

JOHANN STURENSEE.

The tragedy of Sturensee is one of the few romances of Danish history. It occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, rather more than a hundred years after the abdication of Christina of Sweden had attracted attention to the Scandinavian world.

At the time the romance began the King of Denmark was a weak, debauched, dissolute prince of 19. His name was Christian VII; he was a son of his predecessor, Frederick V and of a daughter of George II of England. He cared nothing for public business or his kingly duties; his sole pleasure was sexual delights; his unique occupation was wallowing in unrestrained licentiousness. Horace Walpole described him as "a creature so diminutive that he looked as if he had come out of a kernel in a fairy tale. He is not ill made, though so small, and though his face is pale and delicate it is not at all ugly. He has the sublime strut of a cock sparrow, and his court obey him and bow to him as if his name was Sultan Amurath. He has been mistaken more than once for a girl in boy's clothes."

At the age of 17 this pigmy monarch married his cousin, Caroline Matilda, sister of George III of England, who was then 15. The marriage was performed by proxy, Christian being personated by the Prince who afterward became George III. Caroline was beautiful, accomplished, sprightly, quick-witted and charming. She had been carefully brought up by a tender and judicious mother. She was herself averse to exchanging her pleasant English home for a cold and far-off northern throne but it was explained to her that princesses' marriages were regulated by considerations of state, and she yielded.

She was a fortnight on the voyage to Denmark, and tempestuous weather did not reconcile her to the change in her fortunes. Still, when she met her husband, he was drawn to her by her grace and beauty and modesty, and for a few days the union was happy. But Christian was a coarse and brutal debauchee addicted to behavior which was certain to shock an innocent young girl. A coolness sprang up between the married couple, and the child of fifteen felt herself a widow almost before she was a wife. Christian's tastes led him to throw the handkerchief to the lowest class of women in Copenhagen. He publicly advertised his infatuation for one "Stiefelthekatherine," who was torn from her arms by the police to occupy a cell in the House of Correction. His fickle fancy then turned to a notorious coquette who bore the sobriquet of "M. Day," with her, according to the memoirs of his brother-in-law, the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, the youthful monarch used to make night hideous by scampering through the streets of his capital, breaking lamps, throwing stones into windows and setting the police at defiance.

Fifteen months after the marriage Caroline gave birth to a son. Her husband then resolved to travel, and informed his wife that a due concern for the health of the heir apparent required her to remain at home. He was accompanied by his brother-in-law, the Landgrave, who says of him that he would have been an agreeable companion if he had not been so intolerably lazy and so abominably devoted to women. He was received rather coldly in London, where people annoyed him by inquiring where his wife was; but in Paris which was in plume Regence, he was adored especially by the sisterhood to which Matron Leconte belonged. His conquests in the demimonde could not be counted. The wild hopes which an echevnee Mme. de Flavacourt cherished of playing Pompadour at Copenhagen were a fond delusion, but the monarch himself dreamed of the convenience of a northern Proux Cers. After a time excesses began to tell on him, and his frail constitution refused to bear the strain which he was putting on it. One chronicler describes the appearance of Dr. Sturensee just in the nick of time at Paris to repair the waste of pleasure, but a more authentic account, which Sir James McIntosh follows, states that Christian did not meet Sturensee until he reached Altona on his way home, broken in health and reduced to a wreck by his dissipation.

Sturensee was the son of a bishop, had been an editor, and at this time was a quack doctor, dealing in what would be called in our day, proprietary medicines. He was 27 years of age. He recommended himself to the King by an agreeable exterior, pleasing manners and deep subservience. He knew how to amuse the blase sovereign and to rouse his jaded appetite. He was vain, restless, covetous and personally ambitious; plausible in speech and subtle in intrigue, but entirely devoid of courage or sincerity. He had cherished a dream of going to the East Indies, and raising himself by the ladder of medicine and diplomacy to the rank of Rajah; he affected to regret that these dazzling prospects would have to be relinquished if he had to devote himself to nursing an invalid King. The more reluctance he affected, the more determined grew the monarch to attach him to his person; he offered him a stipend which induced the Altona doctor to become a member of the royal suite. Christian more than kept his promises; on arrival at Copenhagen Sturensee was taken into the palace and appointed a Cabinet Minister. The quack doctor took to public business as if he had been only too glad to throw the cares of royalty upon his shoulders.

