

JOHN CALVIN.

BY W. GUY JOHNSON.

IN an essay published some ten years ago,¹ Dr. W. R. Matthews, now Dean of St. Paul's, wrote :

"The critical point in the life of Calvin is the year 1536. In that year he published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and almost at once stood out in the public eye as the leading intellect of the Reforming movement. In the same year he took up his abode in Geneva, from which city, with one short interval, he was to exercise a growing and determinative influence on the thought and politics of Europe."

The memory of Calvin has suffered much in modern times, and a revulsion against what is often erroneously supposed to be his teaching has created a prejudice of which one result is that the really great work which he did for Protestant and Reformed religion is largely forgotten. Dr. Matthews's appreciative words are a welcome contrast to the general tone of reference to Calvin which is to be found in much popular writing, and suitably introduce this effort to recall his memory in 1936, four hundred years after the *Institutes* appeared in their earliest form.

It is a misfortune that the name of John Calvin has in the popular mind been associated almost exclusively with a harsh and repellent form of the doctrine of predestination, and also with one of the great tragedies of history, the burning of Servetus. This is the more unfortunate because not only has it obscured the real character of the man and the magnitude of the work he accomplished, but also because any censure due in respect of either point, is to be extended with hardly an exception to every one on either side who took part in the great religious struggles of the sixteenth century. As to predestination there was no difference between Calvin's teaching and that of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas on the one hand and that of Luther and the Reformers generally on the other. If some of his successors have carried the doctrine to illegitimate extremes, he is not to be blamed for their excesses. With regard to the trial and execution of Servetus, it met with almost unanimous approval at the time ; and we must remember that it was Calvin who pleaded for a more merciful form of death and that his appeal was refused. Moreover, it is too often forgotten that Servetus had been previously tried and condemned to be burnt by the Roman Catholic authorities at Vienne, but that he escaped from prison and fled before the sentence could be carried out. In consequence, he was burned in effigy by the Church. When, later, the Town Council of Geneva had sentenced Servetus to death, word came from Vienne demanding that he be handed over to the Church authorities there, that they might burn him

¹ *Social and Political Ideas of some Great Thinkers of the Renaissance and the Reformation*. Ed. F. J. C. Hearnshaw, 1925. Article "John Calvin," by W. R. Matthews, D.D.

in execution of the sentence previously pronounced by them. We may be pardoned for wishing that the request had met with a different reception, for then Servetus would have been remembered only as one of the innumerable victims of the insatiable cruelty of the Roman hierarchy. As it is, the odium of this solitary instance of death for heresy in which Calvin was concerned has been used to cloud his reputation and to outweigh all the horrors of Albigensian, Waldensian, Huguenot and other massacres for which the Church of Rome has to answer at the bar of history.

John Calvin was born at Noyon in Picardy on the 10th of July, 1509, the year in which Henry VIII ascended the throne of England. In that year Luther, a Professor at Wittenberg, had reached the age of twenty-six and was to fasten his ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in that town only three years later. Calvin thus belongs to the second generation of the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century. By the time that he was able to take any intelligent interest in it, the Reformation was well on its way and most of the pioneer work had been done. His father, an ecclesiastical lawyer, whose skill in legal and administrative work had won for him social recognition and good professional standing, came from a family which for generations had found occupation as boatmen on the Oise at a village near by. Little is known of his mother, who died before any of her children reached maturity, except that she was a good and devout woman of earnest piety of the medieval type. Noyon is an ancient city of no great size, which was from the early part of the sixth century until the French Revolution, the seat of a Bishopric and was mainly under clerical influence. In situation it is about sixty miles to the north of Paris and so was well within the sphere of influence of the capital.

