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THE STRUGGLE FOR ABSOLUTE MONARCHY
IN SWEDEN AND STOCKHOLM'S
BLOODBATH

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Peep Peter Rebane
1964

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

THE STRUGGLE FOR ABSOLUTE MONARCHY IN SWEDEN AND STOCKHOLM'S BLOODBATH

by Peep Peter Rebane

Sweden, like many other European countries, witnessed between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries a protracted struggle for power between a rising central government and the feudal aristocracy. In Sweden the situation was further complicated by the rise of a nationalist sentiment among the peasantry and the lower nobility. The nationalists worked toward the dissolution of the Union of Kalmar which had joined Sweden with Denmark and Norway in 1397. They also believed that the best way to achieve Swedish independence was through the support of the Swedish regents, the spokesmen for a strong central government. Both the regents and the nationalists were opposed by the Swedish aristocracy who favored the Union of Kalmar because it enhanced their own position as the predominant force in Swedish politics.

In addition to nationalists and unionists, the struggle for power in Sweden also involved the Danish kings who, as union monarchs, attempted to retain and increase their influence in Swedish politics. This attempt was opposed by both the Swedish unionists and nationalists, but for different reasons and independently. The ultimate result of this three cornered struggle for power were the bloody days of November 1520--Stockholm's Bloodbath. Previous studies by Scandinavian historians have focused narrowly on the events of November 7

and 8, 1520; that is, the Bloodbath has not been given its important place in the framework of Swedish history.

This thesis proposes that far from being an isolated event, Stockholm's Bloodbath was the climax of the struggle for power in Sweden, a contest from which the absolute monarchy emerged victorious. The thesis argues that the first absolute ruler of Sweden, the union king Christian II of Denmark, achieved his victory over the Swedish nationalists through the help of the Swedish nobility. The aristocrats realized too late that once Christian had established himself in power his rule would be one of absolutism. Thus, the nobility never regained the power and influence in Swedish politics that they had before November 1520.

Christian, however, was not destined to enjoy the fruits of his victory for long. Within two years of his triumph, he fell from power both in Sweden and Denmark. Stockholm's Bloodbath had united the Swedish nobility and the Swedish nationalists against Christian in a fight for national independence. The new leader of the Swedes was a young nobleman, Gustav Ericksson Vasa, who in 1523 became king of Sweden and established the first Swedish hereditary dynasty, the Vasas. It is, however, doubtful, whether Gustav Vasa would have succeeded had not Christian broken the power of the Swedish nobles and forced them to join the nationalists. By imposing national unity, therefore, Christian II had in fact laid the basis for a Swedish absolute monarchy.

THE STRUGGLE FOR ABSOLUTE MONARCHY IN
SWEDEN AND STOCKHOLM'S BLOODBATH

By

Peep Peter Rebane

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of November 8, 1520, Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, was ominously quiet. The only persons on the streets were a large number of Danish troops who occupied the strategic positions in the town and prevented anybody from leaving their houses or the city. The inhabitants noticed, however, that during the night several scaffolds had been erected in the marketplace, which now was lined on all sides by troops.

Shortly before noon, a number of important Swedes were led by Danish troops to the marketplace. A herald announced that they had been sentenced to death for heresy. As the drums of the soldiers rolled, the prisoners were led to the top of the scaffolds and beheaded. The corpses were thrown to the ground and the heads unceremoniously rolled down the stairs of the scaffolds. When the executions were halted because of darkness, some eighty bodies lay on the ground before the eyes of the horrified citizens of Stockholm and the gutters of the city ran red with Swedish blood. The bodies lay unburied in the marketplace for three days. On the fourth day they were carted to a nearby suburb of Stockholm and burned on one big pyre. This event which was to drastically alter the course of Swedish history and to earn its perpetrator the name "the Tyrant," has become known as Stockholm's Bloodbath.

Why should the execution of this handful of men be of such great importance? After all, more men have been killed for lesser crimes than heresy. The answer must be sought and can be found in the Swedish history that preceded this event. Sweden, like most other

European states witnessed between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries a struggle for power between a rising absolute monarchy and the old feudal aristocracy. In Sweden this struggle culminated in Stockholm's Bloodbath and a victory for the monarchy. Although the feudal aristocracy at later times managed to challenge the authority of the central monarchy, they never regained the power and influence that they had exerted before November of 1520.

CHAPTER II

SWEDEN DURING THE UNION OF KALMAR, 1397-1512

In any attempt to trace the development of Sweden from a feudal state to an absolute monarchy it is evident that the history involved is Scandinavian rather than strictly Swedish. Separated in ancient and early medieval times by geography and the problems of communication, the Swedish, Danish and Norwegian people continued until the fourteenth century to support three more or less independent kingdoms. Nevertheless, the commonness of ethnic background, language and general geographic location tended to create a vague feeling of unity which was eventually to manifest itself at the political level.

When the Danish king, Valdemar Atterdag, died in 1375, his daughter Margaret succeeded after a twenty-year struggle against other claimants to make herself Queen of all three of the Scandinavian countries. She lost no time in consolidating her position in the three kingdoms. In 1395 she secured the election of her grand-nephew, Eric of Pomerania, who was a minor, as king of Norway. In 1396 Denmark and Sweden also elected Eric as their monarch. Until the fourteenth century, Sweden had usually been ruled by a king, traditionally elected from a royal family and, as a result, the feudal nobility had been in a strong position to exert its influence by controlling the elections. This aristocratic control of the king was exercised especially by the members of the King's Council or, as it later was called, the Royal Swedish Council. The composition of this body had

been fixed in the late thirteenth century and thereafter consisted of certain bishops, lawmen from the provinces and other lords.¹ Its number was not to exceed twelve, but most rich and influential nobles secured their election to the Council.² As a result, the number of Council members varied between twenty and thirty and no fast criterion for admission to membership can be established. These same general provisions also pertained to the Danish and Norwegian Councils.

In 1397 the members of the Royal Councils of the three countries met in the Swedish town of Kalmar and elected Eric of Pomerania king of Denmark, Norway and Sweden--a token of the dynastic unity of the realms. This Union of Kalmar lasted, with intermittent breaks, until 1523, when Gustav Eriksson Vasa was elected king of Sweden.

Whereas Margaret had wished to entail the Swedish crown in Eric's dynasty, the final agreement between her and the nobles emphasized that the three countries should jointly elect their future kings, a stipulation doubtlessly inspired by the Swedish Council.³ The countries should live in peace and their foreign policy should be decided by the king with the advice of the Council of the country in which he was residing. Further than that the great nobles evidently did not wish to commit themselves. They asserted definitely that each kingdom should keep its own national code of laws and be governed according to its provisions. This implied, in respect to Sweden, that her government and her castles, the possession of which held the key to the country, could only be entrusted to Swedish-born men. Despite these safeguards against any possible usurpation of power by the king,

¹Andrew A. Strömberg, A History of Sweden (New York, 1931), p. 152.

²Ibid., p. 204.

³Erik Lönnroth, Sverige och Kalmarunionen (Göteborg, 1934), p. 47.

the assembly of nobles never fully ratified this draft of the Union of Kalmar. Only ten of the seventeen signatures required to put the treaty formally into effect were obtained.

The result was that the agreements reached at Kalmar were interpreted in contradictory ways. The later Danish kings used them to justify their attempts to obtain the Swedish crown. The Swedes in turn, based their freedom to reject any Danish king as the king of Sweden on the same agreements, pointing out that the treaty never had formally gone into effect. Margaret, on her part, however, had not been unwilling to allow the document to lapse, realizing that she could build a stronger central government if she was not tied down by written agreements. She probably did not intend to create a northern Empire in which the people should possess equal rights. Denmark became the principal country; Norway and Sweden mere dependencies.⁴ This point of view was maintained even more ardently by her successors and ultimately proved to be the undoing of the union. After Margaret's death, the union became more theoretical than practical. Later rulers lacked in general the qualities needed to keep the countries together. The union came more and more to depend for its existence on the aims of the nobilities of Denmark and Sweden.

After Margaret's death in 1419, Eric of Pomerania inherited the Scandinavian kingdoms. He had a series of foreign conflicts which threatened the effectiveness of his rule and ultimately proved to be his undoing both in Denmark and in Sweden. The campaigns took up so much of Eric's time that he seldom had the opportunity to visit his Swedish kingdom. Since the king alone had the right to summon the Swedish Council, Sweden was for a long time left without a central

⁴C. Hallendorf and A. Schück, History of Sweden, Delaware Edition (Stockholm, 1938), p. 78.

government. Swedish affairs were settled in Denmark and the decisions carried out by the local bailiffs in Sweden. These bailiffs became more and more autonomous and arbitrary, soon arousing the anger of the Swedish inhabitants. Since the majority of the bailiffs were either Danes or Germans--in violation of the Kalmar agreements--the union was soon identified with foreign domination.

In 1426 a new war broke out between Eric and several North German Hansa towns. They established a blockade of the Swedish coast which had a disastrous effect on the Swedish economy. Especially the rising industrial provinces suffered from the ensuing lack of foreign trade. One of the provinces was Dalarna where mining had come into prominence. The miners already constituted a special class in society, raised above the peasants but at the same time intimately connected with them. In 1435 the Swedes rose in rebellion under the leadership of one of these miners, Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson. The uprising became a war of national independence against the Union Kingdom and spread to all parts of the country. A Swedish Council, called by Eric to negotiate with the rebels, was instead forced by Engelbrekt to join in a statement to the king that they no longer considered themselves bound by their oath of fealty to him. This, in effect, meant that Eric was deposed.⁵

After expelling all but a few Danes from Sweden, Engelbrekt agreed to negotiate with the King in Stockholm. It was there decided that an international tribunal should judge the case. In the meantime Engelbrekt was elected regent and since he was afraid, and rightly so, that the tribunal would be weighted in the King's favor, looked around for a new way by which the will of the people could be expressed. For this purpose he called together clergy, nobility, burghers and peasants

⁵Strömberg, p. 187.

for a meeting in the town of Arboga. This meeting which was held in January, 1435, is regarded as the first Swedish Riksdag.⁶

The Riksdag was dominated by Engelbrekt who was re-elected regent. His election was not viewed with favor by the nobility who preferred the restoration of the union as more in keeping with their own interests. A strong regent backed by the Riksdag could very conceivably limit the power and authority of the nobles. The aim of the aristocracy was to make the Swedish Council a permanent government under the leadership of a few high nobles. The union king would retain the outward signs of his dignity, but no real power.⁷ Engelbrekt had no intentions of assisting the setting up of an oligarchy of this kind, but neither did he want an absolute break with the aristocracy which would have led to civil war.⁸ Therefore, he finally consented to rule jointly with Karl Knutsson Bonde, the nobility's candidate for the regency. Engelbrekt in this way hoped to both preserve national unity and to check the excesses of the nobility. Unhappily, he was not permitted to bring his campaign for Swedish liberty to a successful end. While travelling in central Sweden, he was murdered in April, 1436, by the son of one of the jealous nobles.

The work of Engelbrekt, however, was very important for later Swedish history. In the brief span of three years he laid the foundation of Swedish independence, stirred the class consciousness of the yeomen and proved the importance of the common people--peasants, burghers and craftsmen--as a force in national politics. As a result,

⁶Riksdag--the national legislature of Sweden. It was first called by the regents or kings to obtain support for some of their programs or measures. Later the Riksdag developed into the democratic representative institution of today.

⁷Lönnroth, p. 155.

⁸Hallendorf, p. 88.

the nation now slowly divided itself into two groups, the Nationalists and the Unionists. The latter was made up of the higher nobility and the higher ecclesiastics. They favored a union king, in conformity with the plan of the Union of Kalmar, because such a king would not likely have much time for Swedish affairs. He could be counted on to remain away from the country most of the time and leave the lords to rule very much as they pleased. The main objective of the nobles, therefore, was to keep the yeomen, who under Engelbrekt had tasted power, in submission. At the same time the nobles were always fearful that one of their own members would become strong enough to usurp power and have himself declared king. If there was something that the nobles feared more than a strong union king it was a strong native monarch.

The Nationalist party was composed mostly of the common people, but it also included many clergymen and a small but very influential group from the nobility. The party, violently anti-union as it was, wanted a Swedish king, who would rule according to the ancient law of the land. The nationalists feared that the success of the Union would mean the firm establishment of the feudal order which the nobles desired and which would leave the real power in the hands of the nobility. The nationalists, however, would have been willing to settle for a union king, provided that a strong Swedish regent was elected. This regent would strengthen the central administration and thereby check the ambitions of the aristocracy.

After Engelbrekt's death, Karl Knutsson alone acted as the regent. While he had been elected by the lords to check Engelbrekt's ambitions, Knutsson, after the latter's death, placed himself at the head of the National Party. This gained him many enemies among the nobles, and because many yeomen also distrusted him due to his former associations with the aristocracy, his position was unstable.

Between 1436 and his death in 1470, Karl Knutsson became king of Sweden three times. It is ironic that each time he was elevated to his position by the same men who brought about his downfall. His misfortunes can be ascribed partly to his inability to rally the masses and partly to the circumstance that the aristocracy had taken advantage of the decline of the union monarchy to strengthen its influence in the country. Only a thorough reorganization of the administration could have increased his power, but Karl Knutsson was not equal to such a task.⁹

The death of Knutsson brought Sweden face to face with another critical situation. His son-in-law, Ivar Tott, realized that his Danish origin would prevent him from succeeding Karl and the election of a king was therefore postponed. Instead the Royal Council decided to appoint a regent. The choice fell on Sten Sture, a nephew of Karl Knutsson. In 1471 his election was carried in both the Council and the Riksdag. The election ushered in what has become known as "The Sture Age." It was marked by a national revival, a reaction against the hopes of a new union which were still entertained by the aristocracy. Most important, however, was the fact that the Stures were to become true leaders of the common people and the champions of their cause.

Meanwhile the Danish king, Christian of Oldenburg, had been proclaimed king in various parts of Sweden and many people flocked to his banner. During the summer of 1471 he sailed to Stockholm with a well-equipped army and was there joined by a contingent of Swedes sympathetic to his cause. This force engaged in battle with Sten Sture's army on a ridge known as Brunkeberg, situated just outside the city walls, and suffered an overwhelming defeat. The moral effect of the

⁹Ibid., p. 94.

battle was immediate and far-reaching.¹⁰ In Sweden the unionists lost heart and their party disintegrated. The Danes, already tired of war, were reluctant to support Christian I's schemes to win the Swedish crown. This attitude led to an agreement between the two nations in 1472, according to which they pledged to maintain perpetual peace with each other.

Until Christian's death in 1481, Sweden enjoyed tranquility under the able administration of Sten Sture "The Elder." This respite between wars was used to good advantage for the strengthening of law and order, reviving of industry and promoting of cultural interests, such as the founding of Uppsala University in 1477. The Regent was thoroughly Swedish in his sympathies and, basing his power on his popularity among the common Swedes, worked to protect Swedish national interests.

