

either physically or mentally, in spite of large houses and gardens. It is possible, perhaps for the first time, to undertake regular study and reading; to give time for personal prayer for all the parishioners; and to prepare sermons adequately. On the other hand the minister may be living among people without his education and intellectual training; and without the spiritual and intellectual stimulus and competition which will keep him 'up to the mark'. In such circumstances it is not easy to maintain a high standard of self-discipline, and it is all too easy to drift into an easy-going way of life and thought that renders one's ministry useless. The countryman's life may move more slowly than that of his urban counterpart, and he may be slower to express himself, but that does not mean that he is lazy or shallow-thinking. Most countrymen are hardworking, serious-minded people and are quick to detect and to discard those who are lazy in body or mind. He is too shy or polite to argue with such a minister, or even to say that he disagrees with him, but he will not fail to notice, and will sadly include him among those who are no help to him.

Finally, what are the prospects for the future? Among the very many country laymen whom the writer has consulted on this question, there is an almost unanimous opinion that country folk today welcome and respond to a biblical ministry exercised by a spiritually-minded man. One devoted churchwoman, an ex-Diocesan President of the Mothers' Union, when asked what, in her opinion, was the biggest hindrance to revival in her diocese, said: 'the clergy'. Whether that is true or not, it is undoubtedly the view of many of the responsible laity that country folk are frustrated and annoyed by the irrelevancy and lack of sense of purpose of many of the churches, and are longing for a serious, spiritual and scriptural lead, and that such a leader would soon be surrounded with willing helpers and a true church.

## 'THE INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION'

*A Consideration of John Calvin's famous work*

By the REV. PHILIP E. HUGHES, M.A., B.D., D.LITT.

THIS year marks both the 450th anniversary of John Calvin's birth and also the 400th anniversary of the publication of the final edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a work which may justly be praised as the greatest exposition of dogmatic theology ever to have been written. In his own day it was unsurpassed and still today, four centuries afterwards, there are no signs of its being excelled or superseded. The *Institutes*, of course, represent only a small fraction of the great Reformer's literary output, but they were of central importance in his lifework, and it is through them in particular that the powerful influence of his faith and intellect continues to be felt with a force that shows no sign of diminishing. His impressive series of commentaries on nearly all the books of the Old and New Testaments are also of lasting value for all who have a love of God's Word, and the reading of his 'Tracts' or shorter works on practical and polemical issues will be found to be a rewarding and stimulating occupation. Indeed, it seemed impossible for Calvin to write anything, however distracting the circumstances, which did not bear the stamp of a noble and penetrating mind, a large heart, and a burning faith, and which at the same time was not distinguished by grace and virility of expression.

The first edition of the *Institutes* appeared in 1536 when the author was

twenty-seven years of age. The volume, addressed to the King of France, was originally designed as a compact book of instruction in the teaching of Holy Scripture for the growing numbers who were being attracted to the evangelical faith of the Reformation; but, in view of the mounting persecution against the Protestants, was further intended by Calvin to serve as a concise defence or confession of the leading doctrines of the Reformed faith, by reading which the king might be brought to a realization that the teaching of the Reformers was neither novel nor heretical, but fully conformed to the truth of the Scriptures and corroborated by the writings of the fathers of the early Church. Thus convinced, the monarch might be expected to command a cessation of the cruelties which were being perpetrated in the name of the Catholic faith. The work, however, was never read by the French king, and so in this respect it failed in its purpose. But as a manual of instruction for those who were as yet mere fledgelings in the faith, but none the less called upon to pass through the fiercest trials, it fulfilled its function admirably and with great acceptance.

Three years later a second edition was published. The book had grown to nearly three times the size of the original and the chapters had increased in number from six to seventeen. The work, in fact, was in process of developing from a comparatively slender handbook to something much fuller and more comprehensive. Calvin's object, declared in the prefatory Epistle to the Reader, was now 'to prepare and train candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the Divine Word in such a way that they might have an easy introduction to it and also be able to proceed in it with unfaltering step'. From this same introductory Epistle another fact of some significance emerges, namely, that the *Institutes* were intended to be complementary to Calvin's commentaries on Holy Scripture; for it was his hope that those who made use of his commentaries would first have studied the *Institutes*. 'Having thus, as it were, paved the way', he writes, 'it will be unnecessary for me to enter into long discussions of doctrinal points, and to enlarge on commonplaces, in any commentaries on Scripture which I may in future publish, and so I shall always compress them into narrow compass. By reason of this the pious reader will be spared much trouble and fatigue, provided he comes prepared with a knowledge of the present work as a necessary prerequisite.' Apart from showing the role which the *Institutes* were designed to play in Calvin's literary scheme, this passage throws an interesting light on the manner in which he approached the composition of his commentaries. The Bible student will find the latter to be models of plain and practical exegesis.

