

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway
and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE salient features of early northern history first emerge dimly from the mists of antiquity about the middle of the eighth century. The southernmost branch of the Scandinavian family, the Danes, referred to by Alfred a century later (circa 890), as occupying Jutland, the islands and Scania, was, in 777, strong enough to defy the Frankish empire by harbouring its fugitives. North of Scania we find, about the same time, the two closely connected nations of the Swedes and Goths, the former inhabiting the region round Lake Mälare, and the latter extending south of Lakes Wener and Wetter to Scania and the sea; while, westward of the Goths, the numerous "Fylker," or clans of the Norröner or Nordmænd, had long since expelled the aboriginal Finns from the fjords and valleys of southern Norway. Favourable circumstances gave the Danes the lead in Scandinavia. They held the richest and therefore the most populous lands, and geographically they were nearer than their neighbours to western civilisation. Christianity was first preached in Denmark by Ebo of Rheims (822) and by Ansgar (826-865); but it was not till after the subsidence of the Viking raids (which, beginning with the ravaging of Lindisfarne in 793, virtually terminated with the establishment of Rollo in Normandy, 911, using up the best energies of Scandinavia for 120 years), that Adaldag, archbishop of Hamburg, could open a new and successful mission.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

This resulted in the erection of the bishoprics of Sleswick, Ribe, and Aarhus (circa 948), though the real conversion of the country must be dated from the baptism of King Harold Bluetooth (960). Forty years later King Olaf I Trygvesson established Christianity in Norway by force of arms (circa 1000), though it was not till half-a-century after that date that King Sverker I (1134–1155) gave militant paganism its death-blow in Sweden.

Meanwhile, the Danish monarchy was attempting to aggrandise itself at the expense of the Germans, the Wends, who then occupied the Baltic littoral as far as the Vistula, and the other Scandinavian kingdoms. Harold Bluetooth (940–986) subdued German territory south of the Eider, extended the *Danevirke*, Denmark's great line of defensive fortifications, first erected by his father Gorm, to the south of Sleswick, and planted the military colony of Jomsborg at the mouth of the Oder. Part of Norway was first seized after the united Danes and Swedes had defeated and slain King Olaf Trygvesson at the great battle of Svolde (1000); and, between 1028 and 1035, Canute the Great added the whole kingdom to his own; but the union did not long survive him. Equally short-lived was the Danish dominion in England, which originated in a great Viking expedition of King Sweyn I to replenish his depleted exchequer, and had important social consequences for Denmark, inasmuch as Canute the Great, impressed by the superior civilisation of the West, promoted Christian culture in his Scandinavian dominions by introducing foreign clerics. He was also the first to found monasteries in Denmark. Canute moreover greatly strengthened the monarchy by establishing the *Vederlag*, or *Danehof*, originally an assembly of magnates, lay and clerical, bound to the king by oath, who, in return for certain privileges, engaged to render him military service. Gradually the *Vederlag* came to include all the great landed proprietors, and so grew into a *Rigsforsamling*, or National Assembly.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)I] *Denmark under the Valdemars* 3

The period between the death of Canute the Great and the accession of Valdemar I (1035–1157) was a troublous time for Denmark. The kingdom was harassed almost incessantly, and more than once partitioned by pretenders to the throne, who did not scruple to invoke the interference of the neighbouring monarchs, and even of the heathen Wends, who established themselves for a time on the southern islands. Yet, throughout this chaos one thing made for future stability, and that was the growth and consolidation of a national Church, which culminated in the erection of the archbishopric of Lund (circa 1104) and the consequent ecclesiastical independence of Denmark. The third archbishop of Lund, Absalon (1128–1201), was Denmark's first great statesman. His genius materially assisted Valdemar I (1157–1181) and Canute VI (1182–1202) to reestablish the Danish monarchy. The most pressing danger came from the Wends, who, after long years of strife, were utterly routed by Absalon on the isle of Rügen (1184), which was added to Denmark. The policy of Absalon was continued on a still vaster scale by Canute VI's younger brother and ultimate successor, Valdemar II (1202–1241), who, already, as duke of Sleswick, had valiantly defended the southern boundaries of the realm against the Germans, and, by the conquest of Holstein, extended the limits of Denmark to the Elbe. As king, Valdemar II, taking advantage of German anarchy, raised Denmark to the rank of a great power, subduing all the German and Wendish territories on the shores of the Baltic; whilst by the famous crusade of 1219 he even conquered Esthonia, a useless and costly possession to distant Denmark. And then this vast empire suddenly collapsed. Valdemar's vassal, Count Henry of Schwerin, surprised his master at Lyö (1223) and carried him captive to Germany, whence he emerged only by the surrender of all his German conquests and the payment of a heavy ransom. An attempt to recover his empire was frustrated by the crushing defeat of Bornhöved (1227); and henceforth

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

Introduction

[CH.

