

ODD CHARACTERS.

A GALLERY OF ECCENTRIC WOMEN.

By NANETTE MASON.

I.—CHRISTINA, QUEEN OF SWEDEN.



THE bells of Stockholm one morning in the winter of 1626 announced the birth of an heir to the crown of Sweden. The king—Gustavus Adolphus, the hero of Protestantism in the Thirty Years' War—had wished for a son to succeed him, and the whole nation earnestly desired that a son it might be. The stars had been questioned on the subject by the astrologers, whose science was held in great veneration in those days, and the response had led everyone to expect that this universal wish would be realised. But everybody was disappointed: it proved to be a daughter.

When Gustavus, holding the little girl in his arms, presented her to his Ministers, he said—"I hope she will be worth even more than a boy: she will without doubt be very clever, for she has already deceived us all."

She was baptised under the name of Christina; and, to make up as far as possible for the disappointment of his hopes, the king resolved to give her such an education as would develop a masculine disposition. To this education may be attributed many of the singularities which she afterwards displayed.

When she was scarcely two years old her father took her one day to Calmar. The commander of the fortress there omitted to fire the usual royal salute, and the king, on asking the reason, was told that it was for fear of disturbing the princess. "Fire away!" said Gustavus: "the daughter of a soldier ought to be accustomed to the use of arms!" If he had not died so soon after this, Christina would not have had occasion to express regret, as she once did, that she had never assisted at a battle.

On the departure of Gustavus for Germany in 1630, an expedition from which he was never to return, he confided his daughter to the care of Oxenstiern, the famous chancellor, charging him to have her instructed in every possible branch of learning, and particularly in Greek and Latin. At the same time he appointed a regency, and, carrying in the little Christina, presented her to the assembled States of the kingdom as their future sovereign.

Gustavus perished in the battle of Lützen in 1632, and Christina thus came to the throne in her sixth year.

The liberal course of education indicated by her father was strictly carried out. She was thoroughly instructed not only in the classical tongues, but in several modern languages. Her head was also stored with information on history, geography, natural science, and almost every subject one could think of. Unfortunately, it was a species of cramming. Her intellect was crowded and oppressed with a mass of knowledge, either half digested or not digested at all.

A good deal of time was devoted to manly exercises. She rode on horseback, hunted, reviewed troops, could drive a sledge with wonderful dexterity, and used—dressed in boy's clothes—to make long pedestrian excursions.

At the council table she displayed a searching wit and a power of reasoning far beyond her years. Oxenstiern himself attended to her education in politics, and from him she received the ablest lessons in statecraft and the

art of government to be had anywhere in Europe at that time. So much confidence was felt in her that when she was sixteen years old she was pressed to enter on the exercise of her duties and privileges as queen regnant. She declined, however, and it was not till two years later that she took up the reins of government.

The eyes of Europe were now upon the young queen, and many princes were eager to enter into a matrimonial alliance with her. Amongst her suitors were the Prince of Denmark, the Elector Palatine, the Elector of Brandenburg, the Kings of Portugal and Spain, and Charles Gustavus, Duke of Deux Ponts, her first cousin. The last was the favourite with the nation, who all wished their sovereign to marry.

But she would have nothing to say to princely wooers, and the reasons for her refusal have been preserved in a number of eccentric speeches. The real motive was her love of independence.

"My ardent and impetuous temperament," she says herself, "is formed as much for affection as for ambition; however, I have always resisted entering on a wedded life through pride, and because I did not wish to come under subjection to anyone." Tired at last of suggestions on the subject, she solemnly appointed Charles Gustavus, her cousin, as her successor; and from that time she was looked upon as having made deliberate choice of a single life.

