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Oxenstierna in Germany, 1633–1636

I

In 1888 the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities embarked upon the great task of publishing the writings and correspondence of Axel Oxenstierna. In that year there appeared simultaneously the first volume of the First Series, containing his own letters and state papers, and also of the Second Series, devoted to letters addressed to him.¹ Of the Second Series, which is ordered by correspondents rather than on a chronological basis, twelve volumes have so far appeared; of the First Series, fifteen, covering his output down to the moment when in July 1636 he quitted Germany for ever: the last of them to be published (volume XII), which had long formed an awkward gap in the collection, came in 1978, just ninety years after the start of the enterprise. Though it would be an exaggeration to say that what we now have is no more than the tip of the iceberg, it is certainly true that much material still awaits publication: after all, the great Chancellor's active political life did not close until his death in 1654; and though correspondence in the Second Series does in many cases extend beyond 1636, many very important correspondents are as yet unrepresented in it.

What we have, then, is a magnificent but unfortunately uncompleted historical monument which at present seems unlikely to be carried further. The year 1636 is certainly a natural place to suspend operations, if they must be suspended at all; but it is unfortunate that the cessation of publication leaves the historian who may wish to investigate Oxenstierna's later career almost totally stranded.² For as with the sources, so with the literature. It is a truly astonishing fact that there exist no full life of Oxenstierna in any language. The contrast with Richelieu, or with Wallenstein (to look no further) is striking. There is, indeed, a good study of his youth and early career by Wilhelm Tham; and there is Nils Ahnlund's splendid biography which takes the story down to Lützen.³ But otherwise there is literally nothing. Ahnlund's book is a heroic torso, a great historian's masterpiece; but how should we feel if French historiography could show no study of Richelieu which progressed beyond the Day of Dupes? The comparison is not unfair; for when we close Ahnlund's book he leaves us on the threshold of the most strenuous and dramatic period in his subject's life: the period in which his eminence in Europe attained its brief

climax; and after that, the period when he was in all but name the effective ruler of his country. When Oxenstierna's partnership with Gustav Adolf was dissolved in the mists of Lützen, there lay ahead of him in the immediate future a tangled thicket of experience, still imperfectly investigated by the historian,⁴ and not at all by the biographer.

All the more reason, then, to celebrate the completion of the publication of his papers from 1633 to 1636 – the years when the thicket is densest, and the wait-a-bit thorns most deterrent to the explorer. And though there can be no question, within the necessarily limited dimensions of an essay, of embarking upon a detailed narrative of his policies, the eight thick volumes now available make it possible at least to get some idea of the nature of the problems which confronted him, the difficulties with which he had to struggle, and his personal reactions to the pressures upon him.

If we should be tempted to judge those policies by their results, it is difficult to deny that by the summer of 1636 they had failed at all points. The League of Heilbronn was broken and dead; Protestant Germany was rallying to the terms of the Peace of Prague; the old enemy Denmark had once again obtained, in Bremen, a lodgment in north Germany; the conquests in Prussia had been restored to Poland, the tolls at the Prussian ports had been lost; the Rhineland and Alsace had perforce been abandoned to the tutelage of France; the grandiose Swedish pretensions to compensation – territorial or monetary – had been whittled away to nothing; the “security” which Gustav Adolf had been seeking now seemed beyond hope of attainment. In 1633 Oxenstierna had commanded a prestige in Europe such as no subject before him had enjoyed: a position unparalleled, perhaps, before that of Wellington after Waterloo. Armed with plenipotentiary powers which were almost regal, treating petty princes as his equals, he stood covered before kings,⁵ and it seemed neither unreasonable nor presumptuous that he should entertain the idea of having himself made Elector of Mainz: the only question was whether such an elevation was necessary or expedient. Two years later the picture had changed dramatically. By the spring of 1635 his authority was collapsing; central Germany was as good as lost, and in order to reach the coast from Worms he had no option but to make a long detour through France and Holland, bearing with him the booty from a scene of action to which he would never return. A few months later, and the picture was darker still. In August 1635 he found himself the prisoner of his own mutinous officers; driven, in desperate bargaining, to buy them off with promises impossible to fulfil, secretly sending to the Emperor appeals for peace which were answered only by the imprisonment of his envoy. By the end of the year he sat solitary, impotent, embittered, in Stralsund, a weary and disillusioned Canute vainly bidding the tide of German patriotism to retreat, powerless any longer to control the course of events; his forces reduced to one small precarious army, his options limited to a choice between accepting such terms as John George might be prepared to give him, or submitting himself to the fetters of a French alliance.

It is only when we look more closely at the circumstances encompassing this disastrous record that we can understand, not only how the situation came about, but also – more important for our present purposes – the magnitude of the task, and the quality of the man who confronted it. Oxenstierna's record of failure does not damage his reputation: it illustrates it. This is the heroic period of his career; though at the same time it is the most inglorious.

II

What was required of him, on the morrow of Lützen, has only to be stated for its impossibility to become obvious. He must now not only conduct his country's foreign policy, not only manage the finances of war; but also assume the responsibilities and discharge the functions of a commander-in-chief: he was doomed to be Gustav Adolf, no less than Axel Oxenstierna. It was a load no man could carry. Already, in July 1632, he had written to his brother of the crushing burden of work which even then fell upon him:

God is my witness that I am simply not able to do it, and am so harassed *varietate rerum*, so beset *mole negotiorum*, so burdened *difficultatibus*, so surrounded *periculis*, that often I know not what I do. . . I am quite weary of my life, and allow all my duty to fall into arrears. . . For as to devotion and good-will, they are still what they always were; but my strength and my capacity diminish.⁶

But he underrated both the one and the other. What was imposed on him in 1632 was as nothing to the burdens of 1633–36.

At the beginning of 1633 the government in Stockholm sent him his commission.⁷ It gave him powers greater than were entrusted to any Swedish subject before or since; greater than he desired, greater (as he was later to remark) than was prudent.⁸ He was now in supreme control of all Sweden's interests in Germany. It was his business to conduct the intricate diplomacy necessary to sustain the war-effort. He was the director and supervisor of the extensive administrative apparatus which had been set up in Germany in the wake of the Swedish conquests: it fell to him, for instance, to organize the postal system, to fix tolls on rivers, to regulate trade and fairs, to establish a new ecclesiastical organization for the occupied lands, to see to the provision of scholarships for deserving students out of ecclesiastical revenues.⁹ The work was often of an incredibly minute particularity: amid the great issues of war and peace he had to find time personally to specify exactly how much wine, how much meat, how much bread, must be provided from the archdiocese of Mainz, what taxes should be paid by householders, craftsmen and stock-farmers, and how the salt-trade was to be regulated.¹⁰ He was the head of a whole new civil service, German in personnel, half-Swedish in nomenclature. But on top of all this he was also, of course, the director of military operations. He must determine strategy; he must allocate available resources to this army or that; arrange for and control recruiting, taking care that the military enterprisers did not cheat the Swedish crown. He must settle bitter delimi-

tation-disputes in regard to the assignment of quarters; compose the often violent jealousies between generals, for which disputes over quarters provided an inexhaustible store of inflammable material; he must flatter the vanity, appease the pride, and curb the disintegrating ambitions of commanders who were also near-sovereign princes. The task of ensuring the proper functioning of the vital apparatus of “contributions” was in itself a full-time occupation. Every day confronted him with the question of how the armies were to be paid, and by whom. How persuade financiers, in Hamburg or Amsterdam, or among German adventurers doing well out of the war, to make the necessary loans? How coax the enterprisers to shoulder, for just a little longer, the cost of keeping their troops in a state of no more than simmering mutiny? How reconcile the fundamental principle that war must pay for itself, with the no less fundamental principle that the economic life of Germany must be preserved in sufficient health to permit the financial bloodletting without which the war could not go on?¹¹ One main object of the creation of the League of Heilbronn was precisely in order to provide a steady income of men and money. But the object was not achieved; the League members were chronically in arrears. The cumbrous machinery of the League itself, with its *consilium formatum* under Oxenstierna’s presidency, added another burden: that of wrestling with the “slowness, and vain discourses, and untimely meannesses” which he later blamed for the League’s collapse.¹²

As if this were not enough, he found himself saddled with an infinity of responsibilities and problems which had little or nothing to do with the affairs of Germany, though they constituted a substantial addition to the sum of his labours. He still kept in his hands the management of the “licenses” – those tolls which Sweden levied at the Baltic ports which were in her occupation – for he rightly believed that his long experience made him better fitted for the work than anybody else, and that the agents he appointed would function more efficiently under his direction than under that of any conceivable successor. But if he clung to this responsibility by his own choice, the government at home heaped upon him tasks of the most miscellaneous, and sometimes of the most vexatious, kind. At not infrequent intervals he was called upon to transmit to Stockholm, by the hand of Lars Grubbe or some other trusted emissary,¹³ vast memoranda covering the whole field of domestic concerns. He was, of course, incomparably the most experienced member of the Council, and it was perhaps natural that his colleagues should rely heavily on his advice. But the practical effect at times was that in addition to all else he was virtually forced into the position of acting as prime minister *in absentia*. It must be admitted that he by no means always waited to be asked his opinion; and though on such occasions he might apologize for giving it unsolicited, that was no more than a courteous epistolary gesture.¹⁴ He did not merely acquiesce in a domestic pre-eminence which was thrust upon him; he assumed it almost as a right. If he was *not* consulted, and particularly if his advice was not taken, or was not acted upon sufficiently effectively, his colleagues in Stockholm could expect to be told, in

letters of great pungency, that he resented it; and on occasion were plainly informed that they had made asses of themselves.¹⁵

One of the most important of these domestic tasks was the drafting of the *Form of Government* which became law in 1634. It was soon afterwards supplemented, at the request of the Regents, by the comprehensive instruction for provincial governors (*landshövdingar*) and other local officials. These were matters of major importance; and they fell properly within the ambit of his office as Chancellor. But there were other matters where the relevance was not so obvious. It was to Oxenstierna, for instance, that the Regents turned for a detailed determination of the wage-scales for civil servants; it was to him likewise that they applied for a ruling on the question of their own official emoluments.¹⁶ On the best types of taxation, on the easing or maintenance of the fiscal burdens, on the framing of budgets, on the correct minting-policy to be followed, he sent precise and lengthy recommendations which he undoubtedly assumed would be attended to – as, in fact, they usually were. At the Regent's request he drew up for them a schedule of rates for tolls and duties in Sweden and Finland.¹⁷ one might almost suppose that the office of Treasurer was by some accident vacant, and that its functions too had been transferred to Oxenstierna's shoulders. A great mass of correspondence, of increasing acrimony, dealt with the production and marketing of copper, and the folly of the government in putting its trust in the wrong agents.¹⁸ At the end of 1635, with his German world collapsing all round him, he sent them home from Stralsund proposals for the development of Stockholm as a centre of population and trade, together with the first idea for the establishment of a loan-bank there.¹⁹ His theological learning, as well as his experience of the problem in Gustav Adolf's time, made him the natural man to consult in regard to the revived plan for the establishment of a *consistorium generale*.²⁰ later developments would make plain how much they needed his firm hand in dealing with such formidable ecclesiastics as Bishop Rudbeckius of Västerås. Oxenstierna's unwavering conviction that Sweden's safety demanded the keeping of a strong navy produced reiterated exhortations which revealed an astonishing intimacy with naval affairs. Indeed, his mastery of the subject made the Admiral, Karl Karlsson Gyllenhielm, look like an ineffective and negligent amateur: when it came to drawing up the naval estimates Gyllenhielm was very ready to avoid this tiresome duty by simply presenting to the Council the draft estimates which Oxenstierna had taken care to send over to him.²¹ But he was not only the universal, omniscient, all-competent minister – Richelieu, Bullion, Sublet de Noyers, all rolled into one – he was also very much the Elder Statesman, entitled by his length of service and his unique relationship with Gustav Adolf to be informed, to advise and to warn. From Frankfurt or Mainz he sent home weighty admonitions, warnings against peer-creation, warnings against the pursuit of private advantage, or the abuse of noble privileges; and when the Estates met he despatched to them quasi-royal allocutions exhorting them to unity and the necessary sacrifices.²² Before the *riksdag* of 1634 he drew up not

only the Proposition which was to be laid before them, but also (by way of avoiding untoward accidents) the Resolution which the Estates were to take upon it when the Diet ended. Gustav Adolf himself had never gone as far as this.²³

The correspondence with Stockholm displays a range of precise information and a tenacity of memory for relevant detail which are almost incredible: the cumulative effect is overwhelming. In the midst of raging mutiny or military disaster he was able to write, calmly, copiously, and with authority, upon matters as diverse and often as technical as gun-founding, mining, fortifications, types of naval vessels, fisheries, tithe, the gilds, roads and bridges, canals, town-privileges and town-government, ecclesiastical policies and preferments. . . there seems no end to the list. Five years after he had left Prussia to join Gustav Adolf in Germany he still had clearly imprinted on his memory, in minute detail, the location and strength of defensive works and garrisons in that province.²⁴

But it was not only with matters of state – matters which, in many cases, it might have been expected that the Regents should deal with themselves – that he concerned himself, or was made to concern himself. Letters on comparative trivialities abound, in response to commissions or solicitations from home. Nothing, it seemed, however petty, was deemed to fall outside his duty; no call upon his time was forborne by his colleagues. He must see to the selection and despatch of Rhine wine for the Court; he must order the cloth for Gustav Adolf's funeral, must advise the government on which regalia were to be placed in the coffin, must select a suitable necklace for Queen Kristina. His views were sought – and were given in great detail – on the proper furnishing for the Council chamber in Stockholm castle.²⁵ At rare intervals he managed to find time to devote to his family concerns: detailed directions for managing the family estates; the ordering, inspection, and supervision of the pearl-embroidery for his son Johan's wedding outfit; necessary measures for the care of the estates of his son-in-law, Gustav Horn, after Horn was taken prisoner at Nördlingen.²⁶ There seemed to be a general presumption that he was sufficiently at leisure to keep a fatherly eye on any young relative of himself or his colleagues who might be shipped out to Germany to make a career for himself; even his political enemy, Johan Skytte, did not scruple to add to the Chancellor's labours by commending his son to his care. One gets the impression that in Stockholm they regarded him as a kind of commissionaire.

