

The Continental Reformation.

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VIII.—CALVIN IN FRANCE AND SWITZERLAND—*Conclusion.*

IT is said that three representative individuals chanced, for a short period, to be in Paris at the same time—Rabelais, Calvin, and Ignatius Loyola.¹ May we think of them as candidates for the patronage of France? And if we had been there with them, could we have guessed which of the three R's France would adopt, the Renaissance, or the Reformation, or Rome?

One might have supposed that the Gallican independence of the French Church, and the traditional jealousy respecting Papal encroachments upon the rights of French Kings, would have made France a hopeful field for the work of reform; all the more so, because early in his reign (1516) Francis I. had concluded a Concordat with Leo X., by which the King got the right to nominate to the higher ecclesiastical posts, both episcopal and monastic, in the realm. And when reform came in the shape of Calvinism, one might have expected that it would be specially attractive to Frenchmen.

Calvinism, in some respects, is thoroughly French. It is the product of a Frenchman; and its lucid and logical system is just what a very able Frenchman would be likely to produce, and ordinary French people to appreciate. Lutheranism had no such recommendations. The mere fact that it was made in Germany was enough to make it unacceptable in France. Some cultivated Frenchmen read Luther, and were influenced by him. But to the majority he was unacceptable. Although he was indifferent to politics, he was a German of Germans, and could not help showing his sympathies with Saxony and the Empire—powers that were generally antagonistic to France. Not until the Reformation movement came in the form of Calvinism did it make much progress among the French. Calvinism is, as

¹ Fisher, "The Reformation," pp. 248 *et seq.*

French revolutions are apt to be, a radical break with the past. There is a great deal of conservatism in Lutheranism, a desire to preserve, when destruction is not absolutely necessary. But Calvin seems to have had little sentiment about old traditions or a long past. With him the past was not specially venerable ; and whatever could not justify itself as being sanctioned by Scripture, or at least strongly commended by reason, was surrendered without a pang. We have something analogous to this in the modern French temper, which, after a sharp political crisis, destroys national monuments, changes the names of streets and bridges, and strikes the name of God out of all official textbooks.

But there were other elements in Calvinism which were the reverse of attractive to the French character, and which more than counteracted its specially French features with the large majority of French people. Two of these told against its obtaining any wide reception amongst persons of culture, and one told against its reception by the nation in general.

Its leading doctrine of Predestination was abhorrent to most of the educated, and, indeed, to anyone who had clear ideas of justice. Was it credible that God would condemn men to everlasting torment for committing deeds which He had decreed from all eternity that they should commit ?

Again, the failure of Calvinism to attain, either on its religious or its philosophical side, to anything approaching to liberty of thought or toleration of differences, was highly distasteful to those who were inclined to look upon all creeds as only tentative, and more or less open to question. And there were many such persons in France.

Above all, the sternness of the Calvinistic system, and its severity, not only to vice, but to many innocent pleasures, which may lead to vice, made it thoroughly unwelcome to the large majority of so gay a nation as the French. It is curious to speculate what might have been the result, if the genial Luther had been born and bred in France. Being German, he was impossible there.

Was, then, the only alternative to the rigidity of Calvinism, the more picturesque, but hardly more elevating, rigidity of Rome? Was Loyola to secure those whom Calvin failed to attract, so that Spanish Papalism, with its demand for unreasoning obedience to existing authority, was to decide doctrine and ritual for a Church which had just parted with the Pragmatic Sanction?

There were probably not a few Frenchmen in that age, including many of the more thoughtful as well as the most thoughtless, who would have said to these two rivals: "A plague o' both your houses." The liberal-minded followers of the Renaissance did not see why they should sacrifice either their freedom of life to Calvin or their freedom of thought to Rome. It was more in accordance with good taste and sound sense to have a good laugh over all things in heaven and earth with Rabelais, whose "Pantagruel" and "Gargantua" seemed to be far more in touch with human life than either the "Institutes" of Calvin or the "Spiritual Exercises" of Ignatius Loyola.

In 1536, Calvin resolved to bid farewell to France and settle in the Empire. The war between Francis I. and Charles V. caused him to go to Geneva, where he was caught by Farel, who with almost frenzied vehemence declared that God required him to stay at Geneva and help the work of reform.¹ In vain Calvin pleaded that he needed leisure for private study at Strasburg. Equally in vain Farel pleaded the needs of Geneva. At last Farel descended to terrible adjurations, and declared that God would curse Calvin's leisure, if he refused to help in time of need. God had stretched out His hand to stay him. Calvin was frightened, and was convinced that this really was a Divine call. He was now twenty-seven, and he and Farel worked with such energy to enforce strict discipline in Geneva that two years later they were banished.

