

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Calvinism in History

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1. BEFORE THE REFORMATION

IT may occasion some surprise to discover that the doctrine of Predestination was not made a matter of special study until near the end of the fourth century. The earlier church fathers placed chief emphasis on good works such as faith, repentance, almsgiving, prayers, submission to baptism, etc., as the basis of salvation. They of course taught that salvation was through Christ; yet they assumed that man had full power to accept or reject the gospel. Some of their writings contain passages in which the sovereignty of God is recognized; yet along side of those are others which teach the absolute freedom of the human will. Since they could not reconcile the two they would have denied the doctrine of Predestination and perhaps also that of God's absolute Foreknowledge. They taught a kind of synergism in which there was a co-operation between grace and free will. It was hard for man to give up the idea that he could work out his own salvation. But at last, as a result of a long, slow process, he came to the great truth that salvation is a sovereign gift which has been bestowed irrespective of merit; that it was fixed in eternity; and that God is the author in all of its stages. This cardinal truth of Christianity was first clearly seen by Augustine, the great Spirit-filled theologian of the West. In his doctrines of sin and grace, he went far beyond the earlier theologians, taught an unconditional election of grace, and restricted the purposes of redemption to the definite circle of the elect. It will not be denied by anyone acquainted with Church History that Augustine was an eminently great and good man, and that his labors and writings contributed more to the promotion of sound doctrine and the revival of true religion than did those of any other man between Paul and Luther.

Prior to Augustine's day the time had been largely taken up in correcting heresies within the Church and in refuting attacks from the pagan world in which it found itself. Consequently but little emphasis had been placed on the systematic development of doctrine. And that the doctrine of Predestination received such little attention in this age was no doubt partly due to the tendency to confuse it with the Pagan doctrine of Fatalism

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which was so prevalent throughout the Roman Empire. But in the fourth century a more settled time had been reached, a new era in theology had dawned, and the theologians came to place more emphasis on the doctrinal content of their message. Augustine was led to develop his doctrines of sin and grace partly through his own personal experience in being converted to Christianity from a worldly life, and partly through the necessity of refuting the teaching of Pelagius, who taught that man in his natural state had full ability to work out his own salvation, that Adam's fall had but little effect on the race except that it set a bad example which is perpetuated, that Christ's life is of value to men mainly by way of example, that in His death Christ was little more than the first Christian martyr, and that we are not under any special providence of God. Against these views Augustine developed the very opposite. He taught that the whole race fell in Adam, that all men by nature are depraved and spiritually dead, that the will is free to sin but not free to do good toward God, that Christ suffered vicariously for His people, that God elects whom He will irrespective of their merits, and that saving grace is efficaciously applied to the elect by the Holy Spirit. He thus became the first true interpreter of Paul and was successful in securing the acceptance of his doctrine by the Church.

Following Augustine there was retrogression rather than progress. Clouds of ignorance blinded the people. The Church became more and more ritualistic and salvation was thought to be through the external Church. The system of merit grew until it reached its climax in the "indulgences." The papacy came to exert great power, political as well as ecclesiastical, and throughout Catholic Europe the state of morals came to be almost intolerable. Even the priesthood became desperately corrupt and in the whole catalogue of human sins and vices none are more corrupt or more offensive than those which soiled the lives of such popes as John XXIII and Alexander VI.

From the time of Augustine until the time of the Reformation very little emphasis was placed on the doctrine of Predestination. We shall mention only two names from this period: Gottschalk, who was imprisoned and condemned for teaching Predestination; and Wycliffe, "The Morning Star of the Reformation," who lived in England. Wycliffe was a reformer of the Calvinistic type, proclaiming the absolute sovereignty of God and the Foreordination of all things. His system of belief was very similar to that which was later taught by Luther and Calvin. The Waldensians also might be mentioned for they were in a sense "Calvinists" before the Reformation, one of their tenets being that of Predestination.

2. THE REFORMATION

The Reformation was essentially a revival of Augustinianism and through it evangelical Christianity again came into its own. It is to be remembered that Luther, the first leader in the Reformation, was an Augustinian monk and that it was from this rigorous theology

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that he formulated his great principle of justification by faith alone. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and all the other outstanding reformers of that period were thorough-going predestinarians. In his work, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther stated the doctrine as emphatically and in a form quite as extreme as can be found among any of the reformed theologians. Melancthon in his earlier writings designated the principle of Predestination as the fundamental principle of Christianity. He later modified this position, however, and brought in a kind of “synergism” in which God and man were supposed to co-operate in the process of salvation. The position taken by the early Lutheran Church was gradually modified. Later Lutherans let go the doctrine altogether, denounced it in its Calvinistic form, and came to hold a doctrine of universal grace and universal atonement, which doctrine has since become the accepted doctrine of the Lutheran Church. In regard to this doctrine Luther’s position in the Lutheran Church is similar to that of Augustine in the Roman Catholic Church, — that is, he is a heretic of such unimpeachable authority that he is more admired than censured.

To a great extent Calvin built upon the foundation which Luther laid. His clearer insight into the basic principles of the Reformation enabled him to work them out more fully and to apply them more broadly. And it may be further pointed out that Luther stressed salvation by faith and that his fundamental principle was more or less subjective and anthropological, while Calvin stressed the principle of the sovereignty of God, and developed a principle which was more objective and theological. Lutheranism was more the religion of a man who after a long and painful search had found salvation and who was content simply to bask in the sunshine of God’s presence, while Calvinism, not content to stop there, pressed on to ask how and why God had saved man.

“The Lutheran congregations,” says Froude, “were but half emancipated from superstition, and shrank from pressing the struggle to extremes; and half measures meant half-heartedness, convictions which were half convictions, and truth with an alloy of falsehood. Half measures, however, could not quench the bonfires of Philip of Spain or raise men in France or Scotland who would meet crest to crest the princes of the house of Lorraine. The Reformers required a position more sharply defined and a sterner leader, and that leader they found in John Calvin ... For hard times hard men are needed, and intellects which can pierce to the roots where truth and lies part company. It fares ill with the soldiers of religion when ‘the accursed thing’ is in the camp. And this is to be said of Calvin, that so far as the state of knowledge permitted, no eye could have detected more keenly the unsound spots in the creed of the Church, nor was there a Reformer in Europe so resolute to exercise, tear out and destroy what was distinctly seen to be false — so

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resolute to establish what was true in its place, and make truth, to the last fibre of it, the rule of practical life.”¹

This is the testimony of the famous historian from Oxford University. Froude’s writings make it plain that he had no particular love for Calvinism; and in fact he is often called a critic of Calvinism. These words just quoted simply express the impartial conclusions of a great scholar who looks at the system and the man whose name it bears from the vantage ground of learned investigation.

In another connection Froude says: “The Calvinists have been called intolerant. Intolerance of an enemy who is trying to kill you seems to me a pardonable state of mind ... The Catholics chose to add to their already incredible creed a fresh article, that they were entitled to hang and burn those who differed from them; and in this quarrel the Calvinists, Bible in hand, appealed to the God of battles. They grew harsher, fiercer, —if you please, more fanatical. It was extremely natural that they should. They dwelt, as pious men are apt to dwell in suffering and sorrow, on the all-disposing power of Providence. Their burden grew lighter as they considered that God had so determined that they must bear it. But they attracted to their ranks almost every man in Western Europe that ‘hated a lie.’ They were crushed down, but they rose again. They were splintered and torn, but no power could bend or melt them. They abhorred as no body of men ever more abhorred all conscious mendacity, all impurity, all moral wrong of every kind so far as they could recognize it. Whatever exists at this moment in England and Scotland of conscious fear of doing evil is the remnant of the convictions which were branded by the Calvinists into the people’s hearts. Though they failed to destroy Romanism, though it survives and may survive long as an opinion, they drew its fangs; they forced it to abandon that detestable principle, that it was entitled to murder those who dissented from it. Nay, it may be said that by having shamed Romanism out of its practical corruption the Calvinists enabled it to revive.”²

At the time of the Reformation the Lutheran Church did not make such a complete break with the Catholic Church as did the Reformed. In fact some Lutherans point out with pride that Lutheranism was a “moderate Reformation.” While all protestants appealed to the Bible as a final authority, the tendency in Lutheranism was to keep as much of the old system as did not have to be thrown out, while the tendency in the Reformed Church was to throw out all that did not have to be kept. And in regard to the relationship which existed between the Church and the State, the Lutherans were content to allow the local princes great influence in the Church or even to allow them to determine the religion

¹ Froude, J. A. (1871). *Calvinism: An Address Delivered at St. Andrew’s* (p. 42). Bellingham, WA: Longmans, Green, and Co.

² *Calvinism*, p. 44.

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within their bounds—a tendency leading toward the establishment of a State Church—while the Reformed soon came to demand complete separation between Church and State.

As stated before, the Reformation was essentially a revival of Augustinianism. The early Lutheran and Reformed Churches held the same views in regard to Original Sin, Election, Efficacious Grace, Perseverance, etc. This, then, was the true Protestantism. “The principle of Absolute Predestination,” says Hastie, “was the very Hercules-might of the young Reformation, by which no less in Germany than elsewhere, it strangled the serpents of superstition and idolatry; and when it lost its energy in its first home, it still continued to be the very marrow and backbone of the faith in the Reformed Church, and the power that carried it victoriously through all its struggles and trials.”³ “It is a fact that speaks volumes for Calvinism,” says Rice, “that the most glorious revolution recorded in the history of the Church and of the world, since the days of the Apostles, was effected by the blessings of God upon its doctrines.”⁴ Needless to say, Arminianism as a system was unknown in Reformation times; and not until 1784, some 260 years later, was it championed by an organized church. As in the fifth century there had been two contending systems, known as Augustinianism and Pelagianism, with the later rise of the compromised system of Semi-Pelagianism, so at the Reformation there were two systems, Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, with the later rise of Arminianism, or what we might call Semi-Protestantism. In each case there were two strongly opposite systems with the subsequent rise of a compromised system.

3. CALVINISM IN ENGLAND

A glance at English history readily shows us that it was Calvinism which made Protestantism triumphant in that land. Many of the leading Protestants who fled to Geneva during the reign of Queen Mary afterward obtained high positions in the Church under Queen Elizabeth. Among them were the translators of the Geneva version of the Bible, which owes much to Calvin and Beza, and which continued to be the most popular English version till the middle of the seventeenth century when it was superseded by the King James version. The influence of Calvin is shown in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, especially in Article XVII which states the doctrine of Predestination. Cunningham has shown that all of the great theologians of the Established Church during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth were thorough-going predestinarians and that the Arminianism of Laud and his successors was a deviation from that original position.

³ *History of the Reformation*, p. 224.

⁴ *God Sovereign and Man Free*, p. 14.

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If we search for the true heroes of England, we shall find them in that noble body of English Calvinists whose insistence upon a purer form of worship and a purer life won for them the nickname, "Puritans," to whom Macaulay refers as "perhaps the most remarkable body of men which the world has ever produced." "That the English people became Protestant," says Bancroft, "is due to the Puritans." Smith tells us: "The significance of this fact is beyond computation. English Protestantism, with its open Bible, its spiritual and intellectual freedom, meant the Protestantism not only of the American colonies, but of the virile and multiplying race which for three centuries has been carrying the Anglo-Saxon language, religion, and institutions into all the world."⁵

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Cromwell, the great Calvinistic leader and commoner, planted himself upon the solid rock of Calvinism and called to himself soldiers who had planted themselves upon that same rock. The result was an army which for purity and heroism surpassed anything the world had ever seen. "It never found," says Macaulay, "either in the British Isles or on the Continent, an enemy who could stand its onset. In England, Scotland, Ireland, Flanders, the Puritan warriors, often surrounded by difficulties, sometimes contending against threefold odds, not only never failed to conquer, but never failed to destroy and break in pieces whatever force was opposed to them. They at length came to regard the day of battle as a day of certain triumph, and marched against the most renowned battalions of Europe with disdainful confidence. Even the banished Cavaliers felt an emotion of national pride when they saw a brigade of their countrymen, outnumbered by foes and abandoned by friends, drive before it in headlong rout the finest infantry of Spain, and force a passage into a counterscarp which had just been pronounced impregnable by the ablest of the marshals of France." And again, "That which chiefly distinguished the army of Cromwell from other armies, was the austere morality and the fear of God which pervaded the ranks. It is acknowledged by the most zealous Royalists that, in that singular camp, no oath was heard, no drunkenness or gambling was seen, and that, during the long dominion of soldiery, the property of the peaceable citizens and the honor of woman were held sacred. No servant girl complained of the rough gallantry of the redcoats. Not an ounce of plate was taken from the shops of the goldsmiths"⁶

Prof. John Fiske, who has been ranked as one of the two greatest American historians, says, "It is not too much to say that in the seventeenth century the entire political future of mankind was staked upon the questions that were at issue in England. Had it not been for the Puritans, political liberty would probably have disappeared from the world. If ever there were men who laid down their lives in the cause of all mankind, it was those

⁵ *The Creed of Presbyterians*, p. 72.

⁶ Macaulay, *History of England*, I., p. 119.

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grim old Ironsides, whose watch-words were texts of Holy Writ, whose battle-cries were hymns of praise.”⁷

When Protestant martyrs died in the valleys of Piedmont, and the papal autocrat sat on his throne in luxury, gathering his blood-stained garments around him, it was Cromwell, the Puritan, supported by a council and nation of the same persuasion, who wrote demanding that these persecutions cease.

On three different occasions Cromwell was offered, and was urged to accept, the Crown of England, but each time he refused. Doctrinally we find that the Puritans were the literal and lineal descendants of John Calvin; and they and they alone kept alive the precious spark of English liberty. In view of these facts no one can rashly deny the justice of Fiske’s conclusion that “It would be hard to over-rate the debt which mankind owes to John Calvin.”

McFetridge in his splendid little book, “*Calvinism in History*,” says, “If we ask again, Who brought the final great deliverance to English liberty? we are answered by history, The Illustrious Calvinist, William, Prince of Orange, who, as Macaulay says, found in the strong and sharp logic of the Geneva school something that suited his intellect and his temper; the keystone of whose religion was the doctrine of Predestination; and who, with his keen logical vision, declared that if he were to abandon the doctrine of Predestination he must abandon with it all his belief in a superintending Providence, and must become a mere Epicurean. And he was right, for Predestination and an overruling Providence are one and the same thing. If we accept the one, we are in consistency bound to accept the other,” (P. 52).