Calvin's father was ambitious for his children and determined to give them the best education possible. There was a reputable school at Noyon to which the young Calvins were sent, and at an early age John, by his eagerness and industry, gave promise of the qualities which marked him so conspicuously throughout his life. In another respect his school life was a forecast, for his power of forming friendships can be seen in his associations with the sons of the noble family of Hangest, lords of Montmor, and with others. In 1523, when he had just passed his fourteenth birthday, he was sent by his father to the University of Paris, accompanied by three of his friends of the Montmor family. Two years previously, when scarcely twelve years of age, he had been appointed to a chaplaincy attached to the altar of La Gèsine in the Cathedral of Noyon, which though it is an example of a widely spread system of corrupt administration of ecclesiastical affairs, yet on occasion found a measure of justification as a means for providing for the education of promising youths who were intended for the priesthood. Other similar benefices were added later, the duties, of course, being performed by deputy. Dr. Williston Walker in his excellent *Life of Calvin* says: "He doubtless received the tonsure—the only sign of membership in a clerical order which Calvin ever attained in the Roman Church."

The University of Paris in which he now became a student had long been reputed the most eminent seat of learning in Europe, though at this time it had not maintained the intellectual leadership for which it had once been famed. The New Learning of the Renaissance did not find a kindly welcome within its walls, although the more rigid advocates of medieval orthodoxy were less able than they wished to prevent entirely its invasion. The conditions of student life in the Universities of the Middle Ages were such as to make it incredible that any considerable proportion of the youths should survive, or surviving should emerge with any intellectual vigour or enthusiasm left in them; the coarse and scanty food, the subjection to vain, ignorant or brutal masters, the want of sanitation and the ignorance of elementary rules of health, told hardly on the majority; and though Calvin was in some respects exempt from the worst of these evils, yet the severity of his studies and the neglect of proper care undoubtedly laid the foundation of that persistent ill-health which hampered him through life. This accounts for his frequent fits of irritability and caused his death at the comparatively early age of fifty-five. For a few months he enjoyed at the Collège de la Marche the instruction in Latin given by Mathurin Cordier, who was probably the best teacher of that language and one of the most capable educationalists to be found in France at that time. On Calvin's transference to the Collège de Montaigue, he lost this influence. Its principal was Noel Bédá, a conservative theologian of ability, and a determined opponent of all reform in the doctrine or usage of the Roman Church. It is not without interest to note that the principal in Calvin's time was no weak and insignificant champion of the medieval theology taught at the Collège de Montaigue. Erasmus had studied within its walls nearly twenty years prior to Calvin's entering it, and Ignatius Loyola became a student there just as Calvin was leaving. Calvin was a hard and unremitting student during all his years at Paris. He was greatly attracted by the writings of Erasmus and of the humanists generally; he was a diligent student of the Fathers, and as a matter of course he was trained in all the subtleties of the scholastic philosophy. His memory was so retentive that all that he had read was at all times at his command, and in addition he had that clarity of mind and logical precision of thought that seem to be the special characteristic of educated Frenchmen. Moreover, he had a personal attractiveness of no common kind, for though of relatively humble birth we find him on terms of close and intimate friendship with a large and growing circle of persons of social, professional and academic distinction, which can in no other way be explained. The grave, reserved and rather dour person, subject to fits of nervous irritability, and impatient of contradiction, exhibited as the portrait of Calvin, has a measure of truth during the height of his controversies and anxieties at Geneva, and before his influence there was well established, but it does not represent Calvin's character in essence or as a whole. Gravity and seriousness could not but characterise a man to whom the fear of

God and the sense, not only of His love, but of His awe-compelling sovereignty and majesty dominated every thought, but the tenderer and more human qualities which give graciousness and winsomeness to a man's personality were there as well, or he would not have inspired the devotion with which he was regarded by his followers. Moreover, we have it on the testimony of Beza that—"With regard to his manners, although nature had formed him for gravity, yet in the common intercourse of life there was no man who was more pleasant."

