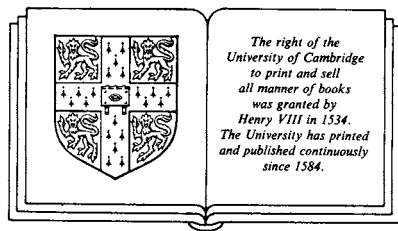


THE AGE OF LIBERTY

Sweden 1719–1772

MICHAEL ROBERTS



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

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First published 1986

First paperback edition 2002

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Roberts, Michael, 1908–

The age of liberty.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Sweden – History – 1718–1814. 2. Sweden – Politics
and government – 1718–1772. I. Title.

DL748.R63 1986 948.5'03 85-12745

ISBN 0 521 32092 5 hardback

ISBN 0 521 52707 4 paperback

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Introduction

The Age of Liberty began and ended with a revolution. Neither movement was tumultuous or violent, and no Swedish blood was shed on either occasion. Nevertheless, each was a true revolution, for each effected a radical alteration in the political system. Historians have always been ready to perceive the revolutionary character of the *coup* of 19 August 1772, whereby Gustav III brought the Age of Liberty to a sudden end; but outside Sweden they have been less inclined to appreciate the true nature of the events of 1719–20. Yet those events resulted in shifts of power and constitutional changes so dramatic, so far-reaching, and so firmly maintained, that only another revolution could undo them.

For nearly forty years before 1718 Sweden had been an Absolutism: an Absolutism popular, and to some extent parliamentary, under Charles XI; unrestrained, ruthless, and at last odious, under his son. By 1718 the sufferings which a period of two decades of continuous war had brought with it had irretrievably alienated the Swedish people. Admiration of the king's heroic qualities and his personal virtues did indeed survive, and would never be extinguished, but the Absolutism, as a political system, was not merely discredited; it was hated. On that point, at least, there was unanimity. Whatever was to be done, and whoever was to do it, Sweden must be safeguarded against a repetition of that experience: this was basic to all the constitutional discussions that took place in the months after the king's death.

For Absolutism, apart altogether from the devastation for which it had been responsible,¹ was a type of government wholly alien to the traditions of Swedish history. In the Middle Ages monarchy had been elective: kings had been chosen under such conditions as the magnates might from time to time succeed in imposing upon a candidate; and Gustav Vasa himself had come to the throne in 1523 as an elected king. But in the course of the sixteenth century the monarchy had ceased to be purely elective: in 1544, by the so-called Succession Pact (*arvförening*) the Estates

¹ Ulrika Eleonora, in her Accession Charter of 1719, was made to declare that the Absolutism had 'damaged, diminished, mutilated and almost laid waste the land'; Axel Brusewitz, ed., *Frihetstidens Grundlagar och konstitutionella stadgar* (Stockholm 1916), p. 51.

had agreed that the Crown should be hereditary in the male line of the Vasa family, or, to look at it in another way, they had extended their election to all Gustav Vasa's male descendants. This decision could have had the dangerous consequence of depriving the representatives of the nation of their chance to impose conditions as the price of coronation, of their right to 'take and break kings'; it could have equated hereditary monarchy with unlimited monarchy. Though the high aristocracy, traditionally the effective check upon the Crown, might insist upon the essentially elective nature of the Succession Pact of 1544, Gustav Vasa's successors contended that it had in fact been a free donation by a grateful people, and that king might now succeed king without limitation of any sort. But in the 1590s the accident that John III's successor, Sigismund, was a Roman Catholic (and also King of Poland) offered an opportunity to retrieve some of what had been given away in 1544. The device the Diet hit upon was the Accession Charter (*konungaförsäkran*). In 1594 Sigismund was required to accept an Accession Charter as a precondition for his coronation. No doubt the main concern of the Estates was to safeguard Sweden from any attempt to undo the work of the Reformation; but for the great magnates of the Council of State it was a deliberate effort to ensure that even though monarchy might now be hereditary, it should not therefore be unlimited.