This peaceful interlude, however, was short; it lasted till 1481. The irreconcilable opponents of a strong centralized power in Sweden, the Swedish nobles, became increasingly aggressive. The situation was further aggravated by the continued plotting of the Danish nobility. Christian had left a son, Hans, who had been elected in 1453 by the Swedes to succeed his father. Hans was fully determined in 1481 to confirm that earlier election and to secure the Swedish crown for himself. The Danish nobles were by this time willing to support Hans but, as usual, only in return for an expansion of their own powers at the expense of that of the monarch.

In their anxiety to placate the Swedes and to win their support for a union king, the Danes suggested a joint meeting for the purpose of reaching an agreement on the relations of the two countries.

¹⁰Rudolf Bergström, "Sturetidens Historia i Ny Belysning," Historisk Tidskrift, LVII (1937), 400.

The meeting took place in Kalmar in 1482. The Swedes refused, however, to proceed to the election of a king on the ground that the Norwegians were not present. A second meeting was held the following year, but only the Danish and Norwegian delegates attended in full strength. Sture ignored the summons, blaming his absence on eye trouble.¹¹ The small number of Swedish representatives who attended possessed no credentials authorizing them to vote in the event of royal elections. The Danes and the Norwegians, however, reached an agreement--known as the Halmstad Recess--in which they elected Hans king of Denmark and Norway. As always, the election was subject to certain conditions, most of them restricting the power of the monarch and increasing the powers of the nobles.¹² Once again the Swedish nobility began to show unionist leanings, but by a temporizing policy, Sture prevented the election of Hans as king of Sweden.

Naturally Hans was not satisfied with the outcome of the two meetings and Sture's independent position. He therefore bided his time and in 1495 formed an alliance with Ivan III of Russia for an attack on Sweden. At the same time the Swedish lords, tired of the strong and restrictive rule of the Regent, rose in rebellion and civil war ensued. The result was that in 1497 Sture was forced to recognize Hans as king of Sweden, but on the condition that the latter would abide by the provisions of the Halmstad Recess. At first the new king adopted a policy of conciliation. Sture and the other nobles received important appointments. Despite this, Hans soon incurred the suspicion of the aristocracy by urging the recognition of his own son

¹¹Olaus Petri, Olai Petri Svenska Krönika, ed. G. E. Klemming (Stockholm, 1860), p. 301. - hereafter cited as Olaus Petri.

¹²Bergström, "Sturetidens Historia . . . , " 402-404.

as the heir to the throne. Although the Swedish noblemen desired to retain the elective character of the monarchy, they finally agreed to Hans' request. The apprehensions of the unionist nobles increased, however, when Hans broke several promises which he had previously made, such as granting of fiefs to Swedes. As a result, many noblemen again drifted toward the nationalist camp.

At the same time that this trend was going on in Sweden, Hans met with a disastrous reverse during a campaign against the free republic of Ditmarchen, located at the mouth of the Elbe River. This defeat served to undermine his prestige in Denmark and encouraged his Swedish opposition. In 1501 Sture and his new adherents started a successful revolt. Sture was again named regent, although the duties of the government were performed by Svante Nilsson, the leader of the unionists, and Hemming Gadh, the violently anti-Danish Bishop of Linköping. Sten Sture retained his position until his death in 1503 and was succeeded by Svante Nilsson who, with the help of Gadh, ruled as regent for the next nine years.

CHAPTER III

STEN STURE "THE YOUNGER" AND THE DECLINE OF THE ROYAL COUNCIL

The death of Svante Nilsson early in 1512 freed the hands of the Swedish Council for an attempted reconciliation with the Danes. As has been evident, it would be incorrect to view the struggle for power during the "Sture Age" as simply a fight for or against the union with Denmark. There existed also a purely internal opposition to the attempts made by Sten Sture "The Elder" and Svante Nilsson to subordinate the feudal and hierarchical forces of the society to strong central authority.¹³

Although Svante Nilsson had generally tried to cooperate with the Swedish Royal Council, the nobles had been anxious to overthrow him and to put in his place one of their own party, that is, a pro-unionist.¹⁴ Their choice was a nobleman from Smaland, Erik Trolle. Trolle's family owned large estates in the Danish-controlled Scanian provinces; he was, therefore, well disposed toward the Danes and to the idea of reviving closer ties with them.¹⁵ By appointing Trolle regent, the Swedish Council hoped to achieve a temporary peace with Denmark and, at the same time, to prevent the rebirth of a strong central authority in Sweden.

¹³Gottfried Carlsson, "Sten Sture d. y.," *Scandia*, II (1929), 120. Lauritz Weibull, "Stockholm's Blodbad," *Scandia*, I (1928), 3.

¹⁴Carlsson, "Sten Sture d. y.," 120.

¹⁵Bergström, "Sturetidens Historia . . . , " 399.

But the Swedish nobility had reckoned without Sten Svantesson, the son of the deceased regent, Svante Nilsson. To stir the popular imagination, Sten Svantesson had adopted the surname Sture. Immediately on his father's death in 1512, he forceably seized the castles and fiefs that had been held by the former regent. By virtue of this power move, Sten held effective control in the country. Public opinion was at the same time aroused in his favor.¹⁶ Faced by a fait accompli, there was nothing for the Swedish Council to do but to remove Erik Trolle and appoint Sten Sture "The Younger" regent of Sweden.

The rule of Sten Sture "The Younger" (d. 1520) in Sweden was an example of the politico of the strong Renaissance Prince.¹⁷ Gathering his support from the peasants and the lower gentry, he strove constantly to break the power of the Swedish Council, the mainstay of the feudal aristocracy.¹⁸ His belated appointment to the regency had already meant a defeat for the Council. After his election he continuously tried to strengthen the office of the regent. Proceeding to

¹⁶The aristocrats tried to save some important castles for themselves but failed in their efforts. For additional information see Edvard Grönblad, Nya Källor till Finlands Medeltidshistoria (Kobenhavn, 1857), p. 566. Rudolf Bergström, Studier till den Stora Krisen i Nordens Historia (Uppsala, 1943), p. 52. Carlsson, "Sten Sture d.y.," 123.

¹⁷Bergström, Studier, p. 52. Bergström, "Sturetidens Historia . . .," 415. There is no outstanding single work on the life of Sten Sture "The Younger." Valuable shorter contributions have been made by Gottfried Carlsson, "Sten Sture d.y.," Scandia, II (1929), 107-133. Rudolf Bergström, Studier till den Stora Krisen i Nordens Historia (Uppsala, 1943), pp. 51-90. Lars Sjödin, Gammla Papper Angående Mora Socken II (Västerås, 1937). Greta Wieselgren, Sten Sture d.y. och Gustav Trolle (Lund, 1950).

¹⁸Carlsson, "Sten Sture d.y.," 124.

revoke fiefs, a privilege traditionally exercised by the Council, he concentrated on bringing as much land as possible under the direct control of his own administration.¹⁹

The power of the Swedish Council was also undercut in various other ways. Sture's main advisors came not from the members of the Royal Swedish Council but from the men in his "camerario consilio" or secretariat.²⁰ This body consisted of trusted followers and the captains of the small but effective mercenary corp of fighters that Sture had recruited. A vigorous propaganda against the nobles and addressed to the commoners also emanated from his court and was fostered by Sture and his agents throughout the country. His rule can be justly described as a popular distatorship.²¹

The similarities between the system of government employed by Sten Sture and that of his arch-enemy, Christian II of Denmark (1481-1559), should be noted. The latter had succeeded his father Hans as the king of Denmark in 1512. Like Sten Sture "The Younger," Christian pursued a domestic policy based on the support of the peasants and the merchants while curbing the power of the aristocracy and the ecclesiastics. In Denmark as in Sweden, the power of the government came to be concentrated in a developing royal bureaucracy.²²

¹⁹Sture's revocation of the fief Stäket is extremely important. This act was later to light the fire of civil war in Sweden.

²⁰Johannes Magnus, "Historia de Omnibus Gothorum Sveonumque Regibus," Scriptores Rerum Suecicarum (Uppsala, 1870), III: 1, pp. 43-67. Bergström, Studier, p. 53. Carlsson, "Sten Sture d.y.," 114.

²¹Bergström, Studier, p. 52. Carlsson, "Sten Sture d.y.," 129.

²²Bergström, Studier, p. 52. Emil Hildebrand. Review of K. P. Arnoldson, Nordens Enhet och Kristian II, Historisk Tidskrift, XIX (1899), 58. Sven-Ulric Palme, "Uppsalaföredraget 1520," Historisk Tidskrift, LXIV (1944), 388. Lauritz Weibull, "Didrik Slaghaec efter Stockholms Blodbad," Scandia, X (1937), 168.

The Danish nobles, however, were apparently more willing to accept this trend than their Swedish counterparts, probably because the change in Denmark was carried out more subtly than in Sweden.

While Christian II, in Denmark, gathered political power into his own hands, Sten Sture in Sweden took advantage of the existing peace with Denmark, which lasted until 1517, to intensify his own absolutist policies. Sture's absolutism created its opposite. In the Swedish Council opposition to the regent formed once again, this time around a young and capable leader, Gustav Trolle, the new Archbishop of Sweden. The stage was thus set for a decisive clash between the conflicting principles of Council rule and popular dictatorship. By no means the least striking features lay in the vivid personalities of the main protagonists.

It is unfortunate that most of the information that is available about the conflict between Sten Sture "The Younger" and Archbishop Gustav Trolle comes almost exclusively from documents issued by the regent. As a result, Sten Sture has to a large extent written his own history and shaped the image that posterity has of him.²³ He has become a national hero, the knight without faults or fear while Gustav Trolle has become the villain, the "Judas Iskariot of Swedish history."²⁴

Gustav Trolle was the son of the deposed regent, Erik Trolle. Gustav combined great learning and unusual willpower with pride and ambition. Feeling that Sten Sture had usurped the place that rightfully belonged to his father, the Archbishop never forgave Sture for this insult.²⁵ To soothe the feelings of the Trolles, Sten Sture

²³Carlsson, "Sten Sture d. y.," 112.

²⁴Hallendorf, p. 116.

²⁵Olaus Petri, pp. 306-307. Karl Ahlenius, "Sten Sture d. y. och Gustav Trolle," Historisk Tidskrift, XVII (1897), 302-303.

himself had apparently nominated Gustav Trolle for the archbishopric. Sture also paid for Gustav Trolle's travel expenses to Rome and instructed his representative there to pay all necessary expenses, such as annates, incurred by Trolle in connection with his election.²⁶

When Trolle returned from Rome, however, his relationship to the regent became more and more strained. Sture apparently had hoped that his support of Trolle's candidacy would help to heal the rift between himself and the Swedish nobility. The Archbishop, however, refused to pledge allegiance to the regent as was customary.²⁷ He was, instead, further angered by Sture's revocation of the fief and castle of Stäket, one of the strategic demesnes which had long been held by the Archbishops of Uppsala.²⁸ Trolle considered Sture's action a gross injustice and an affront to the authority of the Archbishop and the Church, which he held to be superior to that of any secular government. Although attempts were made to reconcile the Regent and the Archbishop, their differences turned to bitterness.²⁹ Trolle gradually became the leader of the unionist-aristocratic faction in Sweden that began to seek ways to oust Sture, the nationalist leader, and his party from power.

One can picture Gustav Trolle and Sten Sture "The Younger" as two young men, both passionately believing in the righteousness of

²⁶Handlingar Rörande Skandinaviens Historia (Stockholm, 1816-1865), XXIV, 45 and 74. - hereafter cited as HSH.

²⁷Ahlenius, "Sten Sture d.y. och Gustav Trolle," 301-330. Carlsson, "Sten Sture d.y.," 115.

²⁸HSH, XXIV, 48-49.

²⁹For additional information see i.e. Olaus Petri, pp. 306-310. Also Bidrag till Skandinaviens Historia ur Utländska Arkiver, ed. C. G. Styffe (Stockholm, 1859-1889), V, No. 481. - hereafter cited as BSH. Gösta Kellerman, "Jakob Ulvsson och den Svenska Kyrkan," Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift (1940), 31-40.

their individual causes. For the sake of objectivity one is forced to conclude that Sten Sture probably valued his own pride too much. He would have had nothing to lose by taking the first steps toward a reconciliation with the Archbishop. Sture, however, lacked the ability to reach political compromises. A policy of give and take had characterized Sten Sture "The Elder" and was later to prove invaluable to Gustav Vasa.³⁰ This flaw in Sten Sture "The Younger's" political sense, combined with Gustav Trolle's hatred for the Stures, led Sweden down the path to civil war.

The struggle between the Regent and the Archbishop culminated in 1516 when Trolle formed a conspiracy with a number of nobles, enticing them with promises of aid from the Danish king.³¹ Civil war broke out. To bolster his cause, Sture summoned a Riksdag which met in Arboga in January 1517.³² Backed by the authority of the Riksdag, Sture continued the siege of Stäket where the Archbishop had taken refuge. An attempt to relieve Trolle, undertaken by Christian II failed, and the Archbishop was compelled to renew the negotiations he had been carrying on with the Regent but which had been severed at the time of the Danish attack.

To settle the problems arising from Trolle's rebellion a new Riksdag was held on November 23, 1517, in Stockholm. Under the protection of a safe-conduct, the Archbishop also attended. "His bearing before the assembly, however, was more suited to his haughty

³⁰Ahlenius, "Sten Sture d. y. och Gustav Trolle," 320. Carlsson, "Sten Sture d. y.," 132-133.

³¹Olaus Petri, p. 310.

³²Historiska Handlingar (Stockholm, 1861-1879), XXVIII:2, 63-65. - hereafter cited as HH.

character than to the posture of his affairs."³³ The proceedings of the Riksdag were almost immediately transformed into an inquiry of the Archbishop's involvement in the attempted Danish invasion. After deliberation a decision was reached that received the approval of all the members of the Riksdag, including the Royal Council and the clergy. Stäket was to be razed to the ground and all those present solemnly swore never again to acknowledge Gustav Trolle as the Archbishop of Sweden.³⁴ This decision was affirmed by a count of hands and the affixing of seals to the document on which the verdict was recorded.³⁵

As soon as the Archbishop returned to Stäket, Sture reopened the siege. Shortly thereafter a second attempt was made by the Danes to relieve Trolle; after a bitter struggle outside Stockholm, the Danish forces were defeated. As a result, Trolle was forced to surrender and was imprisoned while many of his followers were executed.³⁶ Skäket was razed and most of the remaining property of Trolle's see was confiscated.³⁷

For the nationalists the decision of the Riksdag to remove the Archbishop was a daring act because it involved a serious breach of the privileges of the Church. Yet it is amazing how easily the decision was carried out. Sture offered the vacant see to both a papal

³³The History of Gustavus Vasa (London, 1852), p. 36.

³⁴HS., XXIV, 94-98.

