

John Calvin.

BY THE VERY REV. HENRY WACE, D.D.

JOHN CALVIN was born on July 10, 1509, and the fourth centenary of his birth is to be commemorated at Geneva by a series of celebrations from July 2 to 10, in which representatives from many nations, both in Europe and in America, will join. The first stone is then to be laid of an international monument of the Reformation, in which Calvin's name will be associated with those of other leaders in that great movement; and it is to be hoped that the occasion will evoke a very widespread acknowledgment of the immense debt which both the Church and the world at large owe to the great French and Genevan reformer. An English association has been formed in aid of the commemoration, and we rejoice to see among the vice-presidents the Bishops of Durham, Winchester, and Liverpool, and several English Churchmen of distinction, in company, happily, with eminent Nonconformists, such as the Rev. Evan Jones, the President of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, Dr. Horton, Dr. Guinness Rogers, and others. The monument will cost nearly £30,000, and contributions are invited from all countries. The appeal concludes with a hope, in which the readers of this magazine will heartily concur, "that the English Association will be enabled to offer to the memorial a contribution not unworthy of the blessings which England owes to the Reformation."

It is, indeed, to be hoped that this commemoration, like that of Luther's birth in 1883, may have the effect of reviving among us some adequate appreciation, both of Calvin's incalculable services to the Reformation, and of the Reformation itself. The Pageant last month at Fulham afforded a lamentable illustration of the completely subordinate position which the Reformation now occupies in the minds of the Churchmen by whom it was organized. The ordinary spectator would not have learned from it that the whole life of the Church of England was

revived and transformed by that movement, and that the present position of our Church was determined by it. But if this be the case with respect to the general influence of the Reformation on the Church of England, it is not less certain that the present position of the Christian Churches in these islands is mainly due to the life and work of Calvin. He was not, indeed, one of the originating forces of the Reformation. That great honour must always be assigned in the first instance to the profound spiritual and intellectual genius of Luther, and in a secondary degree to the earnestness and ability of Zwingli, and to his influence in Switzerland. The cardinal principles of the Reformation sprang into full life from Luther's heart and brain in the "three great Reformation treatises" of the year 1520—the "Babylonish Captivity of the Church," the "Appeal to the German Nobility," and the tract "On Christian Liberty"—when Calvin was only ten years old. Those principles had spread over Europe, and had taken a deep root in France by the time when Calvin, after some vicissitudes in his course, went to Paris in 1531 with the intention of devoting himself to humanistic studies and to literature. Though he had been brought up under the influence of the Church, and had actually held a benefice for some years as a mere boy, he had fallen under the influence of Luther's writings, and had evidently joined the small band of Protestants in Paris. It is remarkable that very little is known of the movement of thought and experience which led to his change of views. He tells us in his "Commentary on the Psalms" that God drew him from the superstitions of the Papacy by a "sudden conversion," and that he received at that time "some taste of true piety." These expressions indicate no such prolonged or deep spiritual struggle as that through which Luther won his way to the gospel of justification by faith, and the course of Calvin's thought would seem to have been in great measure one of mental enlightenment, fostered by the humanistic studies to which he was devoted. His first publication, in 1532, was an edition of Seneca's "De Clementia," which gives evidence of wide classical

reading, and of acquaintance with Cyprian, Lactantius, Augustine, Jerome, and Synesius. At this point his studies must have become concentrated on Scriptural and patristic learning. We hear of his expounding the Scriptures in the private meetings of the little society of Protestants in Paris; and in 1533 he wrote for his friend, the Rector of the University, an official address which was a statement and defence of **Evangelical truth**, borrowing from Erasmus and from Luther, **but with characteristic thoughts of his own**. It became known **that he was the author**, and he had to leave Paris, and commenced his real career in wanderings which led him at length through France, Basle, Ferrara, and Strasburg to Geneva.