4. CALVINISM IN SCOTLAND

The best way to discover the practical fruits of a system of religion is to examine a people or a country in which for generations that system has held undisputed sway. In making such a test of Roman Catholicism we turn to some country like Spain, Italy, Colombia, or Mexico. There, in the religious and political life of the people, we see the effects of the system. Applying the same test to Calvinism we are able to point to one country in which Calvinism has long been practically the only religion, and that country is Scotland. McFetridge tells us that before Calvinism reached Scotland, “gross darkness covered the land and brooded like an eternal nightmare upon all the faculties of the people.”⁸ “When Calvinism reached the Scotch people,” says Smith, “they were vassals of the Romish

⁷ *The Beginnings of New England*, pp. 37, 51.

⁸ McFetridge, N.S. (1882). *Calvinism in History*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, p. 124.

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church, priest-ridden, ignorant, wretched, degraded in body, mind, and morals. Buckle describes them as 'filthy in their persons and in their homes,' 'poor and miserable,' 'excessively ignorant and exceedingly superstitious,'—'with superstition ingrained into their characters.' Marvelous was the transformation when the great doctrines learned by Knox from the Bible in Scotland and more thoroughly at Geneva while sitting at the feet of Calvin, flashed in upon their minds. It was like the sun arising at midnight ... Knox made Calvinism the religion of Scotland, and Calvinism made Scotland the moral standard for the world. It is certainly a significant fact that in that country where there is the most of Calvinism there should be the least of crime; that of all the people of the world today that nation which is confessedly the most moral is also the most thoroughly Calvinistic; that in that land where Calvinism has had supremest sway individual and national morality has reached its loftiest level."⁹ Says Carlyle, "This that Knox did for his nation we may really call a resurrection as from death." "John Knox," says Froude, "was the one man without whom Scotland as the modern world has known it, would have had no existence."

In a very real sense the Presbyterian Church of Scotland is the daughter of the Reformed Church of Geneva. The Reformation in Scotland, though coming some time later, was far more consistent and radical than in England, and it resulted in the establishment of a Calvinistic Presbyterianism in which Christ alone was recognized as the head of the Church.

It is, of course, an easy matter to pick out the one man who in the hands of Providence was the principal instrument in the reformation of Scotland. That man was John Knox. It was he who planted the germs of religious and civil liberty and who revolutionized society. To him the Scotch owe their national existence. "Knox was the greatest of Scotsmen, as Luther the greatest of Germans," says Philip Schaff.

"The hero of the Scotch Reformation," says Schaff, "though four years older than Calvin, sat humbly at his feet and became more Calvinistic than Calvin. John Knox spent the five years of his exile (1554–1559), during the reign of Bloody Mary, mostly at Geneva, and found there 'the most perfect school of Christ that ever was since the days of the Apostles.' After that model he led the Scotch people, with dauntless courage and energy, from mediæval semi-barbarism into the light of modern civilization, and acquired a name which, next to those of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, is the greatest in the history of the Protestant Reformation."¹⁰

⁹ *The Creed of Presbyterians*, pp. 98, 99.

¹⁰ *The Swiss Reformation*, II., p. 818.

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“No grander figure,” says Froude, “can be found in the entire history of the Reformation in this island than that of Knox.... The time has come when English history may do justice to one but for whom the Reformation would have been overthrown among ourselves; for the spirit which Knox created saved Scotland; and if Scotland had been Catholic again, neither the wisdom of Elizabeth’s ministers, nor the teaching of her bishops, nor her own chicaneries, would have preserved England from revolution. He was the voice which taught the peasant of the Lothians that he was a free man, the equal in the sight of God with the proudest peer or prelate that had trampled on his forefathers. He was the antagonist whom Mary Stuart could not soften nor Maitland deceive; he it was that raised the poor commons of his country into a stern and rugged people, who might be hard, narrow, superstitious and fanatical, but who nevertheless, were men whom neither king, noble nor priest could force again to submit to tyranny. And his reward has been the ingratitude of those who should most have done honor to his memory.”¹¹

The early Scotch reformed theology was based on the predestinarian principle. Knox had gotten his theology directly from Calvin in Geneva, and his chief theological work was his treatise on Predestination, which was a keen, forcible and unflinching polemic against loose views which were becoming widespread in England and elsewhere. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries topics such as predestination, election, reprobation, the extent and value of the atonement, the perseverance of the saints, were the absorbing interest of the Scotch peasantry. From that land those doctrines spread southward into parts of England and Ireland and across the Atlantic to the west. In a very real sense Scotland can be called the “Mother Country of modern Presbyterianism.”

5. CALVINISM IN FRANCE

France, too, at that time, was all aglow with the free, bounding, restless spirit of Calvinism. “In France the Calvinists were called Huguenots. The character of the Huguenots the world knows. Their moral purity and heroism, whether persecuted at home or exiled abroad, has been the wonder of both friend and foe.”¹² “Their history,” says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “is a standing marvel, illustrating the abiding power of strong religious conviction. The account of their endurance is amongst the most remarkable and heroic records of religious history.” The Huguenots made up the industrious artisan class of France and to be “honest as a Huguenot” became a proverb, denoting the highest degree of integrity.

On St. Bartholomew’s Day, Sunday, August 24, 1572, a great many Protestants were treacherously murdered in Paris, and for days thereafter the shocking scenes were

¹¹ *Hist. Eng.* X. 437.

¹² Smith, *The Creed of Presbyterians*, p. 83.

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repeated in different parts of France. The total number of those who lost their lives in the St. Bartholomew massacre has been variously estimated at from 10,000 to 50,000. Schaff estimates it at 30,000. These furious persecutions caused hundreds of thousands of the French Protestants to flee to Holland, Germany, England, and America. The loss to France was irreparable. Macaulay the English historian writes as follows of those who settled in England: "The humblest of the refugees were intellectually and morally above the average of the common people of any kingdom in Europe." The great historian Lecky, who himself was a cold-blooded rationalist, wrote: "The destruction of the Huguenots by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes was the destruction of the most solid, the most modest, the most virtuous, the most generally enlightened element in the French nation, and it prepared the way for the inevitable degradation of the national character, and the last serious bulwark was removed that might have broken the force of that torrent of skepticism and vice which, a century later, laid prostrate, in merited ruin, both the altar and the throne."¹³

"If you have read their history," says Warburton, "you must know how cruel and unjust were the persecutions instigated against them. The best blood of France deluged the battlefield, the brightest genius of France was suffered to lie neglected and starving in prison, and the noblest characters which France ever possessed were hunted like wild beasts of the forest, and slain with as little pity." And again, "In every respect they stood immeasurably superior to all the rest of their fellow-countrymen. The strict sobriety of their lives, the purity of their moral actions, their industrious habits, and their entire separation from the foul sensuality which corrupted the whole of the national life of France at this period, were always effectual means of betraying the principles which they held, and were so regarded by their enemies."¹⁴

The debauchery of the kings had descended through the aristocracy to the common people; religion had become a mass of corruption, consistent only with its cruelty; the monasteries had become breeding places of iniquity; celibacy had proved to be a foul fountain of unchastity and uncleanness; immorality, licentiousness, despotism and extortion in State and Church were indescribable; the forgiveness of sins could be purchased for money, and a shameful traffic in indulgences was carried on under the pope's sanction; some of the popes were monsters of iniquity; ignorance was appalling; education was confined to the clergy and the nobles; many even of the priests were unable to read or write; and society in general had fallen to pieces.

This is a one-sided, but not an exaggerated, description. It is true as far as it goes, and needs only to be supplemented by the brighter side, which was that many honest Roman

¹³ *Eng. Hist. Eighteenth Century*, I., pp. 264, 265.

¹⁴ *Calvinism*, pp. 84, 92.

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Catholics were earnestly working for reform from within the Church. The Church, however, was in an irreformable condition. Any change, if it was to come at all, had to come from without. Either there would be no reformation or it would be in opposition to Rome.

But gradually Protestant ideas were filtering into France from Germany. Calvin began his work in Paris and was soon recognized as one of the leaders of the new movement in France. His zeal aroused the opposition of Church authorities and it became necessary for him to flee for his life. And although Calvin never returned to France after his settlement in Geneva, he remained the leader of the French Reformation and was consulted at every step. He gave the Huguenots their creed and form of government. Throughout the following period it was, according to the unanimous testimony of history, the system of faith which we call Calvinism that inspired the French Protestants in their struggle with the papacy and its royal supporters.

What the Puritan was in England, the Covenanter was in Scotland, and the Huguenot was in France. That Calvinism developed the same type of men in each of these several countries is a most remarkable proof of its power in the formation of character.

So rapidly did Calvinism spread throughout France that Fisher in his *History of the Reformation* tells us that in 1561 the Calvinists numbered one-fourth of the entire population. McFetridge places the number even higher. "In less than half a century," says he, "this so-called harsh system of belief had penetrated every part of the land, and had gained to its standards almost one-half of the population and almost every great mind in the nation. So numerous and powerful had its adherents become that for a time it appeared as if the entire nation would be swept over to their views."¹ Smiles, in his "Huguenots in France," writes: "It is curious to speculate on the influence which the religion of Calvin, himself a Frenchman, might have exercised on the history of France, as well as on the individual character of the Frenchman, had the balance of forces carried the nation bodily over to Protestantism, as was very nearly the case, toward the end of the sixteenth century," (p. 100). Certainly the history of the nation would have been very different from that which it has been.

6. CALVINISM IN HOLLAND

In the struggle which freed the Netherlands from the dominating power of the Papacy and from the cruel yoke of Spain we have another glorious chapter in the history of Calvinism and humanity. The tortures of the Inquisition were applied here as in few other

¹ Calvinism in History, p. 144.

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places. The Duke of Alva boasted that within the short space of five years he had delivered 18,600 heretics to the executioner.

“The scaffold,” says Motley, “had its daily victims, but did not make a single convert ... There were men who dared and suffered as much as men can dare and suffer in this world, and for the noblest cause that can inspire humanity.” He pictures to us “the heroism with which men took each other by the hand and walked into the flames, or with which women sang a song of triumph while the grave-digger was shoveling the earth upon their living faces.” And in another place he says: “The number of Netherlanders who were burned, strangled, beheaded, or buried alive, in obedience to the edicts of Charles V., and for the offence of reading the Scriptures, of looking askance at a graven image, or ridiculing the actual presence of the body and blood of Christ in a wafer, have been placed as high as one hundred thousand by distinguished authorities, and have never been put at a lower mark than fifty thousand.”¹⁵ During that memorable struggle of eighty years, more Protestants were put to death for their conscientious belief by the Spaniards than Christians suffered martyrdom under the Roman Emperors in the first three centuries. Certainly in Holland history crowns Calvinism as the creed of martyrs, saints and heroes.

For nearly three generations Spain, the strongest nation in Europe at that time, labored to stamp out Protestantism and political liberty in these Calvinistic Netherlands, but failed. Because they sought to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience and not under the galling chains of a corrupt priesthood their country was invaded and the people were subjected to the cruelest tortures the Spaniards could invent. And if it be asked who effected the deliverance, the answer is, it was the Calvinistic Prince of Orange, known in history as William the Silent, together with those who held the same creed. Says Dr. Abraham Kuyper, “If the power of Satan at that time had not been broken by the heroism of the Calvinistic spirit, the history of the Netherlands, of Europe and of the world would have been as painfully sad and dark as now, thanks to Calvinism, it is bright and inspiring.”¹⁶

If the spirit of Calvinism had not arisen in Western Europe following the outbreak of the Reformation, the spirit of half-heartedness would have gained the day in England, Scotland and Holland. Protestantism in these countries could not have maintained itself; and, through the compromising measures of a Romanized Protestantism, Germany would in all probability have been again brought under the sway of the Roman Catholic Church. Had Protestantism failed in any one of these countries it is probable that the result would have been fatal in the others also, so intimately were their fortunes bound

¹⁵ *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, I., p. 114.

¹⁶ *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 44.

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together. In a very real sense the future destiny of nations was dependent on the outcome of that struggle in the Netherlands. Had Spain been victorious in the Netherlands, it is probable that the Catholic Church would have been so strengthened that it would have subdued Protestantism in England also. And, even as things were, it looked for a time as though England would be turned back to Romanism. In that case the development of America would automatically have been prevented and in all probability the whole American continent would have remained under the control of Spain.

Let us remember further that practically all of the martyrs in these various countries were Calvinists,—the Lutherans and Arminians being only a handful in comparison. As Professor Fruin justly remarks, “In Switzerland, in France, in the Netherlands, in Scotland and in England, and wherever Protestantism has had to establish itself at the point of the sword, it was Calvinism that gained the day.” However the fact is to be explained it is true that the Calvinists were the only fighting Protestants.

There is also one other service which Holland has rendered and which we must not overlook. The Pilgrims, after being driven out of England by religious persecutions and before their coming to America, went to Holland and there came into contact with a religious life which from the Calvinistic point of view was beneficial in the extreme. Their most important leaders were Clyfton, Robinson, and Brewster, three Cambridge University men, who form as noble and heroic trio as can be found in the history of any nation. They were staunch Calvinists holding all the fundamental views that the Reformer of Geneva had propounded. The American historian Bancroft is right when he simply calls the Pilgrim-fathers, “men of the same faith with Calvin.”

J. C. Monsma, in his book, *What Calvinism Has Done For America*, gives us the following summary of their life in Holland: “When the Pilgrims left Amsterdam for Leyden, the Rev. Clyfton, their chief leader, decided to stay where he was, and so the Rev. John Robinson, Clyfton’s chief assistant hitherto,” was elected leader, or pastor by the people. Robinson was a convinced Calvinist and opposed the teachings of Arminius whenever opportunity was afforded him. “We have the indisputable testimony of Edward Winslow, that Robinson, at the time when Arminianism was fast gaining ground in Holland, was asked by Polyander, Festus Homilus, and other Dutch theologians, to take part in the disputes with Episcopius, the new leader of the Arminians, which were daily held in the academy at Leyden. Robinson complied with their request and was soon looked upon as one of the greatest of Gomarian theologians. In 1624 the Pilgrim pastor wrote a masterful treatise, entitled, “A Defense of the Doctrine Propounded by the Synod of Dort, etc.’ As the Synod of Dordrecht, of international fame was characterized by a strict Calvinism in all its decisions, no more need be said of Robinson’s religious tendencies.