³⁵Olaus Petri, p. 312.

³⁶HS., XXIV, 94-98. About the treatment of Trolle after his surrender see Acta Pontificum Danica. Påvelige Aktstykker Vedrørende Danmark (1316-1536), ed. A. Krarup and J. Linback (Kobenhavn, 1915), VI, 259. - hereafter cited as APD. Scriptores Rerum Suecicarum (Uppsala, 1870), III:2, 73. - hereafter cited as SRS.

³⁷HS., XXIV, 155.

legate, Gian Angelo Archimboldi, who had been sent to Sweden by the Pope to mediate the quarrel between Sture and Trolle, and Bishop Mattias of Strängnäs. But both men declined the offer.³⁸ Sture's policy led to a serious quarrel with the ecclesiastical authorities.

During the Summer of 1517, Archbishop Birger of Lund threatened Sten Sture with excommunication and the country with interdict. Whether this decree was ever implemented is questionable.³⁹ Apparently Archimboldi managed to have the ban lifted that same year.⁴⁰ Neither Gustav Trolle nor Christian II was satisfied with this turn of affairs. They turned to Rome and there argued their case so effectively that during the Fall of 1519, a papal court was held by Archbishop Birger of Lund and Bishop Lage Urne of Roskilde. The papal court excommunicated Sten Sture and his followers and placed Sweden under interdict.⁴¹ Apparently the Swedes did not heed the ban. More fateful was the Church's appeal to the secular power of Christian II to enforce this decree in Sweden. The full wrath of the Church now descended on Sten Sture and his followers.

At the same time Sture also alienated many members of the higher nobility in Sweden. As noted before, Sture's popular dictatorship did not win him many friends among the aristocracy. The general dislike of the regent was increased by the rumor that Sture wanted to

³⁸See Gottfried Carlsson, Hemming Gadh (Uppsala, 1915), p. 304. Kellerman, "Jakob Ulvsson . . .," 41-42.

³⁹Carlsson, Hemming Gadh, pp. 280-281. Rune Stensson, Peder Jakobsson Sunnanväder (Uppsala, 1947), pp. 205-207. Wieselgren, pp. 203-210 and pp. 328-329.

⁴⁰APD., VI, Nos. 4658, 4727. HH., XXVIII:1, 102 and 104-105.

⁴¹APD., VI, 256-257.

have himself crowned king of Sweden.⁴² This was one thing that the nobility would absolutely refuse to go along with. As a result, there were a large number of people in Sweden who, while seemingly allied with Sture, were willing to use any means possible to remove him from the regency. They were, in the final analysis, willing to re-establish the Union.

Consequently, in the winter of 1519-20, Sten Sture was faced with the internal dissension of Swedish noblemen and the external threat posed by Christian II. The course of events in Sweden had so far been discouraging to the King. Christian, who as a minor, in 1499 had been crowned by the Swedes as their King, always looked with dislike and hatred on Sture whom he considered to be an usurper. Just as Trolle felt that the Swedes had unjustly deprived him of his see, so Christian believed that they had unlawfully stripped him of his kingdom.⁴³ Following the failure of his first two invasion attempts, Christian II made extensive preparations for the conquest of Sweden. High taxes were levied both in Denmark and Norway to finance the employment of efficient mercenaries from the continent. In January 1520, a Danish army, about 10,000 strong, invaded south-western Sweden. Sture with his levied army of peasants joined issue with the

⁴²BSH., V, 644. Carlsson, Hemming Gadh, pp. 275-277. Johan Hadorph, Twa gambla swenske rijm-kronikor . . . Then Andra Delem . . . Uplagd aff Johan Hadorph, ed. J. Messenius (Stockholm, 1674), pp. 451-454. - hereafter cited as Hadorph.

⁴³Sveriges Traktater, ed. O. S. Rydberg (Stockholm, 1877-1888), III, 612-613. - hereafter cited as ST. The document was issued by Christina Gyllenstierna, Sten Sture's widow, the Swedish commanders of Stockholm's castle and Stockholm's aldermen on September 5, 1520, after the city had surrendered to Christian. It indirectly shows Christian's conception of the nature of the Swedish resistance. The letter thus accentuates the fact that the defenders of Stockholm had for a long time unlawfully kept the City of Stockholm and its castle from their rightful lord (Christian II).

royal forces on the frozen surface of Lake Åsunden on the twentieth of the same month.⁴⁴ At the outset of the battle the Regent was severely wounded in the leg by a cannonball and could no longer exercise effective command over his troops. Deprived of its leader, the Swedish army disintegrated into undisciplined bands and scattered.⁴⁵

In the beginning Sture's wound did not seem deadly. But, because of the cold, as well as insufficient treatment, it was to become fatal. However, Sture had enough strength left to organize further resistance, this time in the forests of Tiveden. It was only upon receiving the help of a Swedish traitor, who knew of a way to flank the Swedish barricades, that the Danes managed to break through.⁴⁶ Sture then set out to organize the defense of Stockholm. A few days later, he died, while in a sleigh on Lake Mälaren before reaching the capital.

⁴⁴The date of the battle is not exactly known. Rudolf Bergström, "Sten Sture d. y. Banesår," Personhistorisk Tidskrift (1938), 49, gives the date as January 19, 1520. However, in his book Studier, p. 55, n. 3, Bergström fixes the date as January 20 which appears more correct.

⁴⁵Olaus Petri, p. 316.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 317.

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIAN II AND THE UNIONISTS

Swedish history between 1433 and 1520 was a three-cornered contest for power. There was a struggle between a rising central government and the nobility, both spiritual and secular. At the same time, the central government--directed by the Stures--had to fight the unionist leanings of the aristocracy. The loyalty of the aristocrats to the separate kingdom of Sweden had been sharply reduced by their intermarriages with Danish nobility and their possession of fiefs in Denmark. Meanwhile the central government acquired strong support from the fiercely nationalistic native peasantry. Since the Swedish nobility often supported the attempts made by the union kings to reassert their power in Sweden, the peasants aided the central government in its struggle against the native nobility.

When the Swedish nobles saw the continuous rise of the house of Sture, its consolidation of power and its aspirations to the Swedish crown, they looked for a way to rid themselves of this menace. They first tried to check it by appointing one of their own men, Erik Trolle, to the regency. When this failed, they found a natural ally in the Oldenburg kings of Denmark who possessed claims to the Swedish crown. Yet hidden danger lurked in this alliance. The Oldenburgs, during their short visits to Sweden, had shown disquieting tendencies to increase their power at the expense of the Swedish Royal Council, the mainstay of the feudal aristocracy. Recognizing this, the Swedish nobility, while gladly accepting the assistance of Christian II, aimed to limit drastically the power of the union monarch. At this juncture,

however, Christian II seemed to the nobles as the lesser of two evils. The one necessity was to remove the Stures with their absolutistic goals from Sweden.

The death of the regent Sten Sture in 1520, brought into the open many forces that had been secretly hostile to his regime. The hostile sentiments of Archbishop Gustav Trolle and his followers had always been obvious. It then became apparent that there were many others who, because of necessity or opportunism had during Sture's lifetime pretended to be loyal to his cause. The leaders of the new antagonists were important members of the Swedish Council--Bishop Mattias of Strängnäs, Bishop Otto of Västerås and Erik Abrahamson.⁴⁷

One can detect grumblings against Sture's regime during his lifetime.⁴⁸ Especially noteworthy is a letter by the old anti-unionist Hemming Gadh, addressed to Sten Sture "The Younger's" chancellor, Peder Jacobsson. In it, Gadh especially deplored Sture's policy of basing his regime on the support of the peasantry. To Gadh this was much too "democratic."⁴⁹ Almost immediately after Sture's death, Gadh went over to Christian's camp and was followed by most of the higher nobility. Thus, the national unity Sten Sture had enforced vanished with his death.

The Swedish Council's switch of allegiances was based on their dislike of Sture's dictatorial method of government. This hatred is best expressed in the letter of homage addressed to Christian II by

⁴⁷For their activity on behalf of Christian II see BSH., V, 616.

⁴⁸HH., XXVIII:2, p. 9 and p. 14. Carlsson, "Sten Sture d.y.," 127-129.

⁴⁹Bergström, "Sturetidens Historia . . . , " 409-411. Sjödin, Gammla Papper, pp. 469-470.

the city of Örebro and the province of Närke. The document was largely dictated by Bishop Mattias; it shows both his own and his fellow Council members' opinion of Sture. The letter states that the dissension between the "lords of the realm" had been the main reason for the misfortunes that had occurred in the country. This dissension resulted from the fact that some of the lords had not been satisfied with the positions that they occupied but wanted to elevate themselves to kings or captains (hövitsman). They had attempted to enhance their status to prevent the election of a rightful king or captain (hövitsman) for the realm. The lords accomplished their ends successfully by getting the peasantry to join their cause through lies and false promises of booty from both the spiritual and secular nobility. The support of the peasants had then enabled these lords to rebel against the wishes of the Royal Swedish Council and start a civil war.⁵⁰ The letter is directed mainly against Sten Sture "The Younger" since it also states that some of the lords strove to become kings, and, as far as it can be ascertained, Sten Sture "The Younger" was the only one of the Stures who coveted the Swedish crown.⁵¹

There are strong indications that by 1520 ". . . Sture, as well as his wife Christina, had come to think of the regency as something that was hereditary in the Sture family."⁵² The actions of Sten and his wife after the battle of Åsunden accentuated these rumors. Immediately after the battle, Sture himself apparently tried to rally

⁵⁰Hadorph, pp. 451-453. Bergström, Studier, p. 57 n. 6, has called attention to the fact that the document printed by Hadorph must be a draft since the original is in the Royal Danish Archives and differs textually from Hadorph's version.

⁵¹Gottfried Carlsson, "Gustav Vasa och Sturehuset," Historisk Tidskrift, XLV (1925), 260. Carlsson, Hemming Gadh, pp. 275-277.

⁵²Bergström, Studier, p. 58.

his forces around his minor son.⁵³ In addition, his wife, Christina Gyllenstierna, had written a letter to the city of Danzig, dated February 26, in which she asked for help and explicitly stated that she considered herself the regent of Sweden until her sons came of age.⁵⁴

This was all the Swedish nobles could take. A recognition of the right of succession of Sture's sons would, according to Swedish medieval conception, have opened the doors to absolute monarchy. All nobles agreed to oppose absolutism, but the picture is somewhat obscure. The Swedish chronicler, Olaus Petri, asserts that after the battle of Asunden there existed in addition to the nationalists and unionists a third attitude. The proponents of this party were willing to continue the struggle against the Danes if a new Swedish leader was elected; but, they would not fight under the Sture banner. "Some said they would not fight before they knew their new leader (hövitsman); some said they would fight for Lord Sten's children and one part simply refused."⁵⁵ This information strengthens the above statements about a definite opposition to a continuation of the rule by any member of the Sture family.

Their course of action chosen, the nobility, led by the Royal Swedish Council, set out to negotiate with Christian II. The first

⁵³Reimarus Kock, "Chronicon Lubecensis, " Scriptores Rerum Suecicarum (Uppsala, 1870), III:1, 269. - hereafter cited as Kock.

⁵⁴BSH., V, 622. For earlier claims of succession to the Swedish throne by the Stures see Carlsson, "Gustav Vasa och Sturehuset, " 260 n.1 and n.2. Sjödin, Gammla Papper, pp. 246-247, 558, 561. For an opposing point of view about the dynastic plans of Christina Gyllenstierna see Lars Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede. Gustav Vasas Befrielsekrig (Uppsala, 1943), p. 42. - hereafter cited as Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede.

⁵⁵Olaus Petri, p. 318.

attempt was made by Bishop Otto Svinhufvud of Västerås about February 10. It failed, due to the bitter resistance of the peasantry, now led by Sture's lieutenants.⁵⁶ Instead the peasants pressured the nobles into resisting the Danish forces at Illersund. This attempt in turn was foiled by the nobility; they refused to fight without a leader (hövitsman). Since nobody was willing to take the office upon himself, the whole army scattered without a struggle.⁵⁷

After the peasant army had dispersed, the nobles met no obstacles in their negotiations with Christian. Most of the lords met at Bishop Mattias' castle, Tynnelsö.⁵⁸ On February 21, the Danish commanders-in-chief arrived in nearby Strängnäs.⁵⁹ The two parties had no difficulties in reaching an agreement. The following day a truce was signed between the Danish Royal commanders-in-chief, acting as Christian II's representatives, and the Swedish Council. The Danes promised on Christian's behalf that if he was recognized as king of Sweden, he would forgive the Swedes for their mistakes, respect Swedish law, let the spiritual and secular nobilities enjoy their time-honored privileges and rights and respect all other treaties formerly made between the two countries. In addition it was decided that a meeting of the Royal Swedish Council was to be held in the near future.⁶⁰ The meeting soon took place in Uppsala and although nothing is known about the proceedings themselves, their outcome is well-known.

⁵⁶BSH., V, 615.

⁵⁷Olaus Petri, p. 318. "when now the enemy came along, began some of the nobility to cry, that they wanted to know for whom they were fighting and nobody wanted to take on himself the leadership (höffuitzmandzdömet), and to rule the people. Therefore was the whole army scattered, so that nobody resisted the enemy, And this occurred on Monday of Lent."

⁵⁸Olaus Petri, p. 318.

⁵⁹BSH., V, 616.

⁶⁰Ibid., 618.

On March 8, 1520, a treaty was drawn up in Uppsala between the Danish commanders-in-chief, Otto Krumpen, Kai von Alefeldt, Karl Knutsson and Didrik Bramstedt, acting on behalf of Christian II, and the Swedish Royal Council, represented by Archbishop Gustav Trolle, Bishops Mattias of Strängnäs and Otto of Västerås, the knights Sten Turesson, Holger Karlsson and Erik Abrahamsson and the squires Johan Arendsson, Bength Gylta, Knut Bengtson and Knut Nilsson. The Swedish Council proclaimed Christian II king of Sweden. The king through his emissaries promised full amnesty to those who ceased hostilities. He pledged to rule the country with the advice of the Swedish Council and by Swedish law. The clergy and the secular lords were to keep all their rights and privileges. The Swedish castles were to be held by the Swedish Council and those castles which had been conquered by the Danes, Älvsborg and Borgholm, were to be turned over to the Swedes. The King further promised not to levy new taxes without the consent of the Swedish Council and the nobility. All persons who had lost property during the war were to recover it in full. The monarch was to keep all previous contracts (recesser) and treaties (brev) made in Kalmar or in other places if they were beneficial to the three countries. All prisoners were to be released and eternal peace was to exist between Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Those persons, however, who continued to spite the King were warned that they would stand on their own and accept all the consequences of their action. In connection with this warning the city of Stockholm and Stockholm's castle were especially mentioned. The Swedish Council and the Swedish nobles promised to give the King all their support in his efforts to subdue those who continued to rebel against him.⁶¹

⁶¹ST., III, 605-608.