Sturensee lost no time in strengthening his position. He appointed himself an earl. He sent for his brother and made him a councillor of State. The King's chief favorite at the time was a Count Holtz, who was the minister of his pleasures. Sturensee made a secret alliance against him with the Queen, who naturally hated Holtz, succeeded in overthrowing him, and replaced him with a Kammerjunker named Brandt, who was recalled from exile to assume the post. He completed his faction by forming a close alliance with General Count Rantzau, a member of one of the most noble families in Holstein; a gallant soldier, but a duelist and a libertine. He had just killed in a duel an injured father, and had driven his wife into a madhouse through the nervous prostration caused by the catastrophe. This man devoted himself to Sturensee's fortunes, and for a time was loyal to him.

These were mere stepping-stones to the high fortune to which the quack doctor aspired. He had been quick to observe

the misery which the King's conduct inflicted on his wife. He was not blind to her charms of face, manner, and mind. He devoted himself to her society and grew to be her inseparable companion. He persuaded her to ride with him at Copenhagen in male costume, which mightily shocked the good burghers' wives. The Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel says in his memoirs that when the court visited his castle, the Queen and Sturensee sat side by side at table, "touching elbows," which was "a shameful sight to see."

Other writers say that Caroline was so modest and virtuous a creature that they could not understand how she could listen to the voice of the seducer. But she was very miserable. No day passed that her husband did not neglect or insult her, while Sturensee was all deference and respectful attention. He whispered into her ear that her only prospect of happiness was in a close union with him for the conduct of the Government, and for the education of her son, and he pointed out to her how the German princesses console themselves for the infidelities of their husbands. In an evil hour the poor woman's empty heart opened to the subtle tempter; on July 7, 1771, she gave birth to a daughter, of which King Christian could not have been the father.

Meanwhile, at Caroline's advice and assistance, Sturensee effected important reforms in the Government of Denmark. He expedited the administration of law. He introduced freedom of the press. He established a founding hospital at Copenhagen. He abolished gambling halls. He did away with the Council of State. He dissolved the King's Life Guard. Internal affairs and foreign relations were administered solely according to his will and pleasure. All titles, honors, degrees and offices were held by his favor. He invented for himself the most splendid coat of arms in Denmark.

But, like many upstarts, he overdid his work. His reforms were not the result of profound knowledge and slow consideration; they were the work of fitful caprice and often did as much harm as good. They sometimes produced violent changes, ruthlessly resolved upon and carried out with high-handed despotism. Being a free-thinker of the Voltaire school, Sturensee often antagonized the religious opinions of Danish churchmen and made enemies who were the more dangerous because they were silent. He was haughty and overbearing to foreign powers. He provoked the Emperor of Russia till that potentate threatened to send a fleet to Copenhagen, and he was so rude to the English Ambassador that the latter retired to the country. One by one his adherents fell away from him. Rantzau gave notice that he wished to repair to Paris. Brandt wrote: "No despot has ever acquired such power or has used it in such a way as you have. You have infused terror into every one. All tremble before you. Men speak, drink, eat, always in trembling. Even the Queen has no longer a will of her own."

Poor Caroline was indeed an object of pity. Her instincts had always been pure; she had succumbed to Sturensee's wheedling and bullying in the numbness of her broken heart. She had no sooner sinned than she repented. She would have given words to sever the tie she had formed in a moment of thoughtlessness. She tried to forbid her door to her lover, but he, truculent, masterful, unrelenting, well knowing that but for his power over her he would be nothing, refused to abate one jot of his acquired might.

And yet the situation was becoming alarming. There was murder in the air. Placards denouncing the adulterous favorite appeared on the walls. The sailors of the fleet mutinied and drove the court out of Copenhagen. Sturensee surrounded the palace which he shared with the King and the Queen with a cordon of troops; a picked body of spadassins formed his body guard. Foreseeing the future, Sir Robert Keith, the English Ambassador, offered him a large sum of money to go into voluntary exile. He refused. There was nothing to be done except to let events take their course.