His undergraduate course in the Faculty of Arts, to use the modern form of expression, was completed at about the beginning of 1528, and a change was then made in the direction of his studies by his father's insistence that he should now turn from the study of theology to that of law. The reason probably was that his father, who had quarrelled with the Cathedral Chapter at Noyon, thought that the legal profession offered better prospects for a youth of good ability than the Church at that time seemed likely to provide. Calvin seems to have raised no opposition to his father's wishes and he proceeded to the University of Orleans, since Paris had no teacher of jurisprudence comparable with Pierre de l'Estoile, the leading lawyer of France who, with seven other "doctors," of whom he was by far the most noted, was then teaching at Orleans. Here in a freer and more liberal atmosphere than that of Paris, Calvin gave himself to this new and attractive subject of study with such ardour that he increased the dyspeptic disorders which troubled him so seriously in later life. Law, however, did not entirely absorb his energies. For he continued to prosecute the classical studies to which he had been drawn while at Paris, and the thoroughness of his work is shown in his commentary on Seneca's treatise on clemency, which he published in 1523, after he had returned to Paris on the death of his father. It was a work of great erudition and it showed that—

"From the point of view of scholarship the young author had nothing to fear. Written in a Latin style of singular clarity and brilliancy, with not a little of the lawyer's sense for lucid presentation and cogent argument, his book showed a range of reading almost marvellous in a man of Calvin's years."¹

When this book was published the author of it had not reached his twenty-third year. It is important to remember, as Dr. Matthews points out, that Calvin was, besides being a Biblical scholar, a humanist and a lawyer :

"He was a humanist. All the greater Reformers were to some extent children of the new learning, but none had perhaps so clear a right in the family as he. Calvin's most permanent contribution to literature is to be found in his commentaries on Scripture. They bear the marks of one who had learned in the school of classical studies to interpret the meaning of an author and to consider the circumstances in which he wrote. And he was a lawyer. It is to this, perhaps, that we should attribute the less attractive

¹ Williston Walker, *John Calvin*, p. 59 (Putnam's, London, 1906).

elements found in his thinking. His theology is legal, and his mind is clear rather than capacious, ruthless in logic rather than rich in reflection."¹

To somewhat the same effect, Dr. Fairbairn wrote :

" His early humanism made him a scholar and an exegete, a master of elegant Latinity, of lucid and incisive speech, of a graphic pen and historical imagination. His juristic studies gave him an idea of law, through which he interpreted the more abstruse notions of theology, and a love of order which compelled him to organise his Church."²

A vast amount of discussion and research has been expended on the subject of the date at which Calvin's " conversion " took place, into which it is unnecessary to enter here. Calvin himself is reticent on the subject. In the introduction to his *Commentary on the Psalms* he says : " And since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God, by a sudden conversion, brought my mind to a teachable frame." There is no indication in his book on Seneca that this had happened so early as 1532, when that work was published, though the deep sense of moral values which seems to have been with him from childhood, is plainly evident. Nor could it have been much later than the following year. Dr. W. Walker makes the highly probable suggestion that Calvin's " sudden conversion " had as an important factor—perhaps even as its central experience—" the recognition of the Scriptures, and of the Scriptures alone, as the very voice of God." That this was henceforth the dominating note in Calvin's life and writings his whole subsequent career gives ample proof. It was a time of great agitation. The Lutheran Reformation had found a prompt and ready echo in other countries, not least in France, though owing to the " Gallican liberties " the French monarch and people had not so great a sense of grievance as was felt elsewhere. The Reformed teaching had, however, received an eager welcome in many places, and there were already in Paris and elsewhere actual congregations of Evangelical believers who had entirely severed themselves from the Roman Church, and with some of these Calvin appears to have come into close relations, in particular with the much respected merchant de la Forge. These Evangelical associations on the one hand, and the writings of Erasmus and other contemporary humanists on the other, must have had a great if unconscious influence in diminishing the strength of his convictions long before he himself actually took the decisive step of renouncing his connection with the Church in which he had been reared. In 1533, conditions in Paris seemed favourable to the spread of the Reformed opinions, provided no very definite occasion was given to alarm the conservative advocates of the medieval system. But just such an occasion presented itself to Nicholas Cop, a friend of Calvin, at that moment appointed to the Rectorship of the University. He had to give an inaugural address and he delivered one of a very high moral tone, but leaning strongly to the toleration of humanist and reformed opinion. It is

¹ *Op. Cit.*, p. 195.