As a queen she was at first a success, showing great talent and dexterity, and proving herself fully able to conduct the affairs of a powerful kingdom. She knew how to keep her people in order. "It was a wonderful thing," says a Flemish writer of her time, "to see how at the very opening of her mouth every person present trembled. Even the great General Wrangel, who had made all Germany shake in their shoes, was in the presence of this princess as meek as a lamb." She concluded a treaty with Denmark, brought the Thirty Years' War to an end, reformed abuses, filled the treasury, encouraged arts and commerce, and soon had her dominions in a flourishing condition, both within and without.

In the year 1650 she was crowned. It was an affair of more than ordinary splendour and rejoicing. Her subjects, favourably impressed by her doings in the past, had the most enthusiastic hopes for the future.

From this time, however, it was observed that Christina cared less and less for affairs of State, and assumed a philosophic contempt for pomp and parade. She soon developed into a bluestocking of the severest type. Neither time nor money was expended on dress. Her riding-habit a visitor to the Court set down as worth a few shillings. Earrings, bracelets, and such-like ornaments she had none. Her toilet took a quarter of an hour, except on Sundays, when thirty minutes was devoted to it. She combed her hair as a rule once a week, and when her studies were more engrossing than ordinary it was done once a fortnight. Her sleeves and linen were stained with ink, and a rent here and there in her dress was not an uncommon thing. A friend once spoke to her in favour of washing. "Washing!" exclaimed the queen, "that's all very well for people who have nothing else to do."

But, whilst developing some unquently and ridiculous characteristics, she retained not a few good qualities. She hated idleness and idle people. The more she had to do, the better she was pleased. Twelve hours a day

were devoted to study, and sleep was grudged every minute over five hours. No one could accuse her of either sham or hypocrisy, and she carried this characteristic to such an extent, that though she was short of stature she insisted on wearing shoes without heels that she might not seem a hair's breadth higher than the truth.

She was not a woman's woman: far from it. "I have an aversion and an invincible antipathy," she says, "to all that women do and say." Her conversation was very forcible and unfeminine.

The love of intellectual pursuits now appeared to be her ruling passion. She rejoiced in being queen, only that she might act as patroness of learning and learned men throughout Europe. *Savants* of all kinds were invited to her Court, and with them came not a few charlatans, so that she soon found herself surrounded by a picturesque mixture of wisdom and folly. These guests repaid her hospitality by outrageous flattery in poems, letters, and dedications.

The reign of favourites now began. The chief of them was Bourdelot, a French abbé—gossiping, intriguing, and cynical—who pretended to some knowledge of medicine, and resided in the palace in the capacity of physician. He acquired great influence over Christina, and provided her with ill-natured amusement by turning into ridicule her troop of philosophers and men of letters, whose jealousies were incessant. By the natives of Sweden he was intensely disliked, and a plot was laid at last to murder him. He got warning of it, and fled, "carrying with him in coin or plate—national property, too—not less than a hundred thousand crowns."

The welfare of the kingdom began steadily to decline. Public moneys were expended in pensions and presents to the hangers-on of the Royal palace. Christina also spent enormous sums, for a country like Sweden, in buying books, manuscripts, pictures, medals, and miscellaneous curiosities. As an example of her purchases we are told that, having secured some pictures of Titian at extravagant prices, she had them clipped to fit the panels of her gallery.

Her subjects took to murmuring. The waste of money, the patronage of foreigners at the expense of natives, not to speak of other things, excited much ill-feeling, even though the loyal Swedes would have been inclined to pardon much to the daughter of the great Gustavus.

Christina was quick of observation, and soon saw that she had sunk in public estimation. By this time she was weary and disgusted with public affairs, and fretted under what she called the splendid slavery of royalty.

She resolved to abdicate in favour of her cousin, Charles Gustavus. It was the only way, she felt convinced, to indulge her capricious disposition in perfect liberty. Besides, such a step would gratify her vanity; she would, in her own person, provide the world with the extraordinary spectacle of a crowned queen retiring from business.