In the palace occupied by the Queen's mother nightly consultations were held between Juliane Marie, Christian's mother, her son, Count Rantzau, the colonels of two regiments quartered at Copenhagen, the hereditary Prince, Kammerjunker Beringskjold, and others who could be trusted. Two things were evident—first, that Sturensee could only be overthrown by a revolutionary movement, and second, that any such movement would have to be directed against the King as well as his Minister.

On the night of January 16-17, 1772, a domino ball was given at the palace. The dancing was kept up till 4 in the morning. It was observed that the Queen was in high spirits, unusually gay and full of coquetry, and that Sturensee was also very merry. When the guests dispersed, the Queen mother and three of the conspirators stole through the silent passages of the castle to the room where the King's bed stood. He was asleep, and when he was waked it was difficult to explain to him what was happening. He was told that the Queen had been unfaithful, which he indignantly denied. He was told that he must "free land and King," and a paper was thrust into his hand, which he was required in ominous tones to sign forthwith. It was addressed to the Queen and was in these words:

"As you would be ill advised, it is not my fault if I am compelled to send you to Kronenburg."

He then signed warrants for the arrest of Caroline, Sturensee and Brandt. Colonel Von Koller arrested Sturensee and wrenched from his hand a small phial containing poison. He was bound hand and foot, hurried into a carriage and conveyed to the citadel. Colonel Sames effected the arrest of Brandt, who, seizing a sword, attempted to defend himself. But he was disarmed by the soldiers, bound and conveyed to a cell adjoining that of his chief.

The delicate task of arresting the Queen was confided to Count Rantzau. She was in her chamber. The Count sent her word that he must see her to deliver a message from the King. She cried:

"Send for Sturensee; let him come to me directly."

The Count replied that Sturensee was already under arrest.

She screamed: "Lost! Lost! Lost forever!"

The Count and his men then forced the bed chamber door and he handed the Queen the King's note, advising her to obey his majesty's commands.

"The King's commands!" she cried bitterly.

terly. "Commands of which he understands nothing; commands extorted from his imbecility by treachery! A queen does not obey such commands!"

Rantzau retorted that his orders admitted of no decay.

"I will obey no order till I have seen the King," said the frantic Queen. "Let me go to him—I must, I will speak to him!"

Being told that this would not be permitted, she had a hysterical paroxysm, and tried to throw herself, shrieking, out of the window. She was restrained by an officer, whose hair she tore out by handfuls. She fought and struggled until she fainted away, overcome with exhaustion.

When she came to her senses, she was dressed by her women, and handed down to a carriage. Count Rantzau offered her his arm, but she rejected it scornfully, saying: "Away, traitor! I detest you!"

Under an escort of thirty dragoons and with a lady of the bed chamber by her side, she was whirled away in a carriage to Kronenburg, the gloomy prison she knew so well. When she saw the place she groaned.

"God! I am lost for ever. The King has given me up. Oh! let me go away from here. For me there can be no peace more!"

When day broke King Christian, the wretched creature who had driven his wife to her ruin by his infidelity and his brutality, and who had probably connived at her amour with Sturensee, drove through the streets of Copenhagen in a state carriage drawn by eight horses, and the people were in such wild enthusiasm at having got rid of the favorite that they took out the horses and drew the carriages themselves. The crowd was so crazy in their joy that they pulled down all the houses of ill fame as a vicarious atonement, and the King went to the theater, where the audience sang patriotic songs and shouted, "Long live King Christian VII!"

It was felt that the culprits were entitled to a trial, and a special court consisting of officials of character and repute was created to try them. According to the continental custom, they were subjected to preliminary interrogatories. Sturensee exhibited dastardly treachery to the Queen and abject cowardice. He had pretended to desire suicide, had refused food, had been seen to dash his head against the walls of his dungeon and had swallowed horn buttons, which may have disturbed his digestion without endangering his life. On his interrogatory he displayed no wish to shield the unfortunate woman he had led into sin. He confessed that he had carried on a guilty intrigue with her, gave times and places, repeated her words and signed his confession in the presence of witnesses; but he denied strenuously the charges of misgovernment which were brought against him. He was examined in his dungeon, with iron on his hands and feet, and an iron collar which encircled his neck, fastened to the wall. His interrogatory is preserved in the memoirs of Falkenskjold.