Thus the first and not least important thing to remember in judging Oxenstierna's record in Germany is the sheer overwhelming burden of work which was heaped upon him. Often he felt that it was more than he could bear. But though he might lament the paucity of secretarial assistance, might complain that he had no one to whom he could delegate, might appeal (in vain) for the sending of a trusty coadjutor from home, somehow or other everything was attended to, every commission executed. In 1633 he was already a man past middle age, as age went in those days – he was born in 1583 – but though soon

after his return home he began to complain of the weight of years and its attendant disorders, his constitution was sound enough to give him another eighteen years of vigorous activity after that. Certainly his years in Germany revealed a mental stamina capable of enduring severe strains with a fortitude which was only very rarely shaken: he was the fortunate possessor of the Wellingtonian gift of sleep.

Not the least of his troubles was simply his remoteness from Stockholm. In summer it might take a month for a letter to reach him, in winter much longer; and in times of military adversity communications were often hazardous. The inevitable consequence was that the Chancellor and his colleagues could not satisfactorily coordinate policy. On critical issues, such as the question what *satisfactio* Sweden might be prepared to accept, they repeatedly found themselves out of step: in the interval between the despatch of a letter and the receipt of the reply to it the situation might change in such a way as to make the reply irrelevant; and at times the directives from Stockholm had a wild unreality which must have caused Oxenstierna to throw up his hands in despair.²⁷ Another consequence was that the home government's reference to him of purely domestic problems might arrive in Germany at the most inopportune moments. For this the Regents were not, of course, responsible: they might well have postponed their enquiries to a more convenient season if they could have foreseen in what circumstances those enquiries would arrive. Thus it happened that their commission to draw up a code of instructions for *landshövdingar* and the local administration fell upon him in the middle of the crisis produced by the disaster at Nördlingen; thus it was that at the moment when he was the prisoner of his officers in Magdeburg he found himself also required to answer in detail a long questionnaire on the policy to be pursued on a great number of not very urgent domestic issues.²⁸

The difficulty was of course felt on both sides. For the Regents had perforce to conduct certain aspects of Sweden's foreign policy themselves: they could not always wait for Oxenstierna's advice, nor were they always in a position to follow it when it arrived. This was the case, for instance, in regard to relations with Russia, and the question whether Sweden should risk an alliance with the Tsar while Russia was still fighting the Poles. It was the case too in some respects in regard to Denmark: they had to respond to Danish *démarches* in Stockholm according to their own judgment; and on the question of whether to accept Kristian IV's son as successor to John Frederick of Bremen their instinctive hostility to Denmark only slowly retreated before the realities of the situation in Germany. Above all, this was the case in regard to Poland. Oxenstierna had been negotiating with the Poles, off and on, for half his political lifetime, and rightly believed that he knew more about the best way to manage them than anybody else: "I have dealt with Polish affairs so long that I know them like the Lord's Prayer".²⁹ But though the Regents did in fact take care to ask for his advice, and though Oxenstierna was not slow to give it, the responsibility for this crucial settlement fell not on himself as Chancellor, but on the

inexperienced, divided and pessimistic government in Stockholm; and they proved unable to hold their negotiators to the ultimate line of concession which had been agreed upon.³⁰ The resulting truce of Stuhmsdorf, with its surrender not only of Swedish holdings in Prussia but also of the “licenses” at the Prussian ports, moved Oxenstierna to a tremendous outburst of anger. It was not only that he disapproved of the terms obtained; what angered him still more was what he considered to be the incompetence of the Swedish negotiators (as he contemptuously remarked, not one of them – except his son Johan – was capable of speaking Latin),³¹ the leaking of Sweden’s limit of concession to the French ambassador who was acting as mediator, and the failure to notify him officially of the terms until two months after they had been settled. He vented his resentment in intemperate (and in part indefensible) letters which deeply wounded his colleagues.³² They felt, and they had reason to feel, that in his insistence on his own policies he brushed aside considerations which seemed to them impossible to ignore: the exhaustion of the country, the recalcitrant temper of the Estates,³³ the sheer impossibility (as they saw it) of carrying on a war against the Poles in addition to what for many of them had now become the pointless struggle in Germany. It was no very satisfactory answer to their problems to be told that things had been much worse in 1611.³⁴

Oxenstierna for his part came increasingly to feel that he had to deal with a government which exaggerated its difficulties, a government which was nerveless, which could not always be depended upon to stand firm. And his diagnosis, prejudiced and selfregarding as it was, was in its fundamentals correct. The Regency was indeed a weak government. Until the acceptance of the Form of Government in 1634 their constitutional authority was by no means clearly defined; and even afterwards they lacked the capacity for leadership and the evident determination which the situation demanded. It was Oxenstierna’s firm opinion that the Regents ought to settle upon their policy before canvassing it with the Council, and still more before opening it to the *riksdag*,³⁵ but in his view they neglected this necessary element of government. They did not enforce discipline upon themselves or their colleagues: on their own confession far too much time was devoted to dealing with private business. Johan Skytte and Gabriel Bengtsson Oxenstierna came back from their provincial governorships unsummoned, to pursue (it was suspected) private political ambitions of their own.³⁶ The Regents were constantly apprehensive of the incalculable antics of Gustaf Adolf’s widow, and not less so of the designs of John Casimir of the Palatinate to stake out his son’s claim to the succession (in which apprehensions Oxenstierna entirely agreed with them); and there was always the nagging fear of what might happen if Kristina should die. There were moments when it seemed that she might:³⁷ the news of her alarming illness filled the cup of Oxenstierna’s troubles during the mutiny at Magdeburg. And if they felt themselves insecure politically, they were weak also in other respects. Too many of them were ageing men, with not much vigour remaining.

Oxenstierna's main standby and support was his brother Gabriel Gustafsson, who combined efficiency, a great capacity for work, and general popularity;³⁸ but he was undeniably inclined to take a gloomy view of things. From time to time he transmitted depressing bulletins from the governmental sick-room. Karl Karlsson Gyllenhielm, we learn, is grown very feeble, and suffers from asthma (he contrived, all the same, to survive for well over another decade, and to emerge as a leader of opposition in the "forties"); Per Sparre, too, is mostly sick; Gabriel Bengtsson suffers from some unspecified ailment, especially in his head; Gabriel Gustafsson himself is laid up with running eyes, and much troubled by the stone. The effects upon the conduct of business were very serious. There was also, in general, a chronic shortage of secretarial staff; no one, it seemed, was capable of writing a letter in German. Characteristically, their response to this predicament was to implore Oxenstierna to do something about it.³⁹

A situation already bad was made much worse by absenteeism, slackness and incompetence. The lengthy absences of Åke Tott and Clas Christersson Horn meant that for four weeks (in the middle of a war) no business could be transacted in the College of War, since there was no one at hand who was authorized to transact it. The investigation into the working of the collegial system which was undertaken in 1636 revealed that this was by no means an exceptional situation.⁴⁰ The Admiralty seems to have been conspicuously ill-ordered: the Admiral "lamented" that he had not been able to be there for much of the time.⁴¹ There were occasions at the beginning of 1636 when Gabriel Gustafsson found himself the only member of the government present in the *råd*.⁴² Of his relative Gabriel Bengtsson, whom he had pushed into the office of Treasurer, he later remarked that he had proved incompetent, and drily added that "Affairs in the Treasury have a tendency to be rarely accurate".⁴³ The Marshal, Jakob de la Gardie – never celebrated as an enterprising commander – raised all sorts of difficulties about taking up his command in Prussia, and was generally considered to have no stomach for fighting a battle; the Admiral politely excused himself, "for many reasons", from commanding the fleet.⁴⁴ Everywhere, it seemed, it was the same story: "Here is great confusion and disorder", wrote Gabriel Gustafsson, "and some of *ipsa capita collegiorum* do not do their work properly. . . The Chancery College, where most public business ought to be initiated and carried on, neither does nor can do an effective job".⁴⁵

It was perhaps not surprising that a government so constituted should not have been a government united. Their open disagreements reached such a pitch in the *råd* that Per Banér remarked that it was "more a wrangling- than a council-chamber".⁴⁶ And though it might be difficult to trace clear and stable political alignments among its members, there was usually a faction among them which was hostile to Oxenstierna. He was well aware of it, both from his own knowledge and from the reports which his brother sent to him. The anti-

Oxenstierna group included, at one time or another, Karl Karlsson Gyllenhielm, Per Banér, Per Brahe, and above all Oxenstierna's old enemy Johan Skytte.⁴⁷ Outwardly they continued for a time to pay lip-service to the doctrine that Oxenstierna was indispensable in Germany; but that did not deter them from a serious attempt to displace him. The opportunity presented itself when it became necessary to appoint a new High Steward. Gabriel Gustafsson believed that Skytte wanted the Chancellor's office for himself; and whether this was so or not, the attempt was certainly made to kick Oxenstierna upstairs into the Stewardship, and so render the Chancellorship vacant. It is interesting, if profitless, to speculate what the effect upon the history of Germany might have been if they had succeeded. The Voting was alarmingly close; but in the end the Stewardship went to Gabriel Gustafsson, by ten votes to seven;⁴⁸ and the opportunity was taken to thrust another member of the clan – the incompetent Gabriel Bengtsson Oxenstierna – into the office of Treasurer. After which the Chancellor could feel a little more confident of having the government behind him. But only a little; for Gabriel Gustafsson, as he himself confessed, was too junior to impose his authority. Party-divisions continued; and they were accompanied by – and perhaps provided the explanation for – a distressing tendency to break confidence. Important information was leaked – to John Casimir, to the Queen Mother, and thence to her relations in Brandenburg; and it was a leak of this kind – this time to the French ambassador, d'Avaugour – which undermined Sweden's negotiating position during the conferences which preceded the truce of Stuhmsdorf: in a very unedifying council-debate Karl Karlsson Gyllenhielm, Jakob de la Gardie and Johan Skytte all protested, a shade too eagerly, that they were not responsible.⁴⁹

In view of all this it is scarcely surprising that by the end of 1635 Gabriel Gustafsson could note that his brother had become a good deal less open with his colleagues at home: he complained, indeed, that they no longer trusted him.⁵⁰ This may well be true of some of them; for there were those who persuaded themselves that he was the main, and perhaps the only, obstacle to a peace. From as early as August 1634 Per Banér and Skytte were intriguing to have him recalled.⁵¹ On 30 October 1635 de la Gardie told the *råd* that he was "afraid that the Cancellor and the French ambassador [St. Chamont] had jointly resolved to persist in the war, and that thereby the country would be put in a still worse predicament", to which "Herr Johan Skytte said that he had often feared the same thing himself".⁵² It was an ominous sign that Johan Adler Salvius, who had hitherto been one of Oxenstierna's clients and *protégés*, but was now beginning to trim his sails to the wind and to entertain ambitions to succeed him in Germany, should have permitted himself the acid comment that although Oxenstierna "to avoid an affront" might have determined to die in Germany, that would not be particularly helpful, and they would have to make peace just the same.⁵³

In justice to the Regents it must be remembered that though under the impact of the disasters in Germany their confidence in the Chancellor might for a time

be shaken, they had in the past given him very wide discretion, strong moral support and warm encouragement and approbation. They had been magnanimous in their endorsement of the idea that he might aspire to the Electorate of Mainz; on receiving the news of Nördlingen they had sent him the cheering thought that after all this was the first battle Sweden had lost for four years; they had conveyed a real appreciation of the enormous burden of work which lay upon him – even if their actions did not always bear out that assurance.⁵⁴ The very fact that they delegated so much to him which they ought to have been able to tackle themselves was a sign of their confidence, as well as of their deficiencies. And if in practice they displayed a lack of imaginative understanding of his difficulties, he on his side was not altogether in a position to cast a stone. The problems which faced them at home were real problems, and Oxenstierna did not endear himself to his colleagues by simply shrugging them off as difficulties which only required *mascula consilia* to be surmounted. There must have been times when his barely-concealed contempt for their incapacity, his assumption that he knew better than they did, his exercising of a liberty to lecture, were resented;⁵⁵ and his intemperate censure of Per Brahe and Jakob de la Gardie for their conduct of the Stuhmsdorf negotiations was resented very bitterly. But the bitterness was reciprocal. In the autumn of 1635, in private letters to his brother, Oxenstierna permitted himself a succession of quite unusual temperamental outbursts:

The burden is intolerable, but my love of my country prevents me from being sorry for myself [!]. Others do nothing but cry that their needs must be supplied, and they give no thought to me and the rest of us here, who daily stand in danger of being betrayed, slain, captured. I will not and shall not stand it any longer, but they may appoint someone else in my place who can manage things better, and who will appreciate what a nice time I and some others have been having. And so I ask you to present my compliments to the Regents and Council, and put them in mind to send someone else to replace me in the autumn – someone who can make as good a peace as they have made in Prussia.⁵⁶

The threat was not seriously meant, of course: the savage irony of the final clause shows that. If he returned home, who was there to succeed him? In the early months of 1636 he could see only one candidate, Sten Bielke, the governor of Pomerania. But Sten Bielke was bedridden half the time, and on occasion so ill that he could not write his name.⁵⁷ However great Oxenstierna's exasperation, however strong his resentment, he was still the necessary man, and he knew it; and he would quit Germany only when he could do no more good by staying. And when that time came he would have occupation enough in putting affairs at home in good order.

III

It was against this troubled domestic background that he had to execute his commission in Germany. Here the problems, the difficulties, the harassments,

were of a different order. He had to direct the war-effort, coordinate the foreign policy, preside over the counsels, of a collection of allies divided among themselves both upon the objects to be aimed at and upon the means to pursue them. However great the authority which derived from Sweden's position as head of the evangelical party in Germany, he could only rarely permit himself the imperious tone which Gustav Adolf had so often assumed, and still less the outbursts of choler with which he had vented his indignation upon Laodicean allies, forward French diplomats, or insubordinate commanders: where the king would have simply ordered, the Chancellor must seek to persuade and convince. The great majority of the generals in his armies (like their troops) were not Swedish subjects; they owed him no unconditional obedience. In the three years after Lützen the only native Swedish generals who were really fitted to command an army were Gustav Horn and Johan Banér; and after Horn was taken prisoner at Nördlingen Banér had no compatriot of much capacity until Lennart Torstensson arrived in Pomerania from Prussia at the end of 1635. In this situation Oxenstierna was very much at the mercy of German Protestant princes in the Swedish service, or of allies with their own armies who wished to go their own way. Even the most faithful of them, William V of Hesse-Cassel, required tactful handling; George of Brunswick-Lüneburg aspired to fight his own war, for specific personal and dynastic ends; William of Saxe-Weimar had broken with Oxenstierna in December 1632, and his "fantastic proceedings" were considered by him to be one cause of the collapse of Sweden's political position after Nördlingen.⁵⁸ It was obviously essential to keep on good terms with William's brother Bernard, who had assumed the command at Lützen after Gustav Adolf's death, regarded himself as the king's natural military heir and successor, and felt himself entitled to be recognized as *generalissimo* of all the armies of Sweden and her allies. But Oxenstierna would not willingly entrust the supreme command to one who was not a Swedish subject, least of all when there was such a rival in the field as Gustav Horn – who happened, incidentally, to be Oxenstierna's son-in-law. Relations between Horn and Bernard were in any case not good, and Horn bluntly threatened to throw up his command if Bernard were appointed above his head.⁵⁹ The only occasion on which they fought a battle shoulder to shoulder was on the fatal day of Nördlingen, and the feud between them lived on in Swedish propaganda and historiography, which blamed Bernard's rashness and ambition as the cause of the disaster.⁶⁰ However, that may be, Nördlingen at least settled the issue of the command, and in March 1635 Bernard was put at the head of all the forces of the four Circles of Upper Germany.⁶¹ Johan Banér did indeed retain his independent command in the Upper Saxon Circle, and would be the agent of Swedish recovery after 1635; but here again there were personal difficulties. For Oxenstierna, while justly appreciating Banér's quality as a fighting general, found him temperamentally uncongenial, and complained of his "insolent, presumptuous and ambitious spirit".⁶² Banér, for his part, chafed under Oxenstierna's military directives, and plainly regarded him as an amateur

strategist who had better refrain from meddling in matters that he did not understand.