Her intention was announced in 1652, but, for some reason or other, the States remonstrated, and—yielding to the pressure brought to bear upon her—she continued to reign for two years longer. In 1654 she brought the matter forward again, and insisted on having her own way. "I have made up my mind," she said, "and do not trouble myself to know, nor do I care, what people may say about it."

She stipulated for a guaranteed annual income and certain lands, which she could hold at her own sovereign disposal, and reserved to herself her own independence and absolute authority over all the people in her suite or in her house. A signal proof that she was in earnest was given by her sending out of the kingdom over a hundred cases filled with books, medals, paintings, statues, jewels, gold and silver vases, and rare manuscripts.

The abdication morning was on the 6th of June, 1654. At seven o'clock, for they rose early in those days, Christina appeared before the Senate dressed in white, and wearing all the ornaments of royalty. She sat for the last time on her silver throne, and one of the senators read over the conditions on which she laid down the sceptre.

The emblems of sovereignty were removed from her person by an officer of State—all excepting the crown—and she was left standing in her robe of pure white on the steps of the throne. She removed the crown herself, taking it from her head with apparent composure. Then she delivered her farewell address, speaking with eloquence, though her voice sometimes trembled. Most of those present wept outright.

Her speech at an end, she was conducted by Charles Gustavus to her private apartments. Charles left her at the door, and then went to the cathedral, where he took up the crown which she had laid down. His coronation was rather a tame ceremony, on account of the poverty of the public exchequer.

Christina was now free to do as she pleased, and her first resolve was to take a journey through Europe. She set out, and an early incident in her travels was her arrival at a stream which then separated Sweden from Denmark. Descending from her carriage she made a leap to the opposite bank, exclaiming, "I am free at last, and out of a country to which I hope never to return."

At the first halting-place on foreign soil she quitted the habit of her sex, had her luxuriant tresses cut off, and donned a man's wig. Her valet was loth to use the scissors, but she set his mind at ease. "Do you think," said she, "that when I have just parted with a kingdom I care a straw for a head of hair?"

She called herself Count Dohna. Her dress was that of a French gentleman. She wore the hat and large boots which were then fashionable, her wig was black, and she had a carbine slung over one shoulder and a sword hung from the other. Her novel garb and assumed name were, no doubt, precautions to escape impertinent curiosity, and to avoid any dangers she might incur through travelling with only a small number of attendants. When she got safely within the walls of Antwerp—her first important halting-place—the disguise was laid aside.

By the Spanish authorities at Antwerp Christina was received with every demonstration of goodwill. It was now noticed that she began to be exacting on points of etiquette, to which she had hitherto been perfectly indifferent. The change is explained by one of her biographers. "The reigning queen of a country," he says, "was not likely to receive slights. A wandering queen, without a crown, might not get all the respect which she claimed, and could certainly afford less to overlook any attacks on her dignity."

From Antwerp she proceeded to Brussels, which she entered through a gate where there was a firework display, representing two angels holding between them the name "Christina" encircled with laurels. The city was brilliantly illuminated, and everything was done to make her comfortable. Not knowing, perhaps, that she was above caring for the pleasures of the table, and could be satisfied with a ship biscuit and a bit of tough beef, the hospitable people of Brussels, for her benefit, sent long distances

for veal, fish, mutton, venison, and poultry of every kind.

The night after her arrival in Brussels, Christina privately renounced Lutheranism, and was received into the Roman Catholic Church. When this act became known over the Continent it was much talked about, and all the more so as she had, up to this time, exhibited remarkable indifference to religion. Her change of faith seems to have arisen from no conscientious convictions whatever: it was partly a whim and partly a convenience. She was bound for Italy, and lightly threw overboard the faith in which she had been born and bred, in order that at Rome she might be able to do as the Romans do.

She stayed at Brussels for nine months, leaving it on the 22nd of September, 1655, after a distribution of presents on a scale of reckless extravagance to all who had done her the slightest service.