The Queen was examined shortly afterward. She stoutly denied that she had been faithless to her marriage vows, and she persisted in her declaration after she had been told that Sturensee had confessed all.

"It is impossible," said she, "that he can have so wantonly and falsely compromised me."

"Madam," observed Count Rothlan, "If Sturensee's statement is untrue, there is no death cruel enough for a monster who has so maligned your majesty."

The Queen changed from white to red, and gasped; then clutching her throat, and thinking only of a woman's tenderness, of the perfidious scoundrel whom she had loved, she cried: "If I confessed that Sturensee has spoken the truth could I thus save his life?"

"Assuredly," said the Court, "that would increase his chances of pardon."

"Then," replied the Queen, "I will sign the paper," and she began to affix her name to Sturensee's confession. Before she completed her signature she fainted away, and the closing letters of her name were added by the Court.

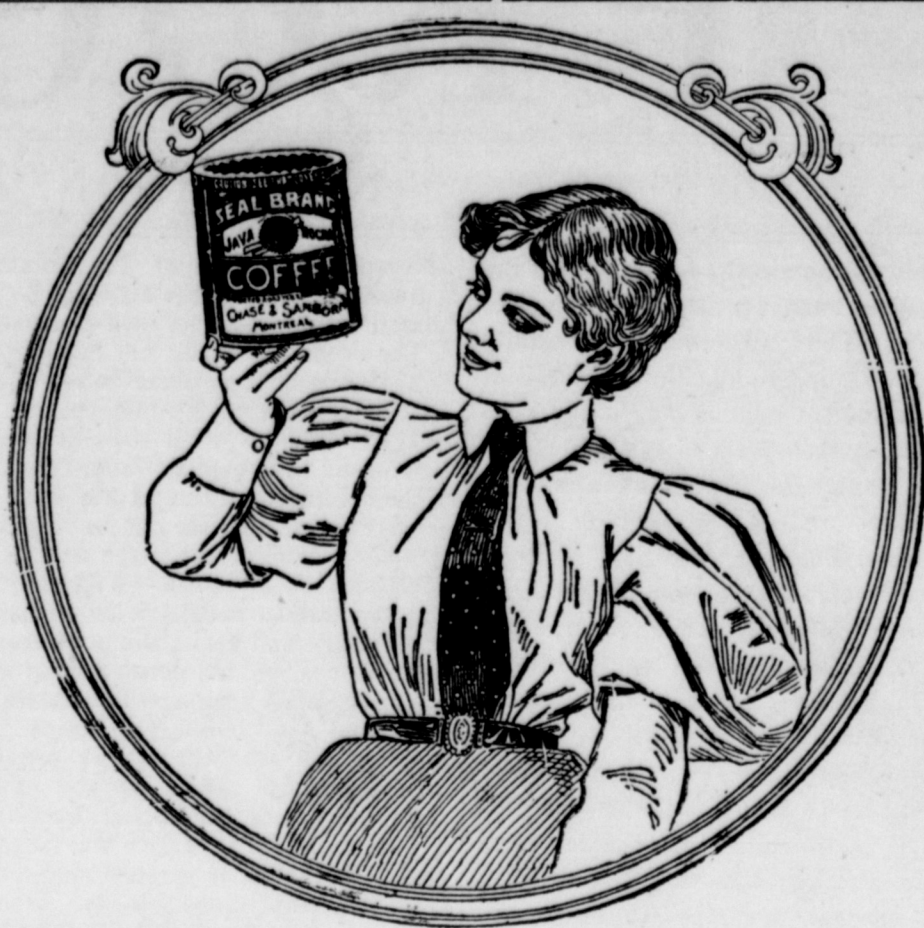
Unhappily for her, the evidence of her lady's maids on her relations with her lover was too circumstantial and explicit to leave any doubt as to the facts.

The trials began on April 21st, sentence was pronounced on April 23rd and was approved by the King on April 27th. On the 28th Christian gave a masquerade ball, and on the following day, after approving the sentences, he attended the opera. The execution was set for the morrow.