There was som truth in this; but Oxenstierna, for cogent reasons, was not prepared if he could help it to allow the control of military operations to fall into other hands. Politics and war were too closely interrelated for such an arrangement to be tolerable, or even practicable; there must be no *generalissimo* – not Bernard, in the first instance, and not Banér afterwards. As Director he must direct, and must be felt to direct, if any sort of coherence was to be maintained; his stubborn clinging to the Directorship, and his insistence that it should be a reality, was not (as Björling once wrote) “pedantic punctiliousness”, nor a jealousy of rivals, it was sound common sense.⁶³ Nevertheless, it obviously entailed serious disadvantages. To insist on conducting operations at a distance, especially in the slow and uncertain state of communications in Germany, was a recipe for military misfortune; and inevitably it led to friction with the generals on the spot. Conspicuously so with Johan Banér, whose strategic appreciations clashed with Oxenstierna’s, and whose difficulties and handicaps were too often simply brushed aside.

But Banér on his side failed to take into account the fact that Oxenstierna was always operating under constraints of a different sort: constraints which forced him at times to sacrifice the best military solution to political considerations. Those constraints could result in what from a soldier’s point of view were undoubted errors of judgment: for instance, the persistence in the months after Lützen in maintaining four or five armies scattered over Germany, instead of the concentration for which Banér pleaded;⁶⁴ or the disastrous appointment of the incompetent von Thurn to command in Silesia, which arose from Oxenstierna’s ineradicable distrust of Hans Georg von Arnim; or his stubborn refusal to burden Pomerania with “contributions” – a policy which was dictated by his determination to avoid, at almost any cost, the alienation of the Pomeranian Estates, but which produced in the autumn of 1633 a situation in which no effective resistance could be offered to Wallenstein’s dramatic advance from Silesia.⁶⁵ But political considerations might also entail important military advantages – as for instance when at the end of 1635 Oxenstierna forced Banér to detach troops to Westphalia. For it was *militarily* important to keep George of Lüneburg in line, and still more so to rescue Sweden’s only ally, William V of Hesse. The great victory by a concentrated force which Banér hoped for, even if it had been decisive (and the days of decisive victories in this war were over, if they had ever existed) would arguably have been more than offset by the loss of William V. And so, when Oxenstierna “wrecked” Banér’s Saxon offensive in January 1636 by responding to William’s desperate appeals and sending reinforcements to the Weser instead of to the Saale, he may well have been justified.⁶⁶

It is true that already in 1633 Oxenstierna’s preference was for a defensive strategy. But this, though perhaps the reaction of an amateur and a layman, was perfectly feasible provided the contributions were systematically organized

and regularly paid, which unfortunately they were not. And it is worth while remembering that Horn, too, was for a defensive strategy, on purely military grounds. There were certainly occasions on which Oxenstierna's strategic judgment was justified by the event: as for instance his disapproval of the joint advance upon Regensburg in 1634, which ended in disaster at Nördlingen; and conspicuously so in regard to his order to Bernard to attack Regensburg in the autumn of 1633 – an order which stopped Wallenstein's irresistible advance upon Pomerania in its tracks, and which led (incidentally) directly to Wallenstein's downfall.⁶⁷ And his refusal to allow Banér to quarter his troops in the coastlands, bitterly as it was resented at the time, was after all later endorsed by Banér himself, when he declared that the coastlands must be spared, as Sweden's last reserve in an emergency.⁶⁸ Still, it may be granted that Oxenstierna was too prone to split his forces in order to keep every line of approach covered, and that he had a general disposition to think in terms of diversions which did not always divert; and there are many occasions on which Banér's irritation and frustration are entirely understandable. Yet, somehow or other, they contrived to maintain reasonable relations, and to work together. Banér, whatever his feelings, nearly always obeyed orders; and Oxenstierna came to see that some latitude should be allowed to his commander: in the last six months of his stay in Germany he was increasingly leaving decisions to Banér's discretion.

The waywardness and insubordination of the German officers, and the unceasing and often desperate need to find the money to pay the armies, combined to produce a policy designed to meet both these difficulties: the policy of appeasing the ambitious and the discontented, and at the same time writing off indebtedness, by the granting of donations.⁶⁹ The device had been used extensively in Gustav Adolf's lifetime, and it was used still more extensively after his death: the volumes of Oxenstierna's correspondence for 1633–36 contain lists of scores of such donations; and the applications for them (from at home, as well as from Germany)⁷⁰ continued even after Sweden's military position had become so precarious that a donation could be of very dubious value. These donations were grants of land, for the most part in enemy areas already in Swedish occupation, or in areas which it might reasonably be expected would soon become so – a speculation on the part of the grantee which often proved a disastrous miscalculation. They were to be held on semi-feudal tenure, reserving the rights of the Swedish overlord, and rendering dues or services to the Swedish crown.⁷¹ The device had the disadvantage that the grantees tended to exploit their grants ruthlessly while they still sat secure in them: a result by no means to Oxenstierna's liking, but (as he remarked) "we have to put up with it if we don't want to make enemies of them".⁷² Those who invested in donations might be the necessary props of war, but he had a very poor opinion of them in general:

The princes and the officers here have no concern for the public interest, beyond mere words; but in truth each seeks his private advantage – how those who have ecclesiastical lands in their territories may grab them; others, how they may get their hands on abbeys, convents, estates, and anything that is going. Princes, counts, lords, towns, nobles and others demand great fiefs according to their importance; and if one refuses them they are disgusted and think a great wrong has been done them. They became accustomed to it in his late Majesty's time, so that a great part of the conquered land has been granted away, and for practically all, promises made and grants prepared. . .⁷³

Like Gustav Adolf before him, Oxenstierna assumed it to be the evident duty of German Protestant princes to give hearty support to a cause which was not simply that of Sweden, but – even more – their own cause too; and like him he was contemptuous of those who postponed that cause to private short-sighted advantage. On the constancy and fidelity of the allies whose efforts he was trying to coördinate he placed little or no reliance: already in February 1633 he proceeded on the assumption that as soon as they felt that they could do without Swedish aid they would not hesitate to leave him in the lurch. That moment, indeed, never came; but what came instead was the mass-desertion which followed the Peace of Prague.

These broken reeds – princes, as Oxenstierna in exasperation remarked, with “centuries of nonsense in their heads”⁷⁴ – were the Estates which formed the League of Heilbronn, together with a handful of other Estates outside it whom he tried to coax into joining it. Estates of the Upper and Lower Saxon Circles, and above all George William of Brandenburg, on whose fidelity he hoped to the last – with increasing improbability – that he could rely. No rational hope of this sort could be entertained of the greatest Protestant prince in Germany: the Elector John George of Saxony. Though at the beginning of 1633 Oxenstierna could write of the Elector's “heroic resolution” to fight on, and though for the next two years he was painfully careful to treat him with courtesy and consideration – with notable self-restraint he refrained absolutely from recrimination after the disaster at Steinau – it was simply not possible to maintain good relations indefinitely. It was not only that each was by temperament thoroughly uncongenial to the other: Oxenstierna dismissed the Elector as “an insignificant tosspot”, and was contemptuous of his beer-befogged, vacillating policies;⁷⁵ John George angrily described Oxenstierna as “ein Plackscheisser.”⁷⁶ The difficult went much deeper. After Lützen John George regarded himself as once more the leader and natural head of German Protestantism; and he could not forgive Oxenstierna's success in asserting Sweden's right to dispute that claim. He was outraged by what he considered to be his presumptuous semi-regal pretensions, and was profoundly suspicious of his designs: was it not obvious that he wished to make himself “absolute master and *dictatorem perpetuum* in Germany”? had he not usurped an imperial prerogative by purporting to restore the Palatines to their Electorate? were not his policies a contrivance to prolong the war, while the Elector's consistently aimed at peace?⁷⁷ John George had concluded his alliance with Gustav Adolf reluctantly, and only when Tilly's soldiery invaded his lands; he felt himself to

have since then been committed to a role alien to the imperialist traditions of his house; and he would welcome any opportunity to reconstruct a "Third Party" in Germany which might be the instrument for negotiating a general peace for the *Reich*. The most estimable trait in his character was his strong German patriotism; and the goal of his policy, for as far ahead as his dim vision could look, was to clear Germany of the foreigner. The League of Heilbronn to him was a quite unacceptable violation of the constitution of the Empire: it was monstrous that it should have been brought into being upon the initiative of a foreign subject, and be dependent for its continuance upon a foreign power.⁷⁸

From the Swedish point of view it was no doubt satisfactory that the Elector's hatred of foreign meddlers should extend also to the French: the attempts of Richelieu and his agents to turn him into a French client and launch him as the leader of anti-Habsburg Germany in opposition to Oxenstierna were hopeless from the beginning, even if Oxenstierna had not forestalled them by organizing the League of Heilbronn. But it was disturbing that John George's opposition to foreign intervention did not, apparently, extend to Denmark, nor prevent the conclusion of a marriage between his daughter and Kristian IV's son. Behind this apparent exception to his principles lay the hope of using Kristian's reiterated proffers of mediation to obtain a peace: proffers which Oxenstierna regarded with alarm, and which he spent some ingenuity in evading. Still worse were the truces which the Elector (or his general, Arnim) concluded with Wallenstein, and the alarming negotiations with the imperialists to which they gave rise. When John George at last reached agreement with the Emperor by the Preliminaries of Pirna in 1634, and consented to their embodiment (and substantial amendment) in the Peace of Prague of 1635, Oxenstierna could feel that Saxon policy had reached its logical conclusion. And that conclusion turned the Elector into Sweden's active enemy, and Oxenstierna's bitterest foe: an enmity which was personal, for John George now saw in him the last remaining obstacle to the general German peace at which he aimed; and there was truth in his claim that it was Oxenstierna, and not Sweden, that he was fighting.⁷⁹

Menaced thus on his north-eastern flank by a wholly unreliable ally and rival, Oxenstierna was similarly threatened in the west by the ambitions of another dubious friend: France. Richelieu was not prepared, if he could help it, to tolerate a Swedish domination of Germany, any more than John George was. He had done his best to prevent the formation of the League of Heilbronn; and when he was worsted in that, pursued a policy designed simultaneously to undermine Oxenstierna's authority within the League, to create by subsidies and bribes to Protestant princes a French party in Germany, and yet to use Sweden's direction of the war-effort to avert the necessity for France's direct intervention. He had some success: it was Swedish forces that chastised Charles of Lorraine, Swedish forces that took Philippsburg, Sweden that was left to bar the way to Spanish troops moving north from Italy. In Alsace, on the Rhine, Sweden and France confronted each other in a tangled relationship in which

suspicion was never far removed from outright hostility. And when, after Nördlingen, the League of Heilbronn began to collapse, Richelieu reaped the due reward of this policy in the shape of the transference of that useless and bankrupt asset to France. The realities of the Franco-Swedish relationship were made startlingly clear when in December 1634 the Cardinal ordered Feuquières to contrive the kidnapping of Oxenstierna and Bernard of Saxe-Weimar. He changed his mind before any attempt could be made to put this plan into execution – if these two were removed, who else had sufficient authority to do France’s business? – and in the event the course of affairs would push Sweden and France into renewed coöperation, and eventually into reluctant alliance; but Oxenstierna, if he had known of the designs upon his person, would have been confirmed in the conviction – which he had held since 1629, and would retain for the rest of the war – that France was a slippery and untrustworthy associate whose only recommendation was the subsidies which she might be induced to pay.⁸⁰

IV

When we have taken into account the burdens, the difficulties and the vexations which Oxenstierna had to endure we have, after all, still done no more than detail a long list of mitigating circumstances. In themselves they provide no satisfactory explanation of the course of events in Germany in the years 1633–36. The collapse of the authority which Oxenstierna inherited from Gustav Adolf was no doubt in part attributable to military disaster. But this is not the whole explanation. For the collapse was political no less than military. It could be interpreted as the damning verdict upon a policy; and for that policy Oxenstierna seemed to be responsible. And to understand what happened we need to know what that policy was.