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“The Pilgrims were perfectly at one with the Reformed (Calvinistic) churches in the Netherlands and elsewhere. In his *Apology*, published in 1619, one year before the Pilgrims left Holland, Robinson wrote in a most solemn way, ‘We do profess before God and men that such is our accord, in case of religion, with the Dutch Reformed Churches, as that we are ready to subscribe to all and every article of faith in the same Church, as they are laid down in the Harmony of Confessions of Faith, published in that name.’ ” (p. 72, 73.)

7. CALVINISM IN AMERICA

When we come to study the influence of Calvinism as a political force in the history of the United States we come to one of the brightest pages of all Calvinistic history. Calvinism came to America in the Mayflower, and Bancroft, the greatest of American historians, pronounces the Pilgrim Fathers “Calvinists in their faith according to the straightest system.”¹⁷ John Endicott, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony; John Winthrop, the second governor of that Colony; Thomas Hooker, the founder of Connecticut; John Davenport, the founder of the New Haven Colony; and Roger Williams, the founder of the Rhode Island Colony, were all Calvinists. William Penn was a disciple of the Huguenots. It is estimated that of the 3,000,000 Americans at the time of the American Revolution, 900,000 were of Scotch or Scotch-Irish origin, 600,000 were Puritan English, and 400,000 were German or Dutch Reformed. In addition to this the Episcopalians had a Calvinistic confession in their Thirty-nine Articles; and many French Huguenots also had come to this western world. Thus we see that about two-thirds of the colonial population had been trained in the school of Calvin. Never in the world’s history had a nation been founded by such people as these. Furthermore these people came to America not primarily for commercial gain or advantage, but because of deep religious convictions. It seems that the religious persecutions in various European countries had been providentially used to select out the most progressive and enlightened people for the colonization of America. At any rate it is quite generally admitted that the English, Scotch, Germans, and Dutch have been the most masterful people of Europe. Let it be especially remembered that the Puritans, who formed the great bulk of the settlers in New England, brought with them a Calvinistic Protestantism, that they were truly devoted to the doctrines of the great Reformers, that they had an aversion for formalism and oppression whether in the Church or in the State, and that in New England Calvinism remained the ruling theology throughout the entire Colonial period.

With this background we shall not be surprised to find that the Presbyterians took a very prominent part in the American Revolution. Our own historian Bancroft says: “The

¹⁷ *Hist. U. S.*, I., p. 463.

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Revolution of 1776, so far as it was affected by religion, was a Presbyterian measure. It was the natural outgrowth of the principles which the Presbyterianism of the Old World planted in her sons, the English Puritans, the Scotch Covenanters, the French Huguenots, the Dutch Calvinists, and the Presbyterians of Ulster." So intense, universal, and aggressive were the Presbyterians in their zeal for liberty that the war was spoken of in England as "The Presbyterian Rebellion." An ardent colonial supporter of King George III wrote home: "I fix all the blame for these extraordinary proceedings upon the Presbyterians. They have been the chief and principal instruments in all these flaming measures. They always do and ever will act against government from that restless and turbulent anti-monarchical spirit which has always distinguished them everywhere."¹⁸ When the news of "these extraordinary proceedings" reached England, Prime Minister Horace Walpole said in Parliament, "Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson" (John Witherspoon, president of Princeton, signer of Declaration of Independence).

History is eloquent in declaring that American democracy was born of Christianity and that that Christianity was Calvinism. The great Revolutionary conflict which resulted in the formation of the American nation, was carried out mainly by Calvinists, many of whom had been trained in the rigidly Presbyterian College at Princeton, and this nation is their gift to all liberty loving people.

J. R. Sizoo tells us: "When Cornwallis was driven back to ultimate retreat and surrender at Yorktown, all of the colonels of the Colonial Army but one were Presbyterian elders. More than one-half of all the soldiers and officers of the American Army during the Revolution were Presbyterians."¹⁹

The testimony of Emilio Castelar, the famous Spanish statesman, orator and scholar, is interesting and valuable. Castelar had been professor of Philosophy in the University of Madrid before he entered politics, and he was made president of the republic which was set up by the Liberals in 1873. As a Roman Catholic he hated Calvin and Calvinism. Says he: "It was necessary for the republican movement that there should come a morality more austere than Luther's, the morality of Calvin, and a Church more democratic than the German, the Church of Geneva. The Anglo-Saxon democracy has for its lineage a book of a primitive society—the Bible. It is the product of a severe theology learned by the few Christian fugitives in the gloomy cities of Holland and Switzerland, where the

¹⁸ *Presbyterians and the Revolution*, p. 49.

¹⁹ *They Seek a Country*, J. G. Slosser, editor, p. 155.

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morose shade of Calvin still wanders ... And it remains serenely in its grandeur, forming the most dignified, most moral and most enlightened portion of the human race.”²⁰

Says Motley: “In England the seeds of liberty, wrapped up in Calvinism and hoarded through many trying years, were at last destined to float over land and sea, and to bear the largest harvests of temperate freedom for great commonwealths that were still unborn.”²¹ “The Calvinists founded the commonwealths of England, of Holland, and America.” And again, “To Calvinists more than to any other class of men, the political liberties of England, Holland and America are due.”²²

The testimony of another famous historian, the Frenchman Taine, who himself held no religious faith, is worthy of consideration. Concerning the Calvinists he said: “These men are the true heroes of England. They founded England, in spite of the corruption of the Stuarts, by the exercise of duty, by the practice of justice, by obstinate toil, by vindication of right, by resistance to oppression, by the conquest of liberty, by the repression of vice. They founded Scotland; they founded the United States; at this day they are, by their descendants, founding Australia and colonizing the world.”²³

In his book, *The Creed of Presbyterians*, E. W. Smith asks concerning the American colonists, “Where learned they those immortal principles of the rights of man, of human liberty, equality and self-government, on which they based their Republic, and which form today the distinctive glory of our American civilization? In the school of Calvin they learned them. There the modern world learned them. So history teaches,” (p. 121).

We shall now pass on to consider the influence which the Presbyterian Church as a Church exerted in the formation of the Republic. “The Presbyterian Church,” said Dr. W. H. Roberts in an address before the General Assembly, “was for three-quarters of a century the sole representative upon this continent of republican government as now organized in the nation.” And then he continues: “From 1706 to the opening of the revolutionary struggle the only body in existence which stood for our present national political organization was the General Synod of the American Presbyterian Church. It alone among ecclesiastical and political colonial organizations exercised authority, derived from the colonists themselves, over bodies of Americans scattered through all the colonies from New England to Georgia. The colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is to be remembered, while all dependent upon Great Britain, were independent of each other. Such a body as the Continental Congress did not exist

²⁰ *Harper’s Monthly*, June and July, 1872.

²¹ *The United Netherlands*, III., p. 121.

²² *The United Netherlands*, IV., pp. 548, 547.

²³ *English Literature*, II., p. 472.

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until 1774. The religious condition of the country was similar to the political. The Congregational Churches of New England had no connection with each other, and had no power apart from the civil government. The Episcopal Church was without organization in the colonies, was dependent for support and a ministry on the Established Church of England, and was filled with an intense loyalty to the British monarchy. The Reformed Dutch Church did not become an efficient and independent organization until 1771, and the German Reformed Church did not attain to that condition until 1793. The Baptist Churches were separate organizations, the Methodists were practically unknown, and the Quakers were non-combatants.”

Delegates met every year in the General Synod, and as Dr. Roberts tells us, the Church became “a bond of union and correspondence between large elements in the population of the divided colonies.” “Is it any wonder,” he continues, “that under its fostering influence the sentiments of true liberty, as well as the tenets of a sound gospel, were preached throughout the territory from Long Island to South Carolina, and that above all a feeling of unity between the Colonies began slowly but surely to assert itself? Too much emphasis cannot be laid, in connection with the origin of the nation, upon the influence of that ecclesiastical republic, which from 1706 to 1774 was the only representative on this continent of fully developed federal republican institutions. The United States of America owes much to that oldest of American Republics, the Presbyterian Church.”²⁴

It is, of course, not claimed that the Presbyterian Church was the only source from which sprang the principles upon which this republic is founded, but it is claimed that the principles found in the Westminster Standards were the chief basis for the republic, and that “The Presbyterian Church taught, practiced, and maintained in fulness, first in this land that form of government in accordance with which the Republic has been organized.” (Roberts).

The opening of the Revolutionary struggle found the Presbyterian ministers and churches lined up solidly on the side of the colonists, and Bancroft accredits them with having made the first bold move toward independence.²⁵ The synod which assembled in Philadelphia in 1775 was the first religious body to declare openly and publicly for a separation from England. It urged the people under its jurisdiction to leave nothing undone that would promote the end in view, and called upon them to pray for the Congress which was then in session.

The Episcopalian Church was then still united with the Church of England, and it opposed the Revolution. A considerable number of individuals within that Church,

²⁴ Address on, “The Westminster Standards and the Formation of the American Republic.”

²⁵ *Hist. U. S., X., p. 77.*

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however, labored earnestly for independence and gave of their wealth and influence to secure it. It is to be remembered also that the Commander-in-Chief of the American armies, “the father of our country,” was a member of her household. Washington himself attended, and ordered all of his men to attend the services of his chaplains, who were clergymen from the various churches. He gave forty thousand dollars to establish a Presbyterian College in his native state, which took his name in honor of the gift and became Washington College.

N. S. McFetridge has thrown light upon another major development of the Revolutionary period. For the sake of accuracy and completeness we shall take the privilege of quoting him rather extensively. “Another important factor in the independent movement,” says he, “was what is known as the ‘Mecklenburg Declaration,’ proclaimed by the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of North Carolina, May 20, 1775, more than a year before the Declaration (of Independence) of Congress. It was the fresh, hearty greeting of the Scotch-Irish to their struggling brethren in the North, and their bold challenge to the power of England. They had been keenly watching the progress of the contest between the colonies and the Crown, and when they heard of the address presented by the Congress to the King, declaring the colonies in actual rebellion, they deemed it time for patriots to speak. Accordingly, they called a representative body together in Charlotte, N. C. which by unanimous resolution declared the people free and independent, and that all laws and commissions from the king were henceforth null and void. In their Declaration were such resolutions as these: ‘We do hereby dissolve the political bands which have connected us with the mother-country, and hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British crown’ ... ‘We hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people; are, and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing association, under control of no power other than that of our God and the general government of Congress; to the maintenance of which we solemnly pledge to each other our mutual cooperation and our lives, our fortunes and our most sacred honor.’ ... That assembly was composed of twenty-seven staunch Calvinists, just one-third of whom were ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church, including the president and secretary; and one was a Presbyterian clergyman. The man who drew up that famous and important document was the secretary, Ephraim Brevard, a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church and a graduate of Princeton College. Bancroft says of it that it was, ‘in effect, a declaration as well as a complete system of government.’ (*U. S. Hist.* VIII, 40). It was sent by special messenger to the Congress in Philadelphia, and was published in the Cape Fear Mercury, and was widely distributed throughout the land. Of course it was speedily transmitted to England, where it became the cause of intense excitement.

“The identity of sentiment and similarity of expression in this Declaration and the great Declaration written by Jefferson could not escape the eye of the historian; hence Tucker,

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in his Life of Jefferson, says: 'Everyone must be persuaded that one of these papers must have been borrowed from the other.' But it is certain that Brevard could not have 'borrowed' from Jefferson, for he wrote more than a year before Jefferson; hence Jefferson, according to his biographer, must have 'borrowed' from Brevard. But it was a happy plagiarism, for which the world will freely forgive him. In correcting his first draft of the Declaration it can be seen, in at least a few places, that Jefferson has erased the original words and inserted those which are first found in the Mecklenberg Declaration. No one can doubt that Jefferson had Brevard's resolutions before him when he was writing his immortal Declaration."²⁶

This striking similarity between the principles set forth in the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church and those set forth in the Constitution of the United States has caused much comment. "When the fathers of our Republic sat down to frame a system of representative and popular government," says Dr. E. W. Smith, "their task was not so difficult as some have imagined. They had a model to work by."²⁷

"If the average American citizen were asked, who was the founder of America, the true author of our great Republic, he might be puzzled to answer. We can imagine his amazement at hearing the answer given to this question by the famous German historian, Ranke, one of the profoundest scholars of modern times. Says Ranke, 'John Calvin was the virtual founder of America.'"²⁸

D'Aubigne, whose history of the Reformation is a classic, writes: "Calvin was the founder of the greatest of republics. The Pilgrims who left their country in the reign of James I, and landing on the barren soil of New England, founded populous and mighty colonies, were his sons, his direct and legitimate sons; and that American nation which we have seen growing so rapidly boasts as its father the humble Reformer on the shore of Lake Leman."²⁹

Dr. E. W. Smith says, "These revolutionary principles of republican liberty and self-government, taught and embodied in the system of Calvin, were brought to America, and in this new land where they have borne so mighty a harvest were planted, by whose hands?—the hands of the Calvinists. The vital relation of Calvin and Calvinism to the founding of the free institutions of America, however strange in some ears the statement

²⁶ *Calvinism in History*, pp. 85–88.

²⁷ *The Creed of Presbyterians*, p. 142.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 119.

²⁹ *Reformation in the Time of Calvin*, I, p. 5.

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of Ranke may have sounded, is recognized and affirmed by historians of all lands and creeds.”³⁰

All this has been thoroughly understood and candidly acknowledged by such penetrating and philosophic historians as Bancroft, who far though he was from being Calvinistic in his own personal convictions, simply calls Calvin “the father of America.” and adds: “He who will not honor the memory and respect the influence of Calvin knows but little of the origin of American liberty.”

When we remember that two-thirds of the population at the time of the Revolution had been trained in the school of Calvin, and when we remember how unitedly and enthusiastically the Calvinists labored for the cause of independence, we readily see how true are the above testimonies.