The Treaty of Uppsala, if ratified by Christian II, would leave him with very limited powers. The king was checked by the Swedish Council and in some cases by the nobility as a whole. The Treaty of Uppsala meant a triumph for the high nobility.⁶² The goal of the aristocratic unionists--removal of the dictatorship of the house of Sture with its hereditary aspirations and the establishment of the aristocratic rule of the Swedish Council, scantily concealed by a union king with nominal powers--seemingly had been achieved.⁶³ That the triumph was more of an illusion than a political reality was soon to become apparent, but for the present the nobles reigned supreme in Sweden.⁶⁴

Strange as it may seem, the strong position of the Swedish nobility at the bargaining table with the King was due to the centers of power which were controlled by the Sture party in Sweden. They still held Stockholm, Kalmar and other important castles. Without the possession of these fortified centers, Christian II's control of Sweden was only nominal.⁶⁵ The military successes of the Danish army were not outstanding and its internal situation was unstable. On February 21, Otto Krumpen and his colleagues wrote to the King and urgently asked for relief in the form of money, food, and weapons.⁶⁶

⁶²Bergström, Studier, p. 63.

⁶³Bergström, "Sturetidens Historia . . . ," 416.

⁶⁴Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, p. 46.

⁶⁵Cf. Weibull, "Stockholm's Blodbad," 1. "The victory had been won with weapons." This statement is very surprising since Weibull himself has carefully noted that very favorable terms of the amnesty granted to the Sture party. Weibull seems to imply that Christian, after having conquered Sweden with pure military might, freely handed out extensive amnesties and without objection let himself be put at a disadvantage by i. e. the Treaty of Uppsala.

⁶⁶BSH., V, 617.

The same request was repeated in a second letter written three days later.⁶⁷ Both letters pleaded desperately for heavy artillery. This evidence shows that the Danish troops had not been able to storm Swedish fortifications and castles with any great success. The Danish commanders also encountered difficulties in trying to control their mercenary troops.⁶⁸ Given these circumstances, Christian needed the support of the unionists and their fighting forces. His bargaining position was weak. Therefore, on March 31, 1520, he ratified the Treaty of Uppsala.⁶⁹

Had these extenuating circumstances not been present, it is doubtful that a ruler who in Denmark with force and determination had subdued the nobles and the Church, should in Sweden be satisfied with the position of a "crowned decoration."⁷⁰ As Christian II had shown by his previous actions in his home country and in Norway, he favored a strong centralized government.⁷¹ The Swedish aristocracy on the other hand strove for a policy that attempted to lessen the powers of the King in favor of an oligarchic rule by the Royal Council.⁷² It was

⁶⁷BSH., V, 619.

⁶⁸Ibid., 616-619.

⁶⁹ST., III, 607-608.

⁷⁰Rudolf Bergström, "Stockholms Blodbad och det Svenska Unionspartiet," Svensk Tidskrift, XXVI (1939), 115.

⁷¹For a discussion of Christian II's anti-aristocratic policies in Denmark and Norway before 1520 see Carl F. Allen, De Tre Nordiske Rigers Historie (Kobenhavn, 1867), III:1, 24 ff.

⁷²Rudolf Bergström has reached the conclusion that the Treaty of Uppsala was in fact the beginning of a Scandinavian aristocratic confederation. Bergström, Studier, pp. 64-65. This is, however, reading too much into the contents of the treaty. For reasons discussed below, the Treaty of Uppsala can best be understood as a strategic compromise between Christian and the Swedish nobles. For a more detailed analysis of this problem see Sven Ulric Palme, "Uppsala-föredraget 1520," Historisk Tidskrift, LXIV (1944), 378-389.

certain, therefore, that it would be in Christian's interest to nullify the Treaty of Uppsala and to subdue not only the Sture party but also the unionists. The existing political situation in Sweden, however, forced the King to cooperate temporarily with the Swedish aristocracy.

The subsequent events in Sweden show that the alliance between Christian II and the Royal Council was more than necessary. The Danish Royal Army was almost defeated on April 6 at Uppsala.⁷³ In May, Christian himself came to direct the siege of Stockholm, but the prospects for taking the city still seemed dim. If one can believe Olaus Petri, the king himself was quite pessimistic about the situation.⁷⁴ Christian was faced with the possibility of having to lift the siege and return home to Denmark since winter was approaching and his supplies were running low.⁷⁵ Negotiations seemed to be the only way to make the city capitulate. It was in connection with this that the King's Swedish supporters came to play the most important role.

Hemming Gadh, the critic of the deceased Sten Sture, had written a fiery letter to the City of Stockholm in March: he announced his support of Christian and tacitly suggested that the city do the same.⁷⁶ In the meantime, Bishop Mattias was agitating among the peasants in the countryside and had been the driving force behind the letter of homage from Örebro and Närke.⁷⁷ The letter of homage, incidentally, makes it rather clear that the Swedish aristocracy was less interested

⁷³Allen, III:1, pp. 217-219.

⁷⁴Olaus Petri, p. 325.

⁷⁵Olaus Petri, p. 324. Sven Ulric Palme, "Stockholms Kapitulation 1520, " Samfundet S:t Eriks Årsbok (1945), 184.

⁷⁶BSH., V, 624-625.

⁷⁷Hadorph, pp. 451-453.

in making Christian II king than it was in aborting a possible rebirth of the Sture regime.⁷⁸ It was, nevertheless, Hemming Gadh who finally succeeded in talking Sten Sture's widow, Christina, into surrendering Stockholm.⁷⁹

Despite this seeming cooperation between Christian and the Royal Swedish Council, it was not long before the basic differences of political opinion between them came to the surface. To induce Stockholm to surrender, Christian had on September 5, issued a general amnesty to all who still opposed him. The amnesty stated that even the crimes committed against Archbishop Trolle, former Archbishop Jacob Ulvsson, Bishop Otto of Västerås and their followers would not be subject to any trial or inquest, either ecclesiastical or secular.⁸⁰ This provision was in direct conflict with that part of the Treaty of Uppsala which stated that the city of Stockholm specifically, and any other city in general that kept on resisting the Swedish Council after March 6, was to be severely punished as the enemies of the King and the Swedish Council. The Council's clerical members vigorously opposed any concessions to the nationalists. In a letter to Gustav Trolle, Bishop Brask reminded the Archbishop to see to it that in case of reconciliation with the nationalists, the King would not abandon the

⁷⁸Bergström, Studier, p. 67.

⁷⁹BSH., V, 641-642. Nils Ahnlund, "KringStockholms Blodbad," Svensk Tidskrift, XVII (1928), 274. Carlsson, Hemming Gadh, pp. 316-317. Note also Olaus Petri's statement that it was the nobles of the city who were the first to surrender. Olaus Petri, p. 325. For further discussion see Palme, "Stockholms Kapitulation 1520," and for a different point of view, Rudolf Bergström. Review of S. U. Palme, "Stockholms Kapitulation 1520," Samfundet S:t Eriks Årsbok (1945), Historisk Tidskrift, LXV (1945), 363-364.

⁸⁰Hadorph, pp. 446-450.

Church's rightful claims of compensation and restitution for damages inflicted upon it by Sture and his followers.⁸¹

The Swedish Council, however, was in no position to veto the amnesty since they could not afford to let Christian return to Denmark without having achieved a complete victory. This would have exposed the Swedish nobility to the vengeance of the nationalists. The amnesty was equally necessary for both the King and the Royal Council. Nevertheless, it was with a heavy heart that the Swedish Council and its members sealed the amnesty proclamation on September 5, 1520.⁸²

Two days later the city of Stockholm and its castle surrendered and Christian II was finally the undisputed ruler of Sweden.⁸³ Supported by a sizable army, he proceeded to carry out the plans that he had previously been forced to conceal. The first step called for the elimination of the unionists from power in Sweden. This in turn meant circumventing the Treaty of Uppsala and the limitations it placed on the monarch. Christian first gained direct control of Stockholm's castle which, according to provisions in the Treaty of Uppsala, was to be held by the Royal Swedish Council. Not only did Christian coerce the Swedish Council into giving him the castle as a fief but this right was to be inherited by his oldest son Hans. It was further stipulated that if Hans died, the castle should be held by Christian's wife, Queen Elizabeth.

⁸¹BSH., V, 635-636.

⁸²The amnesty is signed by the King "to assured keeping and confirmation." The Council members, however, signed it "as witnesses" (till vittnesbörd). ST., III, 615 and 620. This difference in the method of signing the amnesty has given rise to speculations that the Council and its members managed not to bind themselves legally by it. It should, however, be noted that the amnesty is issued by the King with "the advise of the Council" (. . . efter forskrefne wort elsklige riigens raadts raad lofuit . . .). ST., III, 619.

⁸³Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, p. 48.

Only after the latter's death would the castle revert back to the Swedish Council.⁸⁴ By this provision the first step toward the introduction of an hereditary monarchy had been taken.⁸⁵ It is not conceivable that the nobles and the Swedish Council would voluntarily have sanctioned such a move unless they had been afraid of reprisals. By this act Christian had nullified one of the most important provisions of the Treaty of Uppsala that safeguarded the power of the Royal Council, its control over the Swedish castles. The loss of these castles meant in effect the loss of the country.

In September of 1520, Christian II made a trip to Denmark about which there is little information. When he returned to Stockholm, he was accompanied by two of his advisors--the Danish Bishop, Jens Andersen, and the courtier, Didrik Slaghaec. It is interesting to note that both of these men rose from low, if not obscure positions to become Christian's most intimate advisors. The parallel with Sten Sture "The Younger's" method in picking advisors becomes apparent. Andersen was the son of a village shoe-maker and Didrik Slaghaec had been a combination of barber's clerk and surgeon.⁸⁶ Christian had recognized their talents in politics and promoted them to their high positions.

On September 29, 1520, Christian II was hailed as hereditary king of Sweden.⁸⁷ Christian probably could have forced through this

⁸⁴ST., III, 620-621.

⁸⁵Bergström, Studier, p. 71. Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, p. 10.

⁸⁶For the life of Jens Andersen read Allen, II, pp. 349-381. The life of Didrik Slaghaec is treated in Weibull, "Didric Slaghaec Efter Stockholms Blodbad," Scandia, X (1937), 165-190.

⁸⁷ST., III, 623.

recognition of his claims to the Swedish throne without any legal support, but it was typical of him that he was very sensitive about the need for a legal foundation to buttress all his actions.⁸⁸ He therefore had Bishop Jens Andersen deliberately misinterpret the Swedish National Law (Svenska Landslagen) which prescribed the election, rather than the succession, of a native man as the king of Sweden.⁸⁹

The decision [to recognize Christian as hereditary king] was justified by explaining that Christian had been elected lord of the realm in the time of King Hans, when the latter had had many sons [from among whom the King preferably should be elected], but that after his father's death he was the only surviving son [his brother had died] and thus the heir to the kingdom of Sweden [by hereditary right], because of which an election was not possible or even necessary.⁹⁰

In this unusual act of State, one finds for the first time in Swedish history a claim to the throne of Sweden based only on the right of succession and independent of any election. The interpretation of the Landslagen on which this demand rests is nothing but sheer mockery.⁹¹

The proclamation of Christian II as hereditary king of Sweden, and the written confirmation issued by the Swedish Council two days

⁸⁸Examples on this peculiarity in Christian's character can be found in the trials of Torben Oxe (a Danish noble) in 1517, the trial of Didrik Slaghaec in 1522 and the trial preceding Stockholm's Blood-bath. In all three cases the real issues involved were political but the convictions were based on formal charges of theft, embezzlement and heresy respectively. For more details see Lauritz Weibull, Dyvekekatastrofen och Torben Oxe, "Scandia", V (1932), 17-55. Weibull, "Didrik Slaghaec . . .", 165-190.

⁸⁹Bergström, Studier, p. 59. Palme, "Uppsala föredraget 1520," 382 n.4. Cf. Weibull, "Stockholms blodbad," 6-7.

⁹⁰Karl Gustav Hildebrand, "Gustav Vasas Arvförening," Historisk Tidskrift, LIV (1934), 114-145. Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, p. 42.

⁹¹K. G. Hildebrand, "Gustav Vasas Arvförening," 145.

later, was a death blow to the unionists and their policies. The Swedish aristocracy always equated hereditary monarchy with absolute monarchy, as did Christian II.⁹² He was no longer bound by laws or by the Swedish Royal Council. In one stroke, the Treaty of Uppsala, with all its restrictions was rendered ineffective. The unionists who had called in Christian II in order to rid themselves of the threat of an absolute monarchy under the Sture banner found that all their endeavors had been in vain. The Stures had merely been replaced by the Oldenburgs as the absolute rulers of Sweden.

There remained for Christian II a last obstacle to absolute rule, the declaration of amnesty that he had issued to the supporters of the late Sten Sture in order to bring about the surrender of Stockholm.⁹³ In this matter Christian could still count on the support of the Swedish Council which was also interested in rendering the nationalists powerless, although for different reasons. To Christian the nationalists still constituted a possible threat to his omnipotence.⁹⁴ The nobility and the Swedish Council were still afraid of the very possible vengeance of the nationalists. In addition, the Council's clerical members, led by Archbishop Trolle, wanted the restitution of the properties that they had lost during the rule of Sten Sture "The Younger" and compensation for the adversities that they had suffered.⁹⁵ Trolle wanted to rebuild

⁹²Bergström, Studier, p. 59. Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, p. 42. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 7.

⁹³ST., III, 613-618.

⁹⁴Christian as late as the summer of 1521 removed Lady Christina and her sons from Sweden and imprisoned them in Denmark. Gottfried Carlsson, "Gustav Eriksson i Rydboholm," Svensk Tidskrift, XI (1921), 575. Carlsson, "Gustav Vasa och Sturehuset," 256, 256 n. 2 and 263.

⁹⁵BSH., V, 636.

the economic and political power of the Swedish Church to what it had been before 1512.⁹⁶ As will be seen, it was on this point that his interests collided head on with those of Christian. But like goals lead to strange alliances and so both Christian II and the Swedish Council now turned to the task of eliminating the nationalists as a possible power in Swedish politics.

⁹⁶Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, p. 54.

CHAPTER V

STOCKHOLM'S BLOODBATH: THE ACCUSATION

On November 4, 1520, Christian II was crowned king of Sweden in Stockholm by Archbishop Gustav Trolle. The coronation was followed by three days of feasting and merrymaking. On November 7, a different kind of "spectacle" began.⁹⁷ It lasted only two days, yet these two days were to alter drastically Swedish history. On that fateful Wednesday, the leading Swedes, members of the Royal Swedish Council, the aldermen of Stockholm, and Sten Sture's widow, Christina, were summoned to the palace. When the guests were assembled in the main hall of Stockholm's castle, where the king received them, they were unexpectedly faced with an accusation of heresy lodged by Archbishop Trolle and detained in the castle. On the following day, November 8, an ecclesiastical court was convened to try the accused. On the strength of the arguments presented by the Archbishop, the court in a short time convicted the accused Swedes of notorious heresy. The guilty were summarily executed by the civil authorities the very same day.