At the beginning of 1633 the Chancellor and his colleagues at home were in broad agreement as to what Sweden’s objectives must now be. Their aim was peace. Already in 1632, in the high tide of Gustav Adolf’s victories, there had been some members of the *råd* who did not hesitate to say that Sweden’s objectives had been attained, that there was no point in continuing the war, that their main concern now must be to get out of it on terms which would give the maximum return for the efforts which Sweden had made on behalf of the Protestant cause.⁸¹ Neither the Council nor Oxenstierna had ever shown much enthusiasm for those plans for the alteration of the constitutional situation in Germany which had latterly suggested themselves to Gustav Adolf; and certainly they had none now. Their political horizons had undergone a sharp contraction; their concern was no longer with the fate of Germany but with the advantage of Sweden. They were, indeed, still prepared to think that the restoration of Germany to what it had been in 1618 was a Swedish interest: as Per Banér observed, Sweden’s safety depended “a good deal” on the restitution of the German Protestant states to their former condition.⁸² But when they

spoke of restoration, they did so with reservations so large as to qualify the idea very considerably. For if they had their way, the map of Germany would bear a very different appearance from that which it had presented fifteen years ago. They wanted *satisfactio*, that is, the transference into Swedish hands by way of “recompense and debt of gratitude” of large areas of north Germany: in particular, of the lands lying on the Baltic coast. It was to prevent these lands from falling into hostile hands that Gustav Adolf had launched his expedition; and their retention was still considered essential on strategic grounds: they were, after all, the bulwarks which protected Sweden from invasion.⁸³ But in 1633 this by no means exhausted Sweden’s territorial appetite. Both Oxenstierna and the government were thinking of acquisitions – Bremen-Verden, or Magdeburg and Halberstadt or other north German bishoprics, or even Mainz – which had no immediate relevance to any defensive strategy. *Satisfactio*, indeed, tended to merge into another fundamental war-aim: *assecuratio*; by which was meant some sort of guarantee that Sweden would never again be exposed to the kind of danger which had seemed to threaten her as a result of the successes of the Habsburgs at the close of the 1620s: the danger of an imperial domination of the *Reich*. There were two conceivable means of obtaining such a guarantee, and they were not mutually exclusive. One was a strong Swedish foothold in Germany, and the admission of Sweden to the imperial Diet in virtue of her membership of one or more Circles of the Empire. The other, which had been a main preoccupation of Gustav Adolf at the close of his life, was the creation of some association of German states under Swedish leadership which could be counted upon to act as a breakwater against any resurgence of Habsburg power. Three things, then: the coastlands, *satisfactio*, *assecuratio* – without these they could hardly risk making the peace they were seeking. And there was one other consideration on which they insisted; for they were agreed that if and when Sweden extricated herself from the German imbroglio, it must be “with reputation”. The day was not far off when some of them, at all events, would be ready in their desperation to abandon everything else, if only that could be preserved.

A programme of this nature had not been easy to realize when Gustav Adolf was alive; and it became very much less so now that he was dead. It might even be altogether impossible, if it became too obvious that they were determined on peace. Nevertheless, a significant step in that direction was taken early in 1633, when Oxenstierna (with the full approval of the government in Stockholm) organized the withdrawal of all purely Swedish troops from central to north Germany.⁸⁴ The operation was conducted in strict secrecy in order not to upset the German allies, and it seems to have been carried out without exciting suspicion. But the implications were plain. Henceforward, as Oxenstierna put it, Sweden must simply “lend her name” to the war-effort of her allies. It was still essential to maintain her position as the acknowledged leader of the resistance to the Emperor, for if she were to allow that position to fall into other hands her prospects of adequate *satisfactio* would be jeopardized;

but henceforward the burden of war must be transferred as far as possible to German shoulders. The war, he wrote, must be waged

caute and prudenter. . . som that it is ours only in name, though we proclaim and protest to the whole world that we are resolved, with the allies, and with the help of God, to prosecute it; but with a secret determination that we shall be at no expense because of it, either in men or money, except what must unavoidably be borne in regard to the Baltic coast. . . since in the long run no reliance is to be placed on these people and the alliances which have been made with them. I have had ample experience of the fact that they will tolerate us only as long as they feel that they need our help, but when the danger they are in is over there will not be one of them who will give us the smallest thanks for all our trouble and expense.⁸⁵

Behind this programme lay not only Oxenstierna's disillusionment with the German Estates but also his concern for the defence of Sweden itself. In August 1633 he defined his policy as being, first, to prevent Sweden's being attacked or disturbed at home; and secondly, to secure a reasonable *satisfactio*.⁸⁶ The order was not insignificant. At a time when only the life of a sickly child stood between Władysław IV and the Swedish crown, Oxenstierna saw the greatest threat to his country as coming not from Germany, but from Polish intrigues and (when the truce ran out) Polish hostility.⁸⁷ "The Polish war", he wrote, "is *our* war; win or lose, it is our gain or loss. This German war, I don't know what it is, only that we pour out blood here *pro reputatione*, and have naught but ingratitude to expect."⁸⁸ There was also, of course, the perennial danger from Denmark; but about that he was less concerned: Kristian IV's obvious hope of meddling in Germany had at least the advantage of directing Danish attention southwards.⁸⁹ The real importance of the German war, then, was as a diversion: its function was to provide a target at which Sweden's enemies might "shoot their arrows", so that they might have no leisure to attack her nearer home.⁹⁰ It gave Sweden a breathing-space which she might use to rally her forces and perfect her defences against any future assault. Thus the first military priority, at any rate before Nördlingen, was the home front. The navy must be kept up to full strength: on it depended Sweden's safety. The fortresses must be kept well supplied; the government must stockpile arms and ammunition, and he volunteered to assist them in stockpiling salt also.⁹¹ In short, "we must let this German business be left to the Germans, who will be the only people to get any good of it (if there is any), and therefore not spend any more men or money here, but rather try by all means to wriggle out of it".⁹² It is true that when that sentence was written, at the beginning of 1635, circumstances had greatly changed for the worse; but it accords well enough with his whole policy from 1633 onwards.

The formation of the League of Heilbronn on 13 April 1633 appeared to be a major diplomatic success. It reaffirmed Sweden's leadership of Protestant Germany. It represented a defeat for Richelieu, for John George, for Kristian IV. And it seemed to go a long way towards meeting Sweden's prerequisites for peace.

In the first place, it provided something which looked like a solid *assecuratio*. For though the articles of confederation took care to make it clear that the

League was not directed against the Emperor or the imperial constitution, they did bind its members to go on fighting until “German liberties, and observance of the principles and constitution of the *Reich*, be once more put upon a stable footing”; and that meant, in fact, until those liberties and principles had been accepted by a repentant Emperor. It was thus (on paper) a safeguard against any return to the position of 1629. The League was committed to the restoration of Germany to the condition in which it had been at the outbreak of war; and that commitment was reinforced by the treaty which Oxenstierna concluded on the following day with the representatives of the Palatinate house, whereby he pledged himself to restore the Elector to Bohemia, and in return obtained the Palatines’ acceptance of his Directorate, and a promise that they would not “depend” on any other king, prince or Estate. But the League not only took care of *assecuratio* and restitution; it also laid a basis for *satisfactio* – not, indeed, with any precision, but at least in the shape of a general engagement to fight on until Sweden had obtained what was referred to as a “proper” compensation. Moreover, it opened the way to the prosecution of Oxenstierna’s policy of shifting the burden of war to the shoulders of the Germans: the four Circles of Upper Germany bound themselves to raise the forces necessary for carrying on the war, and *also* to provide the financial and other support necessary to their maintenance; and an annexure to the agreement spelled out in detail the obligations of each member, fixed procedures against those falling into arrear, arranged for the establishment of magazines, and prescribed just what administrative staff would be required; and these forces, these administrators, were to be bound, not only to the League, but to the crown of Sweden. Finally, the League appointed Oxenstierna its Director, with effective control not only of all military operations (on which he had a veto) but also of finance. And they did this, as they were careful to point out, not out of respect for the crown of Sweden, but to show their esteem for his “von Gott habende vortreffliche qualitaeten”. It might be true that there was no other conceivable candidate for the position, but it was none the less an extraordinary tribute.⁹³

It might seem, then, that his success in organizing the League of Heilbronn had provided him with the machinery he needed for carrying out his programme. In the event it proved to be nothing of the kind. As an instrument for the safeguarding of German liberties it was from the beginning weakened by the very principles which it was designed to uphold. Its transactions revealed all too clearly that German liberties could be another name for German licence: the prosecution of private ends, dynastic rivalries, ingenuity in evading unwelcome sacrifices, the hostility of Lutheran and Calvinist. . . Not even Oxenstierna’s authority, nor his unremitting attention to business, could make much head against princely particularism. And this being so, what became of the *assecuratio* which the League had been designed to provide? With regard to *satisfactio* the case was not much better. For though the League might adhere to the undertaking to see to it that Sweden received proper compensation, it was a pledge woefully lacking in weight. The League expected Oxenstierna to

get his *satisfactio* from conquered Roman Catholic lands, far from the coast; but the recompense which Sweden desired lay outside the territories which comprised the four Circles of Upper Germany. What they might resolve upon the matter was mere words; what counted was the attitude of the Upper and Lower Saxon Circles.

In one particular it did indeed seem that the League would produce the consequences which Oxenstierna expected of it; that is, the transference of the burden of war to German shoulders. But even here there were problems.⁹⁴ By the articles of confederation the members of the League had agreed to pay the large arrears, accumulated before the League came to birth, for which the armies were now clamouring; and those arrears provoked a serious mutiny in the army of the Danube before the ink was dry on the instrument which brought the League into being. Oxenstierna was forced to meet this situation, in the first instance, by making over to the military enterprisers, and to officers in the Swedish service, the right to levy the contribution and taxes which were being exacted from occupied or conquered lands, *jure belli*. If he could manage it, he ensured that such rights should not be surrendered without compensation: in the two most spectacular deals of this sort – that with Count von Brandenstein for the bishoprics of Magdeburg and Halberstadt, that with Bernard for the bishoprics of Würzburg and Bamberg – he stipulated that each should contribute 600,000 rdr. a year for four years.⁹⁵ By giving or selling rights – real, questionable or imaginary – by ruthless and unscrupulous proceedings of one sort or another, he seems in fact by the autumn of 1633 to have manoeuvred the League not only into paying the army's monthly wages but also into taking over purely Swedish debts.⁹⁶ It proved a dear-bought success. One main object behind the formation of the League had been to organize the payment of the armies on a regular, predetermined scale of contributions from the members, with the idea of avoiding the excesses which irregular payments inevitably produced. But this proved beyond the League's power. It lacked the self-discipline, and perhaps it lacked also the resources, to keep the machinery of contributions in smooth working order. The result, as Oxenstierna was not slow to point out, was the kind of "exorbitances" which the League had been designed to prevent; and those exorbitances in their turn made it difficult for the members of the League to be punctual in paying their contributions. It was a vicious circle: no money, no discipline; no discipline, less money. The League was being ruined by its own soldiery. And was in consequence becoming less effective militarily, and less coöperative politically.

By the end of 1633 it seemed clear that from every point of view – *assecuratio*, *satisfactio*, war-finance – the League was too weak as it stood to do what Oxenstierna had expected of it. It must be afforded; and it must be afforded if possible by the adhesion of the two Saxon Circles. After the tenebrous Saxon negotiations with Wallenstein in the summer and autumn Oxenstierna can have had little hope of persuading John George to join it. The accession of George William of Brandenburg therefore became of vital importance; for the small

fry of Germany would be unlikely to respond positively to an invitation which had been declined by *both* Electors. But one great obstacle stood in the way of George William's adhesion: the question of *satisfactio*; the question of Pomerania. And on that rock Oxenstierna's whole German policy foundered.

Oxenstierna took it for granted that Sweden's *satisfactio* must come mainly from the German protestant states: it was they, after all, who were considered to owe a debt of gratitude to Sweden for their deliverance. It might, indeed, take the form of more or less masterless north German bishoprics; but at this stage the recompense which Sweden above all desired was Pomerania, and to Pomerania she advanced claims which were based partly on the alliance which Gustav Adolf had concluded with Bogislaw XIV, partly on the general ground of *ius belli*. But unfortunately it happened that George William had a long-standing and incontestable right to the succession when Bogislaw should die; and the Estates of Pomerania were wholeheartedly behind him. Sweden's pretensions to Pomerania, therefore, risked the consequence of entailing Brandenburg's enmity at precisely the moment when it was essential to retain the Elector's friendship. It had been in an effort to escape this consequence that Gustav Adolf had floated the idea of a marriage between Kristina and the Elector's heir – a proposal which the government in Stockholm took care to keep alive.⁹⁷ But whether the marriage took place or not, they were in the spring of 1633 clearly in favour of standing firm on Sweden's claim.⁹⁸

Oxenstierna, for his part, was much less certain. Though his tactic of keeping the burdens upon Pomerania to the absolute minimum was certainly based on the supposition that the duchy would one day pass into Swedish hands, and the hope that lenity might help to reconcile it to its new masters, the imperative need so strengthen the League of Heilbronn made him revise his opinion of what could be risked. He had summoned a convention of Protestant princes to Frankfurt for April 1634: and of that convention he expected two main results: the adhesion of the states of the two Saxon Circles to the League, and the more precise definition of Sweden's *satisfactio*. In January and February he sent home serious warnings of the possible consequences of Swedish insistence upon the claim to Pomerania: it might unite the princes of the two Saxon Circles in opposition, and so defeat one of the objects of the convention; it might entail the loss of Prussia, since it might drive George William to ally with Poland.⁹⁹ Talks with George William at Stendal in February did something to relieve his anxiety; for he believed (mistakenly) that he had persuaded the Elector to join the League. In that same month a meeting of the Estates of the Lower Saxon Circle at Halberstadt, which Oxenstierna attended, took a resolution which might have had considerable significance; for they explicitly pledged themselves to join the League, and to raise their own army to act with it.¹⁰⁰ It is said that Oxenstierna later regretted that he had not thereupon cancelled the Frankfurt convention and rested content with his success in Halberstadt.¹⁰¹ But if he indeed came to feel that it would have been better to settle for the half-loaf, it is easy to understand why he did not. The adhesion

of the Lower Saxon Circle could not settle the question of Pomerania; and it in no ways committed George William. Oxenstierna was playing for time; waiting for a final directive from home, hoping that when it came he might be able to induce *both* Saxon Circles to accept it, and in his own mind still uncertain as to what the best line might be. More explicitly than ever he warned his colleagues that Pomerania would prove a “*pomum eridis*”, and that they would hardly obtain it without fighting for it.¹⁰² He received the directive he was waiting for about the time when the Frankfurt convention opened; and substantially it reaffirmed the Regents’ previous attitude: they wanted the whole of Pomerania, if possible, and in any case a Pomeranian port; only if that should prove absolutely impossible would they settle for some unspecified bishoprics and an indemnity of six million riksdaler.¹⁰³

The effects of this directive were disastrous. It wrecked the Frankfurt convention; it destroyed the League. On 12 April 1634 George William took the crucial step on insisting upon an acceptable solution of the question of *satisfactio* before committing himself to the League; on 18 June the members of both Saxon Circles associated themselves with his stipulation.¹⁰⁴ Sweden was now threatened with a head-on collision with Brandenburg. Oxenstierna’s whole German policy was on the brink of collapse. The attempt to provide a really effective *assecuratio* was being wrecked by a quarrel over *satisfactio*. Oxenstierna fully realized the seriousness of the situation; and it was probably in an effort to retrieve it that he launched the idea of renouncing Sweden’s claims to Pomerania in return for the Elector’s duchy of Prussia.¹⁰⁵ The Regents in Stockholm, to do them justice, gave the proposal their immediate attention. They referred it to a committee of the Estates; and that committee’s recommendation – though grudging and conditional – was that Prussia should be accepted in Pomerania’s place.¹⁰⁶