Valdemar, no longer “the Victorious,” devoted himself exclusively to internal administration and judicial reforms, well deserving the epithet “Legislator” bestowed upon him by his grateful subjects.

The period of the Valdemars marks a turning-point in Danish history. The ancient patriarchal system was merging into a more complicated development of separate estates. The monarchy, now dominant, and far wealthier than before, rested upon the support of the great nobles, many of whom held their lands by feudal tenure, and constituted the royal *Raad* or Council. The clergy, fortified by royal privileges, had also risen to influence; but celibacy and independence of the civil courts tended to make them more and more of a separate caste. Education was spreading. Numerous Danes, lay as well as clerical, regularly frequented the University of Paris, with beneficial results. There were signs too of the rise of a vigorous *Bourgeoisie*, due to the development of the natural resources (chiefly fisheries and cattle-rearing) and the foundation of guilds, the oldest of which, the *Edslag* of Sleswick, dates from the middle of the twelfth century. The *Bonder*, or yeomen, were prosperous and independent, with well-defined rights. Danish territory extended over 68,000 sq. kilms., or nearly double its present area; the population was about 700,000; and 160,000 men and 1400 ships were available for national defence.

Sweden and Norway also were beginning to feel the benefit of a centralised monarchical government. In the former country the Swedes and Goths were united under Sverker I (1134); and for the next hundred years each of the two nations supplied the common king alternately. Eric IX (1150–60) organised the Swedish Church on the model prevalent elsewhere, and undertook a crusade against the heathen Finlanders, which marks the beginning of Sweden’s over-sea dominion. Under Charles VII, the archbishopric of Upsala was founded (1164); but the greatest medieval statesman of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I]

Sweden and Norway

5

Sweden was Earl Birger, who practically ruled the land from 1248 to 1266. To him is attributed the foundation of Stockholm; but he is best known as a legislator, and his wise reforms prepared the way for the abolition of serfdom.

After the death, at the battle of Stiklastad (1030), of Olaf II, who completed the Christianising of Norway begun by Olaf I, that kingdom passed for a time under the Danish sceptre, but, in 1035, Olaf's exiled son, Magnus the Good, was summoned from Russia to ascend his father's throne. He was succeeded by his son Harold Haardraade, whose family reigned till 1130. Then ensued a long period of civil discord, resulting for a time in absolute anarchy, till order was restored by King Haco IV, who was crowned by a papal legate in 1246, and did much for the Church during his long reign (1217-63). Under him Iceland and Greenland were incorporated with Norway. Haco's son, Magnus, was obliged to retrocede the Hebrides and Man to Scotland; but his wise internal administration did much to heal the wounds of the kingdom, and as a legislator (hence his epithet *Lagaböte*) he was not inferior to Valdemar II or Earl Birger.

Denmark, meanwhile, had sunk low indeed. On the death of Valdemar II a period of disintegration ensued. Valdemar's son, Eric Plovpenning, succeeded him as king; but his brother and near kinsfolk also received huge appanages, and family discords led to civil wars. Through the whole of the 13th and part of the 14th century the struggle raged between the Danish kings and the Sleswick dukes; and of six monarchs no fewer than three died violent deaths. Superadded to these troubles was a prolonged, if intermittent, struggle for supremacy between the Popes and the Crown, and, still more serious, the beginning of a breach between the kings and the nobles, which had important constitutional consequences. The prevalent disorder had led to general lawlessness, in consequence of which the royal authority had been widely extended; and a strong opposition gradually arose which protested against the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

abuses of this authority. In 1282 the nobles extorted from King Eric Glipping the first *Haandfæstung* or charter, which made the *Danehof*, or Great Council, a regular and legitimate branch of the administration, and gave guarantees against further usurpations. Christopher II (1319–1332) was constrained to grant another charter considerably reducing the prerogative, increasing the privileges of the upper classes, and at the same time reducing the burden of taxation. But aristocratic license proved as mischievous as royal incompetence; and on the death of Christopher II the whole kingdom was on the verge of dissolution. Eastern Denmark was in the hands of one magnate; another magnate held Jutland and Fünen in pawn; the dukes of Sleswick were practically independent of the Danish Crown; the Scanian provinces had (1332) surrendered themselves to Sweden.