In 1540 Calvin went to the Diets at Hagenau and Worms, and in 1541 to the far more important Diet at Ratisbon, which

¹ Kidd, "Documents," p. 544.

was presided over by the Emperor Charles himself. Here Calvin formed a very close friendship with Melanchthon. It was during this period of banishment that a French translation of the Bible appeared at Geneva. It bore Calvin's name, but like Jerome's Vulgate, it was only a revision of a previously made translation. Calvin had revised Olivetan's French version. Its publication may have helped to restore him to favour at Geneva. He was recalled, and on September 13, 1541, he returned, not at all eagerly, but believing once more that the hand of God was upon him. Beza says that he was received with the greatest congratulations of all the people, and recent historians speak of immense enthusiasm. But there seems to have been no public demonstration.¹ He presented himself to the Little Council, and began work again that very day. His banishment, during which he had married, was treated as a mere interlude. So far as was possible, he went on where he had left off three years before. But he had now to work single-handed, for Farel had found a sphere for his energy elsewhere.

Calvin's labours in Geneva from his return till the time of his death—nearly twenty-three years—were enormous. It was reckoned that every year he delivered nearly two hundred lectures and preached nearly three hundred sermons. In addition to this, he had constantly to be attending meetings and writing replies to criticisms. He was also producing the "Commentaries" which are still read by many, and was carrying on a large correspondence with persons in various parts of Europe, especially with the Protestants in France. His health was not strong, and, like Erasmus, he suffered in his later years from gout and stone. He often lay down on a couch and dictated his "Commentaries" and his letters. When he could no longer walk he was carried to the pulpit. He allowed himself fifteen to thirty minutes exercise in the day, and this he commonly took walking about the room. No wonder that he suffered from indigestion! He says that he was usually too busy even

¹ Williston Walker, "Calvin," p. 262.

to look out of window, and he writes to a friend that he has almost forgotten what the sun is like. Many of us know how beautiful the surroundings of Geneva are, with its lake and its mountains, and the amazing blue of the Rhone. It is said that in all the sixty volumes of his works there is not a single reference to these glories. "No vestige of poetical feeling, no touch of descriptive colour, ever rewards the patient reader" of his letters.¹ The varied responsiveness to the feelings of others, and the conscious sympathy with Nature, which often brighten the letters of Luther, are absent from the severe correspondence of Calvin. In such ceaseless pressure of work, he can hardly have had time to feel anything beyond the ceaseless impression that it was an evil world, and that he was called by God to reform it. Like the Pope in Browning's "The Ring and the Book," Calvin lived in the mental attitude of being "Heartsick at having all his world to blame."

Calvin is a conspicuous example of the clear-headed, confident man, who insists upon being heard, because he is quite sure that what he has to say is both true and important. Luther, perhaps, was equally confident, at any rate, as regards opposition to Rome, but he did admit that he had made mistakes. And in their opposition to Rome they were not influenced by the same motives. Luther saw in Rome a system which cheated man of his salvation. Calvin saw in it a system which cheated God of His honour. Both of them protested that they were teaching no new doctrines, but reviving old ones; but Calvin held that a new system was required, intelligible, lucid, and consistent. Rome's strength lay in its skilfully compacted system; and without system it could not be vanquished. Unlike Melancthon and Luther, Calvin was troubled by no doubts. He was quite sure that in his "Institutes" he had taken the right ground and had mapped it out clearly. "He who makes himself master of the method which I have pursued will surely understand what he should seek for in Scripture," which implies that what Calvin sought for in Scripture he was always

¹ Tulloch, "Luther and other Leaders of the Reformation," pp. 241, 242.

able to find there ; and this is no uncommon experience. Calvin is " the greatest Biblical dogmatist of his age " ;¹ and it is through his apparently Biblical system that he has had such wide and prolonged effect, especially in Switzerland, Holland, and Scotland. During the lifetime of each, Luther was a more powerful force in Europe than Calvin ; but in the history of subsequent thought and action, Calvin has had far the greater influence. Calvin's is a system which requires as complete a sacrifice of the intellect, and as much subservience of the will, as that of Rome ; and both systems still find millions of adherents who are willing to render both of these. But such submission is not likely to continue in an atmosphere of increasing thought and enlightenment ; and in both communions the submission has been seriously diminished of late years. There are beliefs which, as time goes on, cannot be maintained, and there are rules to which men will not continue to submit.

We must pass over Calvin's controversies with Albert Pighius in 1543, and Jerome Bolsec in 1551, on the question of Predestination, and with Castellio (Chasteillon) in 1544 on the Inspiration of the Song of Songs and on the Descent into Hell. Far more important and far more famous was the disastrous controversy with Servetus. Its tragic finale ranks with Luther's posting of his Ninety-Five Theses at Wittenberg, and the flight of the Emperor Charles V. from Innsbruck, before that perplexing person, Maurice of Saxony, in 1552, among the greatest events of the sixteenth century.

We have always to remember that in putting Servetus to death neither Calvin nor the Council had any jurisdiction whatever. It was lynch law of a revolting kind. Castellio, Calvin's old opponent, with some others, drew up a collection of opinions against the use of force in religion. It was urged that " Christ would be a Moloch, if He required that men should be offered and burned alive." But Calvin had the support of the large majority of Swiss Protestants ; and even Melanchthon said that the hideous deed was " justly done."