There is some reason to believe that for Oxenstierna the Prussian alternative was not merely a device to break the deadlock with George William. If one may credit his account to the Council in 1641, the Pomeranian-Prussian exchange had been his solution from the beginning, and his efforts to secure it in Gustav Adolf’s lifetime had been defeated only by the opposition of Bernard of Saxe-Weimar.¹⁰⁷ As to Bernard’s share in the business there seems to be no information, nor is it easy to conjecture what his motives may have been if Oxenstierna’s assertion was true. But as far as Oxenstierna himself was concerned the idea had undeniably something to commend it. It would bring a better *assecuratio* by opening the way to George William’s inclusion in a more comprehensive League. This in its turn would mean that an attack on Sweden from Germany would become less likely. Pomerania would become less necessary; and one might always hope that some arrangement might be made about some Pomeranian ports – as pledges, perhaps, for the payment of an unpayable indemnity. The possession of ducal Prussia would help Sweden to retain her hold upon Polish Prussia – which meant, not least, her control of the “licenses” which were so important to her finances. Sweden’s claims on

Pomerania, as Oxenstierna frankly confessed, depended really upon *jus belli* – the most odious of all grounds when advanced against a Protestant state; for Gustav Adolf's Pomeranian alliance was “so obscure, so strained in interpretation, so full of snags”, that it provided a very weak base for Sweden's pretensions: indeed, in his view it probably did no more than entitle Sweden to a refund of expenses.¹⁰⁸

Moved, perhaps, by considerations such as these – moved, certainly, by an increasingly anguished desire for some settlement before the Polish truce ran out – the government in Stockholm had accepted his solution. But their acceptance came too late. By the time the intimation of their change of mind reached him, affairs at Frankfurt had already reached a stalemate, and the position of the League had become critical. Just how critical can be seen from two remarkable suggestions, put forward by Oxenstierna in the desperate hope of retrieving the situation. The first, in May, was an appeal to the Stockholm government to rescue the League by sending over a million *riksdaler*: so much for the principle that the German war must be paid for by the Germans.¹⁰⁹ The other represents the first attempt to find a substitute and a replacement for the League of Heilbronn. On 19 August Oxenstierna offered Feuquières a proposition whereby, in return for a subsidy of a million *livres* a year, Germany was to be divided into French and Swedish spheres of influence, France to take over all Sweden's holdings west and south of the Elbe, Sweden to confine her efforts to the region north and east of that river.¹¹⁰ And he motivated that proposal by the admission that he could no longer control the League. In effect, he was saying that his policy had failed at all points: the League no longer provided any sort of *assecuratio*; the squabble over Pomerania had destroyed any chance that it might stand guarantor for a reasonable *satisfactio*; and its finances (and hence its ability to carry on the war) now depended upon obtaining a French subsidy, or even – intolerable thought – on support from Sweden itself. In this situation it might seem that nothing remained but to abandon central Germany to its fate, and to concentrate Swedish efforts in the area to which the purely Swedish troops had already been withdrawn, in the hope that such a concentration might be sufficient to obtain by arms the *satisfactio* which there now seemed little hope of obtaining by agreement. And all this *before* the catastrophe at Nördlingen, which did not occur until 27 August.

Nördlingen, nevertheless, ensured that Oxenstierna's offer would have no appeal to Richelieu; just as it also ensured that the Regents would not answer his plea for money for the League (where, indeed, could they find it?). Even before the news of the disaster reached them they had given clear signs that they were losing their nerve;¹¹¹ and after it their vacillating views on *satisfactio* – included, as the ultimate resort, seeking the friendship of the Emperor (at a moment when he was flushed with victory) and establishing a closer link with the German Protestant states (when the League was on its deathbed) – suggest

that they had lost their grip upon the realities of the German situation.¹¹² As indeed might well be; for all their attention was now concentrated on the coming negotiations with Poland: as to Germany, they summed up their view in reiterated directives to get out of the war – amicably, if possible, but if that were impossible to get out on any terms which were reconcilable with “reputation”. But in truth it now mattered very little what they suggested. The decisive moment, the turning-point, had been reached and passed. The League of Heilbronn could no longer do Sweden’s business. And it collapsed not so much as a result of military defeat (Nördlingen was not exploited by the victors, and Oxenstierna was able to regroup his forces on the line of the Main), as of the Regents’ failure to heed, in good time, Oxenstierna’s warnings about the consequences of insisting on Pomerania.

The men in Stockholm might now have their eyes fixed on Poland; but Oxenstierna, left in the meantime very much to his own devices, with general instructions to get out of the war somehow – Oxenstierna had to find some method of salvaging what could be salvaged from the wreck of his policy. It was all very well for his colleagues to exhort him, in view of the economic situation at home,¹¹³ “rather to follow the example of Numa than of Romulus, of Solomon rather than of David”, but it was by no means obvious just what Numa and Solomon would have recommended in the circumstances in which Oxenstierna found himself.¹¹⁴ One solution might lie in somehow persuading Richelieu to allow himself to be installed as the new target at which Sweden’s enemies in Germany might “shoot their arrows”.¹¹⁵ Even before Nördlingen members of the League had been turning their thoughts to closer links with France. After Nördlingen there was no help for it; and it was with Oxenstierna’s approval that the League despatched Löffler and Streiff to Paris to make the best treaty they could.¹¹⁶ But the terms which they settled for were such as he could not possibly accept: they transferred French subsidies – or the hope of subsidies, for since 1633 they had been paid irregularly, or not at all – from Sweden to the League; they would have reduced Sweden to the humiliating position of being just one of a bunch of French clients; and above all they stipulated that France would declare war only if assured that John George, George William and the other Estates of the two Saxon Circles did not make peace, or enter into negotiations for it, except in conjunction with France.¹¹⁷ This last provision deprived the treaty of any meaning; for already in June John George had opened peace-negotiations with the Emperor, and on 14 November they issued in the Preliminaries of Pirna. In December a thinly-attended meeting of the League assembled in Worms to take stock of the situation and to decide whether or not to ratify the Löffler-Streiff treaty. The result was decisive. The League, desperate for French assistance in the Palatinate, by a majority ratified the treaty; Oxenstierna refused to do so, and ostentatiously quitted the meeting. It was a clear breach. Though he continued until 1640 to style himself the League’s Director, and though he attended one more meeting

of a miserable rump in March 1635, from this moment the League ceased to enter into his calculations. It could no longer serve his purposes; he must seek other paths, other instruments.

By the close of 1634 Oxenstierna had become a disillusioned and embittered man, conscious that he had lost control of events, and inclined to despair of recovering it. "Henceforward", he wrote to Johan Banér, "I will struggle no longer, but drift where the tide may take me. . . we are hated, envied, harassed",¹¹⁸ – and that hatred, he had come to see, arose from the fact that the German princes now regarded him as the main obstacle to peace. And towards peace the tin was now setting strongly. In a survey of the situation which he sent home in January 1635 Oxenstierna indicated two possible lines of action, as the only alternatives left open to him.¹¹⁹ One was to take the opportunity afforded by the Preliminaries of Pirna, which had provided for the accession of Sweden and France, if they were so minded. The other was an alliance with France. Neither seemed attractive. But if he must choose, Oxenstierna clearly preferred a negotiated settlement in Germany. Somehow or other, Sweden must extricate herself from the German bog, and do it if possible without quarrelling with her alleged friends. Banér was therefore instructed not to oppose, but rather to commend, John George's efforts for peace. For if the Elector and the Emperor made peace, George William of Brandenburg would certainly adhere to it, Pomerania would follow, and so – paradoxically enough – the enemy would be shut out from the coastlands, and Sweden would gain her security on that side after all.¹²⁰ Pomerania was in any case lost, at least for the present; and Oxenstierna drifted with the tide here also. Sten Bielke was ordered not to resist a Brandenburg occupation in the event of Bogislaw's death;¹²¹ and Oxenstierna drafted bases of negotiation which clearly recognized George William's hereditary right.¹²² The best he now hoped for was that some fragments of Pomerania might be retained, as pledges for the payment of a Swedish indemnity. Nor had he any longer much hope an alternative compensation in Prussia, of which he wrote that "we hold it only by our finger-tips".¹²³ There was not much comfort anywhere, at the beginning of 1635. Least of all from John George. For it soon became clear that accession to John George's peace was possible only if Sweden were willing to evacuate Germany altogether – were willing therefore, to abandon both *assecuratio* and *satisfactio*; and it entailed such a sacrifice of "reputation" that even the Regents, desperate for peace as they now were, would hardly be willing to swallow it.

It might seem, then, that nothing remained but to conclude an alliance with France. But Oxenstierna was not prepared – now, or for some years to come – to accept that conclusion. Alliance with France would involve the risk that Sweden might be used to pull Richelieu's chestnuts out of the fire, and be committed to continuing the war for as long as the alliance should last; in fact, to making the German war once again the predominant concern, at the very moment when what he wanted was a German peace. France, it appeared, was now willing to shoulder the League of Heilbronn, and Oxenstierna might well

wish Richelieu joy of his bargain; but he was not minded to add himself to the list of Richelieu's puppets. His object was to use France, as once he had used the League – and even that only if his negotiations for peace in Germany failed. In that case, his hope was “*excitando aut connivendo* to give the House of Austria so much to do that they will forget about us”.¹²⁴ But since Sweden's negotiating position *vis-a-vis* John George was for the moment weak, there was much to be said for a diplomatic demonstration of Franco-Swedish solidarity. It was with this object that in March 1635 he quitted central Germany – as it proved, for ever – and made his way to a meeting with Richelieu at Compiègne. The treaty which he there concluded was in essence no more than a renewal of amity: the positive provisions were kept vague; of binding commitments there were none. But the treaty of Compiègne reflected Richelieu's growing realization that France could not hope to effect her aims through the League alone, any more than Sweden could; and that Oxenstierna, despite the “Gothic” manners and “intolerable pride” which so ruffled the French diplomats, might be a disagreeable necessity, to be courted rather than kidnapped. And for Oxenstierna, on his side, the treaty served (he hoped) as a useful warning, and a demonstration that Sweden did not lack friends.¹²⁵

But when in June 1635 he touched German soil again at Stade, the world had taken another disastrous turn for the worse. On 20 May the Emperor and John George concluded the Peace of Prague, on terms which represented a considerably tougher line on the Emperor's part as compared with the terms agreed upon at Pirna. The Palatines, William V of Hesse-Cassel, Württemberg, Baden-Durlach – the heart of the Swedish party in Germany – were now excluded from mercy; and the Emperor acquired a constitutional authority in the *Reich* such as no Emperor had enjoyed in memory of man. The princes and towns of Germany, for the moment forgetful of German liberties and anxious only for peace, flocked precipitately to accept a settlement which seemed at least to promise that: George William of Brandenburg among them. Within a few months only William V and Bernard of Saxe-Weimar were left to continue the struggle. From Stockholm Gabriel Gustafsson sent accounts of the state of the country which exceeded in gloom all his not inconsiderable achievements in that line.¹²⁶ Hard on the heels of these blows came the official news of the truce of Stuhmsdorf (2 September 1635), which – among other things – finally extinguished the possibility of retaining or regaining the friendship of George William by means of the Prussian exchange. Sweden's military resources in Germany were now reduced to Banér's small army in Pomerania and Mecklenburg. They confronted a resurgence of German patriotism under the Emperor's leadership, a universal desire for peace, a fierce hatred of the foreigner. It was a situation far more menacing than that of 1629. The overwhelming majority of the “Swedish” forces in Germany were threatened now with proscription of themselves and their families if they resisted the Emperor's summons to return to their obedience. Where now could they look for their massive arrears of pay? In August 1635 their officers kept Oxenstierna

a prisoner in their camp at Magdeburg, as a hostage whom they forced to conduct their negotiations with John George; and it was only the Elector's hectoring tone, and his unforthcomingness in the matter of money, that prevented a mass desertion from the Swedish service. Before Oxenstierna made his escape, by Banér's contrivance, he had been driven to promise them that if he did not at the peace obtain sufficient cash to pay their arrears, they might go to Sweden and collect them there in person.¹²⁷

V

The mutinies at Magdeburg inaugurated a new phase – the final phase of Oxenstierna's labours in Germany. He was now driven, almost a fugitive, to take refuge on the extreme periphery of German affairs. As he contemplated the chilly waters of the Baltic from Stralsund or Wismar, he felt the full implications of his situation: "I sit here with empty hands, and write home, and ride around the watch like any other commander or captain."¹²⁸ Small wonder if in such circumstances he began to feel that his usefulness in Germany was nearing its end, and that it would be better to go home. But if he went, who could step into his place to make the peace which had now become a necessity, and above all, who could make it on satisfactory terms? The Stuhmsdorf negotiations did not give him much confidence that such a person could be found in Stockholm. The humiliations of Magdeburg had not only confirmed his will to make peace, they had made very clear to him what the essential condition of such a peace must be: the contentment of the soldiery. The pledge which he had been forced to give to the mutinous officers was a pledge which Sweden simply had not the resources to honour: any peace which failed to transfer that burden to German shoulders would be disastrous.¹²⁹

On 6 October 1635 John George formally declared war on Sweden; on 6 January 1636 George William followed his example. Protestant was now fighting Protestant: it was almost true to say that Germany was fighting the foreigners. But the peace which Oxenstierna intended was not a peace with the Electors, who were after all subjects and auxiliaries; it must be a peace between principals, a peace concluded between sovereigns, a peace with the Emperor; and it must be ratified by him.¹³⁰ This was a principle more easy to formulate than to enforce, as he had discovered already in Magdeburg. In the darkest days of the mutiny he had secretly despatched to Vienna what was almost a plea to open negotiations, and he had been crushingly snubbed: the Emperor did not even deign to send him an answer.¹³¹ After the Peace of Prague Ferdinand II was no longer what he had been before it. He was not now prepared to deal on a footing of equality with a foreign subject whose power and reputation seemed to be on the point of extinction. If Oxenstierna was still minded to treat, he must address himself to John George as the Emperor's delegate – as once the Tsars of Muscovy had condescended to treat with Kings of Sweden only

through the Voyevode of Novgorod¹³² – with no guarantee that any agreement reached would receive the Emperor’s ratification.¹³³ It was all very well for Salvius to argue that this was an acceptable procedure, since the real principals had now made peace and Sweden could be considered simply as an accessory to allies who had mostly repudiated her;¹³⁴ but this was an argument so damaging to Sweden’s “reputation” that Oxenstierna could not easily accept it. Yet, in the existing circumstances, this humiliation too had to be swallowed with the others, if ever negotiations were to begin at all.