There were practically no Methodists in America at the time of the Revolution; and, in fact, the Methodist Church was not officially organized as such in England until the year 1784, which was three years after the American Revolution closed. John Wesley, great and good man though he was, was a Tory and a believer in political non-resistance. He wrote against the American “rebellion,” but accepted the providential result. McFetridge tells us: “The Methodists had hardly a foothold in the colonies when the war began. In 1773 they claimed about one hundred and sixty members. Their ministers were almost all, if not all, from England, and were staunch supporters of the Crown against American Independence. Hence, when the war broke out they were compelled to fly from the country. Their political views were naturally in accord with those of their great leader, John Wesley, who wielded all the power of his eloquence and influence against the independence of the colonies. (Bancroft, *Hist. U. S.*, Vol. VII, p. 261.) He did not foresee that independent America was to be the field on which his noble Church was to reap her largest harvests, and that in that Declaration which he so earnestly opposed lay the security of the liberties of his followers.”³¹

In England and America the great struggles for civil and religious liberty were nursed in Calvinism, inspired by Calvinism, and carried out largely by men who were Calvinists. And because the majority of historians have never made a serious study of Calvinism they have never been able to give us a truthful and complete account of what it has done in these countries. Only the light of historical investigation is needed to show us how our forefathers believed in it and were controlled by it. We live in a day when the services of the Calvinists in the founding of this country have been largely forgotten, and one can hardly treat of this subject without appearing to be a mere eulogizer of Calvinism. We

³⁰ *The Creed of Presbyterians*, p. 132.

³¹ *Calvinism in History*, p. 74.

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may well do honor to that Creed which has borne such sweet fruits and to which America owes so much.

8. CALVINISM AND REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

While religious and civil liberty have no organic connection, they nevertheless have a very strong affinity for each other; and where one is lacking the other will not long endure. History is eloquent in declaring that on a people's religion ever depends their freedom or their bondage. It is a matter of supreme importance what doctrines they believe, what principles they adopt: for these must serve as the basis upon which the superstructure of their lives and their government rests. Calvinism was revolutionary. It taught the natural equality of men, and its essential tendency was to destroy all distinctions of rank and all claims to superiority which rested upon wealth or vested privilege. The liberty-loving soul of the Calvinist has made him a crusader against those artificial distinctions which raise some men above others.

Politically, Calvinism has been the chief source of modern republican government. Calvinism and republicanism are related to each other as cause and effect; and where a people are possessed of the former, the latter will soon be developed. Calvin himself held that the Church, under God, was a spiritual republic; and certainly he was a republican in theory. James I was well aware of the effects of Calvinism when he said: "Presbytery agreeth as well with the monarchy as God with the Devil." Bancroft speaks of "the political character of Calvinism, which with one consent and with instinctive judgment the monarchs of that day feared as republicanism." Another American historian, John Fiske, has written, "It would be hard to overrate the debt which mankind owes to Calvin. The spiritual father of Coligny, of William the Silent, and of Cromwell, must occupy a foremost rank among the champions of modern democracy.... The promulgation of this theology was one of the longest steps that mankind has ever taken toward personal freedom."³² Emilio Castelar, the leader of the Spanish Liberals, says that "Anglo-Saxon democracy is the product of a severe theology, learned in the cities of Holland and Switzerland." Buckle, in his *History of Civilization* says, "Calvinism is essentially democratic," (I, 669). And de Tocqueville, an able political writer, calls it "A democratic and republican religion."³³

The system not only imbued its converts with the spirit of liberty, but it gave them practical training in the rights and duties as freemen. Each congregation was left to elect its own officers and to conduct its own affairs. Fiske pronounces it, "one of the most

³² *Beginnings of New England*, p. 58.

³³ *Democracy*, I., p. 384.

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effective schools that has ever existed for training men in local self-government.”³⁴ Spiritual freedom is the source and strength of all other freedom, and it need cause no surprise when we are told that the principles which governed them in ecclesiastical affairs gave shape to their political views. Instinctively they preferred a representative government and stubbornly resisted all unjust rulers. After religious despotism is overthrown, civil despotism cannot long continue.

We may say that the spiritual republic which was founded by Calvin rests upon four basic principles. These have been summed up by an eminent English statesman and jurist, Sir James Stephen, as follows: “These principles were, firstly that the will of the people was the one legitimate source of the power of the rulers; secondly, that the power was most properly delegated by the people, to their rulers, by means of elections, in which every adult man might exercise the right of suffrage; thirdly, that in ecclesiastical government, the clergy and laity were entitled to an equal and co-ordinate authority; and fourthly that between the Church and State, no alliance, or mutual dependence, or other definite relation, necessarily or properly existed.”³⁵

The principle of the sovereignty of God when applied to the affairs of government proved to be very important. God as the supreme Ruler, was vested with sovereignty; and whatever sovereignty was found in man had been graciously granted to him. The scriptures were taken as the final authority, as containing eternal principles which were regulative for all ages and on all peoples. In the following words the Scriptures declared the State to be a divinely established institution: “Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God; and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldst thou have no fear of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise for the same: for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God’s service, attending continually upon this very thing. Render to all their dues; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor,” Romans 13:1–7.

No one type of government, however, whether democracy, republic, or monarchy, was thought to be divinely ordained for any certain age or people, although Calvinism showed a preference for the republican type. “Whatever the system of government,” says

³⁴ *The Beginnings of New England*, p. 59.

³⁵ *Lectures on the History of France*, p. 415.

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Meeter, “be it monarchy or democracy or any other form, in each case the ruler (or rulers) was to act as God’s representative, and to administer the affairs of government in accordance with God’s law. The fundamental principle supplied at the same time the very highest incentive for the preservation of law and order among its citizens. Subjects were for God’s sake to render obedience to the higher powers, whichever these might be. Hence Calvinism made for highly stabilized governments.

“On the other hand this very principle of the sovereignty of God operated as a mighty defense of the liberties of the subject citizens against tyrannical rulers. Whenever sovereigns ignored the Will of God, trampled upon the rights of the governed and became tyrannical, it became the privilege and the duty of the subjects, in view of the higher responsibility of the supreme Sovereign, God, to refuse obedience and even, if necessary, to depose the tyrant, through the lesser authorities appointed by God for the defense of the rights of the governed.”³⁶

The Calvinistic ideas concerning governments and rulers have been ably expressed by J. C. Monsma in the following lucid paragraph: “Governments are instituted by God through the instrumentality of the people. No kaiser or president has any power inherent in himself; whatever power he possesses, whatever sovereignty he exercises, is power and sovereignty derived from the great Source above. No might, but right, and right springing from the eternal Fountain of justice. For the Calvinist it is extremely easy to respect the laws and ordinances of the government. If the government were nothing but a group of men, bound to carry out the wishes of a popular majority, his freedom-loving soul would rebel. But now, to his mind, and according to his fixed belief,—back of the government stands God, and before Him he kneels in deepest reverence. Here also lies the fundamental reason for that profound and almost fanatical love of freedom, also the political freedom, which has always been a characteristic of the genuine Calvinist. The government is God’s servant. That means that AS MEN all government officials stand on an equal footing with their subordinates; have no claim to superiority in any sense whatever.... For exactly the same reason the Calvinist gives preference to a republican form of government over any other type. In no other form of government does the sovereignty of God, the derivative character of government powers and the equality of men as men, find a clearer and more eloquent expression.”³⁷

The theology of the Calvinist exalted one Sovereign and humbled all other sovereigns before His awful majesty. The divine right of kings and the infallible decrees of popes could not long endure amid a people who place sovereignty in God alone. But while this theology infinitely exalted God as the Almighty Ruler of heaven and earth and humbled

³⁶ *The Fundamental Principles of Calvinism*, H. H. Meeter, p. 92.

³⁷ *What Calvinism Has Done for America*, p. 6.

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all men before Him, it enhanced the dignity of the individual and taught him that all men as men were equal. The Calvinist feared God; and fearing God he feared nobody else. Knowing himself to have been chosen in the counsels of eternity and marked for the glories of heaven, he possessed something which dissipated the feeling of personal homage for men and which dulled the lustre of all earthly grandeur. If a proud aristocracy traced its lineage through generations of highborn ancestry, the Calvinists, with a loftier pride, invaded the invisible world, and from the book of life brought down the record of the noblest enfranchisement, decreed from eternity by the King of kings. By a higher than any earthly lineage they were heaven's noblemen because God's sons and priests, joint heirs with Christ, kings and priests unto God, by a divine anointing and consecration. Put the truth of the sovereignty of God into a man's mind and heart, and you put iron in his blood. The Reformed Faith has rendered a most valuable service in teaching the individual his rights.

In striking contrast with these democratic and republican tendencies which are found to be inherent in the Reformed Faith we find that Arminianism has a very pronounced aristocratic tendency. In the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches the elder votes in Presbytery or Synod or General Assembly on full equality with his pastor; but in Arminian churches the power is largely in the hands of the clergy, and the laymen have very little real authority. Episcopacy stresses rule by the hierarchy. Arminianism and Roman Catholicism (which is practically Arminian) thrive under a monarchy, but there Calvinism finds its life cramped. On the other hand Romanism especially does not thrive in a republic, but there Calvinism finds itself most at home. An aristocratic form of church government tends toward monarchy in civil affairs, while a republican form of church government tends toward democracy in civil affairs. Says McFetridge, "Arminianism is unfavorable to civil liberty, and Calvinism is unfavorable to despotism. The despotic rulers of former days were not slow to observe the correctness of these propositions, and, claiming the divine right of kings, feared Calvinism as republicanism itself."³⁸

9. CALVINISM AND EDUCATION

Again, history bears very clear testimony that Calvinism and education have been intimately associated. Wherever Calvinism has gone it has carried the school with it and has given a powerful impulse to popular education. It is a system which demands intellectual manhood. In fact, we may say that its very existence is tied up with the education of the people. Mental training is required to master the system and to trace out all that it involves. It makes the strongest possible appeal to the human reason and insists that man must love God not only with his whole heart but also with his whole mind.

³⁸ *Calvinism in History*, p. 21.

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Calvin held that “a true faith must be an intelligent faith”; and experience has shown that piety without learning is in the long run about as dangerous as learning without piety. He saw clearly that the acceptance and diffusion of his scheme of doctrine was dependent not only upon the training of the men who were to expound it, but also upon the intelligence of the great masses of humanity who were to accept it. Calvin crowned his work in Geneva in the establishment of the Academy. Thousands of pilgrim pupils from Continental Europe and from the British Isles sat at his feet and then carried his doctrines into every corner of Christendom. Knox returned from Geneva fully convinced that the education of the masses was the strongest bulwark of Protestantism and the surest foundation of the State. “With Romanism goes the priest; with Calvinism goes the teacher,” is an old saying, the truthfulness of which will not be denied by anyone who has examined the facts.

This Calvinistic love for learning, putting mind above money, has inspired countless numbers of Calvinistic families in Scotland, in England, in Holland, and in America, to pinch themselves to the bone in order to educate their children. The famous dictum of Carlyle, “That any being with capacity for knowledge should die ignorant, this I call a tragedy,” expresses an idea which is Calvinistic to the core. Wherever Calvinism has gone, there knowledge and learning have been encouraged and there a sturdy race of thinkers has been trained. Calvinists have not been the builders of great cathedrals, but they have been the builders of schools, colleges, and universities. When the Puritans from England, the Covenanters from Scotland, and the Reformed from Holland and Germany, came to America they brought with them not only the Bible and the Westminster Confession but also the school. And that is why our American Calvinism never

“Dreads the skeptic’s puny hands,
While near her school the church spire stands,
Nor fears the blinded bigot’s rule,
While near her church spire stands a school.”

Our three American universities of greatest historical importance, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, were originally founded by Calvinists, as strong Calvinistic schools, designed to give students a sound basis in theology as well as in other branches of learning. Harvard, established in 1636, was intended primarily to be a training school for ministers, and more than half of its first graduating classes went into the ministry. Yale, sometimes referred to as “the mother of Colleges,” was for a considerable period a rigid Puritan institution. And Princeton, founded by the Scotch Presbyterians, had a thoroughly Calvinistic foundation.

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“We boast,” says Bancroft, “of our common schools; Calvin was the father of popular education—the inventor of the system of free schools.”³⁹ “Wherever Calvinism gained dominion,” he says again, “it invoked intelligence for the people and in every parish planted the common school.”⁴⁰

“Our boasted common-school system,” says Smith, “is indebted for its existence to that stream of influences which followed from the Geneva of Calvin, through Scotland and Holland to America; and, for the first two hundred years of our history almost every college and seminary of learning and almost every academy and common school was built and sustained by Calvinists.”⁴¹

The relationship which Calvinism bears to education has been well stated in the two following paragraphs by Prof. H. H. Meeter, of Calvin College: “Science and art were the gifts of God’s common grace, and were to be used and developed as such. Nature was looked upon as God’s handiwork, the embodiment of His ideas, in its pure form the reflection of His virtues. God was the unifying thought of all science, since all was the unfolding of His plan. But along with such theoretical reasons there are very practical reasons why the Calvinist has always been intensely interested in education, and why grade schools for children as well as schools of higher learning sprang up side by side with Calvinistic churches, and why Calvinists were in so large measure the vanguard of the modern universal education movement. These practical reasons are closely associated with their religion. The Roman Catholics might conveniently do without the education of the masses. For them the clergy—in distinction from the laity—were the ones who were to decide upon matters of church government and doctrine. Hence these interests did not require the training of the masses. For salvation, all that the layman needed was an implied faith in what the church believed. It was not necessary to be able to give an intelligent account of the tenets of his faith. At the services not the sermon but the sacrament was the important conveyor of the blessings of salvation, the sermon was less needed. And this sacrament again did not require intelligence, since it operated *ex opere operato*.

“For the Calvinist matters were just reversed. The government of the church was placed in the hands of the elders, laymen, and these had to decide upon the matters of church policy and the weighty matters of doctrine. Furthermore, the layman himself had the grave duty, without the intermediation of a sacerdotal order, to work out his own salvation, and could not suffice with an implied faith in what the church believed. He must read his Bible. He must know his creed. And it was a highly intellectual creed at

³⁹ *Miscellanies*, p. 406.

⁴⁰ *Hist. of U. S.*, II., p. 463.

⁴¹ *The Creed of Presbyterians*, p. 148.