Outwardly the incident seems to have been nothing but a normal heresy trial--an event commonplace enough in sixteenth century Europe. On closer scrutiny, however, glaring irregularities begin to appear in the seemingly unassailable judicial proceedings. When analyzed in detail, it becomes apparent that the reasons for and the forces behind Stockholm's Bloodbath are of a political rather than religious nature. In addition one is forced to conclude that the Bloodbath

⁹⁷Olaus Petri, p. 327.

can not be seen as an isolated event but as the climax of the political struggle for power between the aristocracy and the monarchy that had plagued Sweden since 1397.

In trying to identify the persons and the motives which were behind the events of November 7 and 8, 1520, the first question that must be asked is whether the charges on which the accused were convicted were from the beginning charges of notorious heresy as some historians have proposed.⁹⁸ If their theory, however, is found to be faulty, one must then try to discover what the original charges were and why and at who's insistence they were changed to heresy. The answers to these new questions will in turn help to expose the real perpetrator of the Bloodbath and the reasons for his actions. The problem is a difficult one, made even more complicated by inadequate sources and the ambiguity of the few sources that illuminate our knowledge about this event.

There are basically five primary sources that provide us with information about the Bloodbath and the events leading up to it. Foremost among these is the sealed verdict of the ecclesiastical court that adjudged Sten Sture "The Younger" and his followers guilty of notorious heresy. Incorporated with the verdict is the letter of accusation, dated November 7, 1520, written by Gustav Trolle.⁹⁹ The verdict itself is dated the following day. These documents list

⁹⁸Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 31-33, 63-64.

⁹⁹Arild Huitfeldt, Danmarckis Rigis Krönicke (Kobenhavn, 1652), II, 1157-1158. The best modern reprint is to be found in Emil Hildebrand, "Dokumenten till Stockholms Blodbads Förhistoria," Historisk Tidskrift, XXXVIII (1918), 122-124. - hereafter cited as HT (1918).

the alleged heresies of the accused, their names and the names of the court members. In addition the documents provide an extensive and detailed list of the economic damages suffered by the Archbishop and his followers during the rule of Sture.

The second most important source is an account of the trial written by three members of the Uppsala Cathedral Chapter, commonly known as "the narrative."¹⁰⁰ All of the authors were members of the ecclesiastical court and one of them, Jöran Turesson, also sealed the verdict. "The narrative" was composed early in 1523 at the request of the Swedish king, Gustav Eriksson Vasa. Its most outstanding feature is its denial of the existence of the ecclesiastical trial and its general attempt to minimize the role of the Swedish clergy during the Bloodbath.

In addition, there are two proclamations by Christian II--one dated November 9, 1520,¹⁰¹ the other in early 1521¹⁰²--and the chronicles of Olaus Petri¹⁰³ and Reimar Kock.¹⁰⁴ Christian II's first proclamation is addressed to three Swedish districts and portrays the king as the faithful secular arm of the Church whose orders he dutifully carries out. The proclamation of early 1521 is addressed to the Pope and in it the cause of the Bloodbath is purported to be the overzealousness of the king's soldiers who massacred the Swedes after rumors

¹⁰⁰SRS., III:1, 68-70. The best modern reprint is found in HT (1918), 118-122.

¹⁰¹Hadorph, pp. 453-454.

¹⁰²APD., V, 333-336. A Swedish translation is printed in Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 14-16.

¹⁰³Olaus Petri, pp. 328-333.

¹⁰⁴Kock, SRS., III:1, 270-273.

of a plot to kill the king. It is obvious that there are great inconsistencies in Christian's attempts to justify the execution of the victims of the Bloodbath. Additional documents describing the Bloodbath exist, but their information is drawn from one or more of the five sources that have been mentioned.¹⁰⁵

It is obvious that the primary sources contradict each other on several fundamental points. If one could without reservation accept the implication in the written verdict of the court that Archbishop Trolle had begun the proceedings on November 7 by presenting king Christian II with a written accusation of heresy against Sten Sture and his followers, no discussion of the Bloodbath would be necessary. It would then be, as the Swedish historian Weibull presumes, the result of an impartial trial of a group of heretic by a legally constituted ecclesiastical court. This court found the accused guilty as charged. The king, being the secular arm of the Church, had to carry out the courts verdict and the sentence was a foregone conclusion--death.¹⁰⁶ Archbishop Trolle thus becomes the driving force behind the massacre. On closer scrutiny, however, the facts do not substantiate Weibull's theory.

The first act of the Bloodbath began with the capitulation of Stockholm on September 5, 1520. Here Christian II overstepped his authority in spiritual matters when he granted amnesty to the besieged for their crimes against the Church. This amnesty had also been sealed by Archbishop Trolle and two other Swedish bishops, Mattias of

¹⁰⁵The Bloodbath is also treated in i. e. a manifest issued by by Gustav I Vasa in December 1522. The best reprint of this document can be found in Rudolf Bergström, "Gustav Erikssons och Rådets Manifest mot Kristian II av den 29 december 1522," Nordisk Tidskrift för Bok- och Biblioteksväsen (1938), 218-225.

¹⁰⁶Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 63-64.

Strängnäs and Otto of Västerås. The amnesty therefore seemed to be equally binding on the king and the Swedish prelates.¹⁰⁷

Yet Trolle and his fellow churchmen were as ecclesiastics not bound by the amnesty. The Archbishop had no right to relinquish any claims made on the behalf of the Church.¹⁰⁸ His claims against Sten Sture in the Papal Curia in Rome, which he had instituted in 1519, were still pending, and any oaths or promises made contrary to the Churches claims were invalid.¹⁰⁹ The Archbishop and his fellow prelates were still free to demand full economic restitution and collect damages despite the amnesty which they had sealed. The perpetrators of the outrages against the Church and clergy could also be prosecuted in a secular court.¹¹⁰ In short, there was no need for the Swedish prelates to present a charge of heresy against Sture and his followers on November 7, 1520, in order to obtain economic restitution. They could either have awaited the outcome of the Papal Curia or appealed directly to a secular court, composed of the king and the Royal Swedish Council.

¹⁰⁷Hadorph, p. 444. ST., III, 618. There has been considerable dispute over the different methods employed by Christian II and the Swedish Council to sign the amnesty. The difference in the signing procedure has led to claims that Archbishop Trolle and the other prelates successfully avoided binding themselves by the amnesty. Nils Ahnlund, Fran Medeltid och Vasatid (Stockholm, 1933), pp. 116-117. Bergström, Studier, pp. 69-70. Kristian Erslev, "Det Stockholmske Blodbad," Dansk Historisk Tidsskrift, Raekke 9, Band 6 (1929), 255 n.l. Palme, "Stockholms Kapitulation 1520," 183-192. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 70-73.

¹⁰⁸Kauko Pirinen, "Källorna Till Stockholms Blodbad i Kanonisk Belysning," Historisk Tidsskrift, LXXV (1955), 245.

¹⁰⁹Aemilius Friedberg, Corpus Iuris Canonici (Graz, 1955), c. 2 X de iureiurando II 24. Pirinen, "Källorna . . .," 246. All canon law is cited after Friedberg. Cf. Kristian Erslev, "Det Stockholmske Blodbads Förhistorie och C. Paludan-Müllers Opfattelse Deraf," Dansk Historisk Tidsskrift, Raekke 6, Band 3, (1891), 157-159.

¹¹⁰c. 8 de foro competenti II 2. Pirinen, "Källorna . . .," 246.

According to his own writ of accusation, dated November 7, Gustav Trolle, however, from the very beginning characterized the accused as notorious heretics.¹¹¹ He asked not only for restitution and fines but also for the arrest and punishment of those he accused.¹¹² We are faced, therefore, with the question of whether the proceedings really began with the simple presentation of Trolle's written accusation to the king or whether the presentation had been preceded by personal conferences between Trolle and the king which determined the content of the written accusation. Lauritz Weibull has denied that any oral deliberations took place since the process according to the sententia, or verdict, began with the presentation of the written writ to the king.¹¹³ The issue according to Weibull is settled. The information related by "the narrative" that verbal conferences had indeed taken place,¹¹⁴ have according to Weibull been added for a specific purpose. The Chapter members, the Church and Trolle would all appear less responsible for the Bloodbath, since Trolle, according to "the narrative," only asked for economic restitution during the personal conference. Weibull argues that the chapter members were at the time in imminent danger of losing their lives.¹¹⁵ "The narrative" was composed early in 1523¹¹⁶

¹¹¹HT., (1918), 123-124.

¹¹²Idem.

¹¹³Using source criticism, Weibull arrived at the conclusion that the sententia is the only authentic primary source. He therefore proceeded to compare all other sources critically with the sententia and rejected all parts of the other sources that conflicted with the information in the sententia. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 1-85. Lauritz Weibull, "Kristian Erslev och Stockholms Blodbad," Scandia, III (1930), 117-139.

¹¹⁴HT., (1918), 118-119. SRS., III: 1, 68-70.

¹¹⁵Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 35-40.

¹¹⁶Gottfried Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," Historisk Tidskrift, XL (1920), 133 n.1.

at the request of Gustav Vasa and its authors would have been fearful of the consequences of their participation in a trial which led to the death of many Swedes including the father of Gustav Vasa himself.¹¹⁷

Weibull's argument is not too convincing. The explanation given by professor Gottfried Carlsson for the creation of this narrative is more credible. Carlsson believes that Gustav Vasa in early 1523 needed information about the Bloodbath, not as evidence against the members of the court, but to compose a political manifest denouncing Christian II and Gustav Trolle.¹¹⁸ If this is true, Weibull's argument that the content of "the narrative" was shaped by fear is invalid, making its information more trustworthy.¹¹⁹

The position taken by Weibull is weakened from still another source. The proclamation by Christian II, dated November 9, 1520, and directed to the districts of Vadsbo, Vartofta and Käkinds, relates oral accusations not only by Archbishop Trolle but also by Bishop Otto of Västerås and canon Jon, the spokesman for the former Archbishop

¹¹⁷Hanserecesse Von 1477-1530, ed. D. Schafer and F. Techer (Leipzig, 1890-1899), VIII, 535. Kock, SRS., III:1, 271. Olaus Petri, p. 329.

¹¹⁸Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 132-134. Josef Sandström, "Några Bidrag till Stockholms Blodbads Historia," Historisk Tidskrift, XLIX (1929), 402 n. 1.

¹¹⁹Weibull pointed out that especially dean Jöran Turesson, one of the eight co-signers of the sententia, was in danger of losing his life at the time the narrative was composed. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 38-40. By 1523, however, his father Ture Jonsson, the powerful lawman of Västergötland, had joined Gustav Vasa's camp and Jöran Turesson himself had just returned to Sweden after being imprisoned in Denmark. It is not probable that a realistic politician like Gustav Vasa would have risked the loss of Ture Jonsson's support just to get revenge on his son who after all had only been a relatively minor official at the trial. Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 133 n. 1. See also Josef Sandström, "Kättardomen vid Stockholms Blodbad," Historisk Tidskrift, XLVIII (1928), 39.

Jakob Ulvsson.¹²⁰ Christian II's proclamation asserts that each of the three men appeared before the king as plaintiffs and initially "narrated" (berättade) their cases.¹²¹ One is therefore forced to conclude that at the inception of the proceedings Trolle presented his claims orally.

It can in addition be proved by textual criticism that Trolle's letter of accusation, as it exists incorporated in the verdict of the ecclesiastical court, has been composed from several independent texts.¹²² There are, for instance, several words that are superfluous to the sentence structure and that can be removed without changing either the sentence structure or the narrative.¹²³ In addition, several other peculiar discrepancies occur in the factual part of the text of the sententia, all typical of errors that arise when a scribe tries to combine two or more documents into one. Assuming that what has been deduced above is correct, there must originally have existed two or three separate letters of complaints. Why then were these suddenly combined into one and how did the hybrid product differ from its component parts?

The most striking feature of Trolle's writ is its economic orientation. The assaults on the ecclesiastics and their properties are carefully listed and measured in money. The jewels, gold, money and rent (from the fief of Stäket) that the archbishopric of Uppsala lost due to the actions of the Sture party were valued at 600,000 mark

¹²⁰Hadorph, pp. 453-455.

¹²¹Hadorph, p. 454. This does not exclude the possibility that Trolle also had a written copy of his own writ.

¹²²Bergström, Studier, p. 89. Sandström, "Kättardomen vid Stockholms Blodbad," 35-36. Sandström, "Några Bidrag till Stockholms Blodbads Historia," 398.

¹²³Bergström, Studier, p. 89.

sterling silver. The damages to Stäket and the physical and mental sufferings of the Archbishop himself were together values at 400,000 mark. Jakob Ulvsson was said to have lost 6000 mark worth of personal property, the destruction to Arnö manor was worth 2000 mark and the encroachment upon his own person was valued at 100,000 mark. Trolle, according to his own writ, was willing to moderate these sums. He asked the king for help in receiving justice over the persons he accused of heresy and the return of the properties of the Church. The Archbishop also asked for the "detainment" (behindring), that is the arrest, of the accused until the king had had time to "advise himself" (beråda sig) about the matter.¹²⁴

The writ is addressed to the king. The Danish historian Kristian Erslev concluded from this that the original proceedings began in a secular court composed of the king and the Royal Swedish Council.¹²⁵ Weibull denies the validity of Erslev's findings. To him it meant only that Trolle was asking for the help of the secular arm of the government against notorious heretics.¹²⁶ According to canon law, however, a secular court could not judge a case of heresy.¹²⁷ Neither could the help of the secular branch of the government be sought before a verdict about the guilt of the accused had been reached. Even in cases of notorious heresy, a verdict, sententia declaratoria, by a competent

¹²⁴Huidfeldt, Danmarckis Rigis Krönicke, II, 1157.

¹²⁵Hadorph, p. 454. HT (1918), 118 and 124. Especially the narrative emphasizes that it was question of a trial. "Pa thet siste när konungen sat pa domstolen i större salen."

¹²⁶Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 47. Weibull, "Kristian Erslev . . .," 126-127. Cf. Bergström, Studier, pp. 84-85. Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, pp. 55-56.