Oxenstierna saw little hope of getting an acceptable peace if he were forced to negotiate in the deplorable military situation of the autumn of 1635. The very real possibility of driving Sweden out of Germany altogether would make John George inaccessible to any proposals for a reasonable settlement.¹³⁵ The truce of Stuhmsdorf, however, did at least bring him one much-needed asset: it permitted the transference to Pomerania of 9700 men under the command of Lennart Torstensson; and this reinforcement enabled Banér in the last months of the year to win a series of useful victories over the Saxon forces, which perhaps did something to make the Elector a little more supple. Final victory might now seem impossible; but something, perhaps, could be done by “molesting” the Elector: in the long run, Oxenstierna believed, the Protestant princes of north Germany would prefer a settlement to the ruin of their territories.¹³⁶ But it was not sufficient simply to hang on, somehow or other, to the coastlands: if effective pressure were to be brought to bear, and above all if the armies were to be supplied, war must be waged offensively, as in the past; and Banér must be strong enough to be able to break out of the exhausted Pomeranian bastion.¹³⁷

The government at home was thinking on other lines. They lacked both Oxenstierna’s nerve and his clear appreciation of what now was at stake. They had already lost any hope of territorial *satisfactio*, and some of them professed not to desire it. “What good does it do us”, cried Karl Karlsson Gyllenhielm, “to acquire many lands, and spend money on it, and so ruin ourselves at home?”¹³⁸ The demand for a territorial *satisfactio*, said Jakob de la Gardie, had been a mistake from the beginning, for it was inconceivable that the Germans would ever agree to an arrangement which violated the Golden Bull.¹³⁹ As early as October 1635 they were ready to abandon all such claims, whether in land or money, if thereby they could keep some friends in Germany.¹⁴⁰ Even Gabriel Gustafsson was soon to say that it was intolerable to go on fighting a war in which they had no interest.¹⁴¹ They did indeed concede that the contentment of the soldiery was the one interest that they dared not let go.¹⁴² But it was naive to suppose (as Gabriel Gustafsson did) that they had only to say so, and peace would be tossed into their lap by a grateful and reconciled Germany.¹⁴³ Oxenstierna knew better. He was as determined on peace as they were – on the last day of 1635 he furnished them with a comprehensive and clinching list of arguments for it¹⁴⁴ – but he had a better appreciation of the difficulty of obtaining it, and of ensuring that it should be observed when obtained. And

so, in the autumn of 1635 and the spring of 1636 he hammered home the point, in letter after letter to the Regents, and in emotional appeals to his brother, that he must have reinforcements, must have supplies, must have money, if there were to be any fair chance of getting the kind of settlement which, they all agreed, was imperative. To Gabriel Gustafsson he wrote that given the necessary supplies they would have a short war and a quick peace; without them, a long war and a peace of ignominy.¹⁴⁵ No doubt the government in Stockholm did its best; but they were too inefficient, too procrastinating, to give him anything like what he was needing, and to Oxenstierna their best seemed infuriatingly inadequate.

Thus it happened that he was forced to negotiate not from strength but from weakness. Direct negotiations with John George broke down almost at once, for he demanded Sweden's immediate evacuation and adherence to the terms of the Peace of Prague, and only then was he prepared to offer a quite inadequate cash payment, with no territorial concessions.¹⁴⁶ Renewed negotiations, this time through the intermediary of Adolf Frederick of Mecklenburg, proved more hopeful. Substantial agreement was reached on a Swedish evacuation of Germany in stages, provided that the Emperor's ratification was forthcoming; and it was agreed also that a separate treaty covering the contentment of the soldiery and a cash *satisfactio* should be hammered out at a convention of Protestant states, designed to be held at Lüneburg early in the new year. But that was the limit of success. Oxenstierna insisted that the negotiations with the Emperor, and the Lüneburg convention, must proceed *pari passu* and take effect simultaneously: he was not going to evacuate Germany and find himself stripped of bargaining-power, in regard to the vital question of the army's arrears.¹⁴⁷ And on this issue the negotiations had reached a deadlock by the opening of 1636.

There were conceivable ways of breaking it: in particular, the device of another approach to France. Since Richelieu's conclusion of the Löffler-Streiff treaty with the League things had gone almost as ill for him as for Sweden. The League predictably proved more of a liability than an asset; its demise followed quickly; and the Peace of Prague left France, as it left Sweden, with no prospect of a German clientelage. In March 1635 Olivares tweaked the Cardinal's nose by kidnapping France's *protégé* the Elector of Trier, and open war with Spain followed with little delay. France could not now go it alone in Germany; and it became Richelieu's anxious concern to prevent Oxenstierna from making a separate peace, and so leaving her in that situation: at the end of the year his ambassador in Germany, St. Chamont, was offering Sweden "mountains of gold" to stay in the war.¹⁴⁸ Oxenstierna was thus in a position to put pressure on France by his negotiations with Adolf Frederick, and might hope that negotiations with France would soften the intransigence of John George. The diplomatic advantage was no longer in Richelieu's hands.

It was with a firm grasp of this situation that Oxenstierna opened talks with St. Chamont at Wismar in February 1636. They produced two *projets* for an

alliance – one Swedish, one French – to be ratified by August, and no French subsidies to be paid until then; but they also produced an agreement binding each side not to make peace in the meantime.¹⁴⁹ On 1 May Louis XIII accepted the Swedish *projet*, agreed to declare war on the Emperor, and to pay Sweden a million *livres* a year in subsidy: this, after all, was the year of Corbie. But Oxenstierna on his side was in no hurry to ratify. He believed that the Emperor, confronted with the prospect of a real collaboration between France and Sweden, would choose to make peace with Sweden;¹⁵⁰ and he was not prepared to tie his hands in such a way as to prevent him from taking advantage of such an opportunity if it came.

Oxenstierna had been quick to grasp the implications for Sweden of the Peace of Prague: “the Emperor”, he wrote, “has gained more by the peace than by two Nördlingens”.¹⁵¹ The sovereign authority which Ferdinand II now seemed to have achieved, the collapse of any counterpoise to his power in Germany, presaged a menace to Sweden in the future. Oxenstierna had not forgotten 1629. Sweden had intervened in Germany, among other reasons, in order to save “German liberties”; for the preservation of those liberties was Sweden’s interest also. Gustav Adolf had expressed this policy in a well-remembered phrase when he said “As long as an Elector sits safe in his Electorate, and a duke is duke and has his liberties, then we are safe”.¹⁵² The conclusion was inescapable: the *ultimate* objective of Swedish policy must now be the destruction of the Peace of Prague; and any settlement must have that consequence, or at the very least provide the means for it. The immediate objective, of course, remained the contentment of the soldiery. Whether in the existing circumstances the ultimate objective was attainable – that was a more dubious question. Translated into practical terms, it meant amnesty for those excluded from pardon at Prague, and the possibility of once more forming from them a nucleus of opposition to Habsburg power. The demand for an amnesty was first seriously put forward in Oxenstierna’s final peace-terms for Adolf Frederick, communicated around Christmas in 1635.¹⁵³ It was not that he felt any obligation to go out of his way to rescue those princes who since Nördlingen had deserted the Swedish cause: it was for Sweden’s sake, and not for theirs, that the demand for amnesty was put forward. For a time he was not altogether without hope that it might be accepted, at least for some of them.¹⁵⁴ But even if it were not, and even if for the sake of an early peace it had to be postponed, the mere fact that it had been made and pressed might do something to remind the proscribed that it was Sweden that was their real friend. In a circular to the Protestant princes of Germany in June 1636 he was careful to make the point that it was just on the question of amnesty that the negotiations with Adolf Frederick had broken down.¹⁵⁵ It was not quite true, of course; but it was useful propaganda.

VI

Such was the situation – the treaty of Wismar still unratified, the German negotiations at a stand – when in July 1636 Oxenstierna at last took his leave of Germany, never thereafter to set foot outside his native land. For months he had been expressing a passionate longing to go home, to see his wife and friends once again, to settle down to a tranquil old age;¹⁵⁶ and this natural private feeling had been reinforced by strong public considerations: the need to arouse the government from its lethargy, the need to talk to the Regents face to face of his policies and his difficulties. If only he could dash over to Stockholm for a week or two, he believed that he would be able to infuse into his colleagues some of his own steadiness of purpose, and to supply from his long experience the administrative grasp which they seemed so conspicuously to lack.¹⁵⁷ But in the autumn of 1635 this kind of fleeting visit was effectually barred by the protests of the officers, who feared that his departure might impede the negotiations for peace, suspected that once he got home he would probably stay there, and were not to be moved by his explanations that he was going mainly in order to expedite the despatch of the arms and supplies of which they stood so much in need.¹⁵⁸ This, however, was not the only consideration which weighed with him, nor perhaps even the main one. For he felt very strongly that it was his duty to stay on until his mission in Germany had been fully discharged – or at least until he was convinced that his presence there would no longer serve any useful purpose; and that was not the case before the beginning of 1636. And until he could feel sure that competent successors could be found to replace him, he scrupled to shuffle off his responsibilities on to shoulders less broad than his own. His letters home in these final months vividly reveal how torn he was between these conflicting obligations. Nevertheless, as winter gave way to spring, the tardiness of the government in meeting his clamorous demands for aid produced a cumulative exasperation. In his letters to his brother he took no trouble to conceal his resentments. In reply to Gabriel Gustafsson's assurance that they would welcome his return and could be relied on to give him a favourable reception, he poured out his pent-up sense of injury in a passionate tirade:

I should be glad (he wrote) to get away from this place, not only with my life, but even at the expense of it. . . . The whole time I have been out here I have been a slave; I am envied and persecuted by friend and foe; and there is no affliction, no labour, no danger to life and reputation, so great that I have not had to endure it, and still have to do so. But all this is nothing to the way I have been treated since I came to these parts (*sc.* Pomerania). . . . Hitherto, I have despised it, but it has now got under my skin to such an extent that my judgment and my resourcefulness are deserting me, and – what is worse – that in order to keep things from going to pieces I must suffer everything patiently, and dare not even confide to paper the contumely with which I – and indeed my country – are treated; not because I shun, or lack the spirit, to face a quarrel, but in order that I do not damage the country's interests. . . . I can't be of any use here; but if I leave, everything will collapse, and all the blame be put on me.¹⁵⁹

There was worse to come. On 11 and 12 March the Regents sent him the formal leave to return for which he had been asking, with discretion to take advantage of it as he saw fit.¹⁶⁰ But they also suggested that leave of absence be given to Banér, who wished to come home to bury his wife. Thus, with extraordinary irresponsibility and lack of imagination, they contemplated depriving Sweden's cause in Germany simultaneously of its most experienced statesman and its best available general; and they had nothing but vague suggestions for supplying the place of either.¹⁶¹ Oxenstierna allowed ten days to pass before acknowledging this remarkable communication – no doubt in order to allow time for his rage to cool before drafting his reply; but to his brother he made no attempt to temper his fury and contempt. The government, it appeared, expected that he should leave affairs in Germany in a posture which was not (in their words) “desperate”; but they gave him no means to do so. They instructed him to take what means he needed from subsidies (what subsidies? the French were still paying none) and from local resources (though it was just because local resources were near exhaustion that Oxenstierna had appealed to them for aid); and at the same time they urged him to press on with the peace negotiations,

as though foreign kings and republics were so amiable and well-disposed towards us that they should, without any visible profit to themselves, lavish money upon us, or that I should simultaneously treat for peace and get money from our friends (for war). . . Instead of an answer to my proposals and questions, I get a short extract of the annual revenue and expenditure of the kingdom – as though I were in a position to do anything to improve it, or that I should content the soldiery and supply our needs with such an extract.¹⁶²

Three days before this letter was sent off, the Council had taken a step which must inevitably widen the cleavage between the Chancellor and the government, when they resolved to send out Salvius to make the peace which – some of them had come to suspect – was being sabotaged by Oxenstierna. Salvius was indeed to take his orders “*de modo tractandi*” from the Chancellor; but “*de realibus*” he was to follow instructions from home. It was a clear vote of no confidence; and Oxenstierna could hardly be blamed if he took it as a censure of his conduct. But he was too old a hand for such a move to succeed. He met it by firmly tying up Salvius in instructions which gave him only the status of a subdelegate subject to his authority, and so deprived him of any opportunity to tangle the wires.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, if he had still any lingering doubts about going home, those doubts must now have been removed: the country could not go on at this rate.

On 16 July 1636 Oxenstierna landed at Dalarö. He had missed his son's wedding; but perhaps he consoled himself with the reflection that he had at any rate ensured that Banér should miss his wife's interment. Four days later he appeared before the Council,¹⁶⁴ scrupulously declining to take his seat in that body until he had made his report on his mission: on the 18th he had addressed a committee of the Estates whose meeting had been postponed until his homecoming. His reception by both these bodies must have come as something of a surprise to him. His view of his colleagues had latterly been such that he

may well have expected to find himself in the position of attempting to defend his record against the attacks of his political enemies. But no such attack developed. The tone was now quite altered. On 22 July the Estates passed a resolution which was in effect an unqualified vote of confidence. His policies were endorsed, his services acknowledged.¹⁶⁵ The Regents and the Council may not have been unaffected by this emphatic manifestation of support. At all events, they associated themselves with it. In the series of protracted debates on foreign policy which occupied the attention of the Council in the last days of July and the beginning of August no one ventured the mildest criticism of his proceedings in Germany.¹⁶⁶ The sniping stopped; the innuendos were heard no more. With touching unanimity they resolved that the only acceptable course of action for the moment was to fight on, as the quickest road to peace, and in the meantime to avoid giving any binding undertaking to France. Oxenstierna found himself accepted without question as the natural head of the government; and he was able at once to set about putting the administration to rights and injecting some of his own spirit into his colleagues. It was a triumph of personality, an extorted tribute to the qualities which had carried him through the stormy years in Germany; and he might have been forgiven if he had received it with a sardonic smile.

