peace of Oliva, whereby Sweden received the whole of Livonia as far as the Düna. Soon afterwards peace was also concluded with Denmark and Russia, the former receiving back Drontheim and Bornholm, which had been taken by Charles X. Sweden, however, kept Scania, Halland, and Blekinge, which were now finally severed from the Danish monarchy. In 1672 Charles XI. him­self assumed the direction of affairs. For some time he seemed to take little interest in public business, and in 1674 he was rash enough to send an army into Germany to aid Louis XIV. in his war with the United Provinces and their allies. The Swedes were defeated at Fehrbellin by the elector of Brandenburg, who at once followed up his victory by taking possession of Pomerania. Christian V. of Denmark, thinking he had now a good opportunity of recovering Scania, joined the enemies of France and Sweden, and at sea the Danes gained several great victories over the Swedes. Charles XI., aroused by these disasters, began to show the real vigour of his character. He placed himself at the head of his army, and in several battles so decisively defeated the Danes that they were driven from Scania, the greater part of which they had occupied. When peace was made in 1679, Sweden had to give up to Brandenburg a part of Pomerania, but she sustained no other losses.

At this time the finances of Sweden were in utter confusion, and the revenue was not nearly large enough to cover the necessary expenditure. So many of the crown lands had from time to time been given away to nobles that the administration could not be carried on without a system of crushing taxation. The common people, unable to bear the burdens imposed upon them, had often insisted that these lands should be taken back. Charles XI. became convinced that there was no other way out of his difficulties, and in 1680, with the sanction of the diet, he ordered that the fourth part of all the crown lands which had been given away during the previous thirty years should be restored. This, however, was only the begin­ning of the so-called process of reduction, which was soon extended and carried out with ruthless severity. By this measure some of the foremost families in Sweden were ruined, and the crown was made almost independent of the diet, for it recovered no fewer than ten counties, seventy baronies, and many smaller estates. Charles became virtually an absolute sovereign, and on the whole he made an excellent use of his power. For more than a century Sweden had been almost constantly engaged in war. She now enjoyed a period of repose, and profited greatly by the king’s vigorous administration. He built fortresses, reorganized the army and navy, and carried on many important public works in the interests of commerce. He also founded the university of Lund, and made larger provision for popular education, frequently impressing upon the clergy the duty of attending to the intellectual needs of their parishioners. His comparatively early death was lamented by the great majority of the people, who were grateful for the steady determination with which he applied himself to the duties of his office.

Charles XI. was succeeded by his son Charles XII. (1697-1718), the most brilliant although not the greatest figure in Swedish history. He was a youth of fifteen when his father died, and he was so enthusiastically devoted to sport and all kinds of physical exercise that he seemed to be utterly destitute of political ambition. Accordingly Augustus II. of Poland and Saxony, Peter I. of Russia, and Frederick IV. of Denmark, thinking the time had come for the recovery of the possessions taken from their predecessors by Sweden, formed an alliance against him, and they appear to have had no doubt that he would be easily overcome. Charles XII., however, was

in reality a man of extraordinary vigour and daring, and he soon convinced his enemies that they would find in him a formidable opponent. In 1700 he began what is known as the Northern War by suddenly advancing against Copenhagen, which he was about to besiege when Frederick, alarmed by the overwhelming numbers of the enemy, accepted Charles’s terms, and signed the peace of Travendahl. Charles at once crossed the Baltic to attack Augustus II. and Peter I., the former of whom was besieging Riga, while the latter threatened Narva. At Narva the Swedish king gained a splendid victory, and afterwards he defeated the Saxons, driving them away from Riga. If he had now concluded peace, he might have been for many years by far the greatest potentate in northern Europe. But he was resolved to humiliate Augustus II., and this he did most effectually. Defeated at Klissoff, Augustus was held to have forfeited the throne of Poland, and at Charles’s suggestion Stanislaus Leczinski was elected king. Charles followed Augustus into Saxony, and in 1706 forced him to conclude the treaty of Altranstädt. Meanwhile Peter I. had been taking possession of Swedish territory on the Baltic, and on a portion of it had begun to build St Petersburg. Instead of attacking him directly, Charles resolved to thwart him by seizing Moscow, and this decision proved fatal to his great designs. Worn out by a long and dreary march, during which many soldiers died of hunger and disease, his dispirited army was defeated at Poltava (1709); and Charles, ignorant of the real condition of the enemy’s forces, fled across the Russian frontier into Turkey. He remained five years in the Turkish dominions, trying to induce the sultan to become his ally. But, although war did break out between Russia and Turkey, the Turks had little confidence in Charles, for it was supposed that he wished to become king of Poland, and the sultan suspected that if this scheme were effected he might become a dangerous enemy of the Ottoman empire. Convinced at last that nothing was to be gained from Turkey, Charles made his escape, and in fourteen days rode from Adrian­ople to Stralsund. In his absence the war had been continued by Peter I., who had soon been joined again by Augustus II. and Frederick IV. ; and ultimately the alliance was strengthened by the accession of the king of Prussia and the elector of Hanover, each of whom was eager to possess those Swedish territories which were in the neighbourhood of his own dominions. In Stralsund, which was besieged by an army of Danes, Saxons, Prussians, and Russians, Charles displayed astonishing valour and military skill, but about a year after his arrival the town was obliged to surrender. He then went to Lund, adopted vigorous measures for the defence of the Swedish coasts, and attacked Norway. By the advice of his friend Baron Gertz he entered into negotiations with Peter I., who was not unwilling to come to terms. Had Charles lived, it is possible that the tide of misfortune might have turned, but he was shot dead while engaged in besieging Frederikshall. His intention was to conquer Norway after having made peace with Russia, and from Norway to cross to Great Britain, where he hoped to punish the elector of Hanover by placing the Pretender on the English throne.

All the conditions of political life in Sweden were now changed. The Swedish people were surrounded by a crowd of enemies whom they could not hope to overcome, and in the confusion caused by the Northern War the nobles had recovered their ancient power. As Charles XII. had no children, it was doubtful whether the crown should pass to his younger sister Ulrica Eleonore or to Charles Frederick of Holstein-Gottorp, the son of his elder sister Hedvig Sophia. The nobles decided in favour of