² *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II, p. 363.

stated that Calvin was the author of this address. Among modern authorities on Calvin there are great names on either side. Fairbairn takes his authorship for granted (*Camb. Mod. Hist.*), but the evidence is not completely decisive. The result of the address showed a greater strength among the opponents of reform than had been anticipated, and both Cop and Calvin found it necessary to leave Paris, to avoid being arrested on the charge of heresy.

Between the end of 1533 and March, 1536, when the first edition of the *Institutes* was published at Basel, Calvin had a period of wandering from place to place seeking a home where he might in quietness and safety devote himself to a life of scholarship. There is no precise account of his movements during this time; but the appearance of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* at the end of it shows how intensely he must have been occupied and how much he had developed his views, if such a word can describe convictions held with the whole force of his being. The *Institutes* are well worth reading, though there is much in them that sounds strangely to modern ears. His reverence for Scripture and his certainty that it is the very Word of God speaking to us, we may prize even though his use and interpretation of particular passages may not be ours. The treatise, though small in comparison with what it afterwards became through successive revisions and additions, is an astonishing production for a young man only twenty-seven years of age. Its knowledge of Scripture, its grasp of fundamental truth, its wide range and its coherent and systematic presentation of Christian doctrine, at once placed its author in the forefront of the leaders of reform. The work was prefaced by a courageous and dignified letter to the King of France presenting the work as a defence of the Reformers against the calumnies that were being hurled against them. To quote Dr. Fairbairn again, this letter "is one of the great epistles of the world, a splendid apology for the oppressed and arraignment of the oppressors. It does not implore toleration as a concession, but claims freedom as a right."

Calvinism as expounded in the *Institutes* does not exhibit the harsh and rigid doctrine of predestination, reprobation and the corruption of human nature that, to many people, is associated with it. For example, in the *Oxford English Dictionary* "Calvinism" is defined as "The doctrines of John Calvin, the Protestant Reformer, particularly his theological doctrines of grace, in which Calvinism is opposed to Arminianism"; and it adds the so-called "Five points of Calvinism"—viz. Particular election. Particular redemption. Moral inability in a fallen state. Irresistible grace. Final perseverance. But divine predestination and election and the consequences to be deduced therefrom were not the sole, nor were they the primary, theological conceptions in Calvin's mind. His main and absorbing interest was concerned with the majesty, righteousness and sovereignty of God. In Him everything, material, moral and spiritual, found its centre, to Him all things witnessed, on Him all else depended. The cause of God only and it alone, was worth living, working and fighting for; and his passionate

conviction, utter sincerity and tireless energy compelled the respect even of those who were only in part prepared to follow him or who thought that at times he was too ready to identify the cause of God with his own plans. Richard Hooker, the great opponent of those Puritans who sought to bring Elizabethan England under the stern rule of the Calvinistic system, yet wrote of the founder of that system as

“incomparably the wisest man the French Church did enjoy, since the hour it enjoyed him. . . . For though thousands were indebted to him as touching Divine knowledge ; yet he to none but only to God, the Author of that most blessed fountain, The Book of Life.”

And a much later writer, Dean Hook, who had little leaning towards Calvinism, wrote :

“ When our countrymen, however, were brought by circumstances under the influence of Calvin, we are not surprised if, while they deplored his intolerance, they were fascinated by his genius and learning. The third edition of his *Institutes* had been published in 1559, and the charm of his style, the profundity of his remarks, together with his intimate acquaintance with Scripture, rendered it influential wherever it was read.”