¹²⁷c. 18 in VI:o de haeretica V 2. Bergström, Studier, p. 85.

authority was necessary. The choice of forum thus indicates that originally a heresy trial was not intended.¹²⁸

In comparison with the detailed economic complaints, the accusation of heresy is extremely diffuse. It appears to be a loosely added decoration at the beginning and the end of the writ. Despite the fact that Trolle declares all the accused to be equally guilty of heresy (liike gode och liike store i kätteri), none of the accusations listed in the writ would actually constitute notorious heresy.¹²⁹ Only the last point, the fact that the accused had forced priests to say mass during the time the country was under interdict, could at the most lead to a suspicion of heresy. But since the respondents had never been tried or convicted for this charge, they could not be refused an absolution from their crimes. As a result, they could by no means be called notorious heretics, a term which implies a relapse.¹³⁰ Also strange is the fact that not all of the accused are individually named. Among them is a collective group, the aldermen, Council and city of Stockholm (". . . borgmestere raadh och Stockholms Stadh.").¹³¹ Both in cases of criminal and canon law, especially during a heresy trial, the accused had to be singled out by name.¹³²

¹²⁸Bergström, Studier, p. 85. Pirinen, "Källorna . . .", 248. Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, p. 56.

¹²⁹Erslev, "Det Stockholmske Blodbad," 253. Pirinen, "Källorna . . .", 251. Sandström, "Några Bidrag . . .", 399. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 44-45.

¹³⁰For a more detailed study of these legal points and the canon law involved see Pirinen, "Källorna . . .", 251-252.

¹³¹HT (1918), 123. Huidfeldt, Danmarckis Rigis Krönicke, II, 1157.

¹³²c. 9 de haeretica V 7. c. 5 in VI:o de sent exc. V 11.

Most illogical, however, is the fact that a heresy trial would be economically disastrous to the Archbishop and the position of the Swedish Church since by canon law the property of convicted heretics, if they were laymen, would revert to the king's fiscus.¹³³ Any restitution or punitive damages that the Church would receive became dependent on the good graces of the monarch. As all those accused by Trolle were laymen, all their property would fall under the control of Christian II.¹³⁴ At the same time it can be ascertained that the Swedish prelates had intensively pursued a policy of demanding economic reparations. Bishop Hans Brask of Linköping had written to Trolle on May 26, 1520 and reminded the Archbishop to make sure that none of the Church's rights would be threatened by any possible amnesty that Christian II might grant to the nationalists.¹³⁵

Taking these considerations into account, one is forced to ask whether it is really possible that a man of Trolle's stature, with his beliefs in the rights and privileges of the Church, would have raised a charge of notorious heresy where none was to be found? At the same time initiating such charges militated against his own interests by making him dependent on Christian II for any restitutions or punitive damages.

The answer to this seeming paradox can be found by examining what the sources have to say about the proceedings that took place on November 7th. According to the chronicle of Olaus Petri,

¹³³c 13 § 1 de haeretica V 7. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 46-47.

¹³⁴The names of the accused can be found in HT (1918), 123.

¹³⁵BSH., V, 635. The attitude taken by Brask does not necessarily mean that the Swedish prelates were more bloodthirsty than Christian II but rather that they insisted that the privileges and rights of the Church be respected.

Christian became displeased with the Archbishop after the latter had presented his accusations and punished him with ". . . words so harsh that the Archbishop became afraid." The reason for this, according to Olaus Petri, was that Trolle had not asked vigorously enough for the lives of the accused.¹³⁶ In "the narrative," however, it was the king who took the more conciliatory point of view. "Lord Archbishop," he asks Trolle, "would You not rather proceed with amity and conciliation?" But the Archbishop was immovable.¹³⁷ He asked instead "ardently" (innerliga) that those present should be arrested and that each of them should satisfy his demands. Trolle then extracted a promise from Christian to this effect, "notwithstanding" (icke imotstondenne)¹³⁸ that such a process was already on his (Trolle's) behalf pending in Rome. But the king did not want the proceedings to be decided or concluded in Rome. Instead he promised the Archbishop

¹³⁶Olaus Petri, p. 328.

¹³⁷Weibull believes that Trolle's refusal to come to terms with the accused proves that the accusation had from the beginning been for heresy. Weibull, "Kristian Erslev . . .," 124. This, however, is not the case. On the contrary. According to canon law, the Archbishop had a direct responsibility to take the accused back into favor if they showed any signs of recanting. The principle adhered to was that the Church never closed its bosom to those who wanted to return to it. (ecclesia non claudit gremium volentibus redire ad ipsam). Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 131-132. c. 9 15 § 1 X de haeretics V 7. c.4 in Vi:o de haeretica V 2.

¹³⁸Gottfried Carlsson has shown that the Swedish term "icke emotstondenne" is the equivalent of the common judicial term "non obstante." Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 131-132. The position taken by Trolle thus contains a reservation. By presenting his charges to the King, the Archbishop did not relinquish his rights to continue his Roman process against Sture's followers. This process was in November 1520 still pending at the Papal Curia. From the Church's point of view this was a sensible precaution. Pirinen, "Källorna . . .," 250. Cf. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 34 n.1.

that the case would be tried in Sweden and that Trolle would be repaid for all the damages done to him and his fellow prelates. With this the Archbishop was satisfied.¹³⁹

Thus Olaus Petri's chronicle and "the narrative" seem to be incompatible, but on two things they agree. Both made it clear that an exchange took place between Christian and Trolle and that the latter was forced to yield his original point.¹⁴⁰ What was the cause of this argument? Olaus Petri's suggestion that Trolle did not desire the death of the accused is quite doubtful because of Petri's known bias for the Archbishop.¹⁴¹ The version given by "the narrative" is the more likely one. Although the sources can be interpreted differently, it must be concluded that the dispute was over the way in which the legal proceedings against the accused were to be continued. Since the evidence shows that a heresy trial would be extremely disadvantageous to Trolle and very favorable to Christian, one is obligated to conclude that it was the king who forced Trolle to change his mind.

The inconsistencies that are inherent in the letter of accusation are explained therefore by the fact that Trolle's original complaints--addressed to Christian--were primarily aimed at achieving economic restitution for the Swedish Church.¹⁴² The thought of a heresy trial,

¹³⁹HT (1918), 118-119. The narrative tells that the King proposed some form of arbitration (. . . semye oc forlicuelsse, then effter som dande men thet kunna rannsacka . . .). It was in this fashion that in 1519 a conflict of interest between Christian and Bishop Jens Andersen of Odense had been settled. Pirinen, "Källorna . . . , " 249.

¹⁴⁰Bergström, Studier, p. 87.

¹⁴¹Ahnlund, "Kring Stockholms Blodbad," 276.

¹⁴²Gottfried Carlsson has suggested that perhaps the Archbishop had not desired a formal trial or verdict. Instead Trolle wanted through threats to force the nationalists to agree to high reparations in the same manner that his predecessor, Jakob Ulvsson, with the help

a course of action extremely favorable to the king, originated later with Christian II and his advisors rather than with Trolle and the Swedish prelates. It was after this turn of events that the original separate complaints were combined into one new petition. It was in this new composite writ that the accused were designated as notorious heretics and their arrest and punishment as such called for. Still, the basis for an accusation of heresy was very weak and the emphasis in the writ continued to focus on the economic implications of the case.

On hearing the new charge of heresy, the accused themselves provided what had so far been missing--a more conclusive foundation for a charge of heresy. The defendants, upon hearing the new charge, pleaded that the actions taken against Trolle and his followers had been decided on by the Riksdag of 1517 and as a result were official acts for which no one individual could be held responsible.¹⁴³ To support this claim, Christina Sture produced the written decree authorizing the measures against the Archbishop which had been adopted and sealed by all the members of the Riksdag. Whether or not this document was known to the king and the Archbishop, its appearance was to decide the fate of the accused.¹⁴⁴ By sealing this document they could now be

of king Hans extracted reparations from Sten Sture "The Elder" in 1497 and again in 1499. Also king Hans had in both years issued sweeping amnesties to the Sture party, the economic implications of which were disregarded by the Swedish prelates. Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 138. Kellerman, "Jakob Ulvsson och den Svenska Kyrkan," 42-43. Sandström, "Några Bidrag . . . ," 407. For the text of king Hans' amnesty see Hadorph, p. 365. For documents in connection with the proceedings against Sten Sture "The Elder" in 1499 see BSH., IV, CCXVIII-CCXXIII, CCXXV and CCXL.

¹⁴³Sjödin, Kalmarunionens Slutskede, p. 55.

¹⁴⁴Bergström, Sandström and Weibull believe that it was the appearance of the 1517 Riksdag decision that initially led to the thought of a heresy trial. Bergström, Studier, pp. 84-90. Sandström, "Några Bidrag . . . ," 408-411. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 55. Since

considered to have banded themselves together against the Papacy, an act that could--with a stretch of the imagination--be construed as heretical. If Christian had hesitated about the course of action he was to follow, the letter of the Riksdag of 1517 made up his mind.

the writ of accusation itself, however, makes no mention of the decision of 1517 and is in no way influenced by it, one is more correct in presuming that the letter merely served to strengthen the prior decision to proceed in the form of a heresy trial. It is also unlikely that neither Christian II nor Trolle knew that such a "letter" existed. Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 140-144. Wieselgren, pp. 277-286.

CHAPTER VI

STOCKHOLM'S BLOODBATH: THE TRIAL

The decision to continue the proceedings on the basis of a charge of heresy, however, warranted a change in the form of trial. While the action against the deceased Sten Sture and his followers had begun in a secular court (the King and the Council), a charge of heresy fell under the jurisdiction of the Church. As a result, an ecclesiastical court was called together on November 8, and the proceedings turned over to it. The court was asked whether the crimes with which the accused were charged constituted notorious heresy and the court answered in the affirmative.¹⁴⁵

According to Weibull, this ecclesiastical court was properly constituted and arrived at its verdict after a proper examination of the canon law.¹⁴⁶ This theory, however, needs closer scrutiny. To suppress heresies, the Popes since Gregory IX had appointed special judges, inquisitores haereticae pravitatis.¹⁴⁷ Besides the inquisitores, the regular ecclesiastical judges, the bishops, retained their rights of inquest. In the diocese of Uppsala, where the crimes of Sten Sture and his followers were alleged to have taken place, the judge was the Archbishop himself. The ecclesiastical court was not a collegium, but the bishop alone was the judge and the other members

¹⁴⁵HT (1918), 124. Huidfeldt, Danmarckis Rigis Krönicke, II, 1157-1158.

¹⁴⁶Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 55-58.

¹⁴⁷Albert C. Shannon, The Popes and Heresy in the Thirteenth Century (Villanova, 1949), p. 58.

only his helpers or assessors.¹⁴⁸ However, the clergymen who constituted the court in Stockholm were a group of ecclesiastics called together by Christian II. They formed an assembly that can best be likened to the "meeting of the country's prelates," a body which in Denmark had under Christian's rule developed into the highest ecclesiastical court of the land.¹⁴⁹ In Denmark this body had been successfully used by Christian on several occasions, for instance, in the trials of Bishop Jens Andersen of Odense and the Norwegian Bishop Karl of Hamar.¹⁵⁰ In all cases the competence of the court was solely based on the judgment and desire of the King.

The question before the ecclesiastical court in Stockholm was whether or not the deceased Sten Sture and his followers were notorious heretics. The charges to be considered by the court were formally those listed in Trolle's writ of accusation, but they had been considerably enlarged during the proceedings. The verdict points out that the charges mentioned in the writ were sufficient to constitute notorious heresy. However, new evidence was introduced into the court in the form of one special "letter," the decision of the Riksdag of 1517, which deprived Trolle of his office. The co-signers also pledged themselves to fight any attempt to interfere with this decision even though this interference might originate in Rome.¹⁵¹ The cathedral

¹⁴⁸The mediaeval ecclesiastical courts did not operate on a majority principle when reaching decisions.

¹⁴⁹Pirinen, "Källorna . . . , " 254. See also Weibull, "Didrik Slaghaec . . . , " 184-185, for the development in Denmark during the rule of Christian II of a new law-code. This code prohibited among other things appeals by Danish clerics to Roman courts and instead set up a royal court to judge cases involving Danish clerics or the Danish Church. Didric Slaghaec was in 1521 convicted by such a royal court.

¹⁵⁰Pirinen, "Källorna . . . , " 254.

¹⁵¹HS., XXIV, 94-95.

members in their narrative let the whole question of guilt revolve around this letter. Thus the court also had to decide whether or not those who had sworn themselves together against the Pope and the papacy were heretics.¹⁵²

The sententia--the verdict of the court--does not give the decision of the Riksdag or the "letter" such a central place in the deliberations. Here the emphasis still is on the writ of accusation and the fact that Sten Sture and his men had for many years been excommunicated, had sought no absolution and, while under the bann, had conspired against Archbishop Trolle. According to the sententia, Sture and his party had as a result of their own free will removed themselves from the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁵³

None of the crimes mentioned, however, would have constituted heresy.¹⁵⁴ The Church had always adhered to the principle that heretics are misguided in their faith (aberrantes in fidei) and that heresy was solely a matter concerning faith (negotium fidei).¹⁵⁵ Thus the crimes committed by the accused did not constitute notorious heresy but could at the most lead to a suspicion of heresy (suspectio de haeresi). According to cannon law, the accused in such a case could not be treated en masse but had to be tried separately. Yet the verdict as well as the writ of accusation contain a collective group. "Lord Sten and others."¹⁵⁶ Weibull has proposed that the executed who were not

¹⁵²HT (1918), 118-122.

¹⁵³HT (1918), 124.

¹⁵⁴Pirinen, "Källorna . . . , " 256-257.

¹⁵⁵c. 10 X de haeretica V 7. Pirinen, "Källorna . . . , " 258.

¹⁵⁶HT (1918), 123-124. Georg Landberg, "Stockholms Blodbad," Nordisk Tidskrift (1928), 269.

specifically named were credentes, or followers, of the accused heretics.¹⁵⁷ This theory, however, expands the definition of credentes too much. Canon law forbade the secular power to decide who was a heretic and who was not and also provided that the punishment for credentes was less severe than that for heretics.¹⁵⁸ All in all, the charges against Sture and his followers were extremely weak and the competence of the ecclesiastical court very suspect.

One is therefore forced to ask whether a formal ecclesiastical court was ever convened. The authors of "the narrative," all supposedly members of the court, deny that such a body ever met. The members of the Uppsala Cathedral Chapter assert that the clergymen who were forcibly assembled in the castle were simply asked by one of the King's representatives whether or not they considered the individuals accused by Trolle to be guilty of heresy.¹⁵⁹ It has been assumed that this denial of the existence of a formal court depended on the fear of the clergy to divulge that a trial, in which they themselves participated, ever took place.¹⁶⁰

However, it has been pointed out earlier that the chapter members were in no fear of losing life or limb at the time the narrative was composed.¹⁶¹ In addition, the time required to write out a document as long as the verdict exceeds the interval between the convocation of the

¹⁵⁷Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 54-55 and 61-62. Weibull, "Kristian Erslev . . .," 135-136.

¹⁵⁸Landberg, "Stockholms Blodbad," 269. Pirinen, Källorna . . . , " 261.

¹⁵⁹HT (1918), 120. Olaus Petri also has no knowledge of any sort of trial.

¹⁶⁰Ahnlund, *Från Medeltid och Vasatid*, p. 22. Bergström, *Studier*, p. 91. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 33-40.

