

# CHRISTINA STEINFORT.

A TALE FROM THE FRENCH.

BY EDMOND HUGOMONT.

1.

"WOULDN'T thou like to be a queen, Christina?" Such was the question addressed by the Baron Steinfort to his daughter, at the close of a game at chess, during which his thoughts had evidently been wandering and distracted.

"Queen of hearts, papa?" carelessly asked the graceful girl, without raising her head from the rich velvet cushion on which she had reposed it, as she fiddled a hideous little lap-dog, her prime favorite among all her pets.

"Queen of hearts, my daughter! that empire is thine already," rejoined the father in a tone of affected gaiety.

The Swedish minister, for such was the rank held by the Baron Steinfort, shook somewhat nervously the splendid snuff-box he held in his hand, as his eye rested on a miniature encircled by diamonds that adorned the lid—the portrait and the present of the ugliest sovereign in Europe—his master, Charles XII.

"Aspires not thine ambition higher than this?" he added, after a pause.

"How should it?" was the reply. "I have already more subjects—slaves they call themselves—than I well know how to manage."

"Of that I doubt not," answered the Baron; "but you have too much prudence, I trust, to encourage their homage."

"Indeed, I care neither to repel nor encourage the homage which is only my due," saucily replied Christina, with a furtive glance at an opposite mirror. "There is only one of my train for whose services I feel the least gratitude."

"And who is he?" enquired the minister, with apparent negligence, but real anxiety, his heavy eyebrows contracting as he spoke.

A deep blush tinged the cheeks of Christina, and without replying she continued her caresses to the dog, pulling his long silky ears as he playfully snapped at her hand.

"Of whom speakest thou Christina?" repeated Baron Steinfort, more firmly.

"Of whom should I speak, my father! but of your handsome nephew, Adolphus de Hesse?"

"You have not been so foolish, I trust, as to

engage your heart to this young man?" said the Baron, in a grave and severe tone.

"Young!" she repeated; "Adolphus is at least twenty; he is the oldest friend I have. I cannot say when I first learned to love him, it is so long ago."

"Tush, girl! you love him but as a brother. You were brought up together by his mother, and nothing is more natural."

"You are quite wrong, father!" Christina calmly answered; "I should be very sorry to see Adolphus my brother."

The Swedish minister rose from his seat and traversed the apartment several times with an agitated step. At last, pausing behind the couch on which his daughter rested, he passed his arm round her slender waist, and said tenderly, but firmly.

"My dear child! this foolish whim must cease. You must forget him."

"My dear father! I shall never try it, for I know I should never succeed. Nay, you are proud of him yourself, and love him too."

"But not enough to make him thus my heir."

"Yet he would become so were I to die, my father!"

The Baron fixed his eyes with a searching look on the fair and rosy face of his daughter, and the expression of paternal alarm which these words had spread over his countenance gradually disappeared.

"All is life here," he said, gently tapping her forehead. "All my thoughts are bent on the disposal of this dear but teasing girl."

"Give me to Adolphus, and you will see the happiest couple in the world," exclaimed Christina with animation, her dark eyes glancing through her tears.

"My poor child!" replied the father, "you have been terribly spoiled; I have allowed you too much freedom. What you now ask is impossible—let me hear no more of it! Be reasonable; and to occupy your mind, your aunt will present you at court. You will see many fine things there;—you will behold our young and brave king——"