Calvin's great service to the Reformation was that with characteristic lucidity and precision of statement, he brought its theological principles into systematic order, showing their connection and relation to each other and their entire dependence on Holy Scripture. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is no mere academic theological treatise, for its primary purpose is the application of the principles with which it deals to the practical daily life of every Christian man both as an individual and as a member of the Christian community or church. Mark Pattison writes of him :

“ The distinction of Calvin as a Reformer is not to be sought in the doctrine which now bears his name, or in any doctrinal peculiarity. His great merit lies in his comparative neglect of dogma. He seized the idea of reformation as a real renovation of human character. While the German Reformers were scholastically engaged in remodelling abstract metaphysical statements, Calvin had embraced the lofty idea of the Church of Christ as a society of regenerate men. . . . The Protestant movement was saved from being sunk in the quicksands of doctrinal dispute, chiefly by the new moral direction given to it in Geneva.”¹

With this purpose in view, it is no matter for surprise that Calvin's writings were read widely, and influenced deeply the men of his time, as they have influenced men right down to our own day. Their influence upon the English Reformers was as great as upon others, though it was not the originative nor the dominant influence. Calvin, as we have seen, did not belong to the first stage of the Reformation. He was only nine years old when Luther nailed his ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. Cranmer was already Archbishop of Canterbury, a theological scholar of distinct repute and in his forty-fourth year when Calvin was a young man of twenty-four. And during the period between Luther's dramatic challenge and the preparation of the English

¹ *Essays*, Vol. I, “ Calvin at Geneva.”

liturgy and Articles of religion Cranmer had been quietly and steadily maturing his position. This must be borne in mind when we are told that the English Reformers and the compilers of the English Liturgy were Calvinists. So far as the doctrines of predestination and election were concerned, Calvin's views were equally those of the German and English Reformers. Not that they necessarily accepted all the consequences deduced from it by Calvin, but that they had all equally entered upon the common heritage of Augustinianism which was both explicit and emphatic upon this dark and insoluble mystery. Indeed, the late Canon J. B. Mozley, at one time Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, after an acute and exhaustive discussion of the Augustinian doctrine, wrote: "I see no substantial difference between the Augustinian and Thomist, and the Calvinist doctrine of predestination," and adds that the same "checks and cautions" which Augustine and his followers in the schools appended to their doctrine were appended by Calvin, just as much as by them.

In regard to this doctrine, the Church of England in Article XVII, while affirming it, is careful to go no further than the text of Holy Scripture plainly warrants, and only indirectly alludes to the question of reprobation. That Article, moreover, points to the danger of "curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination"; and it concludes that "we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture." Now God's promises as generally set forth in Holy Scripture contain many other teachings about God than the mere fact of His Sovereignty and all-prevailing Will; and if we are not to empty the whole matter of moral content they teach emphatically the responsibility of each man for the wrong that he does. It is easy enough so to state the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination as to make it appear that God is the author of evil, a conclusion from which Calvin himself would have shrunk with horror. The subject, from its very nature, confronts us with difficulties and with contradictions which it is beyond the power of our limited mental faculties, in this stage of our being, to reconcile. On none is it more important to remember the warning of Richard Hooker: "Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High . . . He is above, and we upon earth; therefore it behoveth our words to be wary and few." At the same time it must not be supposed that the difficulty is merely a religious or theological one. It confronts the philosopher as well as the theologian, and an age which has seen the rise—through the growth of materialistic science—of an influential determinist philosophy, can hardly dismiss predestination with contempt.