¹⁶¹See above, p. 42. Also Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 132-134.

court and the execution of the victims.¹⁶² The sententia certainly could have been written during the preceding night since the King had already decided the course he was going to pursue. The membership of a fictional court could have been decided on at the same time.¹⁶³

It is therefore quite possible that the narrative contains, if not the whole truth, at least a large part of it. The forceably assembled clergymen could have been asked the simple question of guilty or not guilty. Since the outcome of the proceedings was a foregone conclusion, the confirmation of that decision by the Swedish clergymen was a mere formality. The ecclesiastics either could not, or dared not, protest.¹⁶⁴ It is hard to blame them for not trying.

The whole procedure, before and during the trial, was contrary to canon law. The writ of accusation was not formulated properly since not all of the accused were mentioned separately and by name. The action was incorrectly begun in a secular court and only later

¹⁶²HT (1918), 127.

¹⁶³None of the sources mentions any process of selection of court members but all give the impression that the King simply called together certain clerics who apparently had been decided upon in advance. Characteristically enough, all the court members named in the sententia were from diocese that had been on unfriendly terms with the nationalists.

¹⁶⁴Josef Sandström presents a somewhat similar point of view but it is impossible to agree with his conclusion that the sententia was composed at some later date to justify the Bloodbath. If the sententia was written with this purpose in mind, why does it not contain the names of all the individuals who were executed? In addition, Christian's proclamation of November 9, 1520 mentions a written verdict. The information about the existence of a written verdict would, however, not contradict the theory that no formal court was ever held. Christian had all the reason in the world to make it appear as if a court had been convened. Sandström, "Kättardomen vid Stockholms Blodbad," 34-35. Sandström, "Några Bidrag till Stockholms Blodbads Historia," 413-415.

turned over to an ecclesiastical one. The ecclesiastical court, if one may call it that, had not been called by the proper Church authorities, but by Christian; as a result, its competence was based only on the King's preference. The verdict of this dubious gathering was unusually sharp.¹⁶⁵ It categorically declared that the accused were guilty of notorious heresy, whereas an objective examination of the evidence could at the most have led to a suspicion of heresy.¹⁶⁶ On the basis of this rather dubious verdict, the civil authorities then proceeded to punish the offenders.¹⁶⁷

The executions themselves were undertaken with the greatest of haste. Instead of the customary pyre used in cases of heresy, swords were used to behead the condemned. By nightfall of November 8, 1520, about ninety Swedes had lost their lives in what has become known as the infamous Stockholm's Bloodbath.¹⁶⁸ The slaughter continued

¹⁶⁵Although the court was supposedly composed of fourteen clerics, only eight seals are affixed to the sententia. Of the eight seals only five, those of Archbishop Trolle, Bishop Brask, Bishop Andersen, Bishop Otto and dean Jöran Turesson, are identifiable. For the seals of the remaining six court members not even cuts are made in the parchment. There are several explanations for this discrepancy. One theory is that the start of the executions disrupted the sealing procedure. The lack of proper sealing can, however, also depend on the fact that no formal court was held and that some clergymen, picked at random, were forced to affix their seals (the three unidentified) unto the sententia. For a debate of this issue see i. e. Erslev, "Det Stockholmse Blodbad," 262-263. HT (1918), 126-127. Sandström, "Några Bidrag till Stockholms Blodbads Historia," 396-397 and 414-415.

¹⁶⁶Pirinen, "Källorna . . . ," 261.

¹⁶⁷Cf. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 64.

¹⁶⁸The sources disagree as to the exact number of people that were executed. Hanserecesse, VIII, 535. Huidfeldt, Danmarckis Rigis Krönicke, II, 1158. Olaus Petri, p. 830. Kock, SRS., III:1, 272.

through a second and third day, new victims being enticed out of their hiding-places by royal proclamations of amnesty.

In his proclamation to the Swedes on the morning of November 9, Christian II made it known that since an ecclesiastical court had judged the accused to be guilty of heresy, he, as the secular arm of the Swedish government, was obligated to carry out the court's verdict and inflict the proper punishment.¹⁶⁹ What the King neglected to tell the people was that of the ninety men executed, only some were named in either Trolle's writ of accusation or the verdict of the ecclesiastical court.¹⁷⁰

Trolle's writ of accusation listed by name, in addition to the deceased Sten Sture, seventeen of his followers. The aldermen and council members of the city of Stockholm are also mentioned.¹⁷¹ Nine of the seventeen nationalists were executed on either November 8 or 9.¹⁷² Christina Gyllenstierna, Sten Sture's widow, and Lady Sigrid Banner,¹⁷³ Sten Sture's mother-in-law, escaped the executioner as did

¹⁶⁹Hadorph, pp. 453-454. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 62-69. Although it was required of the civil authorities that they enforce the mandatory death sentence against notorious heretics, it was also customary that the ecclesiastical court added to their verdict a plea of mercy. The Church always retained the formal point of view that "ecclesia non sitit sanguinem." In this case such a plea was lacking.

¹⁷⁰See HT (1918), 123-124 for the names of the individuals accused by Trolle and later sentenced. Cf. the names of the individuals executed in Hanserecesse, VIII, 535. Olaus Petri, p. 330. SRS., III:1, 272.

¹⁷¹HT (1918), 123. Huidfeldt, Danmarckis Rigis Krönicke, II, 1157.

¹⁷²Huidfeldt, Danmarckis Rigis Krönicke, II, 1159-1160. Kock, SRS., III:1, 272. Olaus Petri, pp. 330-333. Erslev, "Det Stockholmske Blodbads Förhistoria . . .," 149.

¹⁷³ST., IV, 12. Christina and her sons were removed to Denmark during the summer of 1521.

two of Sture's lieutenants, Klas Kyle and Michel Nilsson.¹⁷⁴ All four were named in the writ. Two other of Sture's military leaders, Peder Smed and Sven Hök were captured later and executed by Christian in December 1520. The two men had escaped from Stockholm during the massacre.¹⁷⁵ About the remaining two persons on Trolle's list, Sir Kirstijern Bengtsson and Peder Skräddare, nothing is known.

It has been noted that the writ also accused the aldermen and council members of the city of Stockholm of heresy. Seventeen members of these two bodies met their fate on November 8, 1520, or the following day.¹⁷⁶ All included, Trolle's writ of accusation could only be construed to have covered at the most thirty-one of the ninety-plus victims of the Bloodbath. Even if participation in the Riksdag of 1517 is made a valid cause for execution, only three more victims can be found whose death could be justified by the sententia.¹⁷⁷

It becomes apparent then that the people named in either Trolle's writ or the sententia constituted at the most one-third of the victims of Stockholm's Bloodbath. This, however, does not mean that the persons named in these documents were killed solely because of that single fact. An examination of their names shows that almost all of them belonged to the nationalist party. Thus they were also the bitter enemies of Christian II, the man who would benefit much more by their death than Trolle. It becomes incorrect therefore to say that only Trolle desired to see the people listed in his writ punished.

¹⁷⁴Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 127. Erslev, "Det Stockholmske Blodbads Förhistoria . . .," 149 and 149 n. 1. Emil Hildebrand, "Smålandslif 1521," Historisk Tidskrift, XX (1900), 302.

¹⁷⁵Olaus Petri, p. 334.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 330.

¹⁷⁷HSB., XXIV, 94. Erslev, "Det Stockholmske Blodbads Förhistoria . . .," 149 and 149 n. 1.

Moreover, several important Swedes were decapitated whose death Trolle could not have desired or even benefited from. Included among these men were the knights Erik Abrahamsson (lejonhufvud) and Erik Knutsson (tree rosor). Both men were brothers-in-law of his father, Erik Trolle, and both had since early 1520 worked for Christian, Abrahamsson having been entrusted with the key castle of Kalmar. The execution of the two knights was based on the fact that both were closely related to the Sture family. Sir Erik Knutsson was the foster-brother of Sten Sture and Sir Erik Abrahamsson was related to the Stures by marriage.¹⁷⁸ Both men might have played important roles in case of a sudden attempt to restore the Stures to power in Sweden.

The same basic reason--close connection with the Stures and membership in the nationalist party--can be given for the execution of most of the other victims of the Bloodbath. With a few exceptions, they came from the lower nobility, the peasantry and the retainers and servants of Sten Sture. All of these groups were intensely nationalistic and anti-union.¹⁷⁹ The same holds true for those citizens of Stockholm who fell before the executioner's sword.¹⁸⁰ There are two men, however, whose death deserves some additional comment.

These two men, the first to be beheaded on November 8, were the Bishops of Strängnäs and Skara, Mattias and Vincent. Given Trolle's strong belief in the immunity of the Church and the inviolability of its members, it is impossible to presume that the Archbishop would have

¹⁷⁸For Erik Abrahamsson's and Erik Knutsson's relationship with the Stures see Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 128 and 128 n.1-3.

¹⁷⁹Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 128-129 and 141-142.

¹⁸⁰Olaus Petri, p. 361.

brought about the execution of the two bishops. Bishop Mattias had sealed the decision of the 1517 Riksdag--Bishop Vincent was absent from the meeting--but had shortly after Sture's death joined forces with Christian and rendered invaluable services to the King.¹⁸¹ However, during Sture's lifetime, both had supported his policies and cooperated with the nationalists. Their execution, like the beheading of Erik Abrahamsson and Erik Knutsson, can only be attributed to their former strong ties with the Stures.¹⁸²

It must therefore be concluded that Stockholm's Bloodbath can best be described as a deliberate death-blow by Christian II against the Sture party and its real or potential sympathizers. The nationalists were to be crushed once and for all and the perfect opportunity to do it was at hand. At the same time the bloody stigma of treason could be attached to the Swedish clergy and the higher nobility who came to appear as the instigators of the massacre. Maybe Christian hoped in this way to gather the support of the lower nobility and the peasantry. The heresy trial had thus been started in order to give the ensuing massacre an aura of judicial respectability, a maneuver showing at the same time both respect and utter contempt for canon law and the Church.

From what has been discussed above, it appears clear that the executions were carried out after a certain loosely arranged plan and with a definite purpose. Therefore, there is nothing incongruous in

¹⁸¹HSH., XXIV, 95. Bishop Vincent of Skara had not signed the decision of the Riksdag. Weibull less correctly considers him as one of the credentes. Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 69.

¹⁸²The vacant sees of Strängnäs and Skara were later awarded to Jens Andersen and Didrik Slaghaec respectively. It might therefore be possible that the two bishops were executed simply to provide suitable offices with which Christian II could reward his foremost advisors.

the note that appears in the manifest issued in 1523 by the Swedish Council and king Gustav Vasa which states that the less important victims among the citizens of Stockholm were systematically gathered from their houses by soldiers with official proscription lists.¹⁸³

Many other smaller details bear out the theory that some vague plan existed among Christian and his advisers about how to deal with the nationalists. The bishops, Mattias and Vincent, for instance had been arrested and detained in separate quarters as early as the evening of November 7.¹⁸⁴ Christian himself states in a letter to the Pope in 1521 that he had planned after his victory to call together all the Swedish nobles and the inhabitants of the city of Stockholm. The purpose of the meeting was to determine who had been responsible for the misfortunes that the country, and presumably Christian, had suffered during the regency of Sten Sture.¹⁸⁵ Christian's statement can be taken to imply that the King had toyed with the idea of conducting a purge of the nationalists in some other way before he realized the advantages of the course of action that he ultimately chose.

For three days the bodies of the executed remained on the market-place where they had fallen. Then they were carted to Södermalm, a suburb of Stockholm, and burned. Even the bodies of Sten Sture and his infant son were dug up and thrown on top of the funeral pyre. While a few other Swedes were later executed in the countryside and in Finland, Stockholm's Bloodbath per se had come to its tragic end.

¹⁸³Bergström, "Gustav Vasa och Rådets Manifest . . . ," 218-225. Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 129.

¹⁸⁴HT (1918), 120 and 128. Note that by arresting the two Swedish bishops, Christian II had according to canon law committed the same crime that Sten Sture had done by imprisoning Trolle.

¹⁸⁵APD., VI, 333-335.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The examination of Christian II's policies in Sweden thus shows that the King strove to eliminate not merely the Sture party but any and all opposition to his absolutism. The seizure of Stockholm's castle, the proclamation of the hereditary monarchy which annulled the Treaty of Uppsala, the economic advantages gained by the King through the heresy trial that led to Stockholm's Bloodbath--all this strongly implies that Christian deliberately set out to crush the power of the Council and to eliminate the unionists as well as the nationalists as powers in Swedish politics.

Stockholm's Bloodbath was the last step in the King's plan to gain political superiority in Sweden. It has been claimed that Gustav Trolle rather than Christian was the real instigator and the driving power behind this massacre; yet all the evidence indicate the opposite to be true.¹⁸⁶ Is it possible that the leader of the Swedish Church, as much as he might have desired revenge, would have agreed to a trial that grossly violated the basic principles of canon law? Hardly. It is in addition impossible that the Archbishop would have consented to the execution of two fellow bishops who Trolle must have known could only be tried by the Pope.¹⁸⁷ The trial has instead all the

¹⁸⁶Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad," 1-85. Weibull, "Kristian Erslev . . . ," 117-139.

¹⁸⁷The two bishops were never demoted before their trial and execution as they should have been if proper trial procedure had been followed. Olaus Petri related that at least Bishop Vincent had before his execution asked the Danish official in charge, Nils Lykke, to have the charges against him read in public. Contrary to medieval custom, this was not done. Olaus Petri, p. 329.

earmarks of similar proceedings involving the Church and its members that had been held earlier by Christian II in Denmark and Norway.¹⁸⁸

Even if the Archbishop had been willing to overlook the grave violations of Church principles that were committed, he should have received satisfaction for his economic claims had he been the force behind the Bloodbath. Yet as late as June 25, 1521, Trolle wrote to Christian, respectfully asking the latter not to forget to pay the restitutions that the King had earlier promised.¹⁸⁹ To add insult to injury, Gustav Trolle, the logical choice for governor of Sweden, due to his position as the leading member of the Swedish Council and Christian's leading supporter, was by-passed in favor of Didric Slaghaec.¹⁹⁰

Trolle and the unionists had therefore only achieved their goals insofar as their interests coincided with those of Christian, that is, in the elimination of the Sture party. But in other aspects the policy of the Archbishop and the Swedish Royal Council to become the real power in Sweden had failed miserably. Instead, Christian cleverly exploited the role that the Swedish prelates played in the Bloodbath.

¹⁸⁸Pirinen, "Källorna . . . ," 261.

¹⁸⁹Bergström, Studier, p. 80 and 80 n.1. Carlsson, "Stockholms Blodbad," 135.

