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

R. Nisbet Bain

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Cambridge Historical Series.

EDITED BY G. W. PROTHERO, LITT.D.

HONORARY FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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A POLITICAL HISTORY OF DENMARK,
NORWAY AND SWEDEN

FROM 1513 TO 1900

BY

R. NISBET BAIN

Author of "The Daughter of Peter the Great," "Charles XII and
the collapse of the Swedish Empire," etc., etc.

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TO
MY FATHER

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GENERAL PREFACE.

The aim of this series is to sketch the history of Modern Europe, with that of its chief colonies and conquests, from about the end of the fifteenth century down to the present time. In one or two cases the story commences at an earlier date: in the case of the colonies it generally begins later. The histories of the different countries are described, as a rule, separately; for it is believed that, except in epochs like that of the French Revolution and Napoleon I, the connection of events will thus be better understood and the continuity of historical development more clearly displayed.

The series is intended for the use of all persons anxious to understand the nature of existing political conditions. "The roots of the present lie deep in the past"; and the real significance of contemporary events cannot be grasped unless the historical causes which have led to them are known. The plan adopted makes it possible to treat the history of the last four centuries in considerable detail, and to embody the most important results of modern research. It is hoped therefore that the series will be useful not only to beginners but to students who have already acquired some general knowledge of European History. For those who wish to carry their studies further, the bibliography appended to each volume will act as a guide to original sources of information and works more detailed and authoritative.

Considerable attention is paid to political geography; and each volume is furnished with such maps and plans as may be requisite for the illustration of the text.

G. W. PROTHERO.

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PREFACE.

THE political history of Scandinavia is the history of the frustration of a great Baltic Empire. That process of concentration and amalgamation which, in the course of the fifteenth century, resulted in the formation of national monarchies throughout Europe, was anticipated, nearly a hundred years earlier, in the North, by the union of the three northern kingdoms beneath the sceptre of Margaret of Denmark. The Union of Kalmar, imperfect and unstable enough while it lasted, had its best chance of permanency at the very moment when it was about to break up for ever. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Denmark and Norway were, practically, one state; and the differences between Denmark and Sweden seemed in a fair way of being amicably adjusted, when a great crime, "The Stockholm Massacre," converted what had hitherto only been political divergence into national hatred. Henceforward Denmark and Sweden drifted hopelessly apart. From the beginning of the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century this hatred manifested itself in no fewer than eleven fierce wars, which diverted the best energies of both nations from their natural channels with enormous resultant waste; and this, too, at the very time when

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the hegemony of a united Scandinavia might, with comparative ease, have been extended over all the Baltic lands from the Weser to the Vistula. No insuperable obstacle stood in the way of such a hegemony. The collapse of two great mediæval organisations, the Hansa and the Teutonic Order, opened to any compact, homogeneous, modern state with a predominant sea-power more than one door of entrance into headless Germany, anarchic Poland, and barbarous Moscovy. Sweden was such a state. What might not have been effected by Sweden and Denmark together, two sister kingdoms with the same religion, similar institutions, and practically the same language, when, notwithstanding their mutually obstructive and destructive rivalry, one of them, Sweden, actually succeeded in establishing, for a time, an Empire of the first rank, an Empire only destroyed by the banded might of Eastern and Central Europe after a twenty years' struggle?

The present volume is, mainly, an attempt to describe the rise of the Scandinavian Kingdoms to political eminence, and their corresponding influence on European politics generally. But the whole story has also its own peculiar dramatic interest, for it is the chronicle of the ambitions and the achievements of a long series of exceptionally great men, master-magicians of statecraft, who wrought marvels with the feeblest material resources. The history of Sweden in particular, from the middle of the sixteenth to the beginning of the eighteenth century, is a record of surpassing individual genius which seems almost to turn aside, or, at least, suspend for a time, the operation of natural laws. Unfortunately, this heroic process of empire-building on flimsy foundations, if it elicited, most certainly

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also exhausted the vital forces of Scandinavia. This fact, I think, explains the tardy development of the unusually manifold and brilliant Scandinavian literature. The national energy and intellect were wholly absorbed by urgent material necessities; there was no leisure in that period of storm and stress for "the amusement of letters."

Naturally, in writing a history of Scandinavia, I have drawn, for the most part, from native sources. But, occasionally, I have found it necessary to resort to Slavonic authorities to bridge over gaps or to reconcile contradictions. Thus the Polish Wars of Gustavus II and Charles X have been studied from the Polish as well as from the Swedish point of view; and for the proper understanding of the Great Northern War I am not a little indebted to the later volumes of Solovev's great "Istoriya Rossii." Swedish and Danish documents are, of course, mutually supplementary and corrective.

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