The precedent so established was faithfully followed. Every Swedish king, from Sigismund to Gustav III, signed an Accession Charter before he was crowned – with one single exception. That exception was Charles XII, who upon his accession in 1697 neither gave one nor was asked to give one, who swore no coronation oath, and who placed the crown on his head with his own hands. It is true that after 1611, when the most stringent Accession Charter of them all had been extorted from Gustav Adolf, the Charters required of his three successors had tended to be less restrictive; but even when the monarchy was most powerful and popular men did not wholly lose sight of the elective principle. In 1633 Axel Oxenstierna could write of Christina's being queen 'in virtue of the unanimous *designation* of Council and Estates'; in 1634 his brother remarked that 'the Estates have power to elect a king'; and as late as 1660 the Estate of Clergy, demanding the right to approve the great officers of state during a minority, argued 'We have the power *eligendi Regem, quod majus videtur*'.² The proceedings of Charles XII in 1697 were thus a violent and deliberate breach of a constitutional custom, the visible sign that henceforward the king would recognise no limitations of any sort, and would be responsible only to God.

² *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brevvevling* (Stockholm 1954) I. x. 12; *Svenska riksrådets protokoll* IV (Stockholm 1886), p. 8; *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll* II (Uppsala 1954), p. 93.

Throughout the sixteenth and much of the seventeenth centuries the function of law-bearer, watchdog of the constitution, custodian of the rights of the subject, was discharged by the high nobility, and especially by the Council of State. It had been so already in the fifteenth century, though then it had been mostly a question of protecting the interests of the great fief-holders; and it was so afterwards when the great fiefs had disappeared. Erik Sparre in the 1590s had maintained that the Council was an ephorate, in whom alone was vested the right of legal rebellion; Axel Oxenstierna in the 1630s declared that the Council were mediators between king and people, entrusted with the duty of holding a balance in the constitution. But the constitutional pretensions of the Council and the high aristocracy in the 1590s (and afterwards) had been based not only on the need to limit the Crown, but also – almost equally important – on the need for better governance and more effective administration than had been the case under the personal and paternal rule of the early Vasas, with their *ad hoc* devices and their tendency to rely on irresponsible low-born secretaries. The reforms which were needed came through piecemeal legislation in the time of Gustav Adolf, and achieved solidity in the Form of Government of 1634, which remained one of the basic documents of the constitution for many years to come. It set up a central government based on five *Collegia*, or Boards, each headed by one of the great officers of state;³ it defined duties; it prescribed procedures; it fixed emoluments. Axel Oxenstierna, who was mainly responsible for its final drafting, thus fulfilled one of the aspirations of the aristocratic constitutionalists of the 1590s. And in 1660 it was supplemented by an *Additament* which modified or extended it in the light of experience, and in response to new developments.

Yet twenty years later the Council lost – and lost for ever – the ability to discharge the constitutional functions, or to exercise the authority, which they had enjoyed in Oxenstierna's day. And they lost it by reason of their participation, during Charles XI's minority, in the financial incompetence and irresponsibility of those who acted as Regents on his behalf, and by the flaccid discharge of their duties after he came of age. The 'retribution' (*räfst*) which, from 1680 onwards, Charles exacted of the former Regents, soon extended to the Council also. Their pretension to be mediators was explicitly rejected. Their right and duty to give advice, unsolicited, was repudiated. They ceased to be the Council of State: henceforward they would be the King's Council. Their participation in the work of government was curtailed; new, efficient, bureaucrats did much of the king's business, and were ennobled as a new aristocracy,

³ The great officers of state were the High Steward, the Marshal, the Admiral, the Chancellor, and the Treasurer.

swamping the old historic families; and the transformation was accelerated by the economic ruin which overtook many of those families through the pitiless operations of Charles XI's *reduktion*.

By this time, however, the Council had long ceased to be the sole proponent of constitutional principles, or the only brake upon the actions of the king. Another champion of constitutionalism was already on the scene, in the shape of the Diet. The Diet, comprising the four Estates of Nobility, Clergy, Burghers and Peasants, had in the fifteenth century gradually attained sufficient consistency to be available as a political instrument to those who knew how to exploit it; and Sten Sture the younger had indeed exploited it in his struggle to break out of the Scandinavian Union which had been established in 1397. The example had not been lost on Gustav Vasa, who used the Diet with great skill to legitimate his plunder of the Church – and also, of course, to obtain the Succession Pact of 1544. Eric XIV, who followed him, enlisted its help against his personal and dynastic enemies. Charles IX found in it his most effective ally in his struggle against Sigismund, and in his usurpation of the throne. Gustav Adolf collaborated with it in order to spread the responsibility for his hazardous enterprises. Christina turned to it to defeat the Council's resistance to her installation of the future Charles X as her successor. And finally the Absolutism itself was – to begin with – essentially dependent upon the Diet's endorsement of Charles XI's drastic reforms and its acceptance of his constitutional principles.