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that. Even for the Lutheran, education of the masses was not as urgent as for the Calvinist. It is true, the Lutheran also placed every man before the personal responsibility to work out his own salvation. But the laity were in the Lutheran circles excluded from the office of church government and hence also from the duty of deciding upon matters of doctrine. From these considerations it is evident why the Calvinist must be a staunch advocate of education. If on the one hand God was to be owned as sovereign in the field of science, and if the Calvinist's very religious system required the education of the masses for its existence, it need not surprise us that the Calvinist pressed learning to the limit. Education is a question of to be or not to be for the Calvinist."⁴²

The traditionally high standards of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches for ministerial training are worthy of notice. While many other churches ordain men as ministers and missionaries and allow them to preach with very little education, the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches insist that the candidate for the ministry shall be a college graduate and that he shall have studied for at least two years under some approved professor of theology. (See *Form of Government*, Ch. XIV, sec. III & VI). As a result a larger proportion of these ministers have been capable of managing the affairs of the influential city churches. This may mean fewer ministers but it also means a better prepared and a better paid ministry.

10. JOHN CALVIN

John Calvin was born July 10, 1509, at Noyon, France, an ancient cathedral city about seventy miles northeast of Paris. His father, a man of rather hard and severe character, held the position as apostolic secretary to the bishop of Noyon, and was intimate with the best families of the neighborhood. His mother was noted for her beauty and piety, but died in his early youth.

He received the best education which France at that time could give, studying successively at the three leading universities of Orleans, Bourges, and Paris, from 1528 to 1533. His father intended to prepare him for the legal profession since that commonly raised those who followed it to positions of wealth and influence. But not feeling any particular calling to that field, young Calvin turned to the study of Theology and there found the sphere of labor for which he was particularly fitted by natural endowment and personal choice. He is described as having been of a shy and retiring nature, very studious and punctual in his work, animated by a strict sense of duty, and exceedingly religious. He early showed himself possessed of an intellect capable of clear, convincing argument and logical analysis. Through excessive industry he stored his mind with valuable information, but undermined his health. He advanced so rapidly that he was occasionally

⁴² *The Fundamental Principles of Calvinism*, p. 96–99.

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asked to take the place of the professors, and was considered by the other students as a doctor rather than an auditor. He was, at this time, a devout Catholic of unblemished character. A brilliant career as a humanist, or lawyer, or churchman, was opening before him when he was suddenly converted to Protestantism, and cast in his lot with the poor persecuted sect.

Without any intention on his part, and even against his own desire, Calvin became the head of the evangelical party in Paris in less than a year after his conversion. His depth of knowledge and earnestness of speech were such that no one could hear him without being forcibly impressed. For the present he remained in the Catholic Church, hoping to reform it from within rather than from without. Schaff reminds us that “all the Reformers were born, baptized, confirmed, and educated in the historic Catholic Church, which cast them out; as the Apostles were circumcised and trained in the Synagogue, which cast them out.”⁴³

The zeal and earnestness of the new Reformer did not long go unchallenged and it soon became necessary for Calvin to escape for his life. The following account of his flight from Paris is given by the Church historian, Philip Schaff: “Nicholas Cop, the son of a distinguished royal physician (William Cop of Basel), and a friend of Calvin was elected Rector of the University, Oct. 10, 1533, and delivered the usual inaugural oration on All Saints’ Day, Nov. 1, before a large assembly in the Church of the Mathurins. This oration, at the request of the new Rector, had been prepared by Calvin. It was a plea for a reformation on the basis of the New Testament, and a bold attack on the scholastic theologians of the day, who were represented as a set of sophists, ignorant of the Gospel.... The Sorbonne and the Parliament regarded this academic oration as a manifesto of war upon the Catholic Church, and condemned it to the flames. Cop was warned and fled to his relatives in Basel. (Three hundred crowns were offered for his capture, dead or alive.) Calvin, the real author of the mischief, is said to have descended from a window by means of sheets, and escaped from Paris in the garb of a vine-dresser with a hoe upon his shoulder. His rooms were searched and his books and papers were seized by the police.... Twenty-four innocent Protestants were burned alive in public places of the city from Nov. 10, 1534, till May 5, 1535.... Many more were fined, imprisoned, and tortured, and a considerable number, among them Calvin and Du Tillet, fled to Strassburg ... For nearly three years Calvin wandered as a fugitive evangelist under assumed names from place to place in southern France, Switzerland, and Italy, till he reached Geneva as his final destination.”⁴⁴

⁴³ *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 312.

⁴⁴ Schaff, *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 322.

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Shortly after, if not before, the first edition of his Institutes appeared, in March, 1536, Calvin and Louis Du Tillet crossed the Alps into Italy where the literary and artistic Renaissance had its origin. There he labored as an evangelist until the Inquisition began its work of crushing out both the Renaissance and the Reformation as two kindred serpents. He then bent his way, probably through Asota and over the Great St. Bernard, to Switzerland. From Basel he made a last visit to his native town of Noyon in order to make a final settlement of certain family affairs. Then, with his younger brother Antoine and his sister Marie, he left France forever, hoping to settle in Basel or Strassburg and to lead there the quiet life of a scholar and author. Owing to the fact that a state of war existed between Charles V. and Francis I., the direct route through Lorraine was closed, so he made a circuitous journey through Geneva.

Calvin intended to stop only a night in Geneva, but Providence had decreed otherwise. His presence was made known to Farel, the Genevan reformer, who instinctively felt that Calvin was the man to complete and save the Reformation in Geneva. A fine description of this meeting of Calvin and Farel is given by Schaff. Says he: "Farel at once called on Calvin and held him fast, as by divine command. Calvin protested, pleading his youth, his inexperience, his need of further study, his natural timidity and bashfulness, which unfitted him for public action. But all in vain. Farel, 'who burned of a marvelous zeal to advance the Gospel,' threatened him with the curse of Almighty God if he preferred his studies to the work of the Lord, and his own interest to the cause of Christ. Calvin was terrified and shaken by these words of the fearless evangelist, and felt 'as if God from on high had stretched out His hand.' He submitted, and accepted the call to the ministry, as teacher and pastor of the evangelical Church of Geneva."⁴⁵

Calvin was twenty-five years younger than Luther and Zwingli, and had the great advantage of building on the foundation which they had laid. The first ten years of Calvin's public career were contemporary with the last ten of Luther's although the two never met personally. Calvin was intimate with Melanchthon, however, and kept up a correspondence with him until his death.

At the time Calvin came upon the scene it had not yet been determined whether Luther was to be the hero of a great success or the victim of a great failure. Luther had produced new ideas; Calvin's work was to construct them into a system, to preserve and develop what had been so nobly begun. The Protestant movement lacked unity and was in danger of being sunk in the quicksand of doctrinal dispute, but was saved from that fate chiefly by the new impulse which was given to it by the Reformer in Geneva. The Catholic Church worked as one mighty unit and was seeking to stamp out, by fair means or foul,

⁴⁵ *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 348

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the different Protestant groups which had arisen in the North. Zwingli had seen this danger and had tried to unite the Protestants against their common foe. At Marburg, after pleadings and with tears in his eyes, he extended to Luther the hand of fellowship regardless of their difference of opinion as to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper; but Luther refused it under the restraint of a narrow dogmatic conscience. Calvin also, working in Switzerland with abundant opportunity to realize the closeness of the Italian Church, saw the need for union and labored to keep Protestantism together. To Cranmer, in England, he wrote, "I long for one holy communion of the members of Christ. As for me, if I can be of service, I would gladly cross ten seas in order to bring about this unity." His influence as exerted through his books, letters, and students, was powerfully felt throughout the various countries, and the statement that he saved the Protestant movement from destruction seems to be no exaggeration.

For thirty years Calvin's one absorbing interest was the advancement of the Reformation. Reed says, "He toiled for it to the utmost limit of his strength, fought for it with a courage that never quailed, suffered for it with a fortitude that never wavered, and was ready at any moment to die for it. He literally poured every drop of his life into it, unhesitatingly, unsparingly. History will be searched in vain to find a man who gave himself to one definite purpose with more unalterable persistence, and with more lavish self-abandon than Calvin gave himself to the Reformation of the 16th century."⁴⁶

Probably no servant of Christ since the days of the Apostles has been at the same time so much loved and hated, admired and abhorred, praised and blamed, blessed and cursed, as the faithful, fearless, and immortal Calvin. Living in a fiercely polemic age, and standing on the watch-tower of the reform movement in Western Europe, he was the observed of all observers, and was exposed to attacks from every quarter. Religious and sectarian passions are the deepest and strongest, and in view of the good and the bad which is known to exist in human nature in this world we need not be surprised at the reception given Calvin's teachings and writings.

When only twenty-six years of age Calvin published in Latin his "Institutes of the Christian Religion." The first edition contained in brief outline all the essential elements of his system, and, considering the youthfulness of the author, was a marvel of intellectual precocity. It was later enlarged to five times the size of the original and published in French, but never did he make any radical departure from any of the doctrines set forth in the first edition. Almost immediately the Institutes took first place as the best exhibition and defense of the Protestant cause. Other writings had dealt with certain phases of the movement but here was one that treated it as a unit. "The value of

⁴⁶ *Calvin Memorial Addresses*, p. 34.

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such a gift to the Reformation," says Reed, "cannot easily be exaggerated. Protestants and Romanists bore equal testimony to its worth. The one hailed it as the greatest boon; the other execrated it with the bitterest curses. It was burnt by order of the Sorbonne at Paris and other places, and everywhere it called forth the fiercest assaults of tongue and pen. Florimond de Raemond, a Roman Catholic theologian, calls it 'the Koran, the Talmud of heresy, the foremost cause of our downfall.' Kampachulte, another Roman Catholic, testifies that 'it was the common arsenal from which the opponents of the Old Church borrowed their keenest weapons,' and that 'no writing of the Reformation era was more feared by Roman Catholics, more zealously fought against, and more bitterly pursued than Calvin's Institutes.' Its popularity was evidenced by the fact that edition followed edition in quick succession; it was translated into most of the languages of western Europe; it became the common text-book in the schools of the Reformed Churches, and furnished the material out of which their creeds were made."⁴⁷

"Of all the services which Calvin rendered to humanity," says Dr. Warfield, "— and they were neither few nor small—the greatest was undoubtedly his gift to it afresh of this system of religious thought, quickened into new life by the forces of his genius."⁴⁸

The Institutes were at once greeted by the Protestants with enthusiastic praise as the clearest, strongest, most logical, and most convincing defense of Christian doctrines since the days of the Apostles. Schaff characterizes them well when he says that in them "Calvin gave a systematic exposition of the Christian religion in general, and a vindication of the evangelical faith in particular, with the apologetic and practical aim of defending the Protestant believers against calumny and persecution to which they were then exposed, especially in France."⁴⁹ The work is pervaded by an intense earnestness and by fearless and severe argumentation which properly subordinates reason and tradition to the supreme authority of the Scriptures. It is admittedly the greatest book of the century, and through it the Calvinistic principles were propagated on an immense scale. Albrecht Ritschl calls it "the masterpiece of Protestant theology." Dr. Warfield tells us that "after three centuries and a half it retains its unquestioned preëminence as the greatest and most influential of all dogmatic treatises." And again he says, "Even from the point of mere literature, it holds a position so supreme in its class that every one who would fain know the world's best books, must make himself familiar with it. What Thucydides is among Greek, or Gibbon among eighteenth-century English historians, what Plato is among philosophers, or the Iliad among epics, or Shakespeare among dramatists, that Calvin's 'Institutes' is among theological treatises."⁵⁰ It threw

⁴⁷ *Calvin Memorial Addresses*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Article, *The Theology of Calvin*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 330.

⁵⁰ *Calvin and Calvinism*, pp. 8, 374.

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consternation into the Roman Church and was a powerful unifying force among Protestants. It showed Calvin to be the ablest controversialist in Protestantism and as the most formidable antagonist with which the Romanists had to contend. In England the *Institutes* enjoyed an almost unrivaled popularity, and was used as a text book in the universities. It was soon translated into nine different European languages; and it is simply due to a serious lack in the majority of historical accounts that its importance has not been appreciated in recent years.

A few weeks after the publication of the *Institutes*, Bucer, who ranks third among the Reformers in Germany, wrote to Calvin: "It is evident that the Lord had elected you as His organ for the bestowment of the richest fulness of blessing to His Church." Luther wrote no systematic theology. Although his writings were voluminous, they were on scattered subjects and many of them deal with the practical problems of his day. It was thus left to Calvin to give a systematic exhibition of the evangelical faith.

Calvin was, first of all, a theologian. He and Augustine easily rank as the two outstanding systematic expounders of the Christian system since St. Paul. Melancthon, who was himself the prince of Lutheran theologians, and who, after the death of Luther, was recognized as the "Preceptor of Germany," called Calvin preëminently "the theologian."

If the language of the *Institutes* seems harsh in places we should remember that this was the mark and weakness of theological controversy in that age. The times in which Calvin lived were polemic. The Protestants were engaged in a life and death struggle with Rome and the provocations to impatience were numerous and grievous. Calvin, however, was surpassed by Luther in the use of harsh language as will readily be seen by an examination of the latter's work, *The Bondage of the Will*, which was a polemic written against the free-will ideas of Erasmus. And furthermore, none of the Protestant writings of the period were so harsh and abusive as were the Roman Catholic decrees of excommunication, anathemas, etc., which were directed against the Protestants.

In addition to the *Institutes*, Calvin wrote commentaries on nearly all of the books of both the Old and New Testaments. These commentaries in the English translation comprise fifty-five large volumes, and, taken in connection with his other works, are nothing less than marvelous. The quality of these writings was such that they soon took first place among exegetical works on the Scriptures; and among all the older commentators no one is more frequently quoted by the best modern scholars than is Calvin. He was beyond all

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question the greatest exegete of the Reformation period. As Luther was the prince of translators, so Calvin was the prince of commentators.*

Furthermore, in order to estimate the true value of Calvin's commentaries, it must be borne in mind that they were based on principles of exegesis which were rare in his day. "He led the way," says R. C. Reed, "in discarding the custom of allegorizing the Scriptures, a custom which had come down from the earliest centuries of Christianity and which had been sanctioned by the greatest names of the Church, from Origen to Luther, a custom which converts the Bible into a nose of wax, and makes a lively fancy the prime qualification of an exegete."⁵¹ Calvin adhered strictly to the spirit and letter of the author and assumed that the writer had one definite thought which was expressed in natural everyday language. He mercilessly exposed the corrupt doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. His writings inspired the friends of reform and furnished them with most of their deadly ammunition. We can hardly overestimate the influence of Calvin in furthering and safeguarding the Reformation.