We can see now that it was less surprising than it must have appeared to him. The differences between himself and his colleagues had not latterly been about policy; they had been about how that policy was carried out.¹⁶⁷ The Regents suspected Oxenstierna of being dilatory and half-hearted in the pursuit of peace (in which they were quite wrong); Oxenstierna's charge against them was their incompetence and tardiness in supplying him with the means through which peace could be obtained (in which he was quite right, though he ignored the mitigating circumstances). But now his rehearsal of the facts, his total command of the arguments, his formidable personal qualities, bore down their suspicions; and the long debates in the Council must have persuaded him that he could now count on having his colleagues behind him. No one was prepared to tie Sweden to France for the sake of "a squirt of money"; everyone looked forward to a peace in Germany negotiated against a display of Swedish military strength. He and they had the same objective: the contentment of the soldiery, with some additional cash – if they could get it – by way of *satisfactio*. The only serious matter of debate was on the question of amnesty, and on that they came to the same conclusion: Sweden's negotiators must fight hard to obtain it, for the sake of William V and for the sake of Sweden's reputation; but they must not let it stand in the way of peace if it appeared that peace was to be had. Only if a breach on other issues were in any case inevitable should amnesty be made the ostensible – and creditable – pretext. Which was in strict line with the instructions Oxenstierna had left behind him to guide the Swedish negotiators at the still-unsummoned Lüneburg convention.¹⁶⁸ Oxenstierna himself put this policy in the most uncompromising terms: if money to pay the troops could be obtained, "I would not advise continuing the war for an hour longer."¹⁶⁹ If

he meant what he said – if he was not simply intent on rallying the Regents to his policy – it was an indication as strong as any of his anxiety to bring the war to an end. For it implied, and he must have realized that it implied, the postponement – if not the abandonment – of the ultimate objective: the destruction of the Peace of Prague. It was a short-term policy; and in the light of Banér's classic victory at Wittstock on 24 September 1636 it looked as though it might be the right one. In the event it proved an illusion. But that was not yet apparent in the autumn of 1636.

VII

How are we to judge Oxenstierna's achievement during the last years of his exile in Germany? On the morrow of Lützen he was confronted with alternative courses of action, each of which was liable to serious objections. He might continue Gustav Adolf's policy and fight for final victory and a dictated peace. But this, in his view as well as that of his colleagues, meant a concentration on the wrong thing: it demanded a major effort in Germany (with no assurance of real aid from France) instead of the systematic building-up of Sweden's defences against possible attacks from her neighbours, and in particular from Poland. Or he might cut short the German enterprise altogether. But that would leave Sweden with no obvious *assecuratio*, with the problem of paying the troops their arrears, and with the danger that France would seek an ally and an instrument in Denmark. He preferred a middle course which seemed to avoid these disadvantages. The idea of some sort of a permanent confederation of evangelical states had been bequeathed to him by Gustav Adolf. His solution was to take over that idea and adapt it to altered circumstances and new objectives. The League of Heilbronn was the result.

That it should have failed was by no means wholly his fault. If enormous exertions, diplomatic skill and strength of leadership had been sufficient, the solution might have worked. But they were not sufficient. The fiction by which Sweden "lent her name" to the war could not be accepted indefinitely: as soon as the German states saw the chance of a reasonable peace they would probably take it. Pirna offered that chance; and though Prague was a good deal harder to swallow, they swallowed it too, with remarkable alacrity. The device of financing the war by donations had obvious limits; and by the end of 1633 those limits had already pretty well been reached. The question of Sweden's *satisfactio* was already straining the League before the crisis came over Pomerania. Nevertheless, the League might have had a rather longer life if Oxenstierna had been content with the adhesion of the Lower Saxon Circle, as promised at the Halberstadt meeting in 1634; and it might perhaps have been saved altogether if the Prussian alternative to Pomerania had been propounded earlier, and pursued more resolutely. And for these missed opportunities Oxenstierna must undoubtedly bear a share of the blame.

After Nördlingen, and still more after the Peace of Prague, he was driven

back upon a flexible defensive diplomacy, forced to make use of temporary or tactical expedients, and in the very difficult circumstances it is hard to imagine that any better result could have been obtained than that which he actually achieved, with a hand that was almost bare of trumps. He declined to be stampeded into what would have been virtually unconditional surrender, either by disasters in Germany or by pressures from home. He correctly assessed the shift in Sweden's war-aims which the new situation enforced; and he contrived to keep a free hand for realizing them at whatever moment, and by whatever methods, might eventually be most appropriate. And in the end, upon his return home, he had the personal satisfaction of seeing his actions approved, and his policies endorsed, by *riksdag*, Council and Regents.

Nevertheless, it is more than questionable whether his solution was the right one. By evading for the moment the French alliance it did indeed preserve the free hand, and it did indeed put the contentment of the soldiery forward as the immediate objective; but some of the arguments upon which it was based were dubious or specious. When he told the Council that "the Emperor is now as weak as he has ever been, and could well be resisted if one had sufficient backbone"¹⁷⁰ it is hard to believe that he meant what he said. And when he justified his policy of not making amnesty a *sine qua non* by the argument that if negotiations broke down on this issue and the war in consequence went on, then Sweden would be left with no option but to conclude the French alliance, that was as much as to say that in order to avoid committing himself to France he was willing to leave the Peace of Prague intact, and to prefer an unsatisfactory peace to indefinite war.¹⁷¹ But in the event the negotiations did break down, the war did go on, and the consequence – the immediate consequence – was not, as he had insisted, the French alliance: the consequence was that Sweden struggled on alone in pursuit of the peace that was desired. Within a year he was singing a very different tune: by May 1637 the restoration of German liberties had become the "*principalis scopus*" of the war.¹⁷² He was to go on saying the same thing until 1641.¹⁷³ And if ever there had been a chance that this could be effected by Sweden's unaided exertions (which is more than doubtful) that prospect vanished for ever with Banér's retreat from Torgau in 1637, which was in effect a Swedish Dunkirk. In February 1638 Oxenstierna was forced to accept the inevitable, and by the treaty of Hamburg swallow the bitter pill of the French alliance.

It turned out better than he had feared. Thanks to Torstensson's brilliant campaigns, and perhaps also to France's internal difficulties, Sweden did not, after all become a French puppet or client. And when peace came at last it brought with it the two essential objects of Swedish policy: German liberty restored, a comprehensive restoration and amnesty, Sweden herself as Estate of the *Reich*. It was a full *assecuratio*. So too with the contentment of the soldiery, which was firmly placed on German shoulders. These were terms which Sweden could hardly have hoped for from Oxenstierna's tactics of 1636–38. And the attainment of war-aims which were deemed essential brought

with it, almost incidentally, the realization of war-aims which since 1640 or so had been considered only as desirable.¹⁷⁴ It brought territorial gains which seemed to make economic and strategic sense, a large cash indemnity, and (though this had long since ceased to be a major preoccupation) the preservation of the Protestant Cause. It was a result which in July 1636 would have appeared to Oxenstierna as beyond all reasonable expectation. But it was a result which might well have been impossible without him.

NOTES

1. *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brevvexling*, I and II Series (Stockholm 1888–1978), cited as *AOSB*.
2. At the beginning of the last century, however, there appeared *Bref ifrån Svea-Rikes Cancellor Grefve Axel Oxenstierna till Grefve Johan Oxenstierna. . . åren 1642–1649*, ed Carl C Gjörwell (Stockholm 1810, 1819).
3. Wilhelm Tham, *Axel Oxenstierna, hans ungdom och verksamhet intill år 1612* (Stockholm 1935); Nils Ahnlund, *Axel Oxenstierna intill Gustav Adolfs död* (Stockholm 1940).
4. The best and most recent work is the excellent dissertation by Sigmund Goetze, *Die Politik des schwedischen Reichkanzlers Axel Oxenstierna gegenüber Kaiser und Reich* (Kiel 1971).
5. As he reminded his colleagues on his return home: *Svenska Riksrådets Protokoll* (Handlingar rörande Skandinaviens Historia, 3rd Series) (Stockholm 1878–), VI, 401 (cited hereafter as *RRP*)
6. *AOSB* 1:VII:509, (to Gabriel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, 25 July 1632). (Dates are throughout Old Style).
7. *RRP*, III, 12 (11 January 1633).
8. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:389; *RRP*, VI, 400–1
9. *AOSB*, 1:XI:244, for scholarships in the diocese of Magdeburg.
10. *AOSB*, 1:X:183–6
11. On this, see, e.g., *AOSB* 1:IX:89 (to Gustav Horn, 26 June 1633).
12. *AOSB* 1:XII:472 (to Gabriel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, 19 September 1634).
13. For Grubbe, see P G Berggren, *Lars Grubbe, hans lif och verksamhet* (Karlstad 1898).
14. “I know that I act presumptuously in thus giving my views unasked, but. . .”: *AOSB*, 1:IX:357, (7 September 1633).
15. E.g. *AOSB*, 1:XII:649, where he blames the government for being too soft with Riga, tells them that they should have consulted with him first, and adds: “Such proceedings make me weary of my life, and remove much of the hope for the country which I might otherwise have had” (to Gabriel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, 1 November 1634).
16. *AOSB*, 1:XI:382 (to Gabriel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, 6 March 1634); *ibid.*, 741 (Memorial for Lars Grubbe 20 May 1634).
17. *AOSB*, 1:XI:188 (2 February 1634).
18. See, e.g., *AOSB*, 1:X:438; and, for the government’s defence, *Handlingar rörande Skandinaviens Historia*, (Stockholm 1842–) (cited *HSH*), 25, p 141–151.
19. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:291 (to Gabriel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, 30 November 1635).

20. *HSH*, 30, pp 100–1. For the question of a *consistorium generale*, see M Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus. A History of Sweden 1611–1632*, (1953), I. 405–12.
21. *RRP*, V. 345 (24 November 1635)
22. *AOSB*, 1:XII:95–102
23. *HSH*, 29, p 237. Though admittedly he acted at the invitation of the Regents.
24. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:346–8.
25. For some examples of all this, see *AOSB*, 1:XI:661; XII:319, 342; XIII:508.
26. *AOSB*, 1:XV:239; XIV:295, 309; XV:22; XIII:390, 393.
27. A good example of this is the tangled and self-contradictory directive of 12 October 1635 which reached Oxenstierna in Stralsund on 29 November, and which contained (among other solutions) the idea that he might somehow persuade the Protestant states of Germany to make *another* peace with the Emperor in place of the Peace of Prague: (*HSH*, 37, pp. 75–90); or Gabriel Gustafsson's hasty suggestion (in a postscript!) that it might be "a good thing" to conclude an alliance with John George and other Protestants provided they would defend the Baltic coast "and keep us safe from the Emperor" – this on 11 June 1635, with the Peace of Prague already made! *AOSB*, 11:III:364.
28. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:503–18 (14 August 1635).
29. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:92
30. The fullest account of the government's Polish policy is Herbert Rettig, *Die Stellung der Regierung und des Reichstages Schwedens zur polnischen Frage, April 1634 bis November 1636* (Halle 1916).
31. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:272.
32. See, e.g., *AOSB*, 1:XIII:22, 339–43, 350, 353; XIV:91–96; 11:III:379. If he had not lost his temper he would hardly have ventured the statement that the chances of successful war against Poland were now better than in the memory of man: *AOSB*, 1:XIII:341; or told his son that he had "dishonoured my name": *AOSB*, 1:XIII:350. The truth was that he did not consider there was any Swede fit to conduct a negotiation of this kind except himself: *ibid.*, 446. He may well have been right, but it would have been better not to say so.
33. "I have lived through nine *riksdagar* or more in his late Majesty's time", wrote Gabriel Gustafsson, "and never seen the Peasants as wild as now". *AOSB*, 11:III:339 (19 July 1634).
34. "I can well remember the times when we had neither officers, men, money, artillery, ammunition, ships, or any other necessity, were under pressure on all sides and had the enemy all over the country – an enemy much more powerful than now, and with such a hatred and evil intention towards us as any they can now have, yet although it was his late Majesty who corrected these faults, still he was at the beginning of his reign: young, and equally inexperienced in government and war, and supported by none, or very few. . . it is no very new thing for a crown to be in a position of owing money in difficult times": *AOSB*, 1:XIII:11 (5 January 1635).
35. *AOSB*, 1:VIII:233 (13 February 1633).
36. *AOSB*, 11:III:314, (Gabriel Gustafsson to Axel Oxenstierna, 27 December 1633).
37. In June 1635 she was seriously ill with what Dr Robertson called "*in generale vocabulo exantemata or moebellos, germanicesteenpoggen*": *RRP*, IV. 132; and again a year later: *RRP*, V. 86. Oxenstierna suggested fewer medicines and a proper diet: *AOSB*, 1:XIII:506.

38. Kristina later described him as 'un homme qui avait des talens agréables au peuple. Il étoit affable, honnête, aimé, de la Noblesse et du peuple. Il étoit éloquent à la mode du Pais mais d'une éloquence naturelle sans étude, n'ayant qu'une légère teinture du Latin': Arckenholtz, *Mémoires concernant Christine Reine de Suède* (Amsterdam and Leipzig 1751–60), III. 44.
39. *HSH*, 29, p. 237.
40. *RRP*, VI. 39, 43, 112.
41. *RRP*, VI, 154, There is much useful light on the chaos in the Admiralty in Ulf Sjödell, *Riksråd och kungliga råd. Rådskarriären 1602–1718* (Lund 1975)
42. *RRP*, VI. 1, 3, 5.
43. *AOSB*, 11:III:356, 359.
44. *RRP*, V. 83.
45. *AOSB*, 11:III:360, 400. And Johan Oxenstierna wrote to his father: "of all the Colleges there is none so wretched as the Chancery. . . P Banér has not been here for four months": C T Odhner, *Sveriges inre historia under Drottning Christinas förmyndare* (Stockholm 1865), p. 59.
46. *RRP*, V. 77–8
47. *AOSB*, 1:VIII:266.
48. *AOSB*, 11:III:329; *RRP*, IV. 126.
49. *RRP*; V. 230–2
50. *AOSB*, 11:III:396 (Gabriel Gustafsson to Oxenstierna, 1 January 1636). Oxenstierna wrote on 29 August 1635 "I gather that at home, and perhaps in our *collegium*, are some who begin to censure our *consilia* and what we do, and still have to do, out here. . . Our difficulties and problems, alas, are now greater than we can bear. If on top of all this we are now to run the danger of being persecuted at home, you may easily imagine. . . what effect it will have on our courage and our will to endure": *AOSB*, 1:XIII:594, 599. And again, defending his censure of the Stuhmsdorf negotiations, "They complain of me to the Regents, and that's not enough; they complain of me to the Regents and the Council, and that's not enough; to the Estates of the realm, and even *that's* not enough, so they print my letters. I shall answer them, and gladly undergo what the law imposes": *AOSB*, 1:XIV:92 (to Gabriel Gustafsson, 27 September 1635). Fortunately he thought better of it.
51. Sigmund Goetze, *Die Politik des schwedischen Reichskanzlers Axel Oxenstierna gegenüber Kaiser und Reich*, p. 131
52. *RRP*, V. 250–1
53. *RRP*, V. 195.
54. *RRP*, IV. 92; *HSH*, 26, pp. 164–5; 32, p. 208
55. Oxenstierna's confidential agent, Peder Smalz, reported in January 1636 that Åke Axelsson Natt och Dag complained that Oxenstierna "always assumes that he knows more than anybody else; and that he is only interested in getting money for the war in Germany, without bothering himself about how it is to be got": Sverker Arnoldsson, *Poeter och Pirater* (Stockholm 1958), p. 34.
56. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:94, 265.
57. *AOSB*, 11:III:478, (Per Brahe to Oxenstierna, 8 October 1634).
58. Gustaf Björling, *Johan Banér* (Stockholm 1910), II. 73; *AOSB*, 1:XI:631 (to Johan Banér, 28 October 1634).

