brev från De Geer till Sibbern 1877-07-27.]

In 1878/79 there is no information, but in 1880 her condition again worsened. “The convulsions have been so painful, that her loud wailing can be heard from far away; she who for years had suffered in quiet was no longer able. A couple of times the hands, following these violent cramp, have for several days been so constricted, that when she was to eat her meals, she literally has to be fed.”²³ - “It might be indiscreet to speak about it; but as proof of how violent are the cramps, from which the queen suffers, can be mentioned, that the feet [hands?] are literally folded double, the nails penetrate the skin and she has a couple of times received surgery.”²⁴ September & October 1880 Sophie spent six weeks in Amsterdam for massage by J G Mezger. In the autumn of 1882 and spring of 1887, she again got worse. The treatment was rest & isolation. In the autumn of 1882, she spent time at the Hook Sanatorium in Småland. After 1887, the cramps decreased in frequency & strength. In 1887, she had a tumour on her womb and had to undergo further surgery.

Attempted diagnosis: Sophie's convulsion appears to have been tonic (=persistent) rather than clonic (=convulsions), in everyday speech a pull (ICD-10 code R25.2). This can be due to muscle fatigue, fluid or mineral deficiency, or hormonal disorders. Friedrich believed in anemia or a psychogenic cause. The pain & that the muscles felt knotty were, according to him, secondary symptoms and due to overwork. It is hypothesized that as part of her religious practice, Sophie stayed an unhealthy diet and, according to contemporary medical practice, was recommended rest instead of exercise. The wrecking of Sophie's nerves has never been satisfactorily explained. The usual explanation is Oscar's infidelity, but that has not been verifiable. The alternative explanation is that Sophie was long criticized for her conduct as Queen of Sweden. A motherly, empathetic and sociable queen was expected. Instead they got a public health bureaucrat & religious zealot.

As Sophie was only partially fit for work and had difficulty moving around, she was completely dependent on her ladies-in-waiting. The three best known were Ebba von Rosen (1833-1882; employed 1865-1882), Märtha Eketrä (1851-1894; employed (1872-1894) & Marie- Louise Burén (1854-1917; 1895 g. af Segerström). Eketrä was Sophie's confidant and intermediary in sensitive matters. Burén was her adviser on charity issues and “executive power”.

During the convalescence, Sophie became interested in religion. In Heidelberg in 1876, she was influenced by the evangelist and court preacher Emil Frommel (1828-1896). In the autumn of 1878, the English evangelist and lecturer Lord Radstock (1833-1913) visited Stockholm on the way back from his actual mission in Saint Petersburg. Reverend Gustaf Beskow gave him a place to preach in the Blasieholm Church. The response was so great that Radstock lingered over the winter. He held private meetings including at the castle with Princess Eugenie & her circle. The first meeting between him and Sophie was on November 21. Oscar, Sophie, the princes and courtiers participated. Several such meetings took place. No trace of Sophie's possible religion has been preserved, but her interest contributed to the general Radstock craze, which lasted until the 1890s.²⁵

The biggest effect of her religious “revival” was that she the following year began attending Princess Eugénie conventicles. Through them, she made personal contact with the leaders of the EFS, mainly Gustaf Beskow (1834-1899), Peter Fjellstedt (1802-1881) and Bernhard

²³ Upsala 1880-09-21, s 2.

²⁴ Borås Tidning 1880-09-14, s 3.

²⁵ Österlin 1947: ss. 59-63.