It was reserved for another Valdemar to reunite and consolidate the scattered members of his ancestral heritage. This prince, the youngest son of Christopher II, chosen king in 1340, possessed, on his accession, little more than north Jutland as the dower of his wife Helvig, daughter of Duke Valdemar of Sleswick; yet on this slender foundation his genius and statecraft gradually raised the most powerful state in Scandinavia. Before the end of 1346 he had recovered Zealand, and, by 1348, the greater part of Fünen and Jutland. In 1360 the anarchical condition of Sweden enabled him to win back the Scanian provinces; and he had already (1346) advantageously sold Esthonia to the German Order. All his efforts aimed at the establishment of a strong monarchy; and the pacification sworn at the *Danehof* held at Kalundborg in 1360 was the keystone of the newly-erected kingdom. The last fifteen years of the reign of Valdemar IV were devoted to a policy of conquest. In 1361 he subdued the rich island of Gothland, and thus came into collision with the powerful Hanse League. In the middle of the 13th century, the privileges which had been conceded to Lübeck alone were likewise

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1]

The Union of Kalmar

7

extended to the so-called Wendish towns¹, whose unscrupulous competition had hampered Danish trade and prevented the development of an energetic merchant class, which might have proved a counterpoise to the nobility. The League naturally regarded the conquest of Gothland as an act of war. At a Hansetag held at Cologne in 1367, seventy of the towns concerted to attack Denmark, and succeeded in extorting, by the Treaty of Stralsund, 1370, humiliating conditions of peace from Valdemar, though ultimately he contrived to render illusory many of the advantages so gained. He was also able, shortly before his death in 1375, to recover the greater part of Holstein.

With Valdemar IV the male line of Sweyn Estridsson became extinct; but it was reserved for Valdemar's daughter, Margaret, queen of Haco VI, of Norway, to bring about a union of the three northern kingdoms, temporary indeed, but pregnant with consequences which were profoundly to influence the history of Scandinavia for centuries. The way had already been prepared for such a confederation by the first union between Sweden and Norway in 1319, when the three-year-old Magnus, son of the Swedish royal duke Eric and of the Norwegian princess Ingeborg, who had inherited the throne of Norway from his grandfather Haco V, son of Magnus Lagaböte, was in the same year elected king of Sweden likewise. This arrangement was known as the Convention of Oslo. A long minority weakened the royal influence in both countries; and Magnus lost his kingdoms before his death. Norway he was forced to surrender to his son, Haco VI, in 1343; and the Swedes, irritated by his misrule, superseded him by his own nephew, Albert of Mecklenburg, in 1365, but not before he had carried through the unpopular marriage of his son Haco with Margaret, the Danish king's daughter (1363). In Sweden, moreover, the feeble monarch's partialities and

¹ Rostock, Greifswald, Wismar, and Stralsund.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

necessities led directly to the rise of a powerful landed aristocracy enriched by his indiscriminate favours, and indirectly to the growth of popular liberties. Forced by the unruliness of the magnates in his latter days to lean upon the middle classes, he summoned, in 1359, the first Swedish *Riksdag*, or Parliament, on which occasion representatives from the towns were invited to appear before the king along with the nobles and clergy. His successor, Albert, was compelled to go a step further, and, in 1371, to give the first Swedish *Konungaförsäkran*, or, as we should say, take the first coronation oath.

Margaret's first act after her father's death was to procure the election as king of Denmark, under her own regency, of her infant son Olaf, who had already (1380) succeeded his father, Haco VI, as king of Norway. Olaf himself died, however, in 1387; and in the following year (1388) Margaret, who had ruled both kingdoms in his name, was chosen regent of Norway and Denmark. In 1388, responding to the invitation of the Swedes, she defeated their king, Albert of Mecklenburg, at the battle of Falköping, and drove him into exile. Thereupon, at a convention of the representatives of the three northern kingdoms, held at Kalmar, Margaret's great nephew, Eric of Pomerania, a youth of fifteen, was elected the common king, although Margaret continued to hold the reins of government till her death. Simultaneously an agreement, the so-called Union of Kalmar, was arrived at for the closer union in future, under a common monarch, of the three realms, each of which was, nevertheless, to retain its independence¹.

