Ulrica Eleonore, who secured their support by undertak­ing to place all real power in their hands. In 1720 her authority was transferred to her husband, Prince Frederick of Hesse, who reigned as Frederick I. until his death in 1751. He reigned, however, only in name, for the diet, which now practically meant the nobles, usurped every important prerogative of the crown. There were two parties, known as the Hats and the Caps, who assailed one another with much vehemence ; but on one point they were agreed, and that was that the Swedish people should in future be ruled, not by a king, or by a king acting in conjunction with the diet, but by the aristocracy.

Meanwhile Sweden had been shorn of most of the foreign territory for which in past times she had made so many sacrifices. In 1719 she had given up Bremen and Verden to Hanover; in 1720 Stettin and Western Pomer­ania as far as the Peene were resigned to Prussia ; and in 1721 Russia obtained Livonia, Esthonia, Ingermanland, and a part of Viborg län. In 1741, against the wish of King Frederick, the Hats plunged into a war with Russia ; and the consequence was that in 1743 Sweden had to conclude the degrading peace of Åbo, by which she lost Eastern Finland. She had even to beg Russia to aid her against Denmark, and she was obliged to recognize Adol­phus Frederick of Holstein-Gottorp, a relative of the czarina Elizabeth, as heir to the throne.

From the reign of Charles IX. until that of Charles XII. Sweden had been one of the greatest powers in Europe. She had conducted many wars successfully ; she had secured a vast territory beyond her proper limits ; in the crisis of the struggle between Catholicism and Pro­testantism she had lent powerful support to those who were fighting for spiritual freedom. In the management of international relations during this period no great decision was arrived at by any European state without reference to her wishes, and there seemed to be solid reasons for the belief that her power would be enduring. Yet she suddenly sank from her high position to that of a third-rate state, which exercised little or no influence on the affairs of the rest of the world. This striking change was immediately due to the calamities brought upon his country by Charles XII,, but sooner or later it would have come even if he had never lived. The circumstances of Europe were in his time very different from those with which Gustavus Adolphus had to deal. Russia had emerged as a united and growing state ; Prussia had begun to display some of the qualities which were ulti­mately to make her supreme in Germany ; and Hanover had been made important by the accession of the house of Brunswick to the throne of Great Britain. Sweden could not have permanently maintained her conquests against these new political forces. Charles XII., by his bold but headstrong policy, only hastened a process which was in any case inevitable.

Under Adolphus Frederick (1751-1771) Sweden took part in the Seven Years’ War, siding with the enemies of Frederick the Great. But she was now so feeble, and her statesmen were so incompetent, that her intervention led to no serious results. The Hats, who were responsible for the humiliation brought upon Sweden by this exhibi­tion of her weakness, had to make way for the Caps ; but neither party had the power or the will to arouse the nation from the lethargy into which it had fallen. Gus­tavus III., Adolphus Frederick’s son (1771-1792), was a man of a very different temper from his indolent father. He had great energy of character, a thorough comprehen­sion of some of the conditions of political progress, and a frank and persuasive manner. In early youth he seems to have convinced himself that it would be impossible for Sweden to become a prosperous country unless the royal

authority were restored, and when at the age of twenty- five he succeeded his father he secretly resolved to make the crown supreme.

He carried out his plans with remarkable ability and caution. Under the pretence that he wished to introduce a new system of military manœuvres, he collected around him about two hundred officers, most of whom were young men, and they were gradually induced to pledge themselves to support him. Agents were despatched to win over the regiments in the provinces, and Gustavus was careful to make a good impression on the burgher class and on the peasantry. When all was ready, the commandant of Christianstad, on the 12th of August 1772, as previously arranged, formally renounced his allegiance to the diet, and one of the king’s brothers went to the town with the regiments in the neighbourhood and pretended to besiege it. Suspicions were aroused at Stockholm, and at a meeting of the council of state Gus­tavus was bitterly reproached by some of the members. He then boldly proclaimed his purpose. The members of the council of state were arrested, and the king received the homage of the leading authorities in the military, naval, and civil services. The diet was forthwith sum­moned, and at its first sitting Gustavus spoke of the lamentable condition of the kingdom, and of the need for more efficient methods of government. He had no wish, he said, to establish an absolute monarchy, but it was necessary that the supremacy of the aristocracy should be destroyed, and that the country should re-establish the system which existed in the time of Gustavus Adolphus, when the crown and the diet had each its separate func­tions and worked cordially together. A new constitution, which had been drawn up, placing executive power wholly in the king’s hands, was afterwards read, and at once accepted.

Delivered from the trammels which had hampered his immediate predecessors, Gustavus worked hard for the welfare of his subjects. Agriculture, industry, and trade revived ; the army and navy were improved ; and the educated classes began to show greater interest in art, literature, and science. Unfortunately the king took the court of France as the model for his own court, and the country resented the incessant demands for money which were rendered necessary by his personal extravagance. In 1788 he declared war with Russia, hoping to recover Livonia and the part of Finland which Russia had con­quered ; and the discontent he had aroused found expres­sion in the army, the leaders of which declined to fight, protesting that the war ought not to have been begun without the sanction of the diet. At the same time Den­mark was persuaded by the czarina Catherine to attack Sweden. Gustavus seemed to be on the verge of ruin, but he was saved by his own courage and sagacity. Hastening back from Finland, he was able to rescue Gothenburg from the Danes with a force raised in Dale­carlia, and soon afterwards, through the intervention oi England and Prussia, Denmark was induced to withdraw from the struggle. The majority of the diet, seeing the dangers to which the nation was exposed, rallied around the king, and, notwithstanding the opposition of the nobles, recognized the right of the crown to declare war. Impressed by the firm and rapid action of Gustavus, the army returned to its allegiance, and the conflict with Russia was begun in earnest. In 1789 the Swedes were very unsuccessful, but in the following year they gained several victories both at sea and on land. Gustavus saw, however, that it would be impossible for him to wrest from Russia any of her territories, and in 1790 peace was concluded on the understanding that both states should occupy the position they held before the war.