Wadström (1831-1918). Beskow had, as previously mentioned, made a name for himself as the founder of Blasieholmskyrkan & the Beskow school. Fjellstedt was known for his missionary work. Wadström as a publicist. Beskow & Wadström became Sophie's "spiritual advisers". The court employees found the revivalist atmosphere very unpleasant and there were many stories about how Sophie exploited her position to oust the recalcitrant:

Few people have been so distrusted by the public as Queen Sophie. She has been portrayed in the press as a harsh, fanatical and bigoted woman, unable to show the simplest humanity. Many stories have, thanks to printers ink, seen daylight and are now widely disseminated. She has become unpopular.²⁶

The Queen, a very respectable, very strict and very pious lady, is supposed to be more feared than loved. She counts as her closest supporters, those Protestant hypocrites who value her replacing the former frivolity of the Swedish court by a serious pious spirit. Whoever now wants to make a career as a courtier, has to visit some fashionable preacher, listen to the unadorned words of God, conduct himself in the proper manner, viz. move slowly and with lowered eyes utter mournful sighs over the sinfulness of his dear fellow men. Even the king's aides and general staff now hold bible studies as more important than their war science. Queen Sophie can thus be satisfied with her godly activities, mainly targeted at the upper classes. At the Swedish court, prayers are more common than kisses.²⁷

The Queen's real head of court is Reverend Beskow and all his light extinguishing underlings. ... However much one may esteem the Queen's really solid qualities - one can no less than regret that she, who should be the Queen of all, now only is Queen for a fraction of the population.²⁸

Sophie's reputation has also been tarnished by her supposed initiative to charge the author Strindberg for subverting morals, later interpreted as an attack on the labour movements fellow travellers, where she and her revivalist cohorts were believed to have persuaded Oscar. However, no proof of this has ever been found.²⁹ The Sophie-friendly version was:

In fact, the Queen did not know anything about the Strindberg indictment, before it was already decided in the Cabinet. On the same day, Attorney General v. Steyern invited the royal family to dinner. At the table he told them what the government had decided.

- The Queen meant this was the wrong way to go. You cannot use carnal tools to quench the spirit. It will end badly.

And so it did!³⁰

Regardless of her morality and religion, Sophie dressed in style. There is a description from an official dinner in 1884:

The Queen wore a low-necked dress. It was a richly coloured silk, garnished with flowers, and covered by Spanish lace. The mantilla was fastened in the back and fell in pleasant folds down to the trailer. This seemed to shift in all colours of the

²⁶ Barometern 1887-01-26, s 2.

²⁷ Borås Tidning 1887-08-09, s 3. [Resebrev i Wien-tidningen "Neue Freie Presse".]

²⁸ Fleetwood 1968: s. 776. [1888-01]

²⁹ Michanek 1979: ss. 317-319.

³⁰ Barometern 1887-01-26, s 2.

rainbow, as the attached silk ribbons fluttered for every step, her majesty took. A diadem of brilliants glittered on the Queen's forehead, and a narrow diamond studded velvet band enveloped her neck, the diamonds being arranged into a royal emblem. Along the bodice was another eight or ten diamonds of unusual size. Diamonds sparkling wherever you looked: in the hair, on the chest and in bundles on the dress.³¹

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As queen Sophie founded further associations for charity and social work. At the death of Princess Eugénie in 1889, she took over the responsibility of some of her associations. Best known is her contribution to modernizing the nursing education. From young age, she had been fascinated by Florence Nightingale's work on health and education reform. In May 1881, she paid a study visit to the Nightingale Nursing School, St Thomas Hospital, London. On January 1, 1884, she founded the "Home for Nurses" where four young Christian women of good family were educated at her expense as "Sophie Sisters". The credo was that love & dedication was more important than insights & skills. They practised at Sabbatsberg Hospital but their ideas were opposed. On December 14, 1887, Sophie laid the foundation stone for a hospital of her own, "Sofiahemmet". The Sophie sisters' attitude to the profession, a calling rather than a way of making a living, lasted into the 1970s. In practice it meant, as for the female teachers, not to marry.³²

Sofiahemmet consists of two main buildings; One, built at the expense of the king and the queen, houses the hospital itself, the other, built with funds collected from different quarters, contains the nursing home etc. The Queen is chairman of the home's board and takes a very active part in all that concerns this loving creation of hers. Among the many other charities, for which the Queen is the guardian, are: Stockholm Public Protection Association, Crown Princess Louise's institution for sick children, Society for the Same Mission, Society for the Establishment of Children's Schools, Association of the Red Cross, the Eugenia Foundation, Kristiania Children's Home and the Samaritan Association in Kristiania.