After the publication of the *Institutes* Calvin left Basel for Strassburg, but being compelled to make a long detour he passed through Geneva, intending only to stay one night. That city had recently taken steps which logically and inevitably led it to the side of the Reformation, though without any such intention on the

part of the citizens whose main desire was freedom from the power of the Bishop and the House of Savoy. But the banishment of the Bishop, who was the sovereign ruler, and an alliance with the "Reformed" city of Berne, led to unanticipated results; and Guillaume Farel, the fiery French preacher of reforming doctrines, had been doing his best to bring the Genevans to both Protestantism and to decency of moral life. It is not clear to which of these the citizens objected most, but object they did, and Farel found the task beyond his powers. Hearing of Calvin's presence in the city, he went and earnestly adjured him to stay and aid in the difficult endeavour. "Farel kept me at Geneva," Calvin said, "not so much by advice and entreaty as by a dreadful adjuration, as if God had stretched forth His hand from on high to arrest me." The task was hard and uncongenial; but if God had set it before him, he must not shrink. In this way his connection with Geneva, which with one brief interlude lasted for the remainder of his life, was begun.

It was a curious situation at Geneva. The citizens, having banished their Bishop, had been induced to vote *nem. com.* their desire to live in the holy evangelical law and Word of God, "as it has been announced to us, desiring to abandon all masses, images, idols, and all that which may pertain thereto." Thus far had the stirring and fiery preaching of Farel brought them. But he was quite unable to furnish the organising power necessary to bring order out of the ecclesiastical confusion that resulted from the departure of the Bishop, who represented the sole authority in matters of religion and morals. To that authority the Town Council regarded itself as succeeding, and before Calvin arrived there, it had already issued a number of disciplinary ordinances forbidding blasphemy, oaths and card-playing, regulating the sale of intoxicants, and ordering brides to cover their heads. He was therefore, not the originator of the rigorous disciplinary system with which Geneva is associated. He built upon it and made it a practical force. It is not possible here to describe the early efforts of Calvin and those who worked with him in the endeavour to build up a City of God among the wayward inhabitants of this strangely circumstanced town, with its complications of politics, internal and external, and its confusions of religious aims and purposes. It is probable that the reformers, Calvin especially, did not in their ardour and zeal make sufficient allowance for the immaturity and uncertainty of these recent adherents to the party of the Reformation, for the result of their efforts was that within less than two years, Calvin, Farel and Coraud were ordered to leave the city. Their aims had been nobly high. Their personal characters, their absence of self-seeking and their indefatigable labours could not be gainsaid. But they had forced the pace; their impetuosity was that of youth and inexperience. If they had failed it was a failure which carried no taint of disgrace. They were bitterly disappointed at the failure, but did not abandon hope that God would ultimately bring about, possibly through other agents,

the purposes for which they had laboured in the conviction that they were His.

When his expulsion from Geneva became known, Calvin received from Martin Bucer, the spiritual leader of Strassburg, a cordial invitation to make that city his home. The place offered all that Calvin desired, a place where he could, among learned and spiritually minded friends of reforming principles, continue his studies and find opportunities of usefulness. After some hesitation he decided to accept the invitation, again as a call from God, and for the space of about three years he worked happily, though at times under conditions of severe poverty, ministering to a congregation of French refugees who had settled in Strassburg, lecturing in theology and continuing his studies. Here he issued in 1539 a greatly enlarged edition of the *Institutes* besides doing other literary work. It seemed indeed that he had finally found his settled home and vocation, when another and not very welcome call to return to Geneva came. Things in that city had not gone well since his strong and vigorous personality had been removed. The friends of the Reformation there had more than once suggested his return, but now there came something in the way of a formal invitation from the Pastors at Geneva, and this was strengthened by a request from the same Council that had three years before ordered his expulsion. Hooker puts the matter very tersely :

“ The senate of two hundred being assembled, they all craved Calvin. The next day, a general convocation ; they cry in like sort again all, ‘ We will have Calvin, that good and learned man, Christ’s minister.’ This,” said he, “ when I understood, I could not choose but praise God nor was I able to judge otherwise than that this was the Lord’s doing and that it was marvellous in our eyes.” Hooker sententiously adds : “ The other two whom they had thrown out together (with Calvin) they were content *should enjoy their exile.*”

We must remember that during the interval Calvin’s reputation and importance had grown very greatly. The Genevans, too, had no doubt learned something in his absence. The prospect of this return was not attractive, for Calvin knew the forces against which he would have to contend, but if it was God’s will that he should return, that was all that mattered ; and after much hesitation he once more broke up his home and returned to the city where his spirit had been so deeply wounded. To understand adequately the nature of the task which was before him, we should have to know a great deal of the previous history of Geneva. Mark Pattison in his essay, *Calvin in Geneva*, doubts that the moral corruption and political turbulence of the people was worse than in other Swiss cities of its size. This is not saying very much for them, for Switzerland was a great recruiting ground for the mercenary armies of the Continent, and the result was a serious lowering of the morale of the people. The evils which war brings in its train are greatly accentuated when soldiers fight, not from patriotic motives but for the pay and plunder promised to them by those who will make the highest bid for their services. And Switzerland was peculiarly

affected in this way. We need not suppose, however, that the Genevese were sinners above all men, though their standard was not very high. It is sufficient to remember that with them liberty, civic, political and personal, was a passion. They had had to struggle long for their independence and were determined to retain it. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that their Protestantism was a consequence and not a cause of their successful struggle with their episcopal and ducal rulers. It was for liberty and not for religion they had fought. It is obvious that a people who had always shown themselves impatient of restraint would not readily submit themselves to the discipline proposed by Calvin in furtherance of a religion with which they were only in partial sympathy. This was one of the causes of his banishment at the end of the first period of his residence there. But he must have made a real and deep impression, and there must have been many who longed after righteousness in Geneva, or he would never have been recalled; for it was fully known that he was determined to promote the knowledge of the Gospel and to bring men's daily lives into conformity with its demands. His aim was to establish an ecclesiastical constitution which would make the city of Geneva a model Christian community. And though his ideal was not fully realised, as it never can be in a community which is composed of imperfect and erring men and women, yet he succeeded. It has been well said: "He did much more than describe a virtuous society—he created one."

Calvin re-entered Geneva in September, 1541, and for the remainder of his life that city was to be his home and the sphere of his work. It was, except for the final years, a period of unremitting labour and of violent controversy and strife. It was in this period that the tragedy of Servetus took place, a matter which has been used to bring upon his head alone the blame for an action which was not his, though he and nearly everyone else at the time approved it. His special part in the unhappy business was to plead that Servetus might have a more merciful death, though, alas, his request was denied. But the controversies and labours were not unfruitful. He established an ideal of civic and personal righteousness that has had no parallel elsewhere except, possibly, in the early days of the New England settlements. He established a system of compulsory education which gave every citizen the privilege of learning and the opportunity for scholarship. He made Geneva the seed-plot whence came the clergy who were to fill the pastorates of the Reformed congregations springing up everywhere in France; and they were trained in a manner which made them not only heroic and devoted pastors at a time of appalling danger, but formidable defenders of the faith whoever might be the opposer. And he afforded an example of complete devotion to the will of God. The wealthy burghers of Geneva had to respect the sincerity of one who, even in his last illness, refused to allow them or the City Council to pay his doctor's bills, and who doubted whether he ought to draw his not very considerable stipend during illness as he was then unable to perform the duties of his office.

This paper may well close with two testimonies to the character of Calvin as it impressed itself on those who had the opportunities, afforded by close and intimate association, of observing him. Theodore Beza concludes his *Life of Calvin* with the words :

“ Having been a spectator of his conduct for sixteen years, I have given a faithful account both of his life and of his death, and I can now declare that in him all men may see a most beautiful example of the Christian character, an example which it is as easy to slander as it is difficult to imitate.”

And, perhaps, more impressive because of its dignity and restraint is the testimony of the City Council : “ God gave to him a character of great majesty.”¹

¹ Considerable use has been made in the latter part of this paper of my article “ Jean Calvin et L’Eglise Anglicane ” which appeared in *Ecumenica* in July, 1935. W.G.J.