¹⁹⁰The role that Didric Slaghaec played during Stockholm's Bloodbath is somewhat unclear. The narrative pictures him as an arch-fiend. HT (1918), 121. Didric became the governor of Sweden and also received the bishopric of Skara. In 1521, when Christian II was called before a Roman Curia to explain the deaths of the two bishops, he put the blame on Didric Slaghaec. As a result, Didric was executed but under a different charge. Weibull, "Didric Slaghaec . . . ," 165-190. Yet the Roman Curia found the King at least partially guilty. The records of the Curia are unfortunately lost. For an attempted reconstruction see Olaf Kolsrud, "Blodbadet i Stockholm aar 1520," Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift, XL (1940), 176-237.

According to both Reimar Kock and Olaus Petri, Christian had one of his knights, Nils Lykke, explain to the people gathered at the site of the executions that the massacre took place at the insistence of the Archbishop.¹⁹¹ The same implication is also present in Christian's proclamation of November 9.¹⁹² The result was very successful; Christian managed to leave the impression that the responsibility for the Bloodbath rested mainly with the Swedish clergy.¹⁹³ Trolle and his cohorts were certainly not completely innocent, but neither can they be adjudged the perpetrators of massacre. Despite this, the Roman Catholic Church became in the minds of most Swedes identified with anti-nationalism and foreign domination. Its deep involvement in Swedish politics, mostly on the pro-Danish side, and the intrigues surrounding the Bloodbath contributed later in the sixteenth century to the relative ease with which the Protestant Reformation was carried out in Sweden.

In the final judgment the only one who gained from Stockholm's Bloodbath was Christian II himself. He had seemingly eliminated Sture's nationalistic party as a political power in Sweden and at the same time crushed the authority, and the public image, of the Royal Council and the nobility. The economic, and with it the political and military position of the Swedish Church had been undercut so severely that it never recovered from this blow. By cleverly and ruthlessly exploiting the grievances of Trolle and the ambitions of the aristocrats, Christian

¹⁹¹Kock, SRS., III:1, 272. Olaus Petri, p. 329.

¹⁹²Hadorph, pp. 454-455.

¹⁹³Bergström, Studier, p. 77. Christian attempted through these maneuvers to put the aristocrats in deep conflict with the nationalistic segment of the Swedish people. By doing this, he hoped to prevent the development of a united front against him in Sweden.

had succeeded in establishing an absolute monarchy in Sweden. It was the culmination of a trend, the rise of which can be traced from the Union of Kalmar (1397).

It is ironic, however, that Christian II through this act ultimately contributed to his own fall from power in both Denmark and Sweden. Far from dividing the Swedes internally, as Christian had hoped, Stockholm's Bloodbath was to unite the aristocrats and the nationalists. The struggle against Christian became a war of national independence, a struggle to establish a separate Swedish state. A young Swedish nobleman, Gustav Eriksson Vasa, emerged as the leader of the Swedes. His father had been executed in Stockholm and Gustav himself had a few years earlier been imprisoned in Denmark as a hostage. After escaping home to Sweden, he set out to organize a nationalistic rebellion against the Danish king. Gustav carried on this fight so successfully that in 1523 he himself was crowned king of Sweden and ultimately established a strong hereditary monarchy in that country.

He could, however, not have succeeded in his endeavors without the groundwork laid by Sten Sture "The Younger" and Christian II. Sture had proved the effectiveness of the peasantry as a political and military force. He had also realized that a sound system of finances was essential to a strong central government and had partially solved the problem by attaching some of the property of the Swedish Church. With the same move Sture also had limited the political power of that body. Gustav Vasa was to bring this trend to its logical conclusion when he first closed the Swedish monasteries and confiscated their property and later established Lutheranism as the state religion of Sweden.

Yet it was Christian who actually paved the way for Gustav Vasa to the Swedish throne. By his brutal action of November 1520, Christian opened the gates for a wave of revulsion and psychological reaction to

his own rule. In Denmark as in Sweden the reaction took the form of rebellion. The Danish nobles elected Christian's uncle, count Fredrik of Holstein, as the new king of Denmark. After two years of half-hearted fighting, Christian in 1523 abdicated in favor of his uncle.

In Sweden, Gustav Vasa came by mid-1521 to acquire the support of most of the Swedish nobles. Posing as the successor of the Stures, he already had the support of the peasantry and all others who hoped to see a restoration of the Sture dynasty. The hopes of both the nobles and pro-Sture faction were bitterly dashed once the new king gained firm control of Sweden. Repeated attempts to restore some member of the Sture family to power in Sweden occurred and all were crushed ruthlessly.¹⁹⁴ Undoubtly the execution of most of the leaders of the Sture party by Christian greatly aided Gustav Vasa. The pro-Sture faction had no place to turn for a leader since the surviving Swedish nobility and clergy still carried the mark of treason and complicity they had acquired during the Bloodbath. Christian II, therefore, had in fact laid the basis for a Swedish absolute monarchy.

¹⁹⁴For a debate on Gustav Vasa's relationship with the Stures and the Sture party see the following articles. Bergström, Studier, pp. 92-93. Bergström, "Sturetidens Historia . . .", 398-417. Carlsson, "Gustav Eriksson i Rydboholm," 465-480. Carlsson, "Gustav Vasa och Sturehuset," 255-70. Allan Etzler, "Gustav Vasa och Sturehuset," Historisk Tidskrift, XLIV (1924), 389-396. Allan Etzler, "Gustav Vasa och Sturehuset," Historisk Tidskrift, XLVI (1926), 51-61.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

The preceding essay attempted to trace the development of absolute monarchy in Sweden but also to present some sorely needed insight into fifteenth and sixteenth-century Scandinavian history. It is hoped that through the detailed footnoting and the following brief historiographical essay the reader will become familiarized with at least a few Scandinavian historians and their works.

Most of the primary sources used in writing this exposition can be located in one of the huge collections of original of original documents that the nineteenth-century Swedish historians and archivists gathered and printed. Most of the documents and letters written by Sten Sture "The Younger" or his staff can be found in volume twenty-four of Handlingar Rörande Skandnaviens Historia (41 vols. Stockholm, 1816-1865). This collection was superseded by the series of works known as Historiska Handlingar (11 vols. Stockholm, 1861-1879). The latter contains, among other things, the famous decision of the Riksdag of 1517.

In addition, the collection known as Bidrag till Skandnaviens Historia ur Ötlandska Arkiver, ed. Carl G. Styffe, (5 vols. Stockholm, 1859-1889) contains reprints of documents concerning Sweden that are kept in non-Swedish archives. The Treaty of Uppsala of March 6, 1520 is found in a collection of treaties entitled Sveriges Traktater, ed. Oskar S. Rydberg, (4 vols. Stockholm, 1877-1888).

Extremely interesting is the collection of chronicles, letters treaties, histories and other assorted primary sources known as Scriptores Rerum Suecicarum, ed. Carl Annerstedt and A. Fant

(3 vols. Uppsala, 1870-1884). It also contains the chronicles of Reimar Kock and Johannes Magnus.

Two Danish collections of sources must be mentioned. The first, Acta Pontificium Danica: Påvelige Aktstykker Vedrørende Danmark, 1316-1536, ed. A. Krarup and J. Linback (7 vols. Kobenhavn, 1915), contains most of the ecclesiastical documents pertaining to fourteenth through sixteenth-century Sweden. It also includes the proclamation issued by Christian II on November 9, 1520. The second Danish primary source is actually a chronicle, but since it reprints very many original documents now lost to the historian, it is justifiably listed under the heading of primary sources. Arild Huitfeldt's Danmarckis Rigis Krönicke (2 vols. Kobenhavn, 1652) is invaluable since it gives us Trolle's writ of accusation and the sententia, or court verdict.

The nature of the various chronicles is self-explanatory. It should, however, be noted that Johan Hadorph, Twa Gambla Swenske Rijn-Krönikor . . . Then Andra Delen . . . Uplagd Aff Johan Hardorph (Stockholm, 1674), is also a source for some lost documents. Of the various editions of Olaus Petri Svenska Krönika, the edition by G. E. Klemming (Stockholm, 1860) is to be preferred because of its exactness.

Instead of treating each of the secondary sources, this brief historiographical essay will concentrate on the two main issues involved in this thesis. The points of primary interest are the rule of Sten Sture "The Younger" and Stockholm's Bloodbath. The books and articles not mentioned below should not be construed to be of little or no value. They have added to the writer's understanding of the era and enabled him to approach the more central problems in the proper framework of the medieval mentality.

The secondary material on the rule of Sten Sture "The Younger," his ambitions and his quarrels with Archbishop Trolle, is quite limited. No comprehensive biography of either Sture or Trolle has appeared.

One suspects that this lack of treatment depends in a large degree on the limited number of primary sources available. A few significant contributions have, however, been made to the study of the regency of the younger Sture. The prevailing view of Sture as the last chivalrous knight was initially questioned in Gottfried Carlsson's dissertation Hemming Gadh (Uppsala, 1915). By the time his article "Sten Sture d. y.," Scandia II (1929) was finished, Sten Sture had been transformed from the last knight, honest, peace loving and conciliatory, into a shrewd, stubborn and almost brutal renaissance politician.

Lars Sjödin, in his book Gammla Papper Angående Mora Socken II (Västerås, 1937), retains the same view of the Regent. Sjödin, however, broadens the role of the Stures by stating that Swedish history between 1437 and 1520 was a struggle between a "constitutionalism," a lâ Magna Carta, espoused by the aristocracy and the despotic Stures. The same view is also held by Rudolf Bergström in Sturetidens Historia i Ny Belysning, "Historisk Tidskrift," LVII (1937), and Studier till den Stora Krisen i Nordens Historia (Uppsala, 1943). Bergström even goes so far as to assert that the opposition to Sten Sture "The Younger," and later to Christian II, took the form of a Scandinavian aristocratic federation. Shorter but valuable contributions to an understanding of Sten Sture, his plans for the future and his personality, can be found in Gottfried Carlsson, "Gustav Vasa och Sturehuset," Historisk Tidskrift, XLV (1925) and Greta Wieselgren, Sten Sture d. y. och Gustav Trolle (Lund, 1950).

A real wealth of secondary material exists about the second problem discussed in this thesis--Stockholm's Bloodbath. It was talked about and debated from the very beginning, but the first important treatise on the subject appeared in 1867. In that year Carl F. Allen published his book De Tre Nordiske Rigers Historie (3 vols. Kobenhavn, 1867). Allen made equal use of the various primary sources, the writ

of accusation, the sententia and the narrative, without discriminating between them or investigating their accuracy. Yet he gave an impetus to his contemporary, the great Danish historian, Casper Paludan-Muller, to write the biography of Christian II, Den Förste Konger af den Oldenborgske Slaget (Kobenhavn, 1874). It was the first attempt at a scientific approach to the problems involved in Stockholm's Bloodbath. Paludan-Muller was the first to notice the grave factual contradictions in the sententia and the narrative. Because he felt that the sententia was composed during a time of imminent danger to life and limb, Paludan-Muller based his interpretation on the narrative. According to Paludan-Muller, the Bloodbath had materialized in a moment of confusion and anger and the sententia had been composed to justify the massacre.

During the next few years scientific history became very popular in Scandinavia. In 1891, Kirstian Erslev published "Det Stockholmske Blodbad och C. Paludan-Mullers Opfattelse Deraf, " Dansk Historisk Tidskrift, Raekke 6, Band 3 (1891) in which he questioned Paludan-Muller's choice of sources and concluded that the sententia and writ of accusation had some historical value if carefully scrutinized. To Erslev the Bloodbath was deliberately brought about by Christian II to crush his opponents, but who they were remained a mystery to Erslev.

In 1920, an excellent article by Gottfried Carlsson, entitled "Stockholms Blodbad, " Historisk Tidskrift, XL (1920) went by rather unnoticed for several years. In his article Carlsson arrived at an interpretation of the causes for the Bloodbath that mixed the views of Erslev and Paludan-Muller. Carlsson used as his sources both the sententia the writ and the narrative; in addition, he relied on Olaus Petri's chronicle which had not been used scientifically before this time. The trial and the Bloodbath were according to Carlsson a deliberate death-blow aimed at the Sture party. He also shows how all the executed,

especially the individuals not named by the accusation, were persons closely connected with the Stures. Carlsson also proved that the narrative was more accurate than previously believed and added information about the various personalities involved in the Bloodbath.

As has been pointed out, Carlsson's article created little if any stir in historical circles. What started the whole controversy over again, and this time in high gear, was an essay by Lauritz Weibull, "Stockholms Blodbad, " Scandia, I (1928). Ignoring Carlsson's article completely, Weibull set out to prove by comparative textual criticism and cold "scientific" deduction that the only true information about the Bloodbath comes from the sententia and the writ of accusation. Working from this axiom and disregarding any information that contradicted the sententia, Weibull arrived at the conclusion that the man guilty for the Bloodbath was the strong-willed and blood-thirsty Archbishop Trolle. The heresy trial was fair, the court competent and the sentence just, if harsh. Christian II was but a pawn in the hands of the dominating personality of Trolle. The position of Erslev and Carlsson had been reversed.

However, Weibull had stirred a hornets' nest. From 1928 until the present the debate has raged over the relative merit of Weibull's conclusions. The majority of articles have been critical even caustical. Weibull himself resorted at times to emotionalism as is apparent in his one and only rebuttal to his critics, "Kristian Erslev och Stockholms Blodbad, " Scandia, III (1930).

Weibull's critics objected most of all to his exclusive reliance on the sententia as the only absolutely true source of information. Georg Landberg, "Stockholms Blodbad, " Nordisk Tidskrift (1928) pointed out that even the sententia contained narrative parts which should not be taken at face value. Josef Sandström in his two articles, "Kättardomen vid Stockholms Blodbad, " Historisk Tidskrift, XLVIII

(1928) and "Några Bidrag till Stockholms Blodbads Historia," Historisk Tidskrift, XLIX (1929), proved that the writ of accusation was composed of several different documents and also reverted back to Paludan-Müller's theory that the sententia was composed sometime after the Bloodbath in order to justify the executions. Olaus Petri was also brought back as a respectable if not always perfectly reliable source. In general then, there has been a reversion to the old theory that Christian II was the perpetrator of the Bloodbath and that the massacre served the purpose of getting rid of the nationalists. Trolle was guilty not because he was the driving force behind Christian II but because his pride and desire for revenge had proven a willing and ready vehicle for Christian's own designs.

Two additional books dealing in part with Stockholm's Bloodbath should be noted since they attempt to put the massacre into its proper prospective as a part of Scandinavian history and not an isolated event. The books are Rudolf Bergström's Studier till den Stora Krisen i Nordens Historia (Uppsala, 1943), and Lars Sjödin's Kalmarunionens Slutskede: Gustav Vasas Befrielsekrig (Uppsala, 1943). Sjödin calls the Bloodbath the last dying breath of the history of Danish-Swedish union and the birth of the new Swedish nation. Bergström sees the Bloodbath as a successful attempt by Christian II to crush both the nationalists and the unionists. The greatest contribution of these authors, however, is that they placed the Bloodbath in its proper framework as a part of Swedish history and not a single, isolated deed of horror.

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