Oxenstierna, Count Axel Gustafsson

(äk'sö̱l gos'täfs ɵn ūk'sǒnshër ’nä), 1583–1654, Swedish statesman. Named chancellor in 1612, he was the actual administrator of Sweden because Gustavus II was continually occupied with foreign campaigns. Oxenstierna also organized the conquered territories, skillfully managed financial affairs, and aided Gustavus's wars by his diplomacy. In 1629 he arranged a favorable truce with Poland, freeing the army for the campaign in Germany. Habitually cautious, he opposed Sweden's entry into the Thirty Years War, but he acceded to the king's wishes and devoted his energies to keeping supplies and troops at the command of the king. After the death (1632) of Gustavus II at Lützen, the diet granted Oxenstierna full control of Swedish affairs in Germany. At a congress at Heilbronn (1633), he managed to weld the German Protestant princes into some semblance of unity. The Swedish defeat at Nördlingen (1634) forced Oxenstierna to solicit direct assistance from France. From Cardinal Richelieu he secured enlarged subsidies and the open entry (1635) of France into the conflict. As the dominant member of the council of regency in the minority of Christina and virtual ruler of Sweden (1632–44), he followed a cautious foreign policy and distinguished himself by his great program of reforms, including commercial, administrative, and social improvements. He was the author of the constitution of 1634, which centralized administration. He planned and directed the war against Denmark (1643–45) and brought it to a successful conclusion in the Peace of Bromsebro, by which Sweden gained several Danish provinces. Clashes between Oxenstierna and the young queen led to the decline of his power. He himself took no part in the negotiations of the Peace of Westphalia (1648), but his son was one of the Swedish representatives. Oxenstierna opposed the abdication of Christina in 1654, but for the short remainder of his life he served Charles X well in attempts to rehabilitate Sweden financially.