

at Pultawa with much thinned battalions in one of those desperate situations where he had to fight and win a victory or lose not only a whole army, but a whole campaign, and with it the over-sea empire the Vasas had built up for Sweden. When peace was made in 1721 Russia got a large part of Finland and all the Baltic provinces and took Sweden's place as the great power of the north. The memory of that tragedy has mostly grown faint for us now, though it has been preserved in literature that is still classic like Voltaire's *Charles XII* and Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*; to us at any rate it is more the personal tragedy of Charles, but to the Swedes it is still a burning memory of the fall of an empire, the end of what they call their "great period"—*stormaktstid*. It is quite recently, in the nineties, that Von Heidenstam's brilliant work, *Karolinnerna*, (the Carolinians or men of Charles' time) has given a thrillingly imaginative expression to the national feeling on this disaster. The ordinary Swedish historian generally consoles himself and his countrymen with the philosophic reflection that the Swedish empire was too extended for the resources of a small State, but there is no mistaking the bitterness of scorn and regret which lives in those pages of Heidenstam. And it is all turned on Charles. Swedish soldiery, Swedish generals and statesmen, Swedish people, they were all ready to face any sacrifice for their country's cause and did so with wonderful fortitude—never was a leader more devotedly followed; but he with his mad adventurer's romanticism wasted it all in maintaining fancied points of honour in never altering the royal will once it was expressed, in never turning back on the road he had once taken, and in striving heroically to achieve the impossible. And yet this man was of fundamentally heroic temper and character, who never spared himself any more than others, and who put all minor passions and indulgences below his feet from the day he set out at the head of his armies till his death before the fortress of Fredericksten. He was Sweden's last great war-lord and hero and, in spite of all, the Swedish people felt for the first time that when he was lost all was lost. It needs all that new art of Heidenstam's with its strong alloy of fantasy, yet penetrating with curious impressiveness to the magic of life and personality, to give us a picture of that man and his time. It is the