Under him Saxony was perhaps the most influential state in the Empire, and became the cradle of the Reformation. He died in 1525 while the Peasants’ War was desolating his land, and was succeeded by his brother John, who was an enthusiastic supporter of the reformed faith and who shared with Philip, landgrave of Hesse, the leadership of the league of Schmalkalden. John’s son and successor, John Frederick the Magnanimous, who became elector in 1532, might with equal propriety have been surnamed the Unfortunate. He took part in the war of the league of Schmalkalden, but in 1547 he was captured at Mühlberg by the emperor Charles V. and was forced to sign the capitulation of Wittenberg. This deed transferred the electoral title and a large part of the electoral lands from the Ernestine to the Albertine branch of the house, whose astute representative, Maurice, had taken the imperial side during the war. Only a few scattered territories were reserved for John Frederick’s sons, although these were increased by the treaty of Naumburg in 1554, and on them were founded the Ernestine duchies of Saxe-Gotha, Saxe-Weimar, Saxe-Coburg, Saxe-Meiningen and Saxe-Altenburg. For the second time in the history of the Saxon electorate the younger line secured the higher dignity, for the Wittenberg line was junior to the Lauenburg line. The Albertine line is now the royal line of Saxony.

Maurice, who became elector of Saxony in consequence of the capitulation of Wittenberg, was a grandson of Albert, the founder of his line. His predecessors in ruling Albertine Saxony had been his father, Henry, who only reigned for two years, and his uncle George. The latter, a zealous Roman Catholic, had vainly tried to stem the tide of the Reformation in his dominions; Henry, on the other hand, was an equally devoted Protestant. Maurice, who succeeded his father in 1541, was also a Protestant, but he did not allow his religious faith to blind him to his political interests. His ruling motive was ambition to increase both his own power and the importance of his country. He refused to join the other Protestant princes in the league of Schmalkalden, but made a secret treaty with Charles V. Then suddenly invading the Ernestine lands while the elector John Frederick was campaigning against the imperialists on the Danube, he forced that prince to return hastily to Saxony, and thus weakened the forces opposed to the emperor. Although compelled to retreat, his fidelity to Charles V. was rewarded, as we have already seen, by the capitulation of Wittenberg. All the lands torn from John Frederick were not, however, assigned to Maurice; he was forced to acknowledge the superi­ority of Bohemia over the Vogtland and the Silesian duchy of Sagan. Moreover, Roman Catholic prelates were reinstated in the bishoprics of Meissen, Merseburg and Naumburg-Zeitz. Recognizing now as a Protestant prince that the best alliance for securing his new possessions was not with the emperor, but with the other Protestant princes, Maurice began to withdraw from the former and to conciliate the latter. In 1552, suddenly marching against Charles at Innsbruck, he drove him to flight and then extorted from him the religious peace of Passau. Thus at the close of his life he came to be regarded as the champion of German national and religious freedom.

Amid the distractions of outward affairs, Maurice had not neglected the internal interests of Saxony. To its educational advantages, already conspicuous, he added the three *Fürsten- schulen* at Pforta, Grimma and Meissen, and for administrative purposes, especially for the collection of taxes, he divided the country into the four circles of the Electorate, Thuringia, Meissen and Leipzig. During his reign coal-mining began in Saxony. In another direction over two hundred religious houses were suppressed, the funds being partly applied to educational purposes. The country had four universities, those of Leipzig, Wittenberg, Jena and Erfurt; books began to increase rapidly, and, by virtue of Luther’s translation of the Bible, the Saxon dialect became the ruling dialect of Germany.

Augustus I., brother and successor of Maurice, was one of the best domestic rulers that Saxony ever had. He increased the area of the country by the “ circles ’’ of Neustadt and the Vogtland, and by parts of Henneberg and the silver-yielding

Mansfeld, and he devoted his long reign to the development of its resources. He visited all parts of the country himself, and personally encouraged agriculture; he introduced a more economical mode of mining and smelting silver; he favoured the importation of finer breeds of sheep and cattle; and he brought foreign weavers from abroad to teach the Saxons. Under him lace-making began on the Erzgebirge, and cloth- making flourished at Zwickau. With all his virtues, however, Augustus was an intolerant Lutheran, and used very severe means to exterminate the Calvinists; in his electorate he is said to have expelled III Calvinist preachers in a single month. Under his son Christian I., who succeeded in 1586, the chief power was wielded by the chancellor Nikolas Crell *(q.v.),* who strongly favoured Calvinism; but, when Christian II. came to the throne in 1591, Crell was sacrificed to the Lutheran nobles. The duke of Saxe-Weimar was made regent, and continued the persecution of crypto-Calvinism. Christian II. was succeeded in 1611 by his brother John George I., under whom the country was devastated by the Thirty Years’ War. John George was an amiable but weak prince, totally unfitted to direct the fortunes of a nation in time of danger. He refused the proffered crown of Bohemia, and, when the Bohemian Protestants elected a Calvinist prince, he assisted the emperor against them with men and money. The edict of restitution, however, in 1629, opened his eyes to the emperor’s projects, and he joined Gustavus Adolphus. Saxony now became the theatre of war. The first battle on Saxon soil was fought in 1631 at Breitenfeld, where the bravery of the Swedes made up for the flight of the Saxons. Wallenstein entered Saxony in 1632, and his lieutenants plundered, burned and murdered through the length and breadth of the land. After the death of Gustavus Adolphus at the battle of Lützen, not far from Leipzig, in 1632, the elector, who was at heart an imperialist, detached himself from the Swedish alliance, and in 1635 concluded the peace of Prague with the emperor. By this peace he was con­firmed in the possession of Upper and Lower Lusatia, a district of 180 sq. m. and half a million inhabitants, which had already been pledged to him as a reward for his services against the Bohemians.

Saxony had now to suffer from the Swedes a repetition of the devastations of Wallenstein. No other country in Germany was so scourged by this terrible war. Immense tracts were rendered desolate, and whole villages vanished from the map; in eight years the population sank from three to one and a half millions. When the war was ended by the peace of Westphalia in 1648, Saxony found that its influence had begun to decline in Germany. Its alliance with the Catholic party deprived it of its place at the head of the Protestant German states, which was now taken by Brandenburg. John George’s will made the decline of the electorate even more inevitable by detaching from it the three duchies of Saxe-Weissenfels, Saxe-Merseburg and Saxe- Zeitz as appanages for his younger sons. By 1746, however, these Unes were all extinct, and their possessions had returned to the main h\*ne. Saxe-Neustädt was a short-lived branch from Saxe-Zeitz, extinct in 1714. The next three electors, who each bore the name of John George, had uneventful reigns. The first made some efforts to heal the wounds of his country; the second wasted the fives of his people in foreign wars against the Turks; and the third was the last Protestant elector of Saxony. John George IV. was succeeded in 1694 by his brother Frederick Augustus I., or Augustus the Strong. This prince was elected king of Poland as Augustus II. in 1697, but any weight which the royal title might have given him in the Empire was more than counterbalanced by the fact that he became a Roman Catholic in order to qualify for the new dignity. The connexion with Poland was disastrous for Saxony. In order to defray the expenses of his wars with Charles XII. Augustus pawned and sold large districts of Saxon territory, while he drained the electorate of both men and money. For a year before the peace of Altranstädt in 1706, when Augustus gave up the crown of Poland, Saxony was occupied by a Swedish army, which had to be supported at an immense expense.