Her journey southwards was a triumphal progress, and before she was half way to Rome, she was heartily sick of *fêtes*, fireworks, illuminations, triumphal arches, and long-winded addresses. At Innsbruck she made the first public confession of her belief in the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. This was done at the Franciscan Church, which she attended dressed in plain black silk, and wearing the solitary ornament of a splendid diamond cross.

She entered Rome on horseback with all the air of a conquering hero, and was welcomed with enthusiasm by enormous crowds of people. Everyone was in holiday attire, the streets were hung with garlands, and grotesque doings, from morning till night, celebrated the arrival of this illustrious and eccentric convert.

After being confirmed and baptized as Alexandrina by Pope Alexander VII., the ex-queen settled down as tenant of the Farnese Palace. Here we soon find her the centre of a large circle of artists, authors, philosophers, and scientific mountebanks. Her time was spent in study, correspondence, and the examination of the antiquities of the neighbourhood, which her extensive reading enabled her fully to appreciate.

Considerable attention was given to modern art. An anecdote worth repeating is told about a visit she paid one day to the studio of the sculptor Bernini, who was then in the height of his fame. He had just finished a statue of Truth, which Christina admired immensely. She exclaimed several times, "Ah! how beautiful!"

"Heaven be praised," said a cardinal, who accompanied her, "that your majesty loves the truth, which personages of your rank seldom care about!"

"That is likely enough," replied Christina, "because the truth is not always of marble."

She gave some trouble to her new friends. "The newly-caught lamb," says Dr. Doran, "was rather difficult to manage." Ill-feeling sprang up between her and her attendants; then she thought herself slighted by the Roman nobility, who no doubt found her half-civilised ways insupportable. At last she quarrelled outright with some of the cardinals, and found her position in Rome far from comfortable. An excuse was invented for leaving the Eternal City, and off she set on a visit to the Court of France.

Louis XIV., then quite a young man, sent the Duke of Guise to meet her at Marseilles, and from the duke's pen we have a description of her personal appearance:—

"She is not tall," he says, "but well made; her arm is handsome, her hand white and well formed, but more like a man's than a woman's. One shoulder is rather higher than the other; but she conceals the defect so well with her strange dress and movements, that one might make a bet about it. Her face is long, and all her features are strongly marked; her nose

is aquiline, her mouth large but not unpleasant, and her teeth are pretty good.

"Her eyes are beautiful and full of animation. Her complexion is good, and she has an extraordinary headdress. This is a man's wig, made very large and high in front. She wears a great deal of powder, and seldom any gloves. She uses men's boots, and has the voice and manners of a man. She is very polite, and speaks eight languages well, and particularly French, as if she had been born in Paris. She knows more than all our Academy and the Sorbonne put together. She is an admirable judge of paintings and of everything else. She knows more of the intrigues of our Court than I do myself. In fact, she is an extraordinary person. . . . I do not think I have omitted anything from her portrait, except that she sometimes wears a sword and a buff jerkin."

It was in the year 1656 that she entered Paris. She was fairly well received by the Court. Her odd dress and uncured wig, however, gave rise to many a joke, and when she passed through the streets of the capital the Parisians made fun of her, and said she was like "a half-tipsy gipsy." Her coarse manners, too, shocked the ladies. They gave her the cold shoulder; but Christina consoled herself by hobnobbing with authors and philosophers.

Dissatisfied with the impression she had produced, she thought she might do better in England, and so wrote to Cromwell suggesting the possibility of a visit to this country. The Protector had heard too much about her, and in replying gave her no encouragement to come.

Shortly after this, and during her residence at Fontainebleau, she startled the civilised world by a deed of a singularly cold-blooded and unwomanly character. This was the murder—for it was nothing else—of her equerry, Monaldeschi. The reason for taking the life of this unfortunate man is hid in obscurity, but it is generally understood that he had betrayed some secrets entrusted to him.