Calvin was a master of patristic and scholastic learning. Having been educated in the leading universities of his time, he possessed a thorough knowledge of Latin and French, and a good knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. His principal commentaries appeared in both French and Latin versions and are works of great thoroughness. They are eminently fair and frank, and show the author to have been possessed of a singular balance and moderation in judgment. Calvin's works had a further effect in giving form and permanence to the then unstabilized French language in much the same way that Luther's translation of the Bible moulded the German language.

One other testimony which we should not omit is that of Arminius, the originator of the rival system. Certainly here we have testimony from an unbiased source. "Next to the study of the Scriptures," he says, "I exhort my pupils to pursue Calvin's commentaries, which I extol in loftier terms than Helmick himself (Helmick was a Dutch theologian); for I affirm that he excels beyond comparison in the interpretation of Scripture, and that his commentaries ought to be more highly valued than all that is handed down to us by the library of the fathers; so that I acknowledge him to have possessed above most others, as rather above all other men, what may be called an eminent gift of prophecy."⁵²

The influence of Calvin was further spread through a voluminous correspondence which he carried on with church leaders, princes, and nobles throughout Protestant

* A new edition of Calvin's Commentaries in English has recently been published (1948) by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids.

⁵¹ *Calvin Memorial Addresses*, p. 22.

⁵² Quoted by James Orr, *Calvin Memorial Addresses*, p. 92.

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Christendom. More than 300 of these letters are still preserved today, and as a rule they are not brief friendship exchanges but lengthy and carefully prepared treatises setting forth in a masterly way his views of perplexing ecclesiastical and theological questions. In this manner also his influence in guiding the Reformation throughout Europe was profound.

Due to an attempt of Calvin and Farel to enforce a too severe system of discipline in Geneva, it became necessary for them to leave the city temporarily. This was two years after Calvin's coming. Calvin went to Strassburg, in southwestern Germany, where he was warmly received by Bucer and the leading men of the German Reformation. There he spent the next three years in quiet and useful labors as professor, pastor, and author, and came into contact with Lutheranism at first hand. He had a great appreciation for the Luthern leaders and felt closely allied to the Lutheran Church, although he was unfavorably impressed with the lack of discipline and with the dependence of the clergy upon the secular rulers. He later followed the progress of the Reformation in Germany step by step with the warmest interest, as is shown in his correspondence and various writings. During his absence from Geneva affairs reached such a crisis that it seemed that the fruits of the Reformation would be lost and he was urgently requested to return. After repeated urgings from various sources he did so and took up the work where he had left off before.

The city of Geneva, located on the shores of a lake which bears the same name, was Calvin's home. There, among the snow-capped Alps, he spent most of his adult life, and from there the Reformed Church has spread out through Europe and America. In the affairs of the Church, as well as in the affairs of the State, the little country of Switzerland has exerted an influence far out of proportion to its size.

Calvin's influence in Geneva gives us a fair sample of the transforming power of his system. "The Genevese," says the eminent church historian, Philip Schaff, "were a light-hearted, joyous people, fond of public amusements, dancing, singing, masquerades, and revelries. Recklessness, gambling, drunkenness, adultery, blasphemy, and all sorts of vice abounded. Prostitution was sanctioned by the authority of the State, and superintended by a woman called the Reine de bordel. The people were ignorant. The priest had taken no pains to instruct them, and had set them a bad example." From a study of contemporary history we find that shortly before Calvin went to Geneva the monks and even the bishop were guilty of crimes which today are punishable with the death penalty. The result of Calvin's work in Geneva was that the city became more famed for the quiet, orderly lives of its citizens than it had previously been for their wickedness. John Knox, like thousands of others who came to sit as admiring students at Calvin's feet, found there

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what he termed “the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on the earth since the days of the Apostles.”

Through Calvin’s work Geneva became an asylum for the persecuted, and a training school for the Reformed Faith. Refugees from all the countries of Europe fled to this retreat, and from it they carried back with them the clearly taught principles of the Reformation. It thus acted as a center emanating spiritual power and educational forces which guided and moulded the Reformation in the surrounding countries. Says Bancroft, “More truly benevolent to the human race than Solon, more self-denying than Lycurgus, the genius of Calvin infused enduring elements into the institutions of Geneva and made it for the modern world the impregnable fortress of popular liberty, the fertile seed-plot of democracy.”⁵³

Witness as to the effectiveness of the influences which emanated from Geneva is found in one of the letters of the Roman Catholic Francis de Sales to the duke of Savoy, urging the suppression of Geneva as the capital of what the Romish Church calls heresy. “All the heretics,” said he, “respect Geneva as the asylum of their religion.... There is not a city in Europe which offers more facilities for the encouragement of heresy, for it is the gate of France, of Italy, and of Germany, so that one finds there people of all nations—Italians, French, Germans, Poles, Spaniards, English, and of countries still more remote. Besides, every one knows the great number of ministers bred there. Last year it furnished twenty to France. Even England obtains ministers from Geneva. What shall I say of its magnificent printing establishments, by means of which the city floods the world with its wicked books, and even goes the length of distributing them at the public expense?... All the enterprises undertaken against the Holy See and the Catholic princes have their beginnings at Geneva. No city in Europe receives more apostates of all grades, secular and regular. From thence I conclude that Geneva being destroyed would naturally lead to the dissipation of heresy.”⁵⁴

Another testimony is that of one of the most bitter foes of Protestantism, Philip II of Spain. He wrote to the king of France: “This city is the source of all mischief for France, the most formidable enemy of Rome. At any time, I am ready to assist with all the power of my realm in its overthrow.” And when the Duke of Alva was expected to pass near Geneva with his army, Pope Pius V asked him to turn aside and “destroy that nest of devils and apostates.”

The famous academy of Geneva was opened in 1558. With Calvin there were associated ten able and experienced professors who gave instruction in grammar, logic,

⁵³ *Miscellanies*, p. 406.

⁵⁴ *Vie de ste. Francois de Sales, par son neveu*, p. 20.

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mathematics, physics, music, and the ancient languages. The school was remarkably successful. During the first year more than nine hundred students, mostly refugees from the various European countries, were enrolled, and almost as many more attended his theological lectures preparing themselves to be evangelists and teachers in their native countries and to establish churches after the model which they had seen in Geneva. For more than two hundred years it remained the principal school of Reformed Theology and literary culture.

Calvin was the first of the Reformers to demand complete separation between Church and State, and thus he advanced another principle which has been of inestimable value. The German Reformation was decided by the will of the princes; the Swiss Reformation, by the will of the people; although in each case there was a sympathy between the rulers and the majority of the population. The Swiss Reformers, however, living in the republic at Geneva, developed a free Church in a free State, while Luther and Melancthon, with their native reverence for monarchical institutions and the German Empire, taught passive obedience in politics and brought the Church under bondage to the civil authority.

Calvin died in the year 1564, at the early age of fifty-five. Beza, his close friend and successor, describes his death as having come quietly as sleep, and then adds: "Thus withdrew into heaven, at the same time with the setting sun, that most brilliant luminary, which was the lamp of the Church. On the following night and day there was intense grief and lamentation in the whole city; for the Republic had lost its wisest citizen, the Church its faithful shepherd, and the Academy an incomparable teacher."

In a comparatively recent book Professor Harkness has written: "Calvin lived, and died, a poor man. His house was scantily furnished, and he dressed plainly. He gave freely to those in need, but he spent little upon himself. The Council at one time gave him an overcoat as an expression of their esteem, and as a needed protection against the winter's cold. This he accepted gratefully, but on other occasions he refused proffered financial assistance and declined to accept anything in addition to his modest salary. During his last illness the Council wished to pay for the medicines used but Calvin declined the gift, saying that he felt scruples about receiving even his ordinary salary when he could not serve. When he died, he left a spiritual inheritance of unestimated value and a material estate of from fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars."⁵⁵

Schaff describes Calvin as "one of those characters that command respect and admiration rather than affection, and forbid familiar approach, but gain upon closer acquaintance. The better he is known, the more he is admired and esteemed." And concerning his death Schaff says: "Calvin had expressly forbidden all pomp at his funeral and the erection of

⁵⁵ John Calvin, *The Man and His Ethics*, p. 54.

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any monument over his grave. He wished to be buried, like Moses, out of reach of idolatry. This was consistent, with his theology, which humbles man and exalts God.”⁵⁶ Even the spot of his grave in the cemetery at Geneva is unknown. A plain stone, with the initials “J. C.,” is pointed out to strangers as marking his resting-place, but it is not known on what authority. He himself requested that no monument should mark his grave. His real monument, however, says S. L. Morris, is “every republican government on earth, the public school system of all nations, and ‘The Reformed Churches throughout the world holding the Presbyterian System.’ ”

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And again Harkness, although not always a friendly writer, says this: “Those who see in Calvin only unfeeling sternness overlook the almost feminine gentleness which he displayed in many of his parish relationships. He grieved with his people in their sorrows and rejoiced in their joys. Some of his letters to those who had suffered domestic losses are masterpieces of tender sympathy. When a wedding occurred or a baby came to grace a home, he took a warm personal interest in the event. It was not unusual for him to stop on the street in the midst of weighty matters to give a school-boy a friendly pat and an encouraging word. His enemies might call him pope or king or caliph; his friends thought of him only as their brother and beloved leader.”⁵⁷ In one of his letters to a friend he wrote: “I shall soon come to visit you, and then we can have a good laugh together.”

We must now consider an event in the life of Calvin which to a certain extent has cast a shadow over his fair name and which has exposed him to the charge of intolerance and persecution. We refer to the death of Servetus which occurred in Geneva during the period of Calvin’s work there. That it was a mistake is admitted by all. History knows only one spotless being—the Savior of sinners. All others have marks of infirmity written which forbid idolatry.

Calvin has, however, often been criticized with undue severity as though the responsibility rested upon him alone, when as a matter of fact Servetus was given a court trial lasting over two months and was sentenced by the full session of the civil Council, and that in accordance with the laws which were then recognized throughout Christendom. And, far from urging that the sentence be made more severe, Calvin urged that the sword be substituted for the fire, but was overruled. Calvin and the men of his time are not to be judged strictly and solely by the advanced standards of our twentieth century, but must to a certain extent be considered in the light of their own sixteenth century. We have seen great developments in regard to civil and religious toleration, prison reform, abolition of slavery and the slave trade, feudalism, witch burning, improvement of the conditions of the poor, etc., which are the late but genuine results of

⁵⁶ *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 826.

⁵⁷ *John Calvin, The Man and His Ethics*, p. 55.

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Christian teachings. The error of those who advocated and practiced what would be considered intolerance today, was the general error of the age. It should not, in fairness, be permitted to give an unfavorable impression of their character and motives, and much less should it be allowed to prejudice us against their doctrines on other and more important subjects.

The Protestants had just thrown off the yoke of Rome and in their struggle to defend themselves they were often forced to fight intolerance with intolerance. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries public opinion in all European countries justified the right and duty of civil governments to protect and support orthodoxy and to punish heresy, holding that obstinate heretics and blasphemers should be made harmless by death if necessary. Protestants differed from Romanists mainly in their definition of heresy, and by greater moderation in its punishment. Heresy was considered a sin against society, and in some cases as worse than murder; for while murder only destroyed the body, heresy destroyed the soul. Today we have swung to the other extreme and public opinion manifests a latitudinarian indifference toward truth or error. During the eighteenth century the reign of intolerance was gradually undermined. Protestant England and Holland took the lead in extending civil and religious liberty, and the Constitution of the United States completed the theory by putting all Christian denominations on a parity before the law and guaranteeing them the full enjoyment of equal rights.

Calvin's course in regard to Servetus was fully approved by all the leading Reformers of the time. Melancthon, the theological head of the Lutheran Church, fully and repeatedly justified the course of Calvin and the Council of Geneva, and even held them up as models for imitation. Nearly a year after the death of Servetus he wrote to Calvin: "I have read your book, in which you clearly refuted the horrid blasphemies of Servetus.... To you the Church owes gratitude at the present moment, and will owe it to the latest posterity. I perfectly assent to your opinion. I affirm also that your magistrates did right in punishing, after regular trial, this blasphemous man." Bucer, who ranks third among the Reformers in Germany, Bullinger, the close friend and worthy successor of Zwingli, as well as Farel and Beza in Switzerland, supported Calvin. Luther and Zwingli were dead at this time and it may be questioned whether they would have approved this execution or not, although Luther and the theologians of Wittenberg had approved of death sentences for some Anabaptists in Germany whom they considered dangerous heretics,—adding that it was cruel to punish them, but more cruel to allow them to damn the ministry of the Word and destroy the kingdom of the world; and Zwingli had not objected to a death sentence against a group of six Anabaptists in Switzerland. Public opinion has undergone a great change in regard to this event, and the execution of

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Servetus which was fully approved by the best men in the sixteenth century is entirely out of harmony with our twentieth century ideas.

As stated before, the Roman Catholic Church in this period was desperately intolerant toward Protestants; and the Protestants, to a certain extent and in self-defense, were forced to follow their example. In regard to Catholic persecutions Philip Schaff writes as follows: “We need only refer to crusades against the Albigenses and Waldenses, which were sanctioned by Innocent III, one of the best and greatest of popes; the tortures and *autos-da-fé* of the Spanish Inquisition, which were celebrated with religious festivities; and fifty thousand or more Protestants who were executed during the reign of the Duke of Alva in the Netherlands (1567–1573); the several hundred martyrs who were burned in Smithfield under the reign of bloody Mary; and the repeated wholesale persecutions of the innocent Waldenses in France and Piedmont, which cried to heaven for vengeance. It is vain to shift the responsibility upon the civil government. Pope Gregory XIII commemorated the massacre of St. Bartholomew not only by a *Te Deum* in the churches of Rome, but more deliberately and permanently by a medal which represents ‘The Slaughter of the Huguenots’ by an angel of wrath.”⁵⁸

And then Dr. Schaff continues: “The Roman Church has lost the power, and to a large extent also the disposition, to persecute by fire and sword. Some of her highest dignitaries frankly disown the principle of persecution, especially in America, where they enjoy the full benefits of religious freedom. But the Roman curia has never officially disowned the theory on which the practice of persecution is based. On the contrary, several popes since the Reformation have indorsed it... Pope Pius IX., in the Syllabus of 1864, expressly condemned, among the errors of this age, the doctrine of religious toleration and liberty. And this pope has been declared to be officially infallible by the Vatican decree of 1870, which embraces all of his predecessors (notwithstanding the stubborn case of Honorius I) and all his successors in the chair of St. Peter,” (p. 669). And in another place Dr. Schaff adds, “If Romanists condemned Calvin, they did it from hatred of the man, and condemned him for following their own example even in this particular case.”