On the morning of the 28th, Brandt and Sturensee, in state carriages, were driven from the citadel to the military exercise ground, east of the city. They were dressed in gay court costumes, and as the morning was cold they were wrapped in fur overcoats. A strong escort of dragoons accompanied the carriages. In the center of the exercise ground a scaffold, eighteen feet high, had been erected, and this was surrounded by a solid body of infantry. A dense crowd of sight-seers was kept at bay by mounted guards.

Brandt was the first to descend from his carriage. He was perfectly calm and courageous. When he ascended the steps, the executioner shouted: "This is not done without a cause, but has been deserved," and he proceeded to break and deface the Count's coat of arms. Brandt was asked if he repented of his treason. He answered that he did regret it, and asked pardon of the King and his country. As the headman approached, he took off his coat and waistcoat, and knelt down, laying his head on one block and his right hand on another. A single blow on each severed head and hand from the culprit's body.

Then came Sturensee's turn. His nerve and strength had forsaken him. He could not ascend the steps of the scaffold without assistance. When the headman shouted the customary formula, "This has not been done without a cause, but has been deserved," and followed up the words with blows which broke and defaced the escutcheon of the ex-Prime Minister, Sturensee trembled so that he seemed like to fall. His teeth chattered as he repeated after the chaplain a confession of faith and forgiveness of enemies. He tried to remove his coat, but could not; it was torn from his shoulders by the assistants. He made one or two steps toward the block, but tottered, till at a signal the executioner's men forced him into a kneeling position and stretched out his right hand to the supplementary block. A blow from the ax severed the wrist, but the body of the culprit was seized with strong convulsions, which disconcerted the executioner. Instead of severing the neck he only wounded



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PERSIAN WOMEN AT HOME.

Glimpse Into the Apartments of One Who Was Cast Out of the Harem.

Sacred from the eyes of ordinary visitors, generally built at the back of the house, and possessing a small courtyard of its own, is the Andarun—the apartment devoted to the Persian to his womenkind. Here the upper class women live in their little world, and, narrow though it be, they would not exchange it for any amount of Western liberty. They wish for nothing better. So far from being caged birds pining for freedom, a life of wider scope and activity would be eminently distasteful to them. Love, fine clothes, jewels, and plenty of sweetmeats are the ingredients that form their happiness. In Turkey and India the harem doors are being gradually opened to progressive ideas; but in Persia, the land of retrogression and decay, no corner of the purdah has as yet been lifted. Strictly wiled and debarrd from all intercourse with the opposite sex (excepting near relatives), Persian women nevertheless contrive to influence political affairs in no small degree. The most zealous apostle and preacher of the Bab was a woman, and the late Shah's mother was a person of much political importance—through her energy and diplomacy she came to the throne. There is, however, plenty of female society, and much time is spent in paying calls, attending funerals and wedding, and the bath; this last is a general meeting place, where the gossip of the neighborhood is exchanged and characters receive no gentle handling.

A man of wealth places the charge of his harem in the hands of eunuchs, who regulate the household expenses, see that undesirable visitors in the shape of derisives and fortune tellers are excluded, and do their best to keep in abeyance that spirit of intrigue which is as the breath in her nostrils to every Persian woman. Formerly, women convicted of infidelity were horribly punished, and the matter was left in the husband's hands, but cases are now becoming happily rarer. In one small place in which I lived a woman was buried alive, and the populace appeared to think it a just punishment. It is the Shah's royal prerogative to inspect every man's harem, and a visit from the "Aslam of the Universe" is a great event in the lives of the inmates, for if any one of them finds favor with the monarch she is transferred to his keeping, which is considered promotion in her eyes.