It was in the course of the two or three years after thus leaving Paris that he composed the first edition of the work which created his influence and determined the course of his life—the “*Christianæ Religionis Institutio*,” his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Having definitely adopted the reformed faith, he set himself, with characteristic earnestness and thoroughness, to realize its full meaning, and to justify it to the Church and the world. The book is based upon the Apostles’ Creed, and its arrangement is in one respect eminently characteristic of Calvin’s mind. It is divided, not into three parts, dealing with the work of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, but into four, the fourth part dealing with the Church. The doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church was to Calvin of sufficient importance to hold a place side by side with the doctrine of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. This indicates, in fact, the point of peculiar and special importance in Calvin’s work. His book was not the first systematic exposition of the reformed theology. Several years previously Melancthon’s “*Loci Communes*” had expounded systematically the main principles of the Evangelical faith, and had stated at least as strongly as Calvin the doctrines of predestination which have since been so specially associated with Calvin’s name. It is, indeed, quite a mistake to suppose that the revival of those doctrines which had been strenuously asserted in the Middle Ages by the

great schoolman, Archbishop Bradwardine, was specially due to Calvin. Coleridge justly observes¹ that "no impartial person, competently acquainted with the history of the Reformation and the works of the earlier Protestant divines, at home and abroad, will deny that the doctrines of Calvin on redemption and the natural state of fallen man are in all essential points the same as those of Luther, Zwingli, and the first Reformers collectively." He says, not less justly, in his comment on the previous aphorism, that the opinions of Luther and Calvin on this subject ought not to "be confounded with the New England system now entitled Calvinistic. The fact is simply this: Luther considered the pretensions to free-will boastful, and better suited to the 'budge doctors of the Stoic Fur' than to the preachers of the Gospel, whose great theme is the redemption of the will from slavery." But "as the difference of a captive and enslaved will and no will at all, such is the difference between the Lutheranism of Calvin and the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards." "Predestination to life," as Coleridge further points out, is a belief inevitably dictated by humility to every Christian who feels in himself the workings of the Spirit of God, and dare not attribute his privilege to the initiative of his own mind and heart. The doctrine of "election is in itself a necessary inference from an undeniable fact—necessary at least for all who hold that the best of men are what they are through the grace of God." No doubt Calvin pressed the logical consequences of this fact too far; but so did Augustine and Bradwardine and Luther, and even Melancthon. But neither in the doctrine itself nor in its logical exaggeration was Calvin peculiar. Nor, again, was he divided by any marked difference of doctrine on other points from the German Reformers. In point of fact, he signed the Augsburg Confession, and his differences from Luther on the one hand and Zwingli on the other respecting the nature of the presence of our Lord's body and blood in the Holy Communion are of a mediating rather than an antagonistic kind. As Dr. Lindsay says in his admirable "History of the Reformation"

¹ "Aids to Reflection: Aphorism II. on Spiritual Religion."

(vol. ii., p. 59): "Calvin's conception of 'substance' enabled him to say that wherever anything acts, there it is. He denied the crude 'substantial' presence which Luther insisted on; and in this he sided with Zwingli. But he affirmed a real, because active, presence; and in this he sided with Luther." There can, we think, be no reasonable doubt that Calvin's doctrine on this point is that of the Church of England.

It is not in these directions that Calvin's peculiar service to the Reformation is to be recognized. It consisted mainly in the stress he laid on the doctrine and the office of the Church, as illustrated by the fourth book of his *Christian Institutes*. The first Reformers had to rely on the interposition of the temporal power in ecclesiastical affairs for the reformation of the Church, and provided they were thus enabled to suppress Romish abuses, and to establish, within the dominions of their Prince, Evangelical teaching and worship, they did not much care to raise questions respecting the constitution and office of the Church itself. But Calvin seems to have seen from the first that to allow doctrine and discipline to be controlled by the temporal power was inconsistent with the Scriptures, and with the ideal of the primitive Church, and was of extremely dangerous consequence. The Roman Church had erred, not in asserting the independent authority of the Church, but in transforming the Church into another kind of temporal power, until its true spiritual characteristics were lost. He endeavoured accordingly to revive the form of Church life and Church discipline which he found, as he thought, in the Church of the first three centuries, existing independently of the State, and having its own laws, which rest solely on the authority of Christ. He did not, of course, refuse the co-operation of the temporal power; on the contrary, he used it for enforcing the laws of the Church, and even, as in the case of Servetus, for punishing heretics. In point of fact, no one who feels the necessity of appealing, in the last instance, to force can possibly reject the assistance of the temporal power. If Lord Halifax were a Bishop, or even an incumbent, he would better appreciate

the fact that he would need to be protected in the exercise of his prerogatives by the power of the State. Calvin, moreover, appreciated better than some modern High Church theorists that the State can only lend its temporal force to the Church upon terms. It can never—as the Roman Church expects of it—carry out the behests of Church authority without examining and considering them. Calvin had the practical wisdom to concede to the temporal authority of Geneva much more voice and authority in the administration of Church discipline than he thought desirable. He recognized that in the circumstances of that turbulent and democratic city it was impossible to obtain all at once the independent Church life which he desired. But he made a great approach to it in practice, and in his writings he set up an ideal which formed a basis for the organization of the Protestant Churches in all countries where the old Church had not, as in Germany and England, been reformed by the action of the ruling powers. The French and Scottish Protestant Churches were organized on Calvin's principles, though not quite on the Genevan model ; and independent Protestantism was thus enabled to realize the strength of organic union, and to feel that, no less than the Roman Church, it could exert a true Church authority.