Servetus was a Spaniard and opposed Christianity, whether in its Roman Catholic or Protestant form. Schaff refers to him as “a restless fanatic, a pantheistic pseudo-reformer, and the most audacious and even blasphemous heretic of the sixteenth century.”⁵⁹ And in another instance Schaff declares that Servetus was “proud, defiant, quarrelsome, revengeful, irreverent in the use of language, deceitful, and mendacious”; and adds that he abused popery and the Reformers alike with unreasonable language.⁶⁰ Bullinger

⁵⁸ *History of the Swiss Reformation*, II., p. 698.

⁵⁹ *The Creeds of Christendom*, I., p. 464.

⁶⁰ *The Swiss Reformation*, II., p. 787.

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declares that if Satan himself should come out of hell, he could use no more blasphemous language against the Trinity than this Spaniard. The Roman Catholic Bolsec, in his work on Calvin, calls Servetus “a very arrogant and insolent man,” “a monstrous heretic,” who deserved to be exterminated.

Servetus had fled to Geneva from Vienne, France; and while the trial at Geneva was in progress the Council received a message from the Catholic judges in Vienne together with a copy of the sentence of death which had been passed against him there, asking that he be sent back in order that the sentence might be executed on him as it had already been executed on his effigy and books. This request the Council refused but promised to do full justice. Servetus himself preferred to be tried in Geneva, since he could see only a burning funeral pyre for himself in Vienne. The communication from Vienne probably made the Council in Geneva more zealous for orthodoxy since they did not wish to be behind the Roman Church in that respect.

Before going to Geneva Servetus had urged himself upon the attention of Calvin through a long series of letters. For a time Calvin replied to these in considerable detail, but finding no satisfactory results were being accomplished he ceased. Servetus, however, continued writing and his letters took on a more arrogant and even insulting tone. He regarded Calvin as the pope of orthodox Protestantism, whom he was determined to convert or overthrow. At the time Servetus came to Geneva the Libertine party, which was in opposition to Calvin, was in control of the city Council. Servetus apparently planned to join this party and thus drive Calvin out. Calvin apparently sensed this danger and was in no mood to permit Servetus to propagate his errors in Geneva. Hence he considered it his duty to make so dangerous a man harmless, and determined to bring him either to recantation or to deserved punishment. Servetus was promptly arrested and brought to trial. Calvin conducted the theological part of the trial and Servetus was convicted of fundamental heresy, falsehood and blasphemy. During the long trial Servetus became emboldened and attempted to overwhelm Calvin by pouring upon him the coarsest kind of abuse.¹ The outcome of the trial was left to the civil court, which pronounced the sentence of death by fire. Calvin made an ineffectual plea that the sword be substituted for the fire; hence the final responsibility for the burning rests with the Council.

Dr. Emilé Doumergue, the author of *Jean Calvin*, which is beyond comparison the most exhaustive and authoritative work ever published on Calvin, has the following to say about the death of Servetus: “Calvin had Servetus arrested when he came to Geneva, and appeared as his accuser. He wanted him to be condemned to death, but not to death by burning. On August 20, 1553, Calvin wrote to Farel: ‘I hope that Servetus will be

¹ See Schaff, *The Swiss Reformation*, II., p. 778.

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condemned to death, but I desire that he should be spared the cruelty of the punishment'—he means that of fire. Farel replied to him on September 8th: 'I do not greatly approve that tenderness of heart,' and he goes on to warn him to be careful that 'in wishing that the cruelty of the punishment of Servetus be mitigated, thou art acting as a friend towards a man who is thy greatest enemy. But I pray thee to conduct thyself in such a manner that, in future, no one will have the boldness to publish such doctrines, and to give trouble with impunity for so long a time as this man has done.'

"Calvin did not, on this account, modify his own opinion, but he could not make it prevail. On October 26th he wrote again to Farel: 'Tomorrow Servetus will be led out to execution. We have done our best to change the kind of death, but in vain. I shall tell thee when we meet why we had no success.' (*Opera*, XIV, pp. 590, 613–657).

"Thus, what Calvin is most of all reproached with—the burning of Servetus—Calvin was quite opposed to. He is not responsible for it. He did what he could to save Servetus from mounting the pyre. But, what reprimands, more or less eloquent, has this pyre with its flames and smoke given rise to, made room for! The fact is that without the pyre the death of Servetus would have passed almost unnoticed."

Doumèrgue goes on to tell us that the death of Servetus was "the error of the time, an error for which Calvin was not particularly responsible. The sentence of condemnation to death was pronounced only after consultation with the Swiss Churches, several of which were far from being on good terms with Calvin (but all of which gave their consent)... Besides, the judgment was pronounced by a Council in which the inveterate enemies of Calvin, the free thinkers, were in the majority."⁶¹

That Calvin himself rejected the responsibility is clear from his later writings. "From the time that Servetus was convicted of his heresy," said he, "I have not uttered a word about his punishment, as all honest men will bear witness."⁶² And in one of his later replies to an attack which had been made upon him, he says: "For what particular act of mine you accuse me of cruelty I am anxious to know. I myself know not that act, unless it be with reference to the death of your great master, Servetus. But that I myself earnestly entreated that he might not be put to death his judges themselves are witnesses, in the number of whom at that time two were his staunch favorites and defenders."⁶³

Before the arrest of Servetus and during the earlier stages of the trial Calvin advocated the death penalty, basing his argument mainly on the Mosaic law, which was, "He that

⁶¹ Doumèrgue, Article. "What Ought to be Known About Calvin," in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, Jan. 1929.

⁶² *Opera*, VIII., p. 461.

⁶³ *Calvin's Calvinism*, p. 346.

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blasphemeth the name of Jehovah, he shall surely be put to death,” Lev. 24:16—a law which Calvin considered as binding as the decalogue and applicable to heresy as well. Yet he left the passing of sentence wholly to the civil council. He considered Servetus the greatest enemy of the Reformation and honestly believed it to be the right and duty of the State to punish those who offended against the Church. He also felt himself providentially called to purify the Church of all corruptions, and to his dying day he never changed his views nor regretted his conduct toward Servetus.

Dr. Abraham Kuyper, the statesman-theologian from Holland, in speaking to an American audience not many years ago expressed some thoughts in this connection which are worth repeating. Said he: “The duty of the government to extirpate every form of false religion and idolatry was not a find of Calvinism, but dates from Constantine the Great and was the reaction against the horrible persecutions which his pagan predecessors on the Imperial throne had inflicted upon the sect of the Nazarene. Since that day this system had been defended by all Romish theologians and applied by all Christian princes. In the time of Luther and Calvin, it was a universal conviction that that system was the true one. Every famous theologian of the period, Melancton first of all, approved of the death by fire of Servetus; and the scaffold, which was erected by the Lutherans, at Leipzig for Kreel, the thorough Calvinist, was infinitely more reprehensible when looked at from a Protestant standpoint.

“But whilst the Calvinists, in the age of the Reformation, yielded up themselves as martyrs, by tens of thousands, to the scaffold and the stake (those of the Lutherans and Roman Catholics being hardly worth counting), history has been guilty of the great and far-reaching unfairness of ever casting in their teeth this one execution by fire of Servetus as a *crimen nefandum*.

“Notwithstanding all this I not only deplore that one stake, but I unconditionally disapprove of it; yet not as if it were the expression of a special characteristic of Calvinism, but on the contrary as the fatal after-effect of a system, grey with age, which Calvinism found in existence, under which it had grown up, and from which it had not yet been able entirely to liberate itself.”⁶⁴

Hence when we view this affair in the light of the sixteenth century and consider these different aspects of the case,—namely, the approval of the other reformers, a public opinion which abhorred toleration as involving indifference to truth and which justified the death penalty for obstinate heresy and blasphemy, the sentence also passed on Servetus by the Roman Catholic authorities, the character of Servetus and his attitude toward Calvin, his going to Geneva for the purpose of causing trouble, the passing of

⁶⁴ *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 129.

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sentence by a civil court not under Calvin's control, and Calvin's appeal for a lighter form of punishment,—we come to the conclusion that there were numerous extenuating circumstances, and that whatever else may be said Calvin himself acted from a strict sense of duty. View him from any angle you please; paint him as Cromwell asked himself to be painted—"warts and all"—and, as Schaff has said, "He improves upon acquaintance." He was, beyond all question, a man sent from God, a world shaker, such as appears only a few times in the history of the world.

11. CONCLUSION

We have now examined the Calvinistic system in considerable detail, and have seen its influence in the Church, in the State, in society, and in education. We have also considered the objections which are commonly brought against it, and have considered the practical importance of the system. It now remains for us to make a few general observations in regard to the system as a whole.

A sure test of the character of individuals or of systems is found in Christ's own words: "By their fruits ye shall know them." By that test Calvinists and Calvinism will gladly be judged. The lives and the influences of those who have held the Reformed Faith is one of the best and most conclusive arguments in its favor. Smith refers to "that divinely vital and exuberant Calvinism, the creator of the modern world, the mother of heroes, saints and martyrs in number without number, which history, judging the tree by its fruits, crowns as the greatest creed of Christendom."⁶⁵ The impartial verdict of history is that as a character builder and as a proclaimer of liberty to men and nations Calvinism stands supreme among all the religious systems of the world. In calling the roll of the great men of our own country the number of Presbyterian presidents, legislators, jurists, authors, editors, teachers and business men is vastly disproportionate to the membership of the Church. Every impartial historian will admit that it was the Protestant revolt against Rome which gave the modern world its first taste of genuine religious and civil liberty, and that the nations which have achieved and enjoyed the greatest freedom have been those which were most fully brought under the influence of Calvinism. Furthermore that great life-giving stream of religious and civil liberty has been made by Calvinism to flow over all the broad plains of modern history. When we compare countries such as England, Scotland and America, with countries such as France, Spain and Italy, which never came under the influences of Calvinism, we readily see what the practical results are. The economic and moral depression in Roman Catholic countries has brought about such a decrease even in the birth rate that the population in those countries has become almost stationary, while the population in these other countries has steadily increased.

⁶⁵ *The Creed of Presbyterians*, p. vii.

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A brief examination of Church history, or of the historic creeds of Protestantism, readily shows that the doctrines which today are known as Calvinism were the ones which brought about the Reformation and preserved its benefits. He who is most familiar with the history of Europe and America will readily agree with the startling statement of Dr. Cunningham that, “next to Paul, John Calvin has done most for the world.” And Dr. Smith has well said: “Surely it should stop the mouths of the detractors of Calvinism to remember that from men of that creed we inherit, as the fruits of their blood and toil, their prayers and teachings, our civil liberty, our Protestant faith, our Christian homes. The thoughtful reader, noting that these three blessings lie at the root of all that is best and greatest in the modern world, may be startled at the implied claim that our present Christian civilization is but the fruitage of Calvinism.”⁶⁶

We do but repeat the very clear testimony of history when we say that Calvinism has been the creed of saints and heroes. “Whatever the cause,” says Froude, “the Calvinists were the only fighting Protestants. It was they whose faith gave them courage to stand up for the Reformation, and but for them the Reformation would have been lost.” During those centuries in which spiritual tyranny was numbering its victims by the thousands; when in England, Scotland, Holland and Switzerland, Protestantism had to maintain itself with the sword, Calvinism proved itself the only system able to cope with and destroy the great powers of the Romish Church. Its unequalled array of martyrs is one of its crowns of glory. In the address of the Methodist Conference to the Presbyterian Alliance of 1896 it was graciously said: “Your Church has furnished the memorable and inspiring spectacle, not simply of a solitary heroic soul here and there, but of generations of faithful souls ready for the sake of Christ and His truth to go cheerfully to prison and to death. This rare honor you rightly esteem as the most precious part of your priceless heritage.” “There is no other system of religion in the world,” says McFetridge, which has such a glorious array of martyrs to the faith. “Almost every man and woman who walked to the flames rather than deny the faith or leave a stain on conscience was the devout follower, not only, and first of all, of the Son of God, but also of that minister of God who made Geneva the light of Europe, John Calvin.”⁶⁷ To the Divine vitality and fruitfulness of this system the modern world owes a debt of gratitude which in recent years it is slowly beginning to recognize but can never repay.

We have said that Calvinistic theology develops a liberty loving people. Where it flourishes despotism cannot abide. As might have been expected, it early gave rise to a revolutionary form of Church government, in which the people of the Church were to be governed and ministered to, not by the appointees of any one man or set of men placed

⁶⁶ *The Creed of Presbyterians*, p. 74.

⁶⁷ *Calvinism in History*, p. 113.

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over them, but by pastors and officers elected by themselves. Religion was then with the people, not over them. Testimony from a remarkable source as to the efficiency of this government is that of the distinguished Roman Catholic, Archbishop Hughes of New York: "Though it is my privilege to regard the authority exercised by the General Assembly as usurpation, still I must say, with every man acquainted with the mode in which it is organized, that for the purpose of popular and political government its structure is little inferior to that of Congress itself. It acts on the principle of a radiating center, and is without an equal or a rival among the other denominations of the country."⁶⁸

From freedom and responsibility in the Church it was only a step to freedom and responsibility in the State; and historically the cause of freedom has found no braver nor more resolute champions than the followers of Calvin.

"Calvinism," says Warburton, "is no dreamy, theoretical creed. It does not,—despite all the assertions of its adversaries,—encourage a man to fold his arms in a spirit of fatalistic indifference, and ignore the needs of those around him, together with the crying evils which lie, like putrifying sores, upon the open face of society."⁶⁹ Wherever it has gone marvelous moral transformations have followed in its wake. For purity of life, for temperance, industry, and charity, the Calvinists have stood without superiors.

James Anthony Froude has been recognized as one of England's most able historians and men of letters. For a number of years he was professor of History at Oxford, England's greatest university. While he accepted another system for himself, and while his writings are such that he is often spoken of as an opponent of Calvinism, he was free from prejudice, and the ignorant attacks upon Calvinism which have been so common in recent years aroused in him the learned scholar's just impatience.