But though for nearly two centuries the Diet had been the monarchy's ally, and at times its tool, that had not prevented it from putting forward constitutional claims of growing importance; and it had long had in its hands a potential restraint upon the Crown in virtue of its right to grant, or to withhold, new taxes, should the king find himself unable to live within his ordinary income. But after 1632 the Diet began to advance new pretensions. In 1634 the Estate of Nobility demanded that during the Regency for Christina the great officers of state be appointed with the Diet's agreement, and that they be responsible to it in the event of misconduct. In 1650 the three lower Estates, led by the Clergy and the Burghers, for the first time seized the parliamentary initiative. In 1660 the Diet secured acceptance of its position as the only body to make laws; in 1660 also it demanded triennial meetings. A development of far-reaching importance came in 1675, when Charles XI, disillusioned with the Regents who had governed for him since 1660, authorised the Estates to set up an investigating committee to examine their actions, and directed them to scrutinise the minutes of the Council and the *Collegia* in order to provide the evidence required. Here begins the method of securing ministerial responsibility to parliament which was to be a characteristic feature of the constitution during the Age of Liberty. And when the

report of the committee in 1680 led to the Diet's being constrained by the king to undertake the prosecution and judgment of those whom the report pointed out as culprits, that too was an innovation which cast long shadows before.

These might seem to be notable advances; but the Estates soon found that their alliance with the king against the Regents and the Council, and their eagerness to endorse the Crown's resumption of lands alienated to the nobility, had in fact entailed the sacrifice of most of the gains they had made in the preceding half-century. The king did indeed take care to keep them informed; he levied no taxes without their consent; but their share in decision-making now depended upon his grace. Much of their law-making power passed into his hands; and when he needed the Diet's cooperation he increasingly turned, not to the Estates as a whole, but to their Secret Committee. The Secret Committee had first been set up in 1627, with the special object of dealing with delicate questions of foreign policy. At first all four Estates had been represented on it, but the participation of representatives of the Peasants became less frequent with the passage of time. In the 1680s so wide a variety of matters was referred to it that it became virtually a miniature Diet, and indeed the only element in the Diet with any spark of life left in it. It was therefore almost natural that when after 1718 a parliamentary régime was once more established the Secret Committee should from the very beginning have assumed to itself the functions of leadership at the expense of the rights of the *plena*, and of the Council also. But for the rest, the Estates in Charles XI's time acquiesced in the Absolutism almost without resistance: Charles XI, they thought, was the kind of ruler that the times required; Absolutism seemed for the moment the answer to Sweden's problems. They manifested their confidence in the king – and more specifically in his peaceable foreign policy – by authorising in advance the levying of additional taxes and the raising of necessary loans in the event of war: so in 1683, 1686, 1689; and in 1693, as a reward for Charles's success in contriving to live of his own in peacetime, they renewed this authorisation – but without limitation of time. This open-ended commitment proved disastrous; for it left Charles XII free to tax his subjects to the limit – or beyond it – during a war of twenty years. During the whole of his reign Charles XII never called the Estates together. And when in 1713 the Council, in despair, summoned them in order to give some sort of validity to their efforts to make peace, Charles from his Turkish exile peremptorily ordered them to disperse.

Thus the Estates, which had accepted the Absolutism with satisfaction, as giving them security for better governance, found themselves thrust aside and powerless, impotent spectators of the country's ruin. The position of the Council under Charles XII was no better: diminished in numbers, unable to influence the king, wishing but fearing to disobey his

orders, they offered no very promising alternative government, if a chance bullet should put an end to Charles's career. The new efficient bureaucracy which Charles XI had built up, and over which he had presided as the arch-bureaucrat, had likewise been supplanted in the closing years of his son's reign by officials unknown to the constitution, responsible to the king alone, who overrode the law and violated private rights in obedience to his insistence that means must be found, at whatever cost, to carry on his campaigns. For the bureaucrats of the *Collegia*, and for their colleagues in the local government of the provinces, the situation had become intolerable; and they too looked forward to the moment when the country should cease to be governed by emergency measures and constrained to live in a siege-economy, and when the old official hierarchies, the old regularity and order (and the payment of their salaries) might be restored.

