

NOTES ON SONYA KOVALEVSKY

Carlotta Leffler says of Sonya, page 216. "She was in reality reserved, and she considered few people her equals. But the mobility of her nature and intelligence, the wish to please, and the psychological interest she took in all human things, gave her the sympathetic manner which charmed all who saw her. She seldom displayed her sarcastic vein to her inferiors unless they were really uncongenial to her. But she used it freely among those whom she looked upon as her equals.

Meanwhile it did not take her long to exhaust the social interest in Stockholm. After a time she said she knew every one by heart, and longed for fresh stimulus for her intelligence. This was a great misfortune to her, and accounts for the fact that she could not be happy in Stockholm, or, perhaps, in any place in the world. She was continually in want of stimulus. She desired dramatic interests in life, and was ever hungering for high-wrought mental delights. She hated with all her heart the gray monotony of every-day life.

Bohemian by nature, as she often called herself, she hated everything covered by the expression bourgeois."

Strindberg says of Sonya, page 219. "

"I have received from your sister, as a Christmas present, an article by Strindberg, in which he proves, as decidedly as that two and two make four, what a monstrosity is a woman who is a professor of mathematics, and how unnecessary, injurious, and out of place she is. I think he is right au fond, only I wish he would prove clearly that there were plenty of mathematicians in Sweden better than I am, and that it was only galanterie which made them select me!

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Carlotta Leffler is almost in her discription of Sonya as a sportsman. She comments on her desire to do anything that everybody else did something that Sonya herself admits for example in a letter written in 1865 Sonya says: "I have made the acquaintance of a very pleasantman, who has recently returned to Sticckholmfrom America. He is the editor of the largest Swedish newspaper. He has made me promise to write something for his paper, and, as you know, ¹ I can never see my friends at work without wishing to do exactly what they are doing, so I have written a number of short articles for him. ² For the moment I have only one of these personal reminiscences ready, but I send it to you, as you understand Swedish so well. Fifthly (last, not least), can you really believe, unlikely as it sounds, that I have developed into an accomplished skater! At the end of last week I was on the ice every day. I am so sorry you cannot see how well managed in the end. Whenever I have gained a little extra dexterity I have thought of you. And now I can even skate a little backwards!! But I can go forward with great facility and assurance!! All my friends here are astonished how quickly I have mastered the difficult art. In order to console myself a little, now that the ice has disappeared, I have taken furiously to riding with my friends."

Carlotta, commenting on this letter says that as a matter of fact Sonya could scarcely skate at all and in the saddle her fearful screams could be heard if the horse made the slightest movement.

1 The italics have been added by the friend who sends the letter

2 She had in reality written only one of the articles, but in her vivid imagination what she intended doing was already done.