In any case Denmark was bound to be the gainer, and the only gainer, by the Union of Kalmar. Her population was double that of the two other kingdoms combined, besides being far less scattered; and her adventurous nobility welcomed a political compact which led the way to fat benefices and rich emoluments. Neither Margaret nor her successors observed

¹ The actual deed embodying the terms of union never got beyond the stage of an unratified draft.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I]

Changes in Denmark

9

the stipulation that in each country only natives should hold land and high office; and it is remarkable that, while many Danish and even German nobles received fiefs and sinecures in Sweden and Norway, the converse very seldom occurred. Nevertheless during Margaret's lifetime the system worked fairly well. The great queen inherited her father's genius, and was an ideal despot. The *Danehoffer*, or national assemblies, fell into abeyance; membership of the *Rigsraad*, or Senate, became a mere state decoration; and court officials, acting as superior clerks, superseded the ancient dignitaries. On the other hand, law and order were well maintained; the license of the nobility was sternly repressed; and many of the alienated royal domains were recovered by the Crown. Margaret also succeeded in regaining the greater part of Sleswick by barter or purchase. Her pupil and successor, Eric of Pomerania, was unequal to the burden of empire. He was violent where she had been strong, and speedily embroiled himself not only with his neighbours but with his own subjects. The Hanse League, whose political ascendancy had been shaken by the Union, though it still retained its commercial privileges, enraged by Eric's efforts to bring in the Dutch as rivals, as well as by the establishment of the Sound tolls, materially assisted the Holsteiners in their twenty-five years' war with Denmark (1410-1435); but they were twice repulsed from Copenhagen. Meanwhile Eric himself was deposed (1439) in favour of his cousin, Christopher of Bavaria, who terminated the long Sleswick struggle by conferring the Duchies upon Count Adolphus of Holstein and his heirs.

The deposition of Eric of Pomerania marks another turning-point in Danish history. It was the act not of the people but of the *Rigsraad*, or Council of State, which had inherited the authority of the ancient *Danehof*, and after the death of Margaret grew steadily in power at the expense of the Crown. As the government thus grew more and more aristocratic, the position of the peasantry steadily deteriorated.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68885-8 - Scandinavia: A Political History of Denmark, Norway and Sweden: From 1513 to 1900

R. Nisbet Bain

Excerpt

[More information](#)

It is under Christopher that we first hear, for instance, of the *Vornedskab*, or patriarchal control of the landlords in the Danish islands over their tenants, a system which degenerated into rank slavery. In Jutland also, after the repression, in 1441, of a *jacquerie*, caused by the intolerable oppression of the landowners, something very like serfdom was introduced.

On the death of Christopher without heirs, the Rigsraad, after conferring with Duke Adolphus of Sleswick, elected his nephew, Count Christian of Oldenburg, king; but Sweden preferred Karl Knutsson, who reigned as Charles VIII, while Norway finally combined with Denmark at the Conference of Halmstad, 1450. This double election practically terminated the Union, though an agreement was come to that the survivor of the two kings should reign over all three kingdoms. Norway subsequently threw in her lot definitively with Denmark; and indeed by this time that ancient kingdom was incapable of standing alone. Dissension resulting in interminable civil wars had, even before the Union, exhausted the limited resources of the poorest of the three northern realms; and her ruin was completed by the ravages of the Black Death, which wiped out two-thirds of her population. The Hanse League, moreover, powerful everywhere, was absolutely dominant in Norway; and its great emporium at Bergen had become, ever since the middle of the fourteenth century, the principal centre for the export trade of Scandinavia. Unfortunately, too, for Norway's independence, the native gentry had gradually died out, and were succeeded by immigrant Danish fortune-hunters; native burgesses there were none, and the peasantry were mostly thralls; so that, if we except the clergy; headed by the archbishop, there was no patriotic class to stand up for the national liberties, especially as the first unional kings were Germans whose interests lay elsewhere and who had nothing in common with the people.

Far otherwise was it with the wealthier kingdom of Sweden. Here the Church and part of the nobility were favourable to the