For all these elements – Council, Estates, bureaucrats, and victims of the Absolutism – the death of Charles XII offered a unique opportunity. It consisted in the simple fact that Charles left no heir. There were two possible claimants. One was the young Charles Frederick of Holstein, son of Charles XII's elder sister Hedvig Sophia; the other was Charles XII's younger sister Ulrika Eleonora, who in 1715 had married Frederick of Hesse-Cassel. By entering into this marriage she had doubly compromised her claim: first, because Frederick was a Calvinist; and secondly because the Diet of Norrköping in 1604 (and Charles XI's Testament also) had laid it down that in the event of failure of heirs male the throne should pass to the eldest daughter 'who was unprovided for' – and after 1715 Ulrika Eleonora was no longer in that situation. In 1713–14, before her marriage, she had been invited (without Charles's approval) to sit in the Council, and there had even been a suggestion that she should be made Regent. In December 1718 she still believed, with an obstinacy which was characteristic of her, that she was entitled to claim the throne by hereditary right. But she was mistaken. When Charles XII fell at Frederikshald the Crown once again became elective: the situation reverted to what it had been before 1544. And there was virtually no element in Swedish society that was not determined to extract the maximum advantage from this fortunate accident. Whoever succeeded Charles XII – for there were already Hessian and Holstein partisans – whatever the outcome of any struggles for power, one thing was certain: the new monarch would be a limited monarch.

The constitutional revolution was carried through very swiftly. Frederick of Hesse, apprehensive of the rival claims of the young Duke of Holstein, advised Ulrika Eleonora at once to renounce Absolutism and summon a Diet. That advice she had little option but to follow; for the officers of the army gave notice that they would swear no oath of

allegiance to her unless she had been elected by the Estates. In January 1719 she formally renounced her supposed hereditary right; and the Diet, having declared *all* hereditary right to be extinguished, unanimously elected her queen. A month later she gave her Accession Charter and put her signature to the Constitution of 1719.

The Constitution of 1719 stood for no more than a year; and by 1720 it was found necessary to replace it. Ulrika Eleonora had signed it without troubling to read it; she never seems to have understood its terms and implications, which on occasion she violated; she was dilatory and stubborn in the conduct of business; and she strove to place her husband on the throne beside her, after the manner of William and Mary. For this proposal she found no support whatever. But it became clear that a situation in which Frederick, as consort, was becoming the irresponsible power behind the throne, could not be tolerated: much better if the queen would agree to step down in her husband's favour. To this she at last assented; and Frederick of Hesse, having conveniently discovered that he was at heart a Lutheran, gave what amounted to a preliminary Accession Charter, and was in March 1720 invited to take the Crown – an invitation which he lost no time in accepting.⁴

Though the men who were responsible for the revolution were united in their determination to end the Absolutism, in much else they were at odds with one another. The Council – and notably its leader, Arvid Horn – together with the high nobility and the representatives of the old families who had dominated affairs before 1660, hoped to restore the tradition of aristocratic constitutionalism as it had existed in the previous century, and dreamed of a return to the state of affairs established in the Form of Government of 1634: some of them hoped also for the restitution – at least in part – of the lands they had lost by Charles XI's *reduktion*. But the lesser nobility, who cared little about reversing the *reduktion* (of which, indeed, they had been the most eager supporters in the 1680s) and who had retained their hostility to the old Council-aristocracy which they had helped Charles XI to overthrow, had other views: it is significant that they called the Council-party 'Tories'. Massive ennoblement by Charles XI, and again by Ulrika Eleonora in her brief reign, had produced an Estate of Nobility in which great numbers had no landed estates of their own, but were dependent for their livelihood on the service of the Crown – for most of them in the army, but also in civilian office. The officers of the militia were settled on small farms which had been 'allotted' to them

⁴ This was almost a return to 1544, for it gave the succession to Frederick's heirs male (or to Ulrika Eleonora if he died before her). The precedent was followed in 1743, on the election of Adolf Frederick as heir-apparent. But this in no way meant that the monarchy, now once again declared hereditary, was not strictly limited: the Constitution of 1720 bound it so tightly that the reversion to hereditary monarchy no longer mattered.