Monaldeschi was dressed ready to go hunting, when he was summoned into the Galerie des Cerfs, under the famous Galerie de Diane. Letters were shown him, at the sight of which he grew pale. He pled for mercy, but in vain. He fell beneath the daggers of two of Christina's domestics, Christina herself being in an adjoining apartment.

This wicked act, which took place on Saturday, the 10th of November, 1657, at a quarter to four in the afternoon, hastened her departure from France. The Court, though it shut its eyes to what she had done, no longer welcomed her, and as for the people, they looked on her with such abhorrence that for some time Christina hardly dared to show herself abroad.

She returned to Rome early in May, 1658, and busied herself there, as before, with arts and sciences, "filling up her odd moments by writing to Sweden to complain about her annuity, which was paid with great irregularity." Indeed, her Swedish revenues came in so slowly that she was allowed a pension by the Pope. Her capricious temper now showed itself in quarrels with everybody, from the Pope downwards. She felt that she had made a mistake in resigning the Swedish throne, and reflections on that subject did not make her more amiable.

In 1660 Charles Gustavus died, and Christina returned to her native land to see if she could not again get possession of the sceptre. But her old subjects were unfriendly: her change of creed, the murder of Monaldeschi, and her eccentric doings generally had opened their eyes. They supplied her with money more slowly than ever, pulled down her chapel, banished all her Italian chaplains, and made it

quite clear that she was unwelcome even as a visitor. She was compelled to execute another and more binding deed of renunciation, and to return once more to Rome.

About six years afterwards she again set out for Sweden, and on this occasion her reception was even worse. The last spark of national regard for the daughter of Gustavus had died out. She withdrew to Hamburg, and from thence did her best to secure the crown of Poland, then vacant. This brilliant scheme failing, she turned her face towards the sunny south, to establish herself in Rome for the rest of her days.

She lived there for about twenty years after this. Her quarrels were more bitter than ever.

She troubled statesmen by her political intrigues, and puzzled philosophers by asking them questions which they could not answer. The Head of the Church took a paternal interest in her, which she repaid with scorn. She had known four Popes, she said, and only one of them possessed common sense.

For satellites she had a crowd of poets, painters, and learned men of every kind. Amongst them were many "dealers in destiny's dark counsels;" for Christina indulged in dreams of alchemy and judicial astrology. She domineered over her following to the last, and exacted faithful service in the way of additions to her collection—which grew to be a

large one—of books, paintings, and curiosities.

The end came in 1689. She had been for some time seriously unwell, and on the 10th of April of that year her little Court stood round her bed. It was just at noon. As the clock began to strike she turned on her right side, placed her left hand under her neck, and before the last sound of the twelve had died away she was sleeping the sleep of death.

Extraordinary magnificence characterised her funeral rites. She was carried, robed in gold brocade with a white ground, to her last resting-place in St. Peter's, where she now lies under a sonorous epitaph.

(To be continued.)

ONE LITTLE VEIN OF DROSS.

By RUTH LAMB, Author of "Her Own Choice," etc.

CHAPTER VI.

WHO does not know that if anything goes wrong with a heating apparatus, gas-pipes, or electric light, it is certain to be at the worst possible time, and to leave some large assembly in cold or darkness?

The minds of the Longminster authorities had recently been exercised about the warming of the very hall in which that evening's gathering was to take place. The great room not being in very frequent use, some anxiety was felt lest the guests who were to dine in it should suffer from cold. Rather late in the day it had been decided to put down a new heating apparatus. The work of fixing this was only completed a short time before the hall was required for use, and the pipes, which ought long ago to have been diffusing a genial heat through the building, were only beginning to be warm when the guests assembled. To make matters worse, a keen north-east wind lowered the general temperature, and snow began to fall—a change which was the more felt, because the weather had been remarkably mild for the season.