The strength thus added to the Protestant movement was incalculable, but another invaluable result must in justice be assigned to it. Calvin's teaching and example on this point kept alive the idea of the independent life and functions of the Church, at a time when it was in great danger of being not only obscured but overthrown by the action of temporal power in a despotic age. It was a misfortune that Calvin to some extent misread the Scriptures as to the form of Church order which they prescribed, and associated his principles with a too rigid system of organization which necessarily came into conflict with other organizations, and set on foot the unfortunate and wholly unnecessary war between Episcopacy and Presbyterianism. But he rendered Episcopacy the service of compelling it to realize that it rested on a Divine authority, though not

necessarily the only Divine authority, and of thus reviving, even in the English Church, the principles of independent Church life. Laud himself was thus asserting, in opposition to Calvin's followers, the cardinal position of Calvin; and High Church principles are to this extent indebted to Calvin for their revival and their vigour. An illustration of this fact is before our eyes in the present day in the appeal of the Bishop of Birmingham and his followers to the Scottish Church, as an example of the combination of independent Church life with establishment. In point of fact, indeed, the rights of the temporal or lay power are indirectly provided for in the Scottish system, and the danger of absolute ecclesiastical authority is thus guarded against. But the Scottish Church is perhaps the most conspicuous instance of the grand service which Calvin rendered to the Reformation and to Europe, by his clear and unbending assertion of the truth that Jesus Christ had established a society on earth of which He is the sole ruler, and that His society has rights and duties which are independent of any temporal authority, though always to be exercised with due consideration for that temporal authority, which is itself also Divine in its origin.

This momentous work was associated with the revival in men's minds of other vital spiritual principles, without the support of which it could never have been accomplished. The majesty and absolute supremacy of God in all creation and in the life of man; the final revelation of God's will in the Scriptures; the utter corruption and weakness of human nature, and the dependence of our whole spiritual life on the work of the Holy Spirit; and the value of the two Sacraments ordained by Christ as the pledges and the means of that work of grace—these great principles were asserted in Calvin's writings and exhibited before all Europe in his devoted, ascetic, and unselfish life with more clearness than in any other single figure of the Reformation. His contemporaries mention a gesture which was habitual to him. Often in the midst of a conversation he would raise his doctor's cap with one hand, and would point to heaven with the other, sometimes adding, "All for the glory of

God." It is justly said by M. Bossert, in his valuable sketch of the Reformer,¹ that in those words, "All for the glory of God," is contained the whole life of Calvin, and that his Christian Institutes are but their development. For the glory of God, to make the will of God done upon earth, through the Church which the Son of God had redeemed, was the sole motive of Calvin's life, and it was acted upon with a self-sacrifice which has never been exceeded. It is not necessary to dwell upon his admirable labours as an expositor and preacher. In the exegesis of the Scriptures, with the resources of learning that were open to him, he has never been surpassed—perhaps, on the whole, never equalled; and his power of teaching attracted men to Geneva in thousands, and made it the Protestant University and the great theological training school of his day. It would be worse than ungenerous to dwell at present on his limitations or errors. When commemorating the birth of such a man and such a saint, it becomes us best to say of him what one generous man of the world once said of another: "He was a great man, and I have forgotten all his faults." Let us remember him on this occasion only as one of the great doctors and saints of the Church universal, and pray "that we may have grace to direct our lives after his good example."



Biblical Criticism and its Critics.²

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IF the modern critical view of the Old Testament does not soon gain acceptance all along the line, it will not be for want of books expounding and commending it, or for want of buoyant faith in its advocates that its triumph is near. Others

¹ In the series of "Les Grands Ecrivains Français," published by Hachette and Co.

² "Biblical Criticism and Modern Thought; or, The Place of the Old Testament Documents in the Life of To-day." By W. G. Jordan, B.A., D.D., Queen's University, Kingston, Canada. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1909. Price 7s. 6d. net.