On several occasions, she has led charitable rescue operations, such as in connection with the fires in Norrland in 1888 and the terrible storms affecting fishermen in the North Lands in 1882. She has always been ready to assist philanthropic institutions of various kinds. It is well known that in her usual calm and unpretentious way she often does so with go between.³³

She read a lot. On a visit to France in 1888, she was described as follows: "The Queen is a brilliant woman. She reads a lot and already in the morning starts studying all kinds of European newspapers in the original language, most cursory Italian, and in the afternoon she reads requests, letters and newly published books."³⁴ Sophie's library contained books in nine languages and various genres, mainly English & German fiction from classics to Nick Carter, biographies, travelogues & history. She also had much edifying, women's, debating and non-fiction literature about health and prison care.³⁵ She is said to have subscribed to twenty Swedish & foreign daily newspapers.

³¹ Thomas 1891: ss. 350-351.

³² Nilsson 1939; Bohm 1961: ss. 28-33.

³³ Almén 1893: ss. 268-269.

³⁴ Le Figaro, 1888-02-05; Svenska Dagbladet 1888-02-09.

³⁵ Dahlström 2006: ss. 76-121.

She read newspapers *en masse*: Always Times and a German newspaper, and so Swedish and Norwegian of all varieties and colours. After reading a newspaper, she threw it on the floor and took a new one. “When you approached her,” someone said, “it was to wade through a sea of newspapers.” Chamberlain Malmqvist had to pick them up. But when he got old, he got stiff in the back. He couldn't cope with it any more, because there was no end to it.³⁶

Sophie is said to have had an influence on Oscar's politics, but it has been impossible to find any concrete proposals from her side. Those quoted are all of the “do nothing” & “wait and see” variety. Birgitta Eimer calls her biography “Eine Königin macht Politik”, but Sophie did not. Not in the way that Eimer & others put it anyway: As if Sophie through her advice or knowledge, being a power behind the throne. There is absolutely no evidence of that. Her biographer Erik Melander expresses it as:

It has been widely held that Queen Sophie through her political connections and good sense contributed to the peaceful ending of the union [between Sweden and Norway]. I think people are on the wrong track.

The Queen was not a political personality. Not in that sense anyway. She only wanted those responsible to take all factors into account, and consider them calmly one by one. No one should intervene in the decision except those responsible.³⁷

To the extent Sophie did politics it was through her representation & conduct. Her “Norwegian policy” 1888-1905 was her spending most of her summer months in Norway and having documented good relations with the Norwegian politicians. Perhaps it had some effect, perhaps not. She seems to have found the Norwegian revolutionary mood incomprehensible. Prince Carl often heard her say to her Norwegian friends: “There is, however, something higher than the national!” She mainly considered Norway a family matter. We must avoid the Union's conflicts becoming the family's too. There is a clarifying letter from her son Prince Carl regarding the Union crisis of 1895. Having warned her against concessions, he writes:

Now I have done my duty and written openly and unequivocally whether Mom considers herself having need of this or not. No matter. But since Mom has a great influence on Dad, Mom has a corresponding responsibility, and it is probably because of this Mom, so far at least, has willingly heard me and others out.

But there is also another reason for my sincerity in this letter, and that is that Gustaf is of the same opinion, but in a much sharper form, and has the same fears, and with him this is dangerous, because before Mom can imagine it, the family unity may suffer a shipwreck, and to which calamities this can lead I do not need to tell you. Beware of one-sided emotional politics, I beg Mom seriously. And don't forget that twice the Swedish Councillor by threat of resignation can be said to have saved the family's position in Sweden.³⁸

During her lifetime, there were many theories about Sophie's agenda. She was supposed to be more ideological or political than she was. Until 1945, it is difficult to distinguish her from her curriculum vitae. She is what she does. Later depictions erase her CV - leaving little to be portrayed. She becomes - somewhat contradictory - both a political activist & a victim of the

³⁶ Melander 1914: ss. 135-136.

