Gustavus himself took part in it the Swedes were so successful that in 1617 the czar Michael was glad to conclude the peace of Stolbova, giving up Kexholm, Carelia, and Ingermanland, and confirming Sweden in the possession of Esthonia and Livonia. The next task of Gustavus was to subdue Sigismund of Boland, who had formally renewed his claim to the crown of Sweden after Charles IX.’s death, and had proved himself one of the most troublesome of the young Swedish king’s enemies. In 1621 Gustavus took the field against him, and achieved a series of brilliant successes, which were interrupted only when, in 1629, Austria sent to the aid of Poland a force of 10,000 men under Arnheim.

Meanwhile the Thirty Years’ War, begun in 1618, had been raging in Germany. Christian IV. of Denmark, who had intervened on behalf of the Protestants, had been forced to lay down his arms ; and it seemed in the highest degree probable that the Catholic reaction, headed by the fanatical emperor Ferdinand II., was about to be com­pletely triumphant. Gustavus, like his father and grand­father, was an enthusiastic Protestant, and he had watched with grief and dismay the misfortunes of those who were struggling for the right of free judgment in religion. At last he resolved to give them the support they so urgently needed, and, in order that he might without unnecessary delay act upon his decision, he arranged with Poland in 1629 that there should be an armistice for six years. He then began to make preparations for his great enterprise, and in 1630 he embarked for Germany with an army of 15,000 men. In undertaking this splendid task he was not influenced only by religious motives. He wished to punish the Austrians for having helped the Poles; he hoped to find an opportunity of adding to Swedish territory ; and there are reasons for supposing that he dreamed of snatching the imperial crown from the Haps­burg dynasty and placing it on his own head. But all the evidence we possess goes to show that these objects were subordinate. His principal aim was to save Protestantism in Germany from extinction.

He had many unexpected difficulties to contend with, for he was distrusted by most of the German Protestant princes. Very soon, however, his tact and courage enabled him to overcome every obstacle, and at Breitenfeld he gained a decisive victory over the imperial general Tilly. After this great success the confidence of the German Protestants revived, and Gustavus was everywhere received as their deliverer. Tilly tried to prevent him from crossing the Lech, but was again defeated ; and the Swedish king took possession of Munich, having already held court at Frankfort. For some time the destinies of the empire appeared to be at his disposal, but all the hopes excited by his heroic career were suddenly cut short by his death in the battle of Lützen in 1632.

Gustavus was succeeded by his daughter Christina, whom, before his departure for Germany, he had presented to the diet as heiress to the crown. During her minority Sweden was governed by five nobles whom the diet appointed to be her guardians, the foremost place being given to Axel Oxenstjerna. They continued the foreign policy of Gustavus, maintaining in Germany a powerful army, which, although no longer uniformly successful, gained many victories over the imperial forces. Christina. carefully educated in accordance with instructions left by her father, became one of the most cultivated women of the 17th century; and at an early age she astonished her guardians by the vigour of her understanding. In 1644, on her eighteenth birthday, she assumed supreme power, and for some time she fulfilled all the expectations which had been formed as to her reign. In 1645 she brought to an end a war with Denmark which had been begun two

years before. The Danes had been repeatedly defeated, and by the treaty of Brömsebro they resigned to Sweden Jemtland and Harjeaadalen along with the islands of Gotland and Oesel, and gave up Halland for a period of twenty-five years. Contrary to the advice of Oxenstjerna, Christina pressed for the conclusion of peace in Germany, and, when her object was attained, the Swedes had no reason to be dissatisfied with the result. By the peace of Westphalia, concluded in 1648, Sweden obtained the duchies of Bremen, Verden, and Western Pomerania, a part of Eastern Pomerania, and Wismar. Moreover, Sweden was recognized as a state of the empire.

The Swedish people were anxious that Christina should marry, but she declined to sacrifice her independence. In 1649, however, she persuaded the diet to accept as her successor the best of her suitors, her cousin Charles Gustavus of Pfalz-Zweibrücken, the son of the only sister of Gustavus Adolphus. In the following year she was crowned with great pomp. About this time her character seemed to undergo a remarkable change. She became wayward and restless, neglected her tried counsellors, and followed the advice of self-seeking favourites. So much discontent was aroused by her extravagance and fickleness that she at last announced her determination to abdicate, and she abandoned her purpose only in deference to Oxenstjerna’s entreaties. She now devoted herself to her duties with renewed ardour, and made her court famous by inviting to it Descartes, Grotius, Salmasius, and other scholars and philosophers. But she had soon to encounter fresh difficulties. During the Thirty Years’ War the influence of the nobles had been greatly increased, partly in consequence of their position in the army, partly through the wealth they acquired in Germany. They made as usual so bad a use of their power that an agitation which seemed likely to have most serious conse­quences sprang up against them among the peasants, the burghers, and the clergy. Unable to bring order out of the prevailing confusion, and longing for repose, Christina finally resolved to resign the crown; and in 1654 she formally laid the royal insignia before the diet in order that they might be transferred to Charles Gustavus, who forthwith became king as Charles X. Christina imme­diately left the country, and did not return to it for many years. She ultimately made some attempts to recover the crown, as well as to be elected queen of Poland, but her efforts were not successful. She joined the Roman Church, and there was much talk at all the courts in Europe about the eccentricities of her character and about her passionate love of art and learning.

Charles X. (1654-1660) devoted his energies chiefly to war, in which he was brilliantly successful. He began his military career by attacking Poland, whose king claimed to be the true heir to the Swedish crown. In a great battle at Warsaw Charles destroyed the Polish army, and Poland would probably soon have been absolutely at his mercy but for the intervention of Russia, which sought to weaken him by invading Esthonia and Livonia. While the war with Poland and Russia was in progress, Charles became involved in a struggle with Denmark, and he conducted it so vigorously and skilfully that the Danes, by the peace of Roeskilde, signed in 1658, gave up Scania, Halland, Blekinge, and various other territories. War with Denmark was several times renewed, and at the time of his death Charles was engaged in making extensive preparations for a fresh onslaught.

He was succeeded by his son Charles XL, a child of four years of age. During the minority of Charles XI. the government was carried on by his mother Hedwig Eleonore and by the chancellor De la Gardie and four other ministers. In 1660 they concluded with Poland the