

A KING AND HIS CAMPAIGNERS

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A king and his campaigners by Verner von Heidenstam & Axel Teignier

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VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM & AXEL TEIGNIER

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

VERNER VON HEIDENSTAM, a great Little Master in latter-day Swedish literature, is in his narrative style inclined towards impressionism. The very simplicity of his style, its bald directness of effect, his suggestion of environment and character by means of scanty but illuminating detail, and the veiledness of his root intention, make the effort to render his writings into proper English invidious and hard to achieve with any just measure of success.

The stories in this volume, the first of the series entitled "Karolinerna" in the Swedish, deal with the condition of the country and the personality of Charles XII., that military genius of the early part of the eighteenth century. At the age of eighteen he smote Russia, Denmark, and Saxony with her Polish sovereign, who were conspiring to partition his kingdom; and to him Marlborough could say, "I wish I could serve in some campaign under so great a general as your Majesty, that I might learn what I yet want to know."

Heidenstam's work, vivid and picturesque, is charged with a deep knowledge of the period treated. Local colour is dealt out with a sparing hand; only here and there a patch of it lightens the monotone of

his general scheme; and superfluous detail is rigorously eschewed. His delineation of Charles, that ultimate example of splendid but vacillating obstinacy, is impartial and unsympathetic, even to coldness. But whether or no it be correct, considered from the historical standpoint, it is aye set forth with distinction and the sure touch of conviction.

Heidenstam is always the inspired craftsman in his work. Yet impressionism in any form of art tends to obscurity of outline and purport: and it is as much owing to this as to the intensity of vehement imagination, conceiving mental visuality, and likewise obscuring it in part, that his narrative occasionally fails in clearness and cohesion. His defects are the defects of his method.

In these tales, the subject matter has been closely followed, not *litteratim* nor with an eye to the nuances of style, but with as much attention to the truthfulness of its presentment as to its right array in fitting English. I trust that language and form are such as the author himself would have used were he an Englishman.

A. TEGNIER.