³⁷ Brev från prins Carl till drottning Sophie, Stockholm den 26/3 1895, Prins Carls saml., BFA. I: Weibull 1960: ss. 177-178.

³⁸ Brev från prins Carl till drottning Sophie, Stockholm den 26/3 1895, Prins Carls saml., BFA. I: Weibull 1960: ss. 177-178.

Patriarchate. However, there is a quote about her 1848 ideology: "I very well know, that it is only a matter of time, when the constitutional kingdom is to be succeeded by the Republic; however, we must keep its dignity high, as long as it exists!"³⁹

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The Norwegians had a more sceptical attitude. As it seems based on her initiative *Queen Sophie's Association to support the [Swedish] Army and Navy medical care* (SF). The organization was founded in 1900 as a protest against the *Association for Voluntary Care of Wounded and Sick in the Field* (SRK) which, as a Red Cross organization, had an international, not a *Swedish* focus. There is some confusion as to who took the initiative. According to Zalewski, SF came close to being a family business: Oscar II took the initiative, his son Gustaf V was chairman & Sophie protected the organization. The association gained much publicity and quickly grew to be larger than the original association SRK.⁴⁰ (For the fate of Sophie's association see chapter 51.)

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In 1911, the journalist Eira Hellberg also interviewed Sophie:

Her Majesty speaks of her visiting the airport and witnessing Baron Cederström's ascents.

»I'm often sick,» says the Queen, »and I can't often be out there, but it was very fun and interesting. It is a great invention which the future will have to take on. It is extraordinary what progress transport has reached. When I think of Stockholm, what it was when I came here, I have to say that the city's entire look is changed. And not only that, but the moors and the feel are all different.

One thing which has thus changed - and I am pleased that this has happened - is everything that has been done for the education of women. It started with the teacher seminar of the 60s and then the development has gone astonishingly fast. I believe that Sweden is now really ahead of many countries when it comes to the education of women and the use of women in the public and cultural service. And further I am pleased that women can get involved in all work without losing social prestige.

But what makes me sad is that the industry devours so many women. It would be better for the future of both the women's cause and the country if domestic work could keep them. Why do they not want to be handmaids?

I am very interested in the housewife schools, but I would have liked the young girls, when they leave these schools, not to immediately become independent and work in a factory. One or two year as a servant of a good housewife would develop their character more and teach them to become good wives in due course. At the factory they will forget what they have learned, and when they come into their own they will have little use of what they remember. I keep saying that woman's place is in the home. Good mothers, that is what Sweden needs most of all. For on them depends the coming generation and on them the fate of the nation.»⁴¹

Two years later, on December 30, 1913, she was dead. Her son Eugene commented on her obituaries with: "There has been much written about the Queen after her death. But I don't

³⁹ Barometern 1887-01-26, s 2.

⁴⁰ Zalewski, 1999: ss. 263-265.

⁴¹ Jaya 1913: ss. 24-26.

think I've seen pointed out that she was a very happy & content person. That was the case. The Queen was a very happy & content person.”

* * *

Legacy

In 2021, the former superintendent at the Royal Household Chamber Carin Bergström published a biography. Bergström had access to the Bernadotte archive, but since Sofia burned her personal papers, little new material emerged. The work was also interrupted by the pandemic. Sofia's socializing, charity & trips abroad are better described than I managed to do. However, her person, medical history & court life is more cursory. As it seems because Bergström has avoided criticizing the object. My own interpretation is that Sofia, who until the coronation had lived a quiet life, could not handle the consequences of her new official role.