for their maintenance out of the noble lands which Charles XI had resumed to the Crown, and the last thing they wanted was any interference with the 'allotment-system' (*indelningsverk*) and the recovery of these lands by their former owners. The nobility was becoming democratised; and one sign of this was the abolition, in 1720, of the division of the Estate of Nobility into three classes.⁵ And for this numerous nobility, living in modest circumstances, necessitated to carve out for themselves a niche somewhere in the king's service, the matter and manner of appointments and promotions was of vital importance. Hence the careful provisions in the Constitution of 1720 which defined the rights of king, Council and *Collegia* in the nomination to jobs. Nor was it surprising that the Nobility in 1719 should seek to protect their position, or to improve it, by extracting from the queen a grant of privileges more extensive than any they had enjoyed before. But the three lower Estates were not prepared to see the revolution accompanied by the reinforcement of what they considered to be social injustice overdue for correction; and throughout the years 1719–20 the debate on the constitution was complicated by a strife of Estates which on occasion was very bitter. The privileges of 1719 were in fact never applied, and they were destined to be considerably curtailed in 1723.

But the most important part in carrying through the revolution was played by the bureaucracy, now reascent after its eclipse in the last years of Charles XII. As in 1680 the bureaucrats had helped to make Charles XI an absolute monarch, so now they were mainly instrumental in transferring his sovereignty to the Estates. A main motive for their attitude in 1680 had been a determination to put the monarchy on such a financial footing that it would be enabled to pay their salaries punctually and in full; and in 1719 they were equally determined to use the opportunity to ensure that they be paid in good money, and not in a devalued token currency. And in 1719–20 the bureaucrats dominated the Diet, because they dominated the Secret Committee. Already at the Diet of 1713–14 the Secret Committee had shown its readiness to encroach upon what had hitherto been considered to be the concern of the Council; and in 1719 it was perhaps the only element in the state which combined a clear idea of what to do with the strength to do it. The Estates no doubt remembered the constitutional advances they had made in the years before 1680; but it was the Secret Committee which most resolutely revived the parliamentary tradition. The Constitutions of 1719 and 1720 were drafted by committees on which they were strongly represented; and it is significant that the Constitution of 1720 had not yet obtained the approval of the *plena* at the time of Frederick's coronation, and was not

⁵ The division into three classes had been established by the *Ordinance for the House of Nobility* (1626). Class I comprised Counts and Barons; Class II, descendants of former members of the Council; Class III the untitled nobility.

even submitted to the Council until after it had been signed by the king.

The revolution of 1719–20 thus resulted in the defeat of the old tradition of Council-constitutionalism, the ending of the Nobility's claim to be the historic guardian of liberties – and hence, by clear implication, of its claim to those privileges which had hitherto been considered to be its due in return for its discharge of that function. Power passed to the Estates, as the legitimate heirs of a rival tradition. The revolution was thus pregnant with social consequences: the democratisation of the Estate of Nobility, the revival of the claims of the three lower Estates to a greater measure of political equality. Those claims, fiercely asserted in the early 1720s, would revive with increased intensity in the decade before the revolution of 1772, and they would be a decisive factor in the double crisis which the *coup d'état* of Gustav III temporarily resolved.

It was not only in regard to Swedish domestic affairs that the death of Charles XII produced a revolution. It marked the transformation of a system of international politics that had remained, substantially unchanged though occasionally threatened, since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. It was a system dominated by a handful of major powers, of which Sweden had been reckoned as one. At Westphalia Sweden had stood forth as the equal of France and the Emperor, one of the three *partes principales paciscentes*, and with them co-guarantor of the great settlement. Since 1631, with short intervals, she had been France's ally, and France had been Sweden's most faithful friend. Twice – in 1660, and again in 1679 – French diplomacy had been exerted to extricate Sweden from predicaments into which she had been led by unfortunate war. After 1660 there were indeed statesmen who began to feel that the status acquired at Westphalia was becoming too much for the country's limited resources to maintain. Charles XI himself was one of them: after 1680 he devoted his attention to conserving and improving those resources, and took care to refrain from any attempt to emulate the warlike achievements of his predecessors. But the exploits of Charles XII in the first decade of the next century had more than restored any recent loss of reputation, and at the climax of his career in the years around 1707 he blazed like some portentous comet in the European sky. But this brilliance had been dimmed by Pultava and Perevolotschna, and after his return from his Turkish exile in 1715 had been nearly extinguished. By this time, as a contemporary observed, 'a strange planet [ruled] in all the northern circles',⁶ disturbing the old astronomy of Richelieu and Mazarin, Lionne and Torcy, shedding a baleful light and exercising an uncertain influence upon the European system, necessitating difficult adjustments to a wholly new situation. The strange planet was of course Russia. Hitherto Muscovy had been thought