Tom noticed me shivering, and went to the cloak-room for one of the wraps which I had left there. Even this, though lined with soft fur, did not give me a sense of comfortable warmth, and my husband, who was not by my side, looked anxious as he noted my increasing paleness.

I smiled back at him, but I am afraid the effort to look cheerful proved a rather ghastly failure. I tried to swallow a little hot soup, but I felt such a strong disinclination for food in any shape, that, after forcing down a spoonful or two, I gave up the attempt.

Dish after dish was handed. I passed most of them, and when I felt compelled to take a small portion, for fear of exciting observation, I merely toyed with it until the waiter came to remove my plate.

Happily, the old baronet who took me in to dinner was so self-absorbed, and had so much both to say and to eat, that very few words were needed from me. I am sure he did not know whether I had tasted anything, or if my appetite were on a par with his

own, so fully was he occupied in supplying his personal wants or in airing his very decided opinions between the courses.

As a rule I drank no wine, but for once I was thankful to take a little sherry, and by the help of it to force down a morsel of bread, whilst I shivered on my seat, and longed for the meal to come to an end.

There were many complaints about the coldness of the room at first. As the time passed this became mitigated, and in the meanwhile those who were able to enjoy the abundance of good things set before them suffered comparatively little inconvenience from it.

For myself, I hardly knew how the hours went by. I got through the evening in a mechanical fashion, and at length found myself in the carriage, supported by my husband's strong arms, and on the way back to the hotel.

"You have been miserably ill all through this dreadful evening," said Tom. "I have endured a little martyrdom whilst watching your pale, pinched face, so unlike that of my bright Olive. I am determined that a doctor shall see you before I sleep; but I must get you safely to bed first of all, as you are utterly worn out."

I laughed at the idea of my needing medical aid.

"I want nothing but rest," I said. "A good sleep will do more for me than all the medicine in the world. Beside, I cannot part with you, Tom. You must be Bedson's deputy, and hang up my dress, and put away some little matters for me. I am just finding out how unwise it is to boast of one's independence in such things. How often have I told you that a maid was to me a superfluous luxury; but living in society, as I now do, my views in this and other respects are undergoing considerable modification."

"It is a pity you are without Bedson to-night, dear. There is, however, plenty of room for your things to lie about until morning, so I would not trouble about them, though I will do whatever I am told. I am grateful to our landlady for having given us one of her very best rooms, when there was such a run on the place."

I assented; for by this time we were in our own apartment, and its bright appearance and genial warmth were most grateful to me. There was a glowing fire, all that I could possibly require was placed ready to my hand, and my husband removed my wraps and unfastened my dress as deftly as possible.

"You look a little better already," said Tom, as he eagerly scanned my face, to which the glow from the fire and the crimson draperies had imparted a semblance of colour. "I daresay you are right. Warmth and rest will do wonders for you, and if you need medical advice to-morrow, we can get it at Castlemount."

I agreed, and said I should prefer not calling in a stranger, and believed the morning would find me comparatively well.

"I had better unclasp this," said Tom, indicating the diamond necklace. "It is always a little difficult to unfasten. It has come undone quite easily to-night," he added, as he laid the brilliant circlet on the dressing-table. "Surely my mother must have had that clasp repaired lately."

I did not think she had, for it would have been unlike Mrs. Beauchamp to trust such an article to country hands; but I said nothing; I was unequal to much conversation; and Tom laid the ornaments down on the dressing-table without further comment.

"Can I put the diamonds away for you?" he asked, looking round for their cases.

"I will do that," I replied. "I think Bedson put the cases back into my box, that I might know exactly where to find them."

"You must have something hot to take after you lie down," said my husband. "I will run downstairs myself, and ask Mrs. Musgrave what will be the best for you. She is a motherly body, whom I have known all my life, and will be proud to prescribe for my wife."

Away went Tom, and with habitual care I gathered up the diamonds and unlocked my box to find the cases, so that I might put them away at once. This done, I should be ready to step into bed.