59. Lars Tingsten, *Huvuddragen av Sveriges Politik och Krigföring i Tyskland efter Gustav II Adolfs död till och med sommaren 1635* (Stockholm 1930), pp. 65, 120.
60. *AOSB*, 1:XII:390; Göran Rystad, *Vem vållade Nördlingenkatastrofen 1634? En studie i propaganda* (Lund 1959); Arne Stade, 'Gustaf Horn och Nördlingenkatastrofen 1634', *Historisk tidskrift* 1965; and in general Göran Rystad, *Kriegsnachrichten und Propaganda während des dreissigjährigen Krieges* (Lund 1960).
61. His commission (written by himself) is in *AOSB*: 1:XIII:162.
62. *AOSB*, 1:XV:329 (to Gabriel Gustafsson, 29 March 1636).
63. Björling *Johan Banér*, II. 340. Björlings harsh criticisms of Oxenstierna's handling of Banér are much softened in Birger Steckzén's *Johan Banér* (Stockholm, 1939).
64. Steckzén, p. 143.
65. See Roland Nordlund, 'Kontribution eller satisfaktion. Pommern och de svenska krigsfinanserna 1633', *Historisk tidskrift*, 1974.
66. See Björling's trenchant criticisms in *op. cit.* II, 251, 339; and Banér's letter to Oxenstierna, 3 November 1635, in *AOSB*, 11:VI:243–5.
67. For Oxenstierna's relations with Wallenstein, into which it is not possible to enter here, see Pekka Suvanto, *Die deutsche Politik Oxenstiernas und Wallenstein* (Helsinki 1979).
68. Björling, II. 256, 440.
69. Roland Nordlund, 'Krig genom ombud. De svenska krigsfinanserna och Heilbronnförbundet 1633', in Hans Landberg et al., *Det kontinentala krigets ekonomi. Studier i krigsfinansiering under svensk stormaktstid*. (Uppsala 1971).
70. The undeserving Åke Tott, whose application was turned down in 1633, had the nerve to renew it in August 1635: *AOSB*, 1:IX:139; XIII:441.
71. The principle was very clearly laid down by the Regents: *HSH*, 26, p. 143 (17 August 1633).
72. *AOSB*, 1:XI:178
73. *AOSB*, 1:VIII:673.
74. *AOSB*, 1:VIII:334
75. *AOSB*, 1:XV:332: "With them (the Saxons) there is no lack of long *orationes* and *dubitandi rationes* and much ceremony; but I have never yet heard anything *reale* there, and if one tries to negotiate *realiter* one is considered to be acting *imperiose*." *AOSB*, 1:VIII:6. For the vacillations of Saxon policy, see *Svenska Residentens Lars Nilsson Tungels efterlämnade papper* (Historiska Handlingar, 22, 1–2) (Stockholm 1907–9) *passim*; for the Elector's bibulous proclivities, *ibid.*, 195–6
76. Goetze, p. 103.
77. Tungal, pp. 90, 104, 118–9, 140, 210, 250.
78. Tungal, pp. 97, 155, 213.
79. *RRP*, V. 170, 351.
80. Sverker Arnoldsson, *Svensk-fransk krigs- och fredspolitik i Tyskland* (Göteborg 1937), p. 97, for this episode, and for Franco-Swedish relations generally; see also Erik Falk, *Sverige och Frankrike 1632-4* (Stockholm 1911), and the good survey in D P O'Connell, *Richelieu* (1968), pp. 280–330.
81. Thus Claes Fleming argued: "when thus the Protestants can balance the Catholics it is to be presumed (with God's help) that the end of the war has been attained. But if the war be

- prolonged, it is to be feared that our friends could become our enemies, and – some from jealousy, some from war-weariness – take a line which might not only damage us but all our co-religionists”. Gabriel Gustafsson Oxenstierna argued that they could now make peace “with reputation. If we go on, war will beget war, and so we shall have *bellum in perpetuum*.” Jakob de la Gardie demanded proof from Scripture that Sweden was fighting a war for religion: if so, why was she not also fighting France and the Pope?: *RRP*, II. 144–7, 157 (12 March, 14 April 1632).
82. *RRP*, III. 248
 83. And also offered the best naval bases for keeping an eye on Poland and Denmark.
 84. Roland Nordlund, 'Kontribution eller satisfaktion', pp. 325–30. The Stockholm government even instructed him, if necessary, to destroy all Swedish-held positions in central Germany: *HSH*, 24, pp. 274–5 (15 December 1632).
 85. *AOSB*, 1:VIII:162 (4 February 1633): cf. *AOSB*, 1:XII:324–5 (Memorial for Johan Oxenstierna, 28 August 1634).
 86. *AOSB*, 1:IX:227
 87. *AOSB*, 1:VIII:152, 216, 234
 88. *AOSB*, 1:XII:633 (to Johan Banér, 28 October 1634).
 89. All the same, he urged the government to take all necessary precautions: *AOSB*, 1:VIII:609.
 90. *AOSB*, 1:VIII:609 (to Sten Bielke, 8 May 1633)
 91. *AOSB*, 1:XI:741
 92. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:27 (7 January 1635)
 93. *AOSB*, 1:VIII:437–45, for the articles of confederation; *ibid.*, 447–54, for the annexure; *ibid.*, 479–87 for the treaty with the Palatinate. The standard work on the League of Heilbronn is J. Kretzschmar, *Der Heilbronner Bund I–III* (Lübeck 1922).
 94. For what follows see Roland Nordlund, 'Krig genom ombud', *passim*.
 95. Nordlund, *op. cit.*, pp. 332, 334, 408, 410. In the event, Oxenstierna took von Brandenstein's money and refused to hand over the bishoprics, and von Brandenstein died, a prisoner of war in Saxony, almost destitute: *ibid.*, p. 417, n. 6.
 96. *ibid.*, p. 409
 97. *HSH*, 25, pp. 137–9.
 98. *ibid.*, pp. 141–51
 99. *AOSB*, 1:XI:19 (7 January 1634), *ibid.*, 178–81, (2 February 1634).
 100. *Sveriges Traktater med främmande magter* (Stockholm 1909), V₂, 168–82.
 101. Oxenstierna's accounts of his meeting with George William, and of the Halberstadt conference, are in *AOSB*, 1:XI:286, 292, 345–52.
 102. *AOSB*, 1:XI:353.
 103. *HSH*: 29, pp. 232–7.
 104. *AOSB*, 1:XI:596; XII:73.
 105. *AOSB*: 1:XI:735; cf. his rueful retrospective judgment (12 February 1635), in *AOSB*, 1:XIII:116.

106. A A von Stiernman, *Alla Riksdagars och Mötens Besluth*, (Stockholm 1729), II. 862–4; *RRP*, IV. 170–4.
107. *RRP*, VIII. 722.
108. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:72–5 (19 January 1635, to Sten Bielke), 115–17 (12 Feb 1635, to the Regents).
109. *AOSB*, 1:XI:735.
110. Arnoldsson, *Svensk-fransk krigs- och fredspolitik*, p. 32; Falk, p. 159.
111. *HSH*, 32, pp. 126–33.
112. *HSH*, 32, pp. 268–71
113. For a dark picture of conditions in Sweden, *HSH*, 32 pp. 273, 281.
114. *HSH*, 32, p. 273 (5 November 1634).
115. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:22–3.
116. Their instructions are in *AOSB*, 1:XII:430 ff. Löffler was authorized to offer all Swedish holdings in Alsace in return for a French declaration of war on the Emperor and Spain: *ibid.*, XII: 437.
117. *Sveriges Traktater*, V₂, 241–52. For the Löffler–Streiff treaty, see Arnoldsson, pp. 56–75, 87–9, Falk, pp. 164–7; Tingsten, pp. 182–5
118. *AOSB*, 1:XII:664 (5 November 1634)
119. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:18–23 (6 January 1635)
120. *AOSB*, 1:XII:666.
121. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:74 (19 January 1635).
122. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:117 (12 February 1635).
123. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:119.
124. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:22–3 (6 January 1635).
125. *Sveriges Traktater*, V₂, 318–9, and *AOSB*, 1:XIII:242, 261. For an account of his visit to France, F U Wrangel, *Axel Oxenstiernas resa till och i Frankrike 1635*, (Stockholm 1914).
126. *AOSB*, 11:III:363–4 (11 June 1635: Oxenstierna received it in the camp at Magdeburg on 7 July).
127. The agreement between Banér and the German officers of 11 August 1635 (which Oxenstierna signed) promised that if the war went ill, and so “mancher redlicher cavallier gantz von dess reichs boden abgetrieben werden und also sein fortune anderswo suchen müste, also haben S. Exc. in *nahmen der Konigl. Mt. und crohn* (my italics) unss versprochen, dass wir nicht verlassen sondern unsere retraicte uff die crohn Schweeden nehmen und allda nach einer jedern meriten und der möglichkeit mit gelth oder gütern recompensiert werden sollen”: *AOSB*, 1:XIII:484–5. The pledge was reaffirmed on 7 November: *ibid.*, XIV: 215 (to Banér’s officers), and again a week later: *ibid.*, XIV: 233.
128. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:150 (13 October 1635, to Sten Bielke).
129. As the Estate of Nobility said very plainly: *Sveriges Rikes Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdagsprotokoll*, (Stockholm 1850) II. 170, 193, (23 October, 2 November 1635).
130. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:287 (30 November 1635): the Estates at home agreed with him: Stiernman, II. 929–32.
131. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:49 (to Ferdinand II, 17 September 1635). It was not until 10 October that Oxenstierna informed his brother, in strict confidence; and he did not officially report his

overture to the Regents until 30 December, when he apologized for the delay with the brazen excuse that he had been so busy at the time that he had quite forgotten to mention it: *AOSB*, 1:XIV:134, 374. For a differing interpretation of Oxenstierna's letter, see Goetze, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

132. Oxenstierna himself made the comparison: *AOSB*, 1:XIV:23
133. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:76–7 (30 September 1635).
134. *RRP*, V. 224 (23 October 1635)
135. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:376.
136. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:77, 146–9
137. *AOSB*, 1:XV:385 (12 April 1636)
138. *RRP*, IV. 253 (4 December 1634).
139. *RRP*, V. 297 (11 November 1635).
140. *HSH* 37, pp. 75–90 (12 October 1635).
141. *RRP*, VI. 185 (25 April 1636).
142. *HSH* 37, pp. 75–90, *RRP*, V. 201, 251–5, 380–1; Stiernman, II. 929–32
143. *RRP*, VI. 182–3
144. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:385
145. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:406; XV:534.
146. For the negotiations with John George, and the so-called “Schönebeck project”, see Goetze, pp. 184–187.
147. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:313–4, 327, 350, 369–73.
148. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:375–6, 401, 405–6.
149. *Sveriges Traktater*, V₂, 366–372, 373–4
150. *AOSB*, 1:XV:535, 563.
151. *AOSB*, 1:XIII:587
152. See, e.g., *RRP*, VII. 423, 427; VIII. 315 (22 Jan 1639, 14 Nov 1640), when this dictum was more than once quoted in the Council.
153. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:354. It had however been included in the “Schönebeck project” of 6 September 1635: Goetze, pp. 184–5.
154. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:372 (30 December 1635); *RRP*, VI, 391
155. *AOSB*, 1:XV:580. To the Regents, he blamed the breakdown on Adolf Frederick's demand that he promise not to ally with France: *ibid.*, XV:292.
156. “I am weary of myself, and not less of this false world”: *AOSB*, 1:XIII:522; cf. XV:70–1 (to Gabriel Gustafsson, 14 August 1635, 24 January 1636).
157. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:99, 143; XV:70.
158. *AOSB*, 1:XIV:154, 231.
159. *AOSB*, 1:XV:327–30 (29 March 1636).
160. *AOSB*, 1:XV:407–8; *HSH*, 38, pp. 224–35.
161. A week later they had so far come to their senses as to refuse leave to Banér: *HSH*, 38, pp. 243–5.

162. *AOSB*, 1:XV:411–3 (26 April 1636).
163. *AOSB*, 1:XV:547 (Memorial for Salvius, 22 June 1636)
164. *RRP*, VI. 380–95.
165. Stiernman, II. 946; *RRP*, VI. 409–14.
166. *RRP*, VI. 502–9, 759–68.
167. The decline of defeatism among the Regents may perhaps be connected with the marked improvement in the internal situation since 1635: in January they were describing it in unusually optimistic terms: *HSH*, 38, p.144.
168. *AOSB*, 1:XV:547–53, 557–62.
169. *RRP*, VI. 508.
170. *RRP*, VI. 389.
171. *RRP*, VI. 505.
172. *RRP*, VII, 51–4
173. e.g. “Our main concern is our security, and to prevent the Roman Empire from falling into a servitude”: *RRP*, VIII. 573, (16 april 1641); “If you allow the Peace of Prague to stand, then our late king’s *consilia* are annihilated, and afterwards we may be sure that we have war here at home”: *RRP*, VIII. 583, (4 May 1641); and cf. *RRP*, VIII. 333.
174. On 21 November 1640 Oxenstierna told the Council that the acquisition of Pomerania was “not so important as gaining and retaining the Princes’ affection and restoring them to their former state”: *RRP*, VIII. 333; on 16 April 1641 he told them “*Satisfactio* we have insisted upon least of all. The main objectives were amnesty and the contentment of the soldiery: These points are *real*, but our *satisfactio* is not to be so considered”: *RRP*, VIII. 571–3.