⁶ Lord Whitworth, quoted in Basil Williams, *Stanhope – A Study in Eighteenth-century War and Diplomacy* (Oxford 1932), p. 353.

of by most European statesmen as on the very periphery of their world, 'a distant glimmering star', an altogether minor element in their calculations. But now, as Chatham was later to remark, there was 'a great cloud of power in the North', a formidable expansive force. As yet they had formed no notion of how to harness that force; and therefore they must somehow strive to obstruct it. Peter the Great's armies had overrun Finland and the Baltic ports; his troops, to the consternation of all Europe, stood on German soil in Mecklenburg. Desperate adventurers, such as the Jacobites, or Alberoni in Spain, or Görtz in some of the twists and turns of his diplomacy, might be prepared to angle for Russian assistance; but the more cautious statesmen of the West were not prepared if they could help it to admit Russia as a participant in the intricate diplomatic game with which they were so familiar.

In 1719 it seemed to them obvious that the immediate victim of Russian expansion must be Sweden, and the question that confronted them was what they could do, what they were willing to do, what they could afford to do, to rescue Sweden somehow from the plight in which Charles had left her. But this was a problem which had many facets. Peter the Great was not the only predator at large. As the Swedish empire disintegrated, old enmities revived, and new ambitions developed from the opening of new opportunities for plunder. George I, as Elector of Hanover, saw his chance of acquiring Bremen and Verden. Frederick William of Prussia coveted Western Pomerania, which had been denied to Brandenburg in 1648. Frederick IV of Denmark aspired to undo the settlement of 1660, and to recover the southern provinces of Sweden which Denmark had then lost. It would not be easy to arrive at a general settlement of the North which conceded the minimum of satisfaction to these lesser vultures while denying its prey to the Russian eagle.

It was a piece of good fortune for Sweden that at this moment the two great powers of the West were in accord, bound together by the so-called Quadruple Alliance of 1718, and united in their determination to save what could be saved from the wreck that Charles XII had left behind him. But they differed as to what might safely be sacrificed, and what they must strive to retain or regain for their client. To Dubois it still seemed to be important that Sweden should retain a foothold in Germany, should still be a member of the *Reich*, for French statesmen were still influenced by their historic fear of the House of Habsburg, and therefore clung to that 'Eastern System' which was designed to maintain friends or clients – Sweden, Poland, the Turks – who would be available at need to threaten the Habsburgs with a war on two fronts, and so safeguard French influence in Germany. Stanhope, struggling in London or Herrenhausen with the ticklish task of balancing British against Hanoverian interests,

looked at the question rather differently. He was prepared so far to satisfy George I as to support the idea of a Hanoverian acquisition of Bremen–Verden, but he would not willingly concede the lordship of the Baltic to the Tsar in order to save Pomerania. England could not view without alarm the prospect of a situation in which Russia would have a virtual monopoly of the supply of hemp and pitch, masts and spars, which were essential to the British navy. British policy, therefore, as against French, was to try for the restitution to Sweden of Finland, Estonia and Livonia (an uncommonly optimistic programme); and to secure the support of Prussia, as a useful barrier against Russian meddling in central Europe, by persuading the Swedes to sacrifice Stettin. And just as it would not suit British interests to have Russia in total control of the Baltic, so neither would it suit them to allow Denmark once more to straddle the Sound, and in an emergency perhaps to close it to British shipping, as had happened in 1652.