History treats the burning of Servetus as one of the great

¹ Tulloch, p. 254 ; see also Hobhouse, " Bampton Lectures," p. 228.

horrors of the Reformation; and a horror it certainly is, all the more so, because those who perpetrated it had to claim freedom of thought in order to justify their own position. But history is sometimes capricious. One striking event stands out, and is remarked by everyone; other events of the same character are recorded, and are at once forgotten. Hundreds of Anabaptists had suffered in the same manner as Servetus by a variety of cruel deaths, and nobody cared. Nobody cared then, and hardly anybody cares now. Some of us at times recall the extravagances of the Anabaptists, and the hideous things which some of the maddest of them perpetrated. But we do not so often remember that the Anabaptists had their martyrs, who suffered horrible tortures, and faced cruel deaths, as bravely as Servetus did, simply because they would not be false to their religious convictions.

Calvin lived a little more than ten years after the burning of Servetus. On February 6, 1564, he preached his last sermon; on May 2 he wrote his last letter—to Farel; on May 27, about 8 p.m., he died, not quite fifty-five years of age. We admire his immense industry and ability, his skill in organizing men and in systematizing the products of men's minds: above all, we admire what the Genevan Council called the "majesty" of his character. But we are sure that the truth which makes us free, cannot be confined within the barriers which Calvin attempted to place round it, and that God has other ways than those of Calvin for drawing and governing men.

The Reformation was still running its course when men began to ask what were the moral effects of it; and that question has been constantly discussed down to our own day. From the nature of the case, nothing better than a very tentative answer can be given. Even with regard to our own times, respecting which we have elaborate statistics of many kinds, it is impossible to decide, with regard to a given decade or even half-century, whether public morality has improved or deteriorated. With regard to the latter portion of the sixteenth century, it is impossible to obtain a sufficient amount of trust-

worthy evidence. Such evidence, however, as has been collected, points to the conclusion that the *immediate* moral results of the Reformation were, on the whole, bad.

Protestants cannot comfort themselves with the reflection that the evidence comes chiefly from Romanist writers, who were interested in showing that the teaching of the Reformers was productive of much immorality. A great deal of the evidence comes from the Reformers themselves, and from their followers. Döllinger, in his "History of the Reformation," has collected much material from contemporary writers, giving a very gloomy picture of the condition of the Reformed Churches.¹ That work was published in 1848, and twenty-two years later he told the present writer that it was a "one-sided book," produced for the purpose of making out a case. In the latter part of his life he wrote and spoke very differently of the Reformers, especially of Luther and Melanchthon. Nevertheless, the quotations from Bucer, Osiander, Justus Jonas, Bugenhagen, and very many other Lutherans of that time, hold good as evidence, whatever the original motive for collecting them may have been; and they give a very dark picture of Protestant morality, especially with regard to sexual offences. The bad report of the immediate consequences of the Reformation cannot be explained away as being entirely due to Romanist misrepresentation.

It is more to the point to remember that disappointed enthusiasts are apt to be pessimistic, and to exaggerate distressing facts, while they lose sight of what is encouraging. Such catastrophes as the Peasants' War, and the monstrous behaviour of the wilder Anabaptists, to say nothing of the bitter controversies among the Protestants themselves, were disquieting enough, without taking account of any deterioration, real or supposed, in the morality of private individuals.

The deterioration was probably real. In the history of every revolution, and especially of religious revolutions, there are

¹ "Die Reformation, ihre innere Entwicklung und ihre Wirkungen im Umfange des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses."

always persons who are eager to take advantage of all the freedom which the new movement gives them, while they ignore all the new obligations. It was so when St. Paul preached Christian liberty at Corinth and elsewhere,¹ and it was so in Germany when Luther raised the same inspired cry. There were plenty of people who were eager to abandon compulsory confession and fasting, and to admit the nullity of good works, but who would take no pains to acquire that holiness of life which is the sure evidence of Christian faith and Christian freedom. Luther's own evidence is very strong. The devil must have been at work among them: "for under the bright light of the Gospel there are more avaricious, deceitful, selfish, heartless, unchaste persons than under the Papacy." The peasantry "know nothing, learn nothing, and do nothing, except abuse their liberty. They don't say their prayers, don't confess, don't communicate;—as if they had thrown off religion altogether."² Granting the truth of all this, many of these evils were the fruits of the old system, rather than of the new. The best fruits of the Reformation did not become generally manifest until the leaders had passed away.

The good fruits are neither small nor few, and first among them we may place the freeing of men's minds from the terror in which the ecclesiastical tyranny of the Middle Ages had held them. Obedience to the hierarchy had been made the first requisite of salvation. A man's eternal welfare depended on his satisfying the demands of an official class who could exclude him from heaven for disobedience. From this miserable dread, the Reformation set men free by bringing each soul into communion with God, without the necessary intervention of priest or Pope. It would be difficult to overestimate the value of this emancipation. Like the right of everyone to religious toleration, it was very imperfectly worked out at the time; but in both cases the general principle was made clear. The Reformation was a great stride towards the Apostolic ideal, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

¹ K. Lake, "The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul," p. 46.

² Harnack, "The Social Gospel," pp. 54 *et seq.*