"I am going to ask you," says Froude, "to consider how it came to pass that if Calvinism is indeed the hard and unreasonable creed which modern enlightenment declares it to be, it has possessed such singular attractions in past times for some of the greatest men that ever lived; and how—being as we are told, fatal to morality, because it denies free will—the first symptom of its operation, wherever it established itself, was to obliterate the distinction between sins and crimes, and to make the moral law the rule of life for States as well as persons. I shall ask you, again, why, if it be a creed of intellectual servitude, it was able to inspire and sustain the bravest efforts ever made by man to break the yoke of unjust authority. When all else has failed,—when patriotism has covered its face and human courage has broken down,—when intellect has yielded, as Gibbon says,

⁶⁸ *Presbyterians and the Revolution*, p. 140.

⁶⁹ *Calvinism*. p. 78.

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‘with a smile or a sigh,’ content to philosophize in the closet, and abroad worship with the vulgar,—when emotion, and sentiment, and tender imaginative piety have become the handmaids of superstition, and have dreamt themselves into forgetfulness that there is any difference between lies and truth,—the slavish form of belief called Calvinism, in one or other of its many forms, has borne ever an inflexible front to illusion and mendacity, and has preferred rather to be ground to powder like flint than to bend before violence or melt under enervating temptation.”⁷⁰

To illustrate this Froude mentions William the Silent, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Coligny, Cromwell, Milton, and Bunyan, and says of them: “These men are possessed of all the qualities which give nobility and grandeur to human nature,—men whose life was as upright as their intellect was commanding and their public aims untainted with selfishness; unalterably just where duty required them to be stern, but with the tenderness of a woman in their hearts; frank, true, cheerful, humorous, as unlike sour fanatics as it is possible to imagine anyone, and able in some way to sound the key-note to which every brave and faithful heart in Europe instinctively vibrated.”⁷¹

We shall now turn our attention to Calvinism as an evangelizing force. A very practical test for any system of religious doctrine is, “Has it, in comparison with other systems, proved itself a success in the evangelization of the world?” To save sinners and convert them to practical godliness is the chief purpose of the Church in this world; and the system which will not measure up to this test must be set aside, no matter how popular it may be in other respects.

The first great Christian revival, in which three thousand people were converted, occurred under the preaching of Peter in Jerusalem, who employed such language as this: “Him being delivered up by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay,” Acts 2:23. And the company of disciples, when in earnest prayer shortly afterward, spoke in these words: “For of a truth in this city against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass,” Acts 4:27, 28. That is Calvinism rigid enough.

The next great revival in the Church, which occurred in the fourth century through the influence of Augustine, was based on these doctrines, as is readily seen by anyone who reads the literature on that period. The Reformation, which is admitted by all to have been incomparably the greatest revival of true religion since New Testament times,

⁷⁰ *Calvinism*, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Calvinism*, p. 8.

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occurred under the soundly predestinarian preaching of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. To Calvin and Admiral Coligny belongs the credit of having inspired the first Protestant foreign missionary enterprise, the expedition to Brazil in 1555. True, the venture proved unsuccessful, and the religious wars in Europe prevented the renewal of the enterprise for a considerable period.

McFetridge has given us some interesting and comparatively unknown facts about the rise of the Methodist Church. Says he: "We speak of the Methodist Church beginning in a revival. And so it did. But the first and chief actor in that revival was not Wesley, but Whitefield (an uncompromising Calvinist). Though a younger man than Wesley, it was he who first went forth preaching in the fields and gathering multitudes of followers, and raising money and building chapels. It was Whitefield who invoked the two Wesleys to his aid. And he had to employ much argument and persuasion to overcome their prejudices against the movement. Whitefield began the great work at Bristol and Kingswood, and had found thousands flocking to his side, ready to be organized into churches, when he appealed to Wesley for assistance. Wesley, with all his zeal, had been quite a High-Churchman in many of his views. He believed in immersing even the infants, and demanded that dissenters should be rebaptized before being taken into the Church. He could not think of preaching in any place but in a church. 'He should have thought,' as he said, 'the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.' Hence when Whitefield called on John Wesley to engage with him in the popular movement, he shrank back. Finally, he yielded to Whitefield's persuasions, but, he allowed himself to be governed in the decision by what many would rate as a superstition. He and Charles first opened their Bibles at random to see if their eyes should fall on a text which might decide them. But the texts were all foreign to the subject. Then he had recourse to sortilege, and cast lots to decide the matter. The lot drawn was the one marked for him to consent, and so he consented. Thus he was led to undertake the work with which his name has been so intimately and honorably associated ever since.

"So largely was the Methodist movement owing to Whitefield that he was called 'the Calvinistic establisher of Methodism,' and to the end of his life he remained the representative of it in the eyes of the learned world. Walpole, in his Letters, speaks only once of Wesley in connection with the rise of Methodism, while he frequently speaks of Whitefield in connection with it. Mant, in his course of lectures against Methodism, speaks of it as an entirely Calvinistic affair. Neither the mechanism nor the force which gave rise to it originated with Wesley. Field-preaching, which gave the whole movement its aggressive character, and fitted and enabled it to cope with the powerful agencies which were armed against it, was begun by Whitefield, whilst 'Wesley was dragged into it reluctantly.' In the polite language of the day 'Calvinism' and 'Methodism' were synonymous terms, and the Methodists were called 'another sect of Presbyterians.'....

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“It was Calvinism, and not Arminianism, which originated (so far as any system of doctrine originated) the great religious movement in which the Methodist Church was born.

“While, therefore, Wesley is to be honored for his work in behalf of that Church, we should not fail to remember the great Calvinist, George Whitefield, who gave that Church her first beginnings and her most distinctive character. Had he lived longer, and not shrunk from the thought of being the founder of a Church, far different would have been the results of his labors. As it was, he gathered congregations for others to form into Churches, and built chapels for others to preach in.”⁷²

It should also be said at this point that Wesley was a believer in witchcraft. Failure to believe in witches was looked upon by him as a concession to infidels and rationalists. Many of his biographers have passed over this subject in silence, although some of those most friendly to his cause have admitted that he stated his beliefs in words which cannot be misunderstood. In his Journal we read this report of a girl who was subject to fits: “When old Doctor Alexander was asked what her disorder was, he answered, ‘It is what formerly they would have called being bewitched.’ And why should they not call it so now? Because the infidels have hooted witchcraft out of the world; and the complaisant Christians, in large numbers, have joined them in the cry.” Although Calvin lived two and a quarter centuries before Wesley and had not the advantages of the scientific and intellectual progress that had been made during that time, we find no such strange credulity in him. His writings are not only free from witchcraft but contain numerous warnings against such belief.

The famous English Baptist Charles Hadden Spurgeon (1834–1892), one of the world’s greatest preachers, spoke as follows:

“I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist. I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist; but if I am asked what is my creed, I reply, ‘It is Jesus Christ.’ ”

And again, “Many of our Calvinistic preachers do not feed God’s people. They believe election, but they do not preach it. They think particular redemption true, but they lock it in the chest of their creed, and never bring it out in their ministry. They hold final perseverance, but they persevere in keeping quiet about it. They think there is such a thing as effectual calling, but they do not think they are called frequently to preach it. The great fault we find with them is, that they do not speak right out what they believe. You

⁷² *Calvinism in History*, pp. 151–153.

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could not know if you heard them fifty times what were the doctrines of the Gospel, or what was their system of salvation. And hence God's people get starved."

When we come to a study of foreign missions we find that this system of belief has been the most important agency in carrying the Gospel to the heathen nations. St. Paul, whom the more liberal opponents of Calvinism admit to have been responsible for the Calvinistic cast of the theological thought of the Church, was the greatest and most influential of missionaries. If we call the roll of the heroes of Protestant Missions we find that almost without exception they have been disciples of Calvin. We find Carey and Martyn in India, Livingstone and Moffat in Africa, Morrison in China, Paton in the South Seas, and a great host of others. These men professed and possessed a Calvinism which was not static but dynamic; it was not their creed only, but their conduct.

And in regard to foreign missions, Dr. F. W. Loetscher has said: "Though like all our sister Churches we have reason, in view of our unprecedented resources and the appalling needs of heathen lands, to lament that we have not accomplished more, we may at least thank God that our venerated fathers made so good a beginning in establishing missions all over the world; that the Calvinistic Churches today surpass all others in their gifts to this cause; and in particular that our own denomination has the unique honor and privilege of discharging her far-reaching responsibilities by actually confronting every one of the great non-Christian religions, and preaching the gospel on more continents, and among more nations, peoples, and tongues, than any other evangelical Church in the world."⁷³

Although to some it may sound like an unwarranted exaggeration, we have no hesitation in saying that through the centuries Calvinism, fearlessly and ringingly polemic in its insistence upon, and defense of, sound doctrine, has been the real strength of the Christian Church. The traditionally high standards of the Calvinistic Churches in regard to ministerial training and culture have borne a great harvest in bringing multitudes to the feet of Jesus, not in temporary excitement, but in perpetual covenant. Judged by its fruits Calvinism has proven itself incomparably the greatest evangelizing force in the world.

The enemies of Calvinism are not able honestly to confront the testimony of history. Certainly a glorious record belongs to this system in the history of modern civilization. None more noble can be found anywhere. "It has ever been a mystery to the so-called liberals," says Henry Ward Beecher, "that the Calvinists, with what they have considered their harshly despotic and rigid views and doctrines, should always have been the staunchest and bravest defenders of freedom. The working for liberty of these severe

⁷³ Address before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1929.

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principles in the minds of those that adopted them has been a puzzle. But the truth lies here: Calvinism has done what no other religion has ever been able to do. It presents the highest human ideal to the world, and sweeps the whole road to destruction with the most appalling battery that can be imagined.

“It intensifies, beyond all example, the individuality of man, and shows in a clear and overpowering light his responsibility to God and his relations to eternity. It points out man as entering life under the weight of a tremendous responsibility, having on his march toward the grave, this one sole solace—of securing heaven and of escaping hell.

“Thus the Calvinist sees man pressed, burdened, urged on, by the most mighty influencing forces. He is on the march for eternity, and is soon to stand crowned in heaven or to lie sweltering in hell, thus to continue for ever and ever. Who shall dare to fetter such a being? Get out of his way! Hinder him not, or do it at the peril of your own soul. Leave him free to find his way to God. Meddle not with him or with his rights. Let him work out his own salvation as he can. No hand must be laid crushingly upon a creature who is on such a race as this—a race whose end is to be eternal glory or unutterable woe for ever and ever.”⁷⁴

“This tree,” to adopt the eloquent paragraph of another, “may have, to prejudiced eyes, a rough bark, a gnarled stem, and boughs twisted often into knotted shapes of ungraceful strength. But, remember, it is not a willow-wand of yesterday. These boughs have wrestled with the storms of a thousand years; this stem has been wreathed with the red lightning and scarred by the thunderbolt; and all over its rough rind are the marks of the battle-axe and the bullet. This old oak has not the pliant grace and silky softness of a greenhouse plant, but it has a majesty above grace, and a grandeur beyond beauty. Its roots may be strangely contorted, but some of them are rich with the blood of glorious battlefields, some of them are clasped around the stakes of martyrs; some of them hidden in solitary cells and lonely libraries, where deep thinkers have mused and prayed, as in some apocalyptic Patmos; and its great tap-root runs back, until it twines in living and loving embrace around the cross of Calvary. Its boughs may be gnarled, but they hang clad with all that is richest and strongest in the civilization and Christianity of human history.”⁷⁵

As we survey this system we feel as one sitting at the manual of a great organ. Our fingers touch the keys, as stop after stop opens of the swell, until the full chorus responds, a grand harmony. Calvinism touches all the music of life because it seeks the Creator first and above all and finds Him everywhere. Or again, we have been out upon the deep, the

⁷⁴ *Plymouth Pulpit*, article, “Calvinism.”

⁷⁵ *Power and Claims of a Calvinistic Literature*, p. 35, quoted from Smith, *The Creed of Presbyterians*, p. 105.

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great celestial dome overhead, the wide expanse of eternity all around our souls and in and above all, there is GOD. Or again, we stand, as it were, at the rifting of the rocks, with the landscape behind, the gorge before us, the mighty river of time flowing forth out of and into eternity, the sun in its zenith overhead, all ablaze with light and warmth, and in a whisper first, our souls have echoed back the words, “O the depth of the riches!” For Calvinism shows us God and traces His footsteps,—God, in all His greatness, majesty, wisdom, holiness, justice, love. Calvinism shows us God high and lifted up; and our souls cry out again, “What is man that THOU ... art mindful of him?”

This is no vain and empty eulogy of Calvinism. With the above facts and observations every enlightened and impartial reader of history will agree. Furthermore, the author would say of this book what Dr. E. W. Smith in his book, *The Creed of Presbyterians*, said at the close of the chapter on, “The Creed Tested By Its Fruits,”—namely that these facts and observations are “set forth, not to stimulate denominational vanity, but to fill us with gratitude to God for that past history and that present eminence which should be to every one of us

‘A vantage-ground for nobleness’;

and above all to kindle in our hearts a holy enthusiasm for that Divine system of truth, which, under God, has been the foremost factor in the making of America and the modern world.”

In conclusion we would say that in this book the reader has found some very old-fashioned divinity—divinity as old as the Bible, as old and older than the world itself, since this plan of redemption was hidden in the eternal counsels of God. No attempt has been made to cloak the fact that the doctrines advocated and defended in these pages are really wonderful and startling. They are enough to electrify the sleepy sinner who has taken it for granted all his life long that he can square matters with God any time he pleases, and they are sufficient to horrify the sleepy “saint” who has been deluding himself in the deadening repose of a carnal religion. But why should they not cause astonishment? Does not nature teem with wonders? Why should not revelation? One needs to read but little to become aware that Science brings to light many astonishing truths which an uneducated man finds it hard, if not impossible, to believe; and why should it not be so with the truths of Revelation and the spiritually uneducated? If the Gospel does not startle and terrify and amaze a man when presented to him, it is not the true Gospel. But who was ever amazed at Arminianism with its doctrine that every man carves out his own destiny? It will not suffice merely to ignore or ridicule these doctrines as many are inclined to do. The question is, Are these doctrines true? If they are true, why ridicule them? If they are not true, disprove them. We close with the statement that this

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great system of religious thought which bears Calvin's name is nothing more or less than the hope of the world.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Boettner, L. (1932). *The Reformed doctrine of predestination* (pp. 365–431). Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.