When I first knew her, the Khan's wife reigned alone as mistress of the Andarun, though shortly afterward her husband made up the full complement allowed by the Prophet. She had come from the household of Nasr-ed-Din, but had not long enjoyed royal favor, and therefore had been bestowed on the first person worthy of such a mark of honor. She was better educated than any other Persian woman of my acquaintance, even speaking a little French, and possessed a good figure for plain face, which last was probably the reason of her demerit. Conducted by a servant through the large rooms of the Khan's palace, I was delivered into the custody of a Seede slave girl, who received me at the Andarun door, and, pulling aside a heavy curtain, showed me into the presence of the Khanum herself. She was seated in a divan of plump silk covered cushions near the window, and rose to receive me, revealing the in-door dress of a Persian lady, which at first sight is somewhat startling. A green silk jacket, much embroidered slashed under the arms, and with hanging sleeves, opened in front over a thin muslin vest; a loose girdle of filigree, studded with turquoise, encircled her hips, and from this depended a silken shirt bouffante, and short as a ballet girl's (the late Shah issued a declaration that women's skirts should end at the knee); while her shapely legs, innocent of covering, terminated in boots of thinnest yellow kid. Out of doors, where I had occasionally seen her in her carriage she presented a very different appearance; the short skirts were stuffed into baggy trousers, and her whole person enveloped in a chador of indigo blue, striped with gold, which covered every part except her eyes. Her face, was of course, painted according to the canons of Persian beauty, which declare that woman's face must be white and red and her eyebrows as a

single line, and her hands were stained orange with kenna. She rose to meet me, and with many pretty compliments motioned me to a seat on the cushion beside her, and passed me her Ka'ian (water pipe) of Bohemian glass. I inquired how she liked Bushire, and a gesture of her hands expressed contempt for her present abode. The Khanum (myself) should see Tehran; that was the place wherein to live, with its gardens, mosques, and magnificent baths. "And I," she continued, waxing eloquent over departed glories, "lived in the royal palace; I had slaves and horses, jewels too, and as for my apartments, this [looking round the large room with disdain], by comparison, is the stable of a ste camel. In an evil hour an enemy came, dust and ashes fell upon my head, I was no longer of any account, and I am here."

"Have you any children?" I know the Khan had two sons, tiny, grave-eyed mortals, who took their airing near the tennis grounds. A bitter look came over the painted countenance.

"No, I had a boy, beautiful as Mejnoun, strong limbed as Rustam, but he died, and now I have no sons."

The bitterness was explicable; a childless wife is of small account in the harem, and is easily divorced. Still she was not without hope, and explained the methods of using certain charms, invaluable in such cases. A piece of delicate embroidery lay on a carpet near, and I asked if it were the Khanum's doing. Her doing! No, indeed, needlework was for slaves. Was it true that in Feringistan women performed all manner of hard labor, even as the peasants in this country? The guitar also belonged to one of her women, and if it pleased me I could hear her sing. Had I any jewels? She exclaimed my solitary ring with interest, and learning that it was not my only possession, wondered that I did not wear the others. Jewels enhanced the value of women in men's eyes. They were also a consolation in old age.

The Khanum's religious convictions were vague as those of other Iranian women. Allah was great and Omar accursed; she daily repeated the Kebieh (profession of faith) and worshipped at the shrines of holy men. When she died her embalmed body would make the pilgrimage to Kerberia and be buried by the tomb of the sainted Husain. A future state did not come within the range of her philosophy. The large room had long doors or windows opening on the veranda, whence a flight of steps led to the roof, the meeting place in hot weather; it was scantily furnished, but the matted floor was nearly covered with valuable carpets; soft heaps of cushions with ancient-looking chests, seemed the only furniture, and the walls were hung with curious cotton draperies printed with pictures, histories of celebrated characters, together with a few gaudy colored oleographs.

Refreshments were served by a very pretty girl—sweets, cakes, and coffee, muddy, brown, and sugary, in tiny glass cups, decorated with a portrait of the Shah. Then my clothes and handkerchief were sprinkled with attar of roses, which smell haunted me for weeks. On my leaving, the Khanum expressed a thousand regrets. Might she be sacrificed, she said, but my presence had illumined her life, and bending low she laid my hand against her forehead. At the outer door a servant waited with a tray loaded with fruit and sweets, and covered with a silk handkerchief, which he carried behind me to my house—a mark of esteem and respect from the ex-wife of Nasr-ed-Din.

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Why? "Why does that Blodgett girl wear such a thick veil?" "She thinks it increases her beauty." "Then why doesn't she get behind a screen door?"