Both England and France were in 1719 represented in Stockholm by bold and able ministers who worked well together; and the pressure exerted by the devastations of Russian landing-parties on the Swedish east coast supplied them with a leverage which made their task less difficult than would otherwise have been the case. It proved possible to reconcile the British and French views of what ought to be done; and thanks above all to the exertions of Carteret, the British minister, the programmes of each were in fact realised – up to a point. In July 1719 Carteret persuaded the Swedes to agree to the cession of Bremen–Verden to Hanover; in August he renewed the Anglo-Swedish alliance of 1700, with a secret article pledging Sweden to hand over Stettin, Usedom and Wollin to Prussia – a pledge which was implemented by the Swedish–Prussian peace of January 1720. In return he promised subsidies which were essential if Swedish resistance was to be carried on at all; and he ordered up Admiral Norris from the Sound to cooperate with the Swedish fleet. It remained only to deal with Denmark and Russia. As to Denmark, England and France were at one in refusing to countenance the transference to Denmark of Wismar, or of the areas in Pomerania occupied by Frederick IV's troops; and England was inflexibly opposed to any Danish gains in Sweden itself. Carteret therefore undertook to mediate; and having extorted Sweden's abandonment of that exemption from the Sound Dues which had been her privilege since 1645, he carried it with a high hand in Copenhagen. In return for an indemnity Frederick IV renounced all his conquests except 'royal' Holstein, and France and England guaranteed his possession of Slesvig.

The problem of a settlement with Russia had still to be tackled, and the activities of Russian raiding-parties – who on one occasion reached the

outskirts of Stockholm – made it a problem of the utmost urgency. It was in these circumstances that Frederick of Hesse, in conjunction with Carteret and Campredon, launched the idea of a great concert of powers which should by joint military and naval action force Russia to make concessions in the Baltic. It was to comprise England-Hanover, Prussia, Poland, and if all went well the Emperor, and was to be financed by heavy French subsidies. In the mind of Frederick I, it was conceived of as a Grand Alliance comparable to that which had brought Louis XIV to reason: Frederick, after all, had had a distinguished military career in the service of that cause. It may be doubted whether even under the most favourable auspices such a coalition, if it had been formed, would have long held together, or would have had much chance of success; but as it happened such prospects as it may have had were blighted by the domestic troubles of the two major powers that were behind it. For France, 1720 was the year of the collapse of Law's Mississippi scheme; for England, it was the year of the South Sea bubble. Few Englishmen felt any enthusiasm for fighting a war in the Baltic; few Frenchmen were disposed now to pay for one. The concert never got off the ground. And so the Swedes were left to themselves to make the best settlement they could with the Tsar. They had a strong feeling that the allies – and England in particular – had let them down. In return for the painful sacrifices which Carteret had cajoled them into making they felt that they had received virtually no assistance. They forgot that without the subsidies which France and England provided the government of the country would have been simply unable to carry on.

In 1721, therefore, Swedish and Russian negotiators met at Nystad to discuss terms. The Swedes were not only under overwhelming Russian naval and military pressure; they had also to face the possibility that the Tsar might support the claims of Charles Frederick of Holstein, and use the opportunity to install a Russian client on the Swedish throne. Their only real hope was that the Tsar was sufficiently anxious for peace to be more or less content with what he had got. And so it proved: by the terms of the peace of Nystad Sweden ceded to Russia Ingria, Estonia, Livonia; but she recovered (what she was certainly in no position to reconquer) all of Finland except Viborg and part of Karelia; she obtained the right to purchase 50,000 roubles' worth of grain from Russia each year, free of duty – a concession of real importance; she received two million *riksdalers* in cash, as compensation for her losses; and she obtained from the Tsar an undertaking that he would not interfere in Swedish domestic affairs, or disturb the order of succession, or permit the subversion of the Constitution of 1720.

The position in which Sweden now found herself was succinctly summed up by Carl Germund Cederhielm in a famous epigram:

The glory of our age is dead and gone;
We to our former nothingness are fated.
King Charles is in his grave; King Frederick's consecrated;
And Sweden's clock has moved from XII to I.⁷

The hands of the clock could certainly never be put back; but the clock, in spite of everything, was still going: it must be the task of the post-war generation to ensure that it continued to do so. They might luxuriate in the newly-won liberty which the Constitution of 1720 secured to them; but they could never forget that 'great cloud of power' which hung so menacingly over them. After 1721 it was an imperative task to contrive some system of foreign policy which might neutralise or deflect any thunderbolts which might in the future issue from it.

⁷ Vad i sin period den högsta punkten sett
plär åter strax därpå sitt förra intet röna.
Kung Karl vi nyss begrov, kung Fredrik vi nu kröna.
Så har vårt svenska ur nu gått från tolv till ett.