In 1541 a French translation of the *Institutes* was published. Calvin, who hitherto had shown himself to be a master of a Latin prose style which in its purity and vigour could stand comparison with the best of the classical authors, now, by the appearance of this French version, took his place not only as one who was able to wield and mould his native language with consummate skill, but also as a great creative former of the French literary tradition. Whether writing in Latin or in French, however, Calvin is no mere stylist; his prose is entirely free from artificiality; it is not an ornament to dazzle, but always a vehicle of the truth. On every page the strength and nobility of the style are a faithful projection of the strength and nobility of the author's own personal character. Dignity, sincerity, and complete singleness of purpose are the hallmark of the man as well as of his writings.

The Reformer continued to work at his *Institutes*, revising and adding to the text as the years went by. New Latin editions appeared in 1543 (now comprising twenty-one chapters), 1545, 1550, 1553, and 1554, and further French versions were published in 1545 and 1551. To the 1543 edition he prefixed, and thereby applied to himself, the saying of Augustine: 'I

admit that I belong to the number of those who by profiting write and by writing profit.' The whole process was crowned with the printing of the final edition, in Latin, in the year 1559. The work was now five times its original size. To his Epistle to the Reader Calvin now appends a Latin couplet to the effect that the zeal for instruction of those whom he had intended to defend in a slender booklet has caused it to grow into a large volume. He explains how in each succeeding edition of the work he had sought to bring about some improvement, but had been unable to rest satisfied until it was arranged in the order of this final edition. He mentions, as an evidence of the application with which he had prepared this final revision, that the previous winter, when he believed himself to be dying of quartan fever, the more his illness was aggravated, the less he spared himself, in order that he might leave the completed work behind him as some return to the godly at whose invitation he had undertaken it. He adds that it was his only wish that it should be productive of some benefit to the Church of God, more so than hitherto.

His wish was to be granted a thousand times over. During the ensuing years this magnificent monument of devotion and industry, a superb example of an intellect of genius surrendered to the service of the Word of God, has been a means of blessing to each succeeding generation of the Church, and the sphere of its influence has constantly increased as it has been translated into many different languages and been studied with thankfulness in every corner of the earth. The intervening centuries have not dimmed the worth or abated the freshness and force of this masterpiece, written not for the plaudits of men, but solely to the glory of God. No reader of the *Institutes*, who is also a lover of scriptural truth, can fail to echo from his heart the exclamation '*Laus Deo!*' which Calvin added when at last the final paragraph was completed.<sup>1</sup>

## 'LET WISDOM JUDGE'<sup>2</sup>

A REVIEW BY THE REV. J. W. CHARLEY, M.A.

IT is fitting that the bi-centenary of the birth of Charles Simeon should be marked by the republication of a selection of his sermons. To read the works of eminent preachers of the past is always beneficial for those who are engaged in similar work today; and Charles Simeon ranks among the greatest of evangelical preachers. His unbounded courage, faithful proclamation of the gospel, inspired leadership and missionary vision reached far beyond the confines of Cambridge. It is more the pity that though Handley Moule's biography has made his life better known, yet his works still remain in obscurity. His own sermon outlines in fact form an invaluable commentary on most of Scripture and are very profitable for the preacher. They suffer the double misfortune of being published under the forbidding title of *Horæ Homileticæ* and of consisting in a large

<sup>1</sup> Some parts of the article above have been reproduced from a chapter on the Pen of Calvin, contributed to a volume entitled *Calvin: Contemporary Prophet*, recently published in the U.S.A.

A new edition of Henry Beveridge's English translation of the *Institutes* (published by James Clarke and Co.) is available at the reasonable price of 30s. for the two volumes.

<sup>2</sup> *Let Wisdom Judge*, University Addresses and Sermon Outlines by Charles Simeon. Edited by Arthur Pollard. *Inter-Varsity Fellowship*. 192pp. 9s. 6d. Owing to the recent printing dispute there is likely to be a two months' delay in